

**A CASE STUDY:
The Development and Efficacy of
Pasture-Raised Beef Marketing
Messages**

Full Circle Farm

**Don Adams and Nan Bonfils
1579 P Avenue
Madrid, IA 50156
515.795.3288**

**Case Study Prepared by Food Alliance Midwest and
Practical Farmers of Iowa**

**Supported by FoodRoutes and the
Leopold Center for Sustainable Ag.**

September 2005

Introduction: Pasture-Raised Meats Marketing Messages

As consumers become increasingly attuned to health and environmental effects of food production, meat producers are racing to make claims about their production methods. Even mainstream grocery stores now stock many products carrying labels such as “organic,” “free range,” “grass-fed,” or “pasture-raised.” Does this barrage of sustainability claims confuse the consumer? Which of the many marketing messages employed is the most effective? How can producers make convincing claims about their sustainable meat production methods?

With these questions in mind, Food Alliance Midwest through a collaboration with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Minnesota, the Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems at the University of Wisconsin, Iowa State University Extension, and Food Routes designed a project to study the development and efficacy of pasture-raised meat marketing messages. The project was supported by FoodRoutes and the Leopold Center.

The group chose three Iowa farmers who practice pasture-raised production systems and who market their products directly to consumers. We conducted case studies to examine which messages and communication strategies are effective

in communication the benefits of pasture-raised systems to consumers.

The first step in the process was to conduct consumer surveys and focus groups to determine which messages about pasture-raised meats were most convincing and compelling to the average consumer. The focus groups overwhelmingly indicated that the most compelling messages about pasture-raised meats focused on taste, health and nutrition, support for local farmers and, to a lesser extent, environmental sustainability and humane treatment of animals.

A consultant then conducted farm visits and interviews with the participating meat producers. The consultant developed marketing materials for each producer, catering to each producer’s desired consumer market and focusing on those messages about pasture-raised meat that the consumer focus groups determined to be most effective and compelling.

The following case study tells the story of one of the three Iowa meat producers, Nan Bonfils and Don Adams of Full Circle Farm, Madrid, IA.



One set of the three Iowa producers selected to participate in this project were Don Adams and Nan Bonfils, owners of Full Circle Farm in Madrid, Iowa.

Coming full circle

The name Full Circle Farm refers to the cycles that underpin the daily life of the farm: the cycle of the seasons, the cycle of nutrients and energy that connects sun, plants, soil and animals, and the ethic of recycling materials, which Don and Nan practice on the farm. But, in addition, to these physical cycles that define the farm, “Full Circle” refers to the circle of events that led Don—after years of education, work and travel abroad—back to where he began: his father’s farm in Central Iowa. Don’s father, Harold, has raised cattle on pasture for decades. Originally, he raised a dairy herd on pasture, but in 1960 he sold off that herd and began to build a herd of Angus beef cattle. In 1992, Don returned to the farm with Nan to continue his father’s legacy of pasture-raised beef production.

Currently, Don and Nan raise 55 pure Angus animals on their 300 acres. Full Circle Farm is certified biodynamic, and in 2004 the farm received organic certification. All calves are born on the farm from cows with over 10 years of genetic consistency. The cattle feed on a mix of pasture grasses and legumes, as well as a small amount of open-pollinated corn that is grown on the farm. Winter feed includes hay and silage made of pasture grasses, supplemented with a small amount of corn for energy, and to make the feed more palatable.

Both Nan and Don spend much time with the herd everyday, touching and talking to the animals, walking and working among them. As a result of this careful treatment, the animals are comfortable with humans and not easily spooked. When the time comes for slaughter, Don takes many steps to reduce the stress of the process. Cows are taken to the processing plant in pairs, to reduce their fear and stress. Don parks the trailer near the cows the night before, so they can become familiar with it before they are put inside. Once they arrive at the processing plant, the animals are slaughtered almost immediately, to reduce the stressful waiting time. In addition to being humane, these practices actually preserve the quality of the meat. According to Don, cattle that move through large feedlot operations are exposed to multiple stresses that cause their bodies to create adrenaline. The adrenaline courses through the muscle of the animal, compromising flavor and texture. Besides being good in itself,

Don and Nan's humane treatment of their animals helps ensure the quality of their product.

Markets and Goals

Before the case study project, Don and Nan were primarily marketing their meat directly to consumers. The majority of their customers were buying in bulk—usually a quarter or half an animal. In addition, Don and Nan had installed a freezer on the farm from which they sold individual cuts to customers who did not have storage space for bulk quantities; customers either picked up the meat at the farm, or Don and Nan would deliver to them. Finally, they had just begun marketing individual cuts of meat to Wheatsfield Grocery natural food co-op in Ames.

Don and Nan's main method of advertisement was word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied customers. In addition, they had developed a basic brochure and a short history of the farm to hand out to customers. They communicated at least once a year with all of their known customers, inviting them to an annual event at the farm. They also promoted their product by donating beef to fundraisers and local events.

At the start of the project, Don and Nan hoped to expand the market for their pasture-raised beef, although their land would not support a larger herd. They hoped to increase interaction with chefs and restaurants, and also look into a connection with a community college chef training

program in the area. In addition, one of their primary goals for the project was to improve their marketing around the issue of meat preparation. The grass-fed beef from Full Circle Farm tends to cook faster than the fattier grain-fed beef found in mainstream supermarkets. Don and Nan wished to compile more recipes and cooking tips in order to ensure the customers are preparing the meat for maximum satisfaction.

John Seymour Anderson, the consultant contracted to design marketing materials for each project participant, visited Full Circle Farm in the summer of 2004 to interview Don and Nan. Anderson designed a brochure with informational inserts focusing on different aspects of the product. Following the guidance of the focus groups, Anderson focused on the flavor and nutritional qualities of the pasture-raised beef. The brochure also highlighted a variety of cooking tips for pasture-raised beef, in accordance with Don and Nan's marketing goals.

Pasture-Raised messages

- ❖ **Flavorful.** The Angus breed of cattle is known for its quality and flavor. In addition, pasture-raised beef has a "full and bright" flavor, as opposed to the "dull and heavy" flavor of some conventional beef.
- ❖ **Easily Prepared.** Brochure provides tips for cooking, as well as a simple recipe for a steak rub.

- ❖ **Nutritious.** Studies show that pasture-raised beef contains a healthier ratio of essential fatty acids. Full Circle Farm beef is also free of synthetic chemical residues. The meat is lean and low in cholesterol and saturated fats.
- ❖ **Convenient.** Customers can purchase meat directly from the farm, either bulk or individual cuts, or from a nearby food co-op.
- ❖ **Sustainable.** The small scale of the farm, as well as the long history of good land management, contributes to the overall sustainability of the farm and a low-stress, humane environment for the animals.
- ❖ **Humane.** Don and Nan strive to keep the animals' stress levels low. They "think it's important to let cows be cows" outside with "natural light, sounds and smells." Also, this ensures a more flavorful and tender meat (repeated stress on an animal tends to compromise meat flavor and texture).
- ❖ **Local.** Full Circle Farm partners with a small local processor that handles the cattle humanely and carefully.

Measuring success

One year after its development, Nan and Don have distributed the brochure widely. They make it available at field days and tours at their own farm, as well as other field days with the permission of the host. The brochure is also distributed at the

popular Turtle Farm stand in Granger and at Wheatsfield Grocery whenever Nan and Don sample beef there.

Nan and Don asked the consultant to develop a single-panel fact sheet for distribution at larger events where the audience less defined. This allows for cheaper shipping and eliminates the concern of having to keep tabs on the more precious brochure.

Nan said the best measure of the brochure's effectiveness is the way potential customers have responded to receiving it in the mail. "Anytime we get the vaguest nibble of a sale, we mail a brochure," she said. "I don't know that it's a deal clincher, but very few people who get the brochure fail to make a purchase."

Nan and Don indicated their target audience for the brochure is "people we didn't know, people who did not get a personal sales pitch from us. People who had other options and would need a compelling reason to pick us over another source."

Their success in reaching that audience is reflected by the fact that half of their customers are now people they have never met. Three years ago Nan and Don were personally acquainted with 75-80 percent of their customers.

The brochure fulfilled most of what Nan and Don had hoped to accomplish with the piece. This included:

- "A professional piece that looked sharp."

- “A format that would serve a variety of interests and information needs.”
- “A comprehensive piece that would tell the story of the farm and make us real enough to believe.”

Asked if the content of the brochure was effective, Nan said “very effective if the consumer had the time to take in all the information.” She added, “I sometimes fear they were not effective because the content was so comprehensive.” Some customers asked questions after “reading” the brochure that had already been answered *in* the brochure. On the other hand, Nan said the materials “cut way back on our phone time and bills. Most of our conversations with people after reading the brochure are nuts and bolts—‘when do I call the processor?’... ‘when do I have to pay?’... The sale has already been committed.”

Which messages most effective

Customers expressed most interest in the antibiotic- and hormone-free aspect of Full Circle beef and the fact that they are certified organic. “For some families, the pasture-raised aspect was most important,” Nan said. “Typically these families were fighting cancer.” Successful, but of less importance, were local processing and variety of customized processing.

Some specific comments Nan and Don received in reaction to the brochure:

- “When I called I had no idea you were certified organic—that’s even better.”
- “Wow” (in response to the content and layout).
- “I feel like I know you.”
- “We’re sold.”

Whenever customers asked how they could afford such a “fancy” brochure, Nan and Don were quick to point out the list of “benefactors” inside.

Reflecting focus group research, customers were least interested in:

- Land stewardship
- Humane husbandry
- A sustainable future

Nan and Don rated the helpfulness of working with the consultant a five out of five. “We never would have gotten it to look so attractive without him,” Nan said. “We might never have gotten it done at all.”

Asked of suggestions for improvements, Nan and Don said a speedier process would be good. “I think it was a year from John’s first visit to product,” Nan said. “That’s not a criticism, but setting up realistic timelines would an improvement.”

The project brought about an evolution in the way Nan and Don think about their product and story. “The consultant concluded we were selling ourselves short.” Nan said. “We’d been too modest.”

Ongoing marketing consultation is something Nan and Don see as a good idea (they have, in fact,

continued to work with Anderson).
Nan said, “Despite having created something that will endure for us—in terms of information and actual printed inventory—one still needs a fresh perspective as demographics change, for the farm as well as the consumer.”

With characteristic enthusiasm, Nan summed up the experience, “It was a blast!”

Brochure Developed for Full Circle Farm

modified organisms.

We don't give our animals growth hormones or antibiotics to promote growth or production. And, no animal byproducts are ever included in their feed.

During the warm months, the cattle graze on lush organic pasture. During winter, we feed them a blend of hays harvested from our pastures, topped with silage and some open pollinated Nokomis Gold corn, also grown organically on the farm. The corn is added to boost energy output during the cold months. It helps the cows keep themselves warm and supports their extra energy needs for calving.

(* For more details on health and nutrition, visit www.eatwild.com or www.mercola.com/beef.)



DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS
TELEPHONE: 515-795-3288 • E-MAIL: FULLCIRCLEFARM@OPENCOMINC.COM

◆ FULL CIRCLE FARM ◆

Choose Pasture Raised Beef for Flavor and Nutrition



Full Circle Angus

Our 100% Angus cattle are born, raised and bred on this farm. They have been for nearly half a century. They are well adapted to the particular environment of this farm. Unlike some Angus operations that cross with other breeds to increase their size and weight, we never breed outside the Angus family. We don't want to compromise their well being by pushing them to grow bigger or faster than is natural for them.

Rich, Full Flavor

From supper club steaks to roasts to burgers at home, the Angus breed of beef is recognized as a benchmark of quality and flavor. When beef cattle like ours are raised on pasture (the original home and diet for cattle), you get naturally juicy meat with a robust flavor that is full and bright — not dull or heavy. The cattle lead low stress lives, and the great amount of time they spend outdoors grazing, roaming and resting benefits their health. Once you've tasted Full Circle Angus, enjoyed the full eating experience, you start to think nature has had the right idea all along.

Nourishing and Lean

Pasture raised beef is high in vitamin A,

beta carotenes, vitamin E (antioxidant, heart health) and overall nutrient density. Pasture raised beef — though lean and low in cholesterol, saturated fats and calories — also contains very healthy complex fats. Those fats contribute both to the flavor and the health promoting qualities of our beef.

A Source of Healthy Fats

Recent studies* have shown that beef raised on pasture contains Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids in a much healthier ratio than beef raised on a grain only, or grain finished, diet. The higher proportion of Omega 3 is believed to promote heart health and help prevent cancer, obesity, arteriosclerosis and diabetes. The fats in grain fed beef are disproportionately high in Omega 6 fatty acids, which have been linked to heart disease. Research also suggests that beef raised on pasture contains significant levels of Conjugated Linoleic Acid, a natural anti-carcinogen.

Free of Synthetic Chemicals

Everything we feed our cattle is vegetarian and grown right here on the farm. Organic certification underscores our personal guarantee that it is produced without the use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides or genetically

(continued on back panel)

little fat you encounter. Some customers even add an egg or cracker crumbs to the ground beef to keep burgers from crumbling. And one customer told us that “an extra grid of mesh between the grill surface and the burger means more beef makes it to the bun.” Thanks, Ken!

We’re always collecting such tips and recipes from customers. We hope you’ll share what you discover about cooking Full Circle Farm beef. Meanwhile, visit www.americangrassfedbeef.com for additional suggestions. (And, while you’re there, check out the prices. You’ll feel really good about ours!)

You can also feel good about cooking ground beef that comes from one healthy animal. It’s not like commodity meat, normally a mix of beef collected from over thirty animals from locations not identified to you. With Full Circle Farm, you know exactly where your beef is coming from.

◆ FULL CIRCLE FARM ◆

Cooking Tips for Pasture Raised Beef



FULL CIRCLE FARM

Raised With Care



Near Madrid, Iowa

DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS

ELEPHONE: 515-795-3288 • E-MAIL: FULLCIRCLEFARM@OPENCOMINC.COM

Leaner Beef

Our pasture-raised beef is bound to be leaner than conventional, corn fed beef from the feedlot system. Think about it. Our animals are on the move, grazing for the best morsels that appeal to their palates. They are not standing at a trough chowing down on grain. So naturally, they are going to have less fat.

General Tips

The best cooking tip for this lean beef is *slow down*. You don't need to give up tenderness for taste when you prepare pasture-raised beef, but you do need to pay attention. Cooking processes that lock in moisture work well with this beef. Your grandmother could be your best coach here since grass fed beef may be just the beef she prepared. Try roasting, braising, and stewing. Pasture raised beef does really well in a crockpot, although personally we prefer our cast iron Dutch oven.

Steaks

Don't be afraid to grill pasture-raised beef. For the grill, try a marinade or at least a rub of blended seasonings. The rub* can be applied to the surface of uncooked steaks immediately before grilling or up to a few hours in advance

as long as the beef stays refrigerated 'til just before grilling time. Then give those steaks just a little less heat than you might be used to.

High in protein and low in fat, pasture raised beef requires less cooking time than grain fed beef. It even continues to cook a bit after you remove it from the heat source. So, watch your thermometer and don't leave your steaks unattended. Let your steaks sit covered in a warm place for a few minutes after they come off the heat. This allows the juices to redistribute.

** Rubs should be very simple and applied lightly. You want to bring out the flavor of the meat, not mask it. Try combining cracked black pepper with minced garlic and dried thyme.*

Here's a Full Circle Farm favorite:

*1 tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary,
2 cloves minced garlic,
1 tsp. freshly grated lemon peel,
1 tsp. olive oil,
1/2 tsp. coarse ground black pepper,
1/4 tsp. salt.*

Ground Beef

The first time you cook pasture raised ground beef, you will be amazed at how

(continued on back panel)

◆ FULL CIRCLE FARM ◆

**Humane Treatment,
Local Processing:**

*The Best For The Animals,
The Best For You.*



FULL CIRCLE FARM

Raised With Care



Near Madrid, Iowa

DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS

TELEPHONE: 515-795-3288 • E-MAIL: FULLCIRCLEFARM@OPENCOMINC.COM

Our small Angus herd has access to lots of open space on varied terrain, surrounded by natural light, sounds and smells. The pasture we provide is ideally suited to their constitution. We have many reasons why we raise our cattle this way. Partly, we think it's important to let cows be cows.

Partly, and what is likely to be most important to you, is the fact that humane handling ensures better flavor and tenderness, and better control over food safety. If animals are stressed over a long period of time, or frightened or excited at the time of processing, the stress triggers chemical reactions in their bodies that negatively affect both the flavor and tenderness of their meat. So, both the length of time in transit to the processor and the experience they have there, as well as their general quality of life, are important considerations

Because we spend a great deal of time among our animals, they're comfortable with us and the sounds of our voices – even when we're moving them. They remain calm, and are not easily upset. And, we transport the animals to the processor ourselves.

We partner with expert, small state inspected processors (also called lockers) in neighboring communities – less than

an hour's drive from our farm. To work with us, they must ensure that the cattle don't wait long between arrival at the locker and processing. We insist on careful handling. We're confident in their high standards, consistent quality and the overall integrity of their operations. Their inspection protocols uphold the highest standards of food safety.

at Wheatsfield, on Douglas Avenue in downtown Ames, you'll discover a great selection of healthy fresh and delicious foods to complement our beef. Wheatsfield sets their prices. The store is a member owned co-op with open-to-the-public shopping from 9 to 9 seven days a week. Look for our name and logo on the beef packages in the freezer section.

◆ FULL CIRCLE FARM ◆

Three Ways to Buy Pasture Raised Beef From Full Circle Farm

- *By the Quarter, Half
or Whole Beef*
- *Cuts at the Farm*
- *At Wheatsfield
Grocery, Ames*



DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS
TELEPHONE: 515-795-3288 • E-MAIL: FULLCIRCLEFARM@OPENCOMINC.COM

1) Buy a quarter, a half or a whole beef.

If you have the freezer space, this is a great deal for you. You get your beef cut exactly the way you want it. From steaks to roasts to ground beef, the cuts are tailored to your family's size and meal preferences. That's because you will specify how you want your portions cut, and you can designate how you want it packaged. For example, do you want four steaks to a package, or two? Do you want ground beef in one, two or three pound packets? The lockers can string wrap your roasts, convert round steaks to minute steaks, and shape ground beef patties for additional fees. We'll be happy to give you a tip sheet to help you think through your choices.

"We didn't know we could afford to eat so well."

—BILL CHANEY, DES MOINES CUSTOMER SINCE 1999

By purchasing in bulk, you'll have the assurance and the convenience of knowing that you have flavorful, healthy meat on hand. Plus, it comes at a total cost only slightly above what you'd pay for grain-fed commodity beef in a supermarket, based on the USDA national average.

By far, buying bulk directly is the most economical choice we offer. The majority

of our customers buy by the quarter (called a "half of a half"). Some buy a half. Sometimes, a few families get together to split a whole beef. If you'd like to talk with some of these folks, just ask us for names and numbers. Satisfied customers are our best advertising. We also invite you to call us for more explanation, especially if you have never bought meat this way before.

2) Buy individual cuts of beef directly from us.

Maybe you don't have enough room in your freezer for a bulk purchase. Or, perhaps you want to sample a few cuts before you buy in quantity. Come to the farm to buy your beef. We sell from a designated, state inspected freezer right here at Full Circle Farm. We'll give you a fair price – call for the latest. While we do not have regular business hours for beef sales, if you call for an appointment we can usually match your schedule. We'd be delighted to meet you.

3) Buy cuts of Full Circle Farm beef at Wheatsfield Grocery, in Ames.

We are pleased to be selling our beef at Wheatsfield Grocery, Ames' premier health conscious food store. Shopping

(continued on back panel)

Full Circle Farm Pasture Raised Angus Beef

- ◆ Locally raised with humane care at Full Circle Farm, Madrid, Iowa
- ◆ Fed 100% organically grown vegetarian diet
- ◆ Graze certified organic pastures—no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides are used
- ◆ Not given antibiotics or growth-promoting hormones
- ◆ Custom processed locally in small batches

Part of a Larger Circle

We are committed to the vitality of our local community, and want the high quality food we grow to contribute to the well being of the folks around us. Our customers can depend on us and our local processors to provide premium quality meat, safe and humane processing, and custom options, while circulating more food dollars in our local economy. Our field days are an opportunity to open up the farm for walking and talking, and sharing our abundance of foods. Other visits are welcome by appointment.

We strive to be a preferred local source for natural beef—chosen for its flavor, nutritional content, freedom from contaminants, and affordable value.



DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS
TELEPHONE: 515-795-3288 • E-MAIL: FULLCIRCLEFARM@OPENCOMINC.COM

◆ PASTURE RAISED ◆

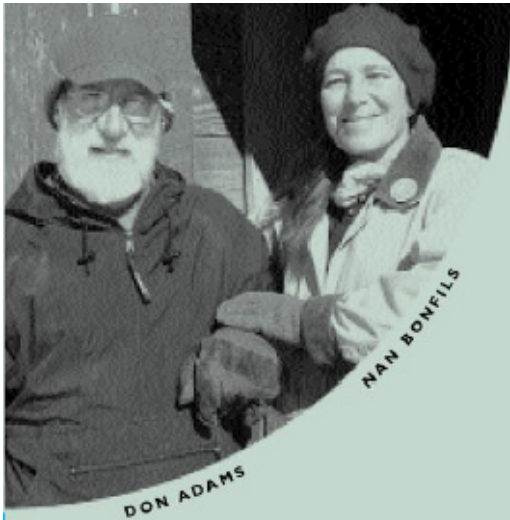
Angus Beef

LEAN, ALL NATURAL

*Tender,
moist,
robust beef
flavor*



DON ADAMS AND NAN BONFILS



DON ADAMS

NAN BONFILS

What's In A Name?

Full Circle Farm is a diverse family farm. We're dedicated to producing delicious, all natural, pasture raised beef while preserving and enhancing the surrounding biological community. The farm name reminds us of the cycle of the seasons, the waste-not-want-not attitude that guides our decisions, the importance of our local community and the bounty that surrounds us.

Materials developed and designed by John Seymour-Anderson, Minneapolis, MN, with support from Food Alliance Midwest and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

A Remarkable Place

Located near Madrid, Iowa, half an hour west of Ames, we're just down the road from Ledges State Park. The farm is situated on river valley uplands where prairie and woodlands meet. With a small man made lake, and with varied terrain and tree species, this 300-acre farm is also a welcoming habitat for an array of wildlife. Over the past ten years we have successfully increased soil vitality to a healthy level without the use of synthetic chemicals. Farming organically has definitely increased the biodiversity on the farm. At Full Circle Farm we believe preserving the environment is a prerequisite for producing wonderful food.

Brochure Developed for Full Circle Farm

♦ PASTURE RAISED ♦

Angus Beef

LEAN, ALL NATURAL

Tender, moist, robust beef flavor

- ♦ Locally raised with humane care at Full Circle Farm, Madrid, Iowa
- ♦ Fed 100% organically raised vegetarian diet
- ♦ Graze certified organic pastures—no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides are used
- ♦ Free of antibiotics and growth-promoting hormones
- ♦ Custom processed locally in small batches in Nevada, Iowa

Studies Show Pasture Raised Beef Is:

- Low in Saturated Fat
- Low in Cholesterol
- Lower in Calories than Grain Fed Beef
- High in Health Promoting Essential Fatty Acids
- High in Vitamin E (for heart health)
- Highly resistant to E coli and other pathogenic bacteria

For more information about pasture raised foods, visit www.ecowild.com.



Order Ahead and Pick Up Only
Tel: 562-641-1144 • 1144 • 1144 • www.ecowild.com