

# BISON WORLD

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SPECIAL FOOD SECTION INSIDE  
MARKETING INSIGHTS  
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# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Wild T Bison, Fritz & Kerry Wildt, Haynesville, VA Local Flair Brings Lasting Rewards

by Laurie Dineen

Fritz and Kerry Wildt didn't start out as bison marketers; it's a title that they grew into over the years. Owning a 128 acre farm with 50 to 60 head of bison in Virginia offered them challenges that brought about opportunities.

When the Wildts processed their first animal for their own personal consumption, they had no idea that it would bring about a great deal of change. With Kerry being a natural cook who loves to experiment with recipes, their window of opportunity opened and soon they found themselves involved in the local farmers' market. At first they noticed a lot of people walking by their booth; many were not familiar with bison, or had received a lot of misinformation that formed negative opinions. However, it didn't take long for Fritz, who has a fun and interactive personality, to start a conversation with people. He will go out of his way to help re-educate the public about the benefits and wonderful values that the animal and bison meat has to offer.

With her expertise and willingness to experiment with recipes, Kerry's role is to provide various recipes as handouts at their booth. "It is critical for people to have a good experience the first time they try bison. And once you get them to buy it, they must know how to cook it properly," Kerry said. Kerry has also worked with local chefs to prepare wonderful entrees that are not only easy to prepare, but delicious. Maintaining a folder of all types of recipes from the most basic to more advanced to fit with all types of customers has been a great asset.

Over the past five years, the Wildts have learned a lot about buffalo meat. They point out to their customers that with buffalo being a lean, healthful product, it must be cooked properly and it is, hands down, the best meat that one can experience.

Another benefit of the farmers' market has been the "Chef Tent," where chefs are on hand to cook various items supplied from vendors found that day at the market. This has increased the meat sales for the Wildts. Another marketing tool they use to their advantage is to incorporate other vendors' products along with their bison, such as fresh fruits and vegetables that can ac-



Fritz and Kerry Wildt promoting bison at a local farmers' market.

company a bison entree. "We also offer samples at our booth along with recipes, and use a lot of visual aids that really help our overall sales," said Kerry.

The Wildts have found the "multi-task" marketing approach to be effective. "We reach out to the local individual customer at the farmers' market, but have also expanded to the local restaurants to promote our meat product and have also incorporated ranch tours to give the "total experience" to help educate and promote our industry," Fritz commented.

By talking with other bison producers and reading the literature, the Wildts have been able to learn what other producers are doing and mold various ideas to fit into their local area and type of business that they have built. One unique marketing tool that Kerry has used is to invite the owners of a local deli that sells bison meat to their home for dinner. "By doing this, I can prepare a wonderful bison meal and we can have their undivided



attention to educate them about bison. Then they pass on their positive experience in their own business,” she said.

“We see so many people that purchase buffalo as a novelty item for a dinner party,” Kerry said. By providing cooking instructions and recipes, the Wildts are prepared to offer a variety of ways to prepare bison so that they can pass on the information and insure that everyone has a great experience. The Wildts also provide recipes for consumers who prefer medium to well done to still have a wonderful experience with buffalo.

With Kerry’s wonderful recipe ideas, the Wildts are able to market more roasts, which is more profitable than selling just the burger. Her London Broil recipe is “to die for” and the Eye of Round is another favorite. (See page 15 of the food section).

“Offering the “Ultimate Bison Experience” is what we want our customers to remember us for,” said Fritz.

“While farmers’ markets are not for everyone, because they are a lot of work—we participate in them because it brings more to our life than just marketing meat. It is all the little things that matter. Some things may not even be direct marketing, but they get people involved in bison,” Fritz said.

Fritz and Kerry work together on the farm. “We made a promise to each other that quality was the key to success, and we work hard every day to keep our promise,” they said.

“We try to promote the bison industry as a whole. We utilize the NBA website to help direct customers to producers and markets that may be closer to them. We use the NBA marketing brochures and cookbooks because it brings continuity and credibility to our industry. As a small industry, we all need to help each other and by doing so, we all benefit,” said the Wildts. “The



*Kerry is an accomplished bison chef. Her Grilled London Broil shown here is fabulous.*

real key for people to see is that our industry is profitable. This will help gain new producers and ensure our industry a long, healthy life.”

Both agreed that they never get too far from the original reason that they got into the bison business. “We have a great animal; we have good farmland with good pastures and a great story to tell the general public. We are good stewards,” said Fritz. “The buffalo have taught us a lot, and we see how many producers have tailored their operations around the animals and their natural cycle. We all benefit by working with nature.”

