

Bull



Cow



Calf

# BISON



# BISON

**Top 10 Minnesota Counties for Raising Bison in 2007:**  
Stearns, Winona, Otter Tail, Houston, Nobles,  
Cottonwood, LeSueur, Redwood, Rice and Sherburne

## Background Information

For purposes of production agriculture, the bison is considered an alternative livestock and not a "traditional" farm animal. However, the industry is growing and is revered for its heart-healthy, lean meat.

In America the bison is commonly referred to as "buffalo"; however, this is a misnomer; the term "buffalo" properly applies only to the Asian water buffalo and African buffalo. In America, bison is the scientific name and buffalo is the "nickname" for the same animal. Mistaken as oxen by French explorers, they called them "les boeufs," and over the years the name transitioned to buffalo. The name became so closely connected to America's history and heritage that they are still called buffalo by many Americans today. Often the animal is called bison and the meat it provides is called buffalo.

## An Historical Perspective

Some 60 million bison once roamed North America. Only a century ago, bison teetered on the brink of extinction. Bison were the center of life for the Native Americans who used all parts of the bison, wasting little. The meat was a primary source of food. Bones made tools and weapons as well as toys and games for their children. Hides provided materials for blankets, clothing and tepees. Although once considered an endangered species, more than 400,000 bison now roam the pastures and prairies across North America. Since 1995, the National Bison Association has worked in partnership with farmers and park managers to help bring bison back as part of the North American ecosystem, and the American diet.

## Home on the Range

Historically, bison were known as nomadic grazers and traveled in herds from coast to coast and Canada to Mexico. Bison have never been domesticated, although the American bison is kept on some farms. Bison live to about 20 years and are born without their trademark "hump" or horns. With the development of their horns, they become mature at two to three years of age, although the males continue to grow slowly to about age seven.

Bison have a fairly simple diet. The bison's main food is grass. Bison also eat the low lying shrubbery that is available. In the winter, bison forage in the snow looking for grass. If there is little grass available, bison have to resort to eating twigs of the shrubs and plants.

## A Large Animal

The bison is the largest mammal in North America. When mature, bison can reach an average weight of 1,000 pounds for cows (females) and 2,000 pounds for bulls (males). The young are referred to as calves. The bison is a ruminant, which means they have four compartments in their stomach, much like cattle and sheep.

The bison can jump a 6 foot fence from a standing position and dig deep into the snow to find food. They are strong and aggressive, and can jump as well as deer, outmaneuver horses, and break through fences that would imprison other livestock. Bison can run at speeds up to 35 miles per hour, and easily outrun a horse. Besides providing meat, bison also contribute other by-products: hides are used in many different leather products, and their skulls and other bones are used for ceremonial and decoration purposes.

## How are bison raised today?

Bison have been raised on American farms and ranches for over 100 years. Today there are over 4,000 people raising 400,000 bison. Of these, over 12,000 reside on Minnesota farms and are mostly marketed for their lean, healthy meat. Minnesota is second nationally for number of bison producers and seventh in number of animals. You can find bison in all 50 states.

Bison are raised on pastures and eat hay and grass. Some farmers supply them grain during the last 90 to 120 days before slaughter. Antibiotics and growth hormones are never given to bison. Today's bison are slaughtered between 20 and 30 months.

Bison are an ecologically sustainable livestock, having evolved alongside the various ecosystems of North America. They are very adaptable, and are able to thrive in a variety of climates without providing shelter. They can tolerate extremes of heat and cold, and their particular style of grazing leaves the pastures evenly trimmed, and the stronger for it.

## Bison...America's Original Red Meat!

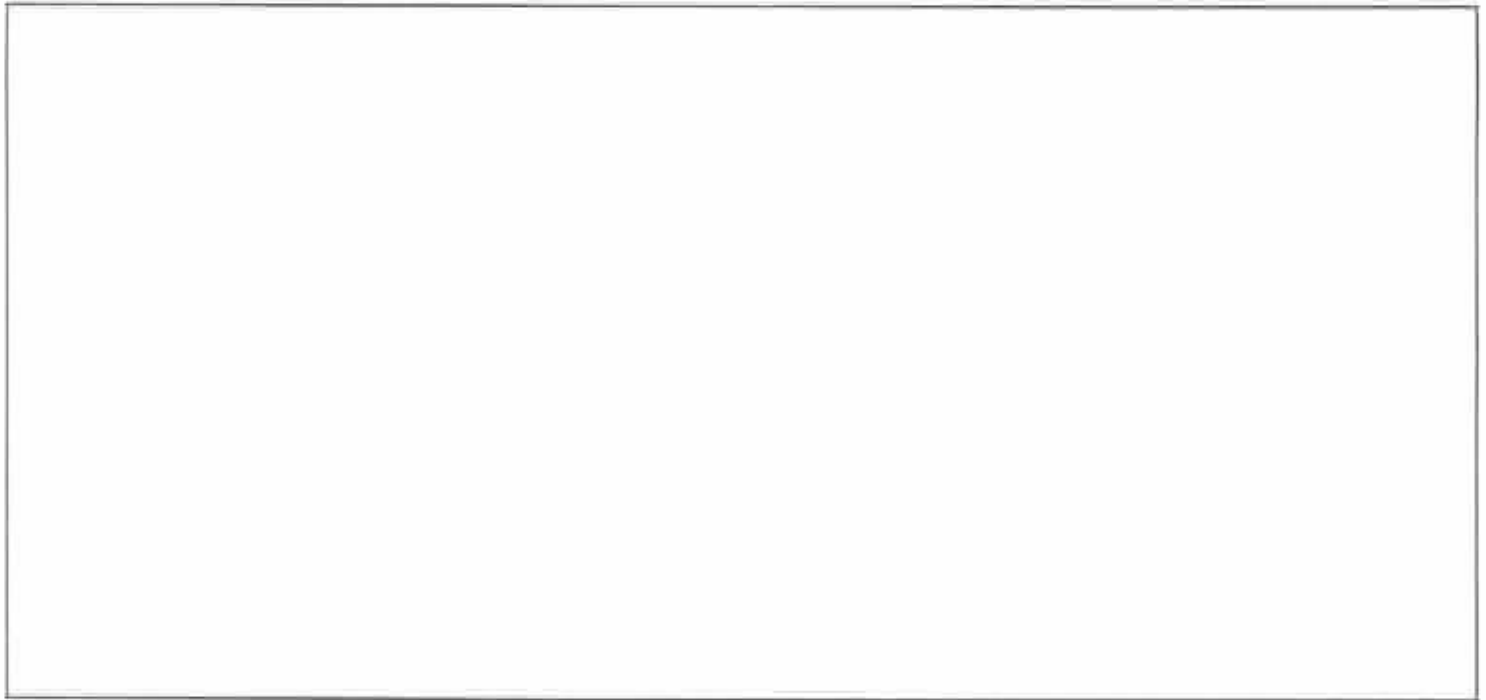
How is bison different than beef? Bison is a deeper red color before cooking because there is no marbling (white flecks of fat within the meat muscle). Bison is said to have a sweeter, richer flavor than beef. The retail cuts are similar to the beef animal.

Bison meat is very healthy. It is high in protein, iron and Omega 3 fatty acids. It is also low in cholesterol, calories and fat. One rule of thumb when cooking bison: avoid cooking beyond medium or it becomes dry.

An online bison class is offered by the National Bison Association. Visit [www.bisoncentral.com](http://www.bisoncentral.com).

## BISON

1. In the box provided, draw a bull, cow, and calf.



2. In America what is the bison commonly referred to as?
3. Describe the bison physically (weight, height, their stomachs, capabilities).
4. How are bison raised?
5. How is bison different than beef?
6. Using your map of Minnesota counties, create a symbol for bison and mark the top 10 counties that raised cows in 2007.