

## ***El Morro Valley Ranch: Ramah, NM***

By Rebecca Allina



El Morro Valley Ranch is located on the high plains of the Zuni Mountains in northwestern New Mexico. The ranch looks out over striped mesas, ancient volcanoes and El Morro National Monument. It is at 7,000 ft elevation. Cattle at the ranch graze on native grasses and are winter-supplemented with organically raised forage crops. This last summer the first range-fed beef went to market from this relatively new endeavor. Charles Mallery is the owner/operator of this ranch, and no stranger to cattle ranching, having raised cattle over 20 years ago for the commodity market. He is ranching once again; something Charlie has wanted to do for a long time. This time it is with increased awareness and concern over the state of food in America. He has always been environmentally oriented and has sought to keep his ranching operation natural and environmentally sound, which brings him to his newest endeavor; raising range-fed organic beef.

Charlie purchased cows in 2008 from an old friend who was leaving the cattle business. Soon after, he made the decision to seek organic certification for his grazing and farming land and also for the cattle that would be born into the herd. The ranch land was certified organic by NMOCC in summer of 2009 and cattle born after May, 2009 are certified organic. None of the meat the he has processed so far is certified organic but it is all raised within organic, grass-fed guidelines.

“This is not easy country to farm,” says Charlie. “So often you hear about how many cows you can graze per acre. Out here it is how many acres you need per cow. One of the things that we are trying to do is to graze carefully, moving the cattle frequently so the fragile grassland is not overgrazed. Operating our ranch as ‘grass farmers’ has required a good deal of time and attention for us. I now realize that this is at least two businesses; one is raising and finishing the cows and the other is marketing and distributing the beef.”

Lack of a nearby processing facility is a challenge. There are only 2 USDA Organic certified slaughter facilities in the area; one near Albuquerque (3 hours away) and one in Durango, CO (4 hours away). We have to truck our cows to those facilities. “It is not what we would like to do for their sake *and* ours,” says Charlie, “We believe that low stress management and processing is an important piece to maintain all the tenderness and other benefits of range feeding and finishing.”

The ranch has looked into use of the Mobile Matanza (a traveling slaughter facility) but since the beef is dry aged for 21 days there is a need for a place to hang and package it. According to Charles, “The question is how to create a viable infrastructure that makes all aspects of the business possible. Our vision is for regional processing centers. We want to eliminate the stress of handling and transporting the cattle to slaughter. The idea of the Mobile Matanza could be part of the solution and a great resource for range and grass-fed producers. Regional processing centers where beef is aged, processed and distributed are needed to complete the regional processing system.

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**Mission Statement:** *“SWGLA is an alliance of producers, land managers, conservationists and researchers that promotes grass-fed livestock products through applied research, educations and cooperation in order to improve human, ecological, social and animal health.”*

**Dave Pratt** *(continued)*

showing us that it should not be just a collection of assets and lots of jobs. He suggested that we need to spend time **working on the business**, not just **working in the business**. We need to pay ourselves a salary and learn to analyze each enterprise we operate so we know if it returns a profit. Then we can clear away the “dead wood” and become more successful. RMC has even developed benchmarks that are based on successful agricultural businesses that we can compare to once we’ve learned how to calculate gross margins and profit. Dave also challenged us with many questions: What is profit for? Should we buy land or rent? Why are most grassfed businesses not profitable? We learned to distinguish between direct costs and overheads and where to allocate them when figuring profits.

The seminar was well attended and SWGLA did a great job organizing the day. For those new to Dave Pratt’s way of teaching, it might have been difficult to grasp enough in this introductory session to put to use by the end of the day. Much of the information provided was general in scope with the idea of challenging us to start thinking “outside the box”. Some who attended were looking for answers to very specific questions regarding their own grassfed business. The RMC people attempt to give you the tools and the mindset to be able to answer these specific questions yourself. This seminar was a great introduction to the concepts of Ranching Management Consultants and a good refresher course for those of us who had already attended their school.

***El Morro Valley Ranch (continued)***

We are committed to raising organic, range-fed cattle and believe that changes in the way that America eats and produces food are very important. We support the concept of a regional food system and enjoy doing our part in reinvesting carbon into the soil.”

El Morro Valley Ranch offers grass-fed and range-fed USDA Certified beef. They have halves, quarters, and variety boxes. Custom boxes and orders are also available. The ranch will have Certified Organic Range-fed Beef, certified by NMOCC, in the summer of 2010. You may contact the ranch at:



*Charles Mallery and Rebecca Allina*

[elmorrovalleyranch@gmail.com](mailto:elmorrovalleyranch@gmail.com) or the ranch headquarters at (505) 783-4521.

**What’s Cooking?**



**Oxtail Ragout** 4-5 servings.

- 2 oxtails, skinned and cut into pieces
- 2 T butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 T parsley
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 carrot, peeled and chopped
- 1 T flour
- ½ cup beef stock
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1 ½ T cognac, optional
- 1 cup canned, diced tomatoes
- 1 T lemon juice
- 1/8 tsp. nutmeg
- ¼ cup Marsala or Madeira wine
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Brown oxtails well in butter and oil in a large skillet. When browned transfer to a crockpot. Add carrot, celery and garlic to skillet and cook until lightly browned. (Add a bit more butter or oil if needed) Sprinkle the carrot and celery pieces in the skillet with the flour and add some stock. Stir to dissolve brown particles and scrape this mixture into the crockpot. Add the remaining stock to the crockpot with the red wine, cognac, tomatoes, parsley and bay leaf. Cook on low for 8 hrs. Add more beef stock if needed.

Remove the oxtail pieces, skim excess fat from sauce. Heat sauce, add lemon juice, nutmeg, Madeira and pepper. Simmer 5 mins. and pour sauce over oxtails.

Rice or mashed potatoes go well with this.

From  
**Barbie Goebel:**  
**Cimarron Angus**  
Maxwell, NM