

Weekend Best Bets: Lemurs, Beavers and Weezer

Take It Slow

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(M)Eat Local

BY KIRSTEN BALLARD

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Jennifer Curtis and Tina Prevatté with their meat wagon

Jennifer Curtis was a vegetarian. “I didn’t feel comfortable with what I was putting in my body,” she said. Jennifer grew up around food, daughter of an avid cook and organic gardener. But after the birth of her daughter, things changed. “She was just one of those kids who loved meat, so I guess you can blame her.”

Jennifer is now co-CEO of **Firsthand Foods**, a business she and **Tina Prevatté** started in 2010. Firsthand Foods is the middleman for meat farmers and local restaurants, markets and now customers.

Starting in July, Firsthand Foods’ **(M)eat Local Boxes** will be available for pickup. The boxes are a seasonal, subscription-based program that provides participants with a monthly delivery of local, pasture-raised pork and beef at selected drop-off locations in Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. You pay in advance for a three-month subscription of either a large or small box. Boxes contain a variety of meats adapted to the season with the ability to grill or braise the meat. You’ll enjoy familiar products like pork loin chops and flat iron steaks. But you’ll also discover more unique items like beef shank and Boston butt roasts, to satisfy more adventuresome cooks. To meet your everyday needs, frozen ground beef, sausages and whole pasture-raised chickens are available as “add-ons” when you pick up your box.

Firsthand Foods started as a **Sausage Wagon** food truck in 2010. Now it has a full-time staff of four with a database of 60 local farmers and an ever-growing demand. Firsthand Foods supplies local, hormone-free, antibiotic-free, outdoor-raised and vegetarian-fed meat, usually pork or beef, though they provide poultry on a smaller scale.

Jennifer attests to the difference in flavor. “It’s just fresh.” The meat has multiple health benefits — including the transfer of grass-fed beef’s nutrient-rich diet to the consumer — but that’s not the only focus of Jennifer’s mission. She’s interested in the sustainability of this type of farming.

Firsthand Foods ensures that they’re selling the maximum yield per animal in an effort to reduce waste.

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“I love the opportunity sustainable agriculture provides,” Jennifer says. “It provides hope. We’re helping the planet instead of destroying it. Everybody has to eat.”

Jennifer has enjoyed the growing awareness of eating local. “People want to know where their food is coming from.” Firsthand Foods is big on transparency.

But it’s not only the consumers who can enjoy knowing where their meat came from. Farmers enjoy knowing as well. “I can think of one time where I visited a hog farmer down in Clinton, and when I was able to tell him his meat was in sausages going to **UNC**, it made him so proud.”

While this meat-supply chain is less efficient, it is more humane and healthy. “It’s not a religion,” Jennifer says. “But making small changes makes a big difference. Start asking questions: Where did this meat come from? Identify a source and work on incorporating it into the family diet weekly.”

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