



## WHERE'S THE (ETHICAL) BEEF?

Butchers up the standards on the meat we eat. » D1



## LUXURY DIGS AT YVR MALL

Architecture, shops create unique experience. » C6

# VANCOUVER SUN

A DIVISION OF POSTMEDIA NETWORK INC

BREAKING NEWS | VANCOUVERSUN.COM

SERIOUSLY WESTCOAST SINCE 1912

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2015



RIC ERNST/PNG

## Dope battle heats up

Ottawa tells city to enforce the law; pot activists vow to fight city's regulation effort

JEFF LEE AND PETER O'NEIL  
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver found itself facing a fight on two fronts Tuesday in its efforts to regulate and license marijuana shops.

On one hand, the federal government increased its opposition to the city's plans and expressly told the Vancouver Police Department it should enforce Canada's drug laws.

Vancouver police Chief Jim Chu speaks to The Vancouver Sun at his Cambie Street office on Monday. The chief is retiring next month.

## Police, pot and politics: Jim Chu

There's nothing that'll put you off your food like knowing an animal had to suffer to get to your dinner plate.

That's why a growing number of farmers, distributors, butchers, chefs and consumers are fighting to raise the ethical standards of the meat we eat — or at least give us some better choices.

The question is, what exactly are those better choices?

"It's confusing for people," says food writer Don Genova. "What's the difference between organic and grass-fed and grass-finished? How is that different from antibiotic free? And what is best from an ethical standpoint and what is best from a flavour standpoint? It doesn't always match up."

Those are just some of the questions that Genova hopes will be answered today when he moderates a hospitality industry symposium on ethical meat as part of the EAT! Vancouver Food and Cooking Festival ([eat-vancouver.com](http://eat-vancouver.com)).

"I think in general I want people to come out of there with a lot more knowledge of where their meat comes from and how to cook it, what it can be used for," he says.

Meanwhile, if you don't want to give up meat, but you do want to make more ethical choices when it comes to your burgers and bacon, here's where to start.

## On the farm

"For me, ethical meat all starts with the farmer and the way the animal is raised," says Tim Cuff, executive chef at West Oak Restaurant in Yaletown. "And that includes not just the animal, but the land. It's kind of a complete circle."

If you're envisioning a solution as black and white as a happy Holstein grazing in a field, well, it's not quite as simple as that, especially when it comes to our favourite protein, beef.

"It depends on what's happening at the farm and in the life cycle of the animal," says Jason Pley, owner of Two Rivers Specialty Meats in North Vancouver, which carries beef from animals that spend their lives on the range, free from antibiotics, hormones and steroids. "The starting period of all cattle is actually very good. It's what happens after that where things change."

Calves are born on the range and spend their first few months grazing under open skies. Then some 90 per cent of them are sent into the commodity program, which means a feedlot or CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation). There they are injected with hormones or

# MEAT WITHOUT GUILT

## How to make ethical choices at the butcher shop

steroids to make them grow and medications to keep them from getting sick from the hundreds of thousands of other cattle that share the feedlot with them.

"It doesn't sound great. But that's not to say there's anything wrong with that beef," says Pley. "It's just not easy to say, 'This is wrong' and 'We shouldn't do that.' This is just one system of raising beef to feed the masses."

And, he points out, not all commodity animals are the same. For instance, Johnston's could be considered a commodity pork producer, but the owners have put effort into creating environments where the pigs are happy and comfortable, and get to play and socialize, even if they do live in a big barn.

Contrast that to horror stories of pigs kept in filthy, overcrowded factory farms where they don't have room to move and never see daylight. Or chickens penned together so tightly in battery cages that their beaks have to be cut off so they won't peck each other to death out of frustration.

It's exactly those scenarios that spurred the creation in 2002 of the BC SPCA Certified program. This spring, the program is being rolled out across Canada with the hopes that more farms will join in and the SPCA Certified red barn symbol will become as recognizable as Ocean Wise is for sustainable seafood.

To become certified, farms have to adhere to a long list of clearly stated ethical practices.

"In general, that means omitting practices that cause pain or fear or distress to the animals," says program manager Brandy Street.

## In the shop

Up in Peace River country, Jerry Kitt, owner of First Nature Farms, might just have the happiest pigs around. Not only does he let them live and play outdoors with their families, but also, butcher Sebastian Cortez says, "(Kitt) goes out to the forest and he plays the accordion to them and that pork is the best I've ever had."

For Cortez, who is the owner of Sebastian & Co. Fine Meats in West Vancouver, it's important that meat be raised ethically. But it's even more important that it tastes good.

Often, ethical meat is more flavourful than commodity meat. For one thing, an ethically raised and slaughtered animal isn't as stressed; stress floods the body with adrenalin, which can impart an unpleasant tang.

Unfortunately, though, some organic grass-fed and finished beef can be chewy and gamy, with an unpleasant liverish note, which is a bit tough to swallow at \$30 a pound. That's why Cortez and Pley prefer to sell naturally raised beef that is grass-fed, but spends a short time being "finished" on grain such as organic barley. The grain adds intramuscular marbling, that is, the fat that makes beef so delicious.

How the animal was raised isn't the only factor consumers should consider when trying to make an ethical choice. Another thing to keep in mind is the type of cut you buy, which feeds into important issues of food waste and sustainability.

If people want to keep small, ethical farmers and retailers

in business, Cortez says, they should start buying lesser-known cuts, which are cheaper than, say, tenderloin, but more profitable than ground beef.

Some beef cuts Cortez recommends include: vacio (bavette or flap steak), entraña (skirt steak), picanha (sirloin cap), tri-tip, flank, flat iron and hanger steak, which are all popular in Europe and South America, but almost unheard of here.

## On the menu

For ethical choices — whether they are offcuts, SPCA Certified or organic meats — to become the standard, consumers have to be willing to pay for them.

At West Oak, Cuff says, "It's all we do. Everything we do from fish to chicken to beef to venison. Whenever we use meat, it's important we get it from a reputable supplier and know how the animal was raised. As a chef, I want to be proud of the food I put on the plate."

It can be challenging. Free-range chicken is more expensive than commodity chicken, and hanger steak is a tougher sell than tenderloin. Plus, a consistent supply of products isn't always possible. Even so, Cuff says, many restaurants "really do care. The owners and the chefs have a commitment for sure."

Part of that commitment is educating consumers on what to expect. For instance, Cuff says, "Sometimes the grass-fed beef flavour profile is a little bit different. We let people know that's how it's supposed to taste. I think it has more flavour than a farmed animal."

Education counts, but the really big issue, in Pley's mind, is transparency.

"Is it free range or organic? Those are two different things. You can have organic beef that's been raised in a feedlot. It doesn't mean anything," he says. For consumers, he admits, it can be "bloody hard."

Basically, it's up to you to do the research. A big retailer like Whole Foods has to adhere to strict labelling protocols. The SPCA Certified logo is also a good indicator. Get to know your butcher, chef or charcutier and learn where they source their meat. And support your local farmers — they can always use more help.

As Cuff says, "There are so few things that we can control on this planet. Composting, recycling, choosing Ocean Wise fish, sustainable meat — everything we use should be sustainable. I'm not a hippie or a tree hugger, but so much damage has been done. I want to be part of making things better."

And isn't that something we're all hungry for?



## Beyond the Trees: Wallpapers in Dialogue with Emily Carr

Wallpapers is Sara Ludy, Nicolas Sassoon and Sylvain Saille. The Vancouver collective creates dynamic digital desktop designs exhibited online at [w-a-l-l-p-a-p-e-r-s.net](http://w-a-l-l-p-a-p-e-r-s.net), and projected at art galleries and events. For Nuit Blanche, in Toronto, Wallpapers transformed the Drake Hotel's facade into an otherworldly landscape. Right now, Nicolas Sassoon's waterfall projection streams down Burrard Arts Foundation. For the VAG's fifth instalment of its Dialogue with Emily Carr series, the trio creates an immersive environment that evokes the dense, swirling forest with patterns that mimic Carr's brush strokes.

To Sept. 7 | Vancouver Art Gallery  
More info: [vancouverartgallery.bc.ca](http://vancouverartgallery.bc.ca)



## Kevin Boyle: DaySleeper

Kevin Boyle slinks at night around small, mostly boarded-up Prairie towns, where he finds "a freedom that the day never seemed to deliver; a peace and quiet in the air." Boyle's photographs explore ways darkness can illuminate beauty.

Opens May 1, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.;  
to May 23 | Kimoto Gallery