



V. Mac Baldwin Baldwin Family Farms



One of the Local Food Champions of 2019 by the NC Local Food Council.

By Casey Jean Roe

When a buyer from Whole Foods Market visited Baldwin Family Farms in 2004, V. Mac Baldwin gave him a tour and decided to “let the beef do the talking” by sending him home with a sample. As days passed without hearing from the buyer, Baldwin mused, “Well, there went a couple good rib eyes.”

Baldwin believes it takes faith to farm. His cattle graze on sweet grass and clover in a natural cycle through the seasons. He describes this annual orchestration of forage as his “grass ministry” and he carries a testament in his pocket each day.

“I was always interested in cattle,” says Baldwin. As a child, Baldwin cut out photos of cattle from magazines. He bought his first calf for sixty dollars when he was ten years old and kept it watered and fed in the yard of his childhood home in Durham, North Carolina.

While working with cattle seemed inevitable, selling beef was not. “We got into this by accident,” Baldwin says, as he describes how he and his wife Peggy Baldwin spent 20 years raising Charolais breeding calves before transitioning to raising full weight cattle. He takes pride in the Charolais breed and the lean beef they produce.

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Baldwin’s faith was well placed in the flavor of his beef. Eventually, he got a call back from the Whole Foods Market buyer, who was sold by the sample and placed an order. Today, Baldwin Beef is available in more than 10 Whole Foods Market stores in North Carolina and Virginia. Each package of Baldwin Beef comes from a single animal.

“The ticket to success,” says Baldwin, “is learning about your consumers.” The Baldwin family sells their beef directly to customers in an on-farm store and at the Carrboro Farmer’s Market. Baldwin believes in the power of word of mouth marketing and the principle that, “you have to work until your product is so good your consumer wants to tell her friends.”

The location of the farm, in Caswell County, North Carolina, has important characteristics that support Baldwin’s farm system. There is generally sufficient rainfall to grow forage. There is also a market of consumers who, in Baldwin’s words, “like to eat well” and are willing to pay a premium for health, flavor and to support a local farmer.

Baldwin has adapted his business over the years, including adding chickens to his farm system. The Baldwin’s raise hatching eggs and use manure from the hens as fertilizer to grow lush pasture. Chickens have added further income diversification to the farming operations, which is important to the economics of the farm business. In turn, Baldwin Family Farms contributes to the local food economy by providing jobs, managing natural resources and stewarding farmland.

There are now three generations of the Baldwin family operating the farm, including V. Mac and Peggy Baldwin's adopted son.

"We have a family that we would not have had if we didn't go down the adoption path," explains Baldwin. His grandchildren are involved in the farm and his son will eventually run the business.

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Baldwin has kept his faith and his entrepreneurial spirit. The family is gradually buying land and he expects the next generation will double the farm's acreage. "You can't stand still," Baldwin emphasizes, "there's always a challenge to do more."

As the farm grows, the family must also grow the market for their beef. This is the next focus for Baldwin: "We have to do a better job of telling our story."

Learn more about NC Local Food Councils' champions and their work at nclocalfoodcouncil.org.

Baldwin Slow Cooked Beef Brisket

Ingredients:

- 1 fresh or frozen beef brisket (3-4 lbs)
- 1/2 lb sliced fresh mushrooms
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cups crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 1/4 cup cold water
- 2 cloves minced garlic



The Baldwin family describes their slow cooked brisket as "an easy, gotta try dish."

Cut the brisket in half; place in a 5 quart slow cooker. Add mushrooms and bay leaves.

Combine the tomatoes, onion, brown sugar, vinegar and ketchup; pour over the beef.

Cover and cook on low heat for 6-7 hours or until the meat is tender.

Remove beef and keep warm. Discard bay leaves. In a large saucepan, combine cornstarch and water until smooth.

Gradually stir in cooking liquid. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes until thickened.

Slice meat across the grain;

Serve with sauce.