

Former newsman pitches advantages of grass-fed cattle

By Carmen McCollum
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Jonathan Miano | The Times Chicago news anchor Bill Kurtis, center, talks to Ivy Tech Community College culinary faculty and students Thursday at the school's East Chicago De La Garza campus. Kurtis has started his own cattle ranch, Tallgrass Beef, in Sedan, Kansas.

EAST CHICAGO | Comparing obesity to homicide, Chicago newsman turned cattle baron Bill Kurtis talked about the health benefits of grass-fed cattle.

When Kurtis retired from the media, he started his own cattle ranch, Tallgrass Beef in Sedan, Kansas. He spoke to culinary faculty and students at Ivy Tech Community College's East Chicago De La Garza campus Thursday about the benefits of grass-fed cattle as opposed to corn-fed.

Kurtis said obesity is killing Americans through diet, fast food, chemicals, preservatives, additives, fat content and portion sizes. He said cattle weren't meant to eat corn, but producers learned corn-fed beef can be fattened quicker — in 14 to 16 months — and corn is a cheaper food source. He also said finishing cattle in feedlots is quicker and cheaper because the cattle are confined to pens or paddocks and fed a very high-energy diet.

He said he was interested in the benefits of grass-fed cattle. Kurtis said grass-fed cattle has a more robust flavor, much like wild game and has higher levels of Omega-3 fatty acids, lower levels of saturated fat, fewer calories and less cholesterol.

"We produce our beef the way Mother Nature intended," Kurtis said, adding his mission is truly to educate people.

In 2011, three of every five Americans are overweight and one in five are obese, Kurtis said. He also said what we eat is the reason why so many people are being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. He said the additives and preservatives in foods have made young girls mature faster.

Kurtis said there is high fructose corn syrup in most every product, and he challenged students and faculty to begin reading labels when shopping at the grocery store.

Allen Williams, who works with Kurtis on his farm, said there is a growing trend to buy organic food. A 2009 American Institute Consumer Survey, indicated 42.3 percent of Americans have bought natural or organic meats. People between age 25 and 39 are more likely to buy organic products, according to the survey.