



# THIS WEEK TIP SHEET

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## GOT GAME?

While the options for Torontonians to try wild-caught game remain limited, there are plenty of opportunities to purchase farmed meat at restaurants or butcher shops. The flavour will certainly be less gamey than wild-caught, but that doesn't mean there aren't quality products and dishes out there.

BY **SHERYL KIRBY** MARCH 4, 2015 7:18 PM

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David Laurence

Whitehouse Meats' Qendrim Pera cuts and packs buffalo cheeks (left).

Game meat can split a crowd. Many balk at the slaughter and consumption of beautiful wild animals, but others realize that meat like venison is a healthy, natural alternative to intensively farmed products.

Game is generally leaner than beef or pork, and wild-caught animals eat a diet of twigs, berries and acorns instead of corn and antibiotics. That makes for a vast difference in flavour and texture from the farmed version.

Too bad for Ontarians that the only game meat we can purchase in stores and restaurants is farmed.

Concerned about quality control and poaching, most Canadian provinces have laws that prohibit the sale of wild-caught game. When game meat shows up at a butcher shop or restaurant, it's usually rabbit, venison or other animals that take well to domestication. Nobody seems especially interested in farming moose or bear.

Slaughter of farmed game meat must meet provincial guidelines regarding inspection and sanitation, while wild-caught meat is usually skinned and gutted in the woods and then either butchered by the hunter or a willing butcher.

Butchers who work with wild-caught meat must keep it separate from their inspected

commercial wares, and some in rural areas even close their shops during hunting season to focus on bespoke game butchery.

In Newfoundland, where moose outnumber people, and Nova Scotia, laws around game meat are slowly changing. Restaurants there may deal directly with hunters to purchase wild-caught game. The hunters must be licensed, and all laws must be met (hunters are usually limited to one or two deer per season and must have tags and paperwork).

A program started last year in Quebec permits a small number of high-end restaurants to serve wild-caught game, and there is hope among some Toronto chefs that Ontario will eventually follow suit.

In the meantime, restaurants here are only allowed to serve wild-caught meat at charitable events. While no permits are needed, they must ensure that all profits go to charity and keep paperwork that guarantees all meat was legally obtained.

Events like the annual Canoe Wild dinner - where chef John Horne and other chefs from across Canada serve seal, ptarmigan, squirrel and venison - draw sell-out crowds, and the Group of Seven Chefs has hosted events where moose and even beaver were on the menu.

🔖 Tags *meat, food*

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