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Faye Fang, a freshman journalism and art history major, tries a burger made with grass-fed beef on Wednesday at Lenoir Mainstreet.

UNC tries out grass-fed beef

By: Sara Peach, Staff Writer

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Carolina Dining Services is finding that mixing local farmers and open pastures is a recipe for a successful burger.

Starting this month, students have been able to purchase locally produced, environmentally friendly hamburgers at Carolina Kitchen in Lenoir Dining Hall.

The meat in the burgers comes from cows raised at Harris Acres Farm in Pinetops about 100 miles east of Chapel Hill. Patrick Robinette of Harris Acres said the cows are grass-fed and free of antibiotics and pesticides.

Now about 400 of the 600 burgers sold daily are made from Robinette's beef.

At \$3.99 for a quarter-pounder and \$4.99 for a half-pound burger, they cost \$1 more than the conventional burgers sold in Lenoir.

"It's a dollar more, but I think it's worth it," said Aspen Price, a junior environmental studies major. She said she supports purchasing food from local farmers because it reduces the amount of fuel burned to transport food to consumers.

The introduction of the hamburgers results from a partnership between Carolina Dining Services and Fair, Local, Organic Food, a student organization that has asked dining services to serve more locally grown, organic food from companies with fair labor practices.

Scott Myers, director of food and vending for Carolina Dining Services said he met Robinette at a FLO Food event in December.

The burgers went on sale at the beginning of the spring semester.

Senior David Hamilton, one of the leaders of FLO Food, said burgers made from grass-fed cows are healthier than conventional ones.

"Cows are supposed to eat grass. It's their natural diet," he said.

A majority of U.S. cows are fed corn and raised in crowded conditions, which makes them more susceptible to disease, Hamilton said.

Research has also shown that meat from grass-fed animals contains more omega-3 fatty acids, more

beta-carotene and less total fat than conventional meat.

"The good stuff, the nutritional stuff is in there," Robinette said.

But Gary Gregory, a beef cattle research technician at N.C. State University, said some people dislike the taste of grass-fed beef.

"It's going to be a tad tougher," he said, attributing the meat's texture to its lower fat content. "It all comes down to preference as far as what people want to eat."

Still, the burgers appear to be popular with students, said Preston Cravey, a sous chef with Carolina Dining Services. "We get a lot of good comments about the grass-fed," Cravey said.

Grass-fed beef has also caught on at Duke University, which began selling Harris Acres meat two years ago. The school now purchases about 20 percent of its beef from the farm.

Price said that as long as the grass-fed burgers are available, she will keep buying them.

"I don't think I'll get a regular hamburger again," she said.

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

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