

# THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

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## Why do your kids hunt?

Just last weekend I was visiting with a couple of the other cooks at a wild game dinner here at the county fairgrounds (oddy enough, we ended up sitting around a campfire rather late in the evening, actually—into the wee hours of the next morning), and we determined that while we all consider ourselves hunters, each of us has a very different perspective of what is important about hunting. We also had different opinions as to why and how we pass it on to the next generation.

We had become friends quickly in our efforts to make enough mouth-watering wild game masterpieces to serve the 3,000 guests expected the next day. Many of us had acquired our wild game meat afield, and naturally when the opportunity arose, we spent considerable time discussing our experiences as hunters. It was a spirited discussion with much more common ground than not, as you might expect. However, it is interesting to note that while we were all about the same age, we had significantly different backgrounds and upbringings.

This diversity of the group and the ambience of the setting provided a remarkable opportunity for all of us to compare notes. We quickly found that we all love to hunt and we are all committed to passing down our hunting heritage. We agreed easily that hunting is a right, not a privilege, that it is worthy of the effort and that it can and should be beneficial to the wild animals and wild places. What might surprise you is that rather than regale one another about our successes afield and the grand trophies we had each put on the wall, we ended up talking most about why, how, and what we taught our kids about hunting.

One of the fellows explained that he taught his kids that the deer they hunt are food first. He taught them to hunt successfully, to shoot true and sure, to fill their tags, and to take proper care of the meat. He showed them how to feed themselves and their family. He explained that the meat was free of steroids and chemicals and that it is a natural part of man's diet as God intended. He was not sanctimonious. He was pragmatic. He taught his children, both daughters, to be respectful, to be precise, to hunt effectively, and to value their rights as hunters. He taught them to be involved and to do what is necessary to make sure others after them have the same opportunities. I was humbled by the purity of his intent.

The next cook told us that it is all about the pursuit—the harder, the better. He loves the mountain hunt. He teaches his boys that the rigors and the challenges are where the true value of the hunt is derived. He takes them on quests and teaches them to be highly skilled at the climb, the stalk, the camp; and he showed them how to manage when the weather changes suddenly. He helped them learn to be exceptionally resourceful in

their efforts. He says they spend countless hours reveling in their adventures and their love of the hunt provides some of the glue that binds them together as a family. His excitement and enthusiasm were inspiring.

Another father told us about how he taught his young hunters that there is a right of ascendency on their family ranch. He said that in order to manage the natural competitiveness among his children and those of his siblings, they had a set of rules as to how big a buck a kid could take based on the child's age and proficiency. You see, the family ranch had no shortage of opportunity and so they devised a program where the kids had to earn their place by demonstrating the necessary skill and discipline to be a success by their ranch standards. I happen to know a couple of the kids that learned to hunt on this ranch, and while it may sound like a silver-spoon upbringing, these kids are serious, dedicated, and highly skilled in their pursuits off the ranch. They are all members of hunter-conservation groups and they each invest in and work for the good of our community. I admire how this family nurtures its hunters.

Another learned from his father and then taught his children how taking hunters on their sheep and goat ranch could supplement the family income and help keep the ranch together. Yet another told us how he learned to hunt entirely on his own and that he made sure his kids were raised to understand and value their right as hunters.

I was delighted and surprised to see such conviction about our hunting heritage derived from so many different perspectives. I could find myself adopting each philosophy. I gained something valuable from each of these dads, and I will factor it all in to my teaching for the benefit of my children and theirs. Incidentally, I found it particularly poignant that none of the dads stressed antler inches as a primary objective in their lessons.

We all learned something that night/morning. It was a great campfire. The next night, we shared our blessings with our friends and neighbors as we nurtured them with food from the wild, not the grocery store.

And, just in case you are wondering, Pedrotti's Wild Pizza Team cooked pizzas on the grille—Buck Luck and Dove Love. ■

