

Food for Thought

People • Products • Purpose

April 2022

"We will find neither national purpose nor personal satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress, in an endless amassing of worldly goods... GDP measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile, and it can tell us everything about America — except why we are proud to be Americans."

— Robert F. Kennedy campaigning in 1968

Back to grass

To have turkeys ready for Thanksgiving, growing out the birds starts now

In the culinary world, spring is associated with Easter hams, legs of lamb and early season herbs and vegetables like chives and asparagus. For Greg Gunthorp, it's time to start the hatchling turkeys.

"We like to harvest them at 16 to 24 weeks, so our first summer batch is in the incubator now," he said. "They go in a barn for seven to eight weeks until fully feathered, and then they can be outside."

In some ways turkeys are hardier than chickens but in others they are more delicate, he says, with greater sensitivity to light and temperature. It takes a little more coaching to get them feeding and watering. Turkey poults also require a higher level of protein in their diet compared to chicks. The reason? Chicks absorb nutrients from the yolk prior to hatching which gives them a headstart meeting their nutritional needs.

Greg and his family plan to raise and process several batches of pastured turkeys this year on their farm in northern Indiana, but meat chickens for them are now a thing of the past.

Giving up the chickens was "the hardest business decision I ever made," Greg laments, but labor shortages and market volatility drove it. Many small independent restaurants — those most likely to support local growers — are still struggling to recover from the pandemic. "We did chickens for 20 years and it was pretty good for us until 2019. Then the big guys started getting into the fancy label market without doing anything special and the regulations got stricter," all of which accelerated the demise of small family farms.



BIRD FLU POSES RISK: Turkeys are particularly susceptible to a strain of avian influenza that has already claimed millions of wild and domestic birds worldwide, while impacting all of the major U.S. flyways. Outdoor poultry benefits from a healthy environment with sunshine and fresh air, Greg says, but there's more risk of co-mingling with wild birds that spread the virus. "If you raise livestock and poultry, you can do everything right and still have a problem," he says.

In addition, if a local case is identified nearby, surrounding flocks could be quarantined or even depopulated by animal health officials. During the last big outbreak of 2014-2105, the U.S. government offered an indemnity program but covered losses at the prices paid for mass-produced commodity birds. "We would lose our shirt" at that price, Greg says.

DID YOU KNOW: At least 97 percent of turkeys are raised on confinement farms that house more than 30,000 birds, according to federal ag statistics



A refreshing alternative

The great pandemic reset forced many people to re-discover the pleasures of al fresco dining



Vibrant made-from-scratch sauces and fresh garnishes elevate street food style tacos, burritos, carnitas and smothered fries from the El Chapin taco trailer. The fries are hand cut and cooked in Callicrate beef tallow. Drinks like horchata are made from fresh natural ingredients. Follow updates and find contact info on Facebook.

The beloved El Chapin taco trailer is a fixture in the parking lot at the Ranch Foods Direct Fillmore store, open daily (except Sunday) for a quick convenient healthy meal, but it also hires out for catering, an option that surged in popularity after the pandemic began, allowing owner Luis Guerra to expand the family business.

“Every year different companies hire us to do some type of employee appreciation day to thank their hard-working people,” he explains. “They like the idea of a food truck, because everything is outdoors. We come and set up a nacho bar, and we serve fresh, good, local food. We bring it to them, get everything ready and then we do all the clean up, so they can relax and just enjoy their time together.”

Hiring a taqueria-style food truck is also increasingly popular for weddings. El Chapin has catered for up to 220 guests.

Luis started the business four years ago after working his way up to head the meat processing crew at Ranch Foods Direct. He can't say enough about the satisfaction he gets from hearing enthusiastic responses to the quality of the meat, whether it's a Callicrate steak he's cut by hand or a pork carnita hot off the grill. "Mike has been an amazing person to work with. I have learned a lot from his business model. I love serving fresh local product. Working here is a huge opportunity," he says.

His family, which includes three daughters and two sons, all pitch in to support the venture. Daughter Jalitza (shown above with Luis) particularly enjoys making the El Pastor, which is marinated in pineapple juice and topped with a colorful sauce. "It's really flavorful and fun to make," she says. She's proud of what her parents have accomplished and dreams of seeing the family someday expand even further by opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant.



MORE DINING NEWS: Trivelli's is reopening the old takeout location at Murph's Tavern, 2729 N. Nevada Ave. The 45-year-old family business, run by the original founders' son Steve, has generated a loyal following making fresh hoagies stuffed with tender Callicrate Beef. Get grand opening updates on Facebook.





Better beef with barley



Lush spring barley matures into a golden grain crop that is harvested in the summer.

DON'T THROW AWAY THAT LEFTOVER PICKLE JUICE

As everyone knows, food waste is a huge problem in this country. Leftover pickle or sauerkraut juice or olive brine is something that can be transformed into a versatile cooking ingredient. Use it as a quick and simple marinade for meat and vegetables. To adjust the flavor, consider sweetening it with a little honey or tanging it up with some prepared mustard or infusing it with fresh, diced garlic and firey spice. Boil it down and allow it to cool and you'll have a sweet-and-sour glaze especially good on pork or chicken. Leftover pickle brine can also be re-used to make a fresh batch of pickles. Just slice up your preferred veggies, fully submerge them in the liquid and leave the jar in the fridge for a week. Voila!



STUFFED REUBEN BURGERS: Instead of putting hot pastrami on a bun why not stuff it inside a juicy grilled burger? To prepare the patties, combine 2 pounds ground beef with 2 T. Worcestershire sauce, 2 T prepared mustard and 1/2 cup finely chopped onion. Divide into six and halve the patties. In the middle, place 1/4 cup of filling made by mixing 1 cup finely chopped pastrami, 2 cups sauerkraut (juice drained), 4 oz. softened cream cheese and 1 cup shredded cheese such as Swiss or Havarti. Carefully seal patties back together and allow to rest for 15 minutes before pan frying or grilling.
NOTE: Ranch Foods Direct deli-style pastrami is made in-house from Callicrate beef roast!

Though not widely grown or fed these days, barley has many advantages over the more common corn, according to Drew Kaup, general manager of Callicrate Cattle Company. “The protein in barley is very similar to the protein in corn, but barley has never been genetically modified. It’s also more drought-tolerant than corn. And it’s versatile: if it’s not going to make much grain, you can always use it as a hay crop.”

As part of a high quality mixed feed ration, it delivers a meat quality advantage too. Cattle fed barley yield a whiter, brighter fat than cattle fed corn.

“Come to find out a lot of the old Dutch farmers in this area, that’s what they’d grow on their lighter soils. They learned over many years that under tough conditions the crop would flourish. And they preferred to feed it to their own milk cows they kept at home because it enhanced the quality of the milk,” Drew notes.

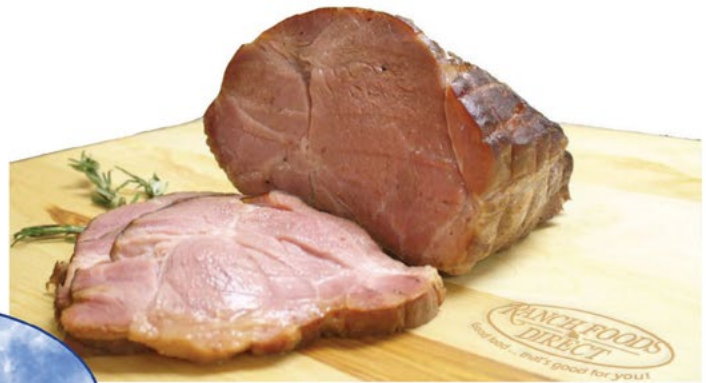
Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate considers feeding high fiber nutritive barley one of the unique aspects that sets the Callicrate beef production system apart. The benefits are comprehensive and holistic, extending beyond healthier animals and beautifully marbled meat to diversification of the prairie landscape and preservation of what he calls “fossil water” — the precious freshwater in the underlying Ogallala Aquifer, which is millions of years old and utterly essential to life on the plains.

Splurge on a traditional holiday ham

From pigs raised on fresh air and sunshine for optimal nutritiousness

Plus, from the in-house kitchen,

*A ham's favorite side:
cheesy au gratin potatoes*



Lemon Mustard Sauce

- 1 T olive oil
- 2 T finely diced onions
- 2/3 cup sour cream
- 1/3 cup prepared mustard
- 1 T chopped fresh chives
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp honey

Heat oil in small saucepan over medium heat. Add onions; cook and stir about 2 minutes or until tender. Remove from heat; cool 1 minute. Stir in remaining ingredients. Serve warm.

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