

Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

August 2021

"A traditional craftsman hopes to make a living by selling his product, but usually also has concern for its quality, a love for the material, and a feel for the art. A corporation does not." — *Thomas Stork*

"A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn." — *Andrew Lytle*

Kits for camping

Couple assembles ready-to-go meal kits that make it easy to enjoy cooking and eating in the great outdoors

Rob Wood and Lara Maas love to spend weekends camping together in the Colorado mountains. Before each trip, the couple gathers supplies, which includes hitting up Ranch Foods Direct for regeneratively raised meat. At some point, an idea struck these long-time vendors at the Woodland Park Farmers Market: why not sell pre-assembled camp-friendly meal kits?



Rob Wood at the Woodland Park Farmers Market

"We thought, wouldn't it be cool if people didn't have to stop at four or five different stores just to get ready to go camping? And we decided to package together what we were doing for ourselves and make it into a product we could share with others," Rob said inside their booth this summer. "We recognized the difficulty in finding good food, especially regeneratively raised beef, and figured it is probably hard for other people to find that too."

Ranch Foods Direct not only provided the kind of humanely raised meat the couple was looking for, the company also

embraced and supported their entrepreneurial dream, Rob said.

"Everybody involved with RFD made what we're doing possible. Before we hooked up with them, we probably spent eight months just trying to contact regenerative ranchers who would work with us. RFD was the only one that was excited about it and would do a wholesale deal and provide us with freezer space we needed. It all worked out so nice."

"Owner Mike Callicrate especially is really trying to help people start their own businesses. He's created a community — instead of people trying to use each other, or compete with each other, he's bringing people together. He could charge triple what he's charging, but he's not. So we're able to sell the best ingredients on Planet Earth, and they are comparable to chain store prices. So it's been pretty easy to push people toward that."

The meal kits consist of steaks and Mountain Pie Co meat pies, paired with locally grown veggies. They're designed to be

eaten outdoors and packaged with environmentally friendly materials. "We don't want a bunch of single-use packaging, and we are trying to upcycle as many materials as we can," Rob says. "Like using old wine boxes for storage and making meal kit boxes out of old reclaimed cedar wood and using insulated reusable bags made from hemp, wool or cotton." The couple is in the process of having the non-chemically treated cedar tested to see if it could be used for cooking or meat smoking. "We're trying to get to where people can break the box down for wood to start a fire, cook their steaks and then not have anything to pack out afterward," he explains.

"I'm glad Covid turned people toward the outdoors," he adds. "That's the whole spirit of what we're doing. Take your food and eat it outdoors, go grill, go camp, do something outside and it tastes better. It just feels more communal when you're together around a fire. It turns eating into a celebration rather than a chore." For now the couple are selling the kits at the Woodland Park Farmers Market but they hope to make home delivery, store pick-up and online subscription options available soon.

Restored to health

Rob Wood takes issue with the fact that so much of today's nutritional advice fails to account for the differences in meat production methods. His own culinary journey brought him to Ranch Foods Direct in search of an alternative to commodity meat. "When I was young I saw a PETA video and stopped eating meat. But then I started having health problems," he recalls. "So I learned a lot about diet and nutrition. I spent six years as a vegetarian and that's when I finally came to the epiphany that really the best way to eat is just naturally raised foods." He now believes eating healthy meat and fats helped to heal his gut. "Healthy beef is fantastic for you," he says. "It contains magnesium and manganese and all these other things that are pretty difficult to find in plants." He's amazed by the quality of Ranch Foods Direct beef. "I gave a guy I know a couple of the chuck-eye steaks to take home on Father's Day. It was so good he went to King Sooper's and bought a chuck-eye steak the next week, but he had to come back and personally tell me it's not the same steak whatsoever. He says he's never buying an ordinary grocery store chuck-eye again." In addition to the chuck-eye, Rob's other RFD favorites include the pork green chile Mountain Pie Co meat pies (made with Pueblo chiles!) and Sourdough Boulangerie bread.



Environmental concerns influence every aspect of Rob Wood's Mountain Bacchus business, including his insistence on reusable insulated bags made from renewable materials such as wool. The bag he's holding here is made by Woolcool Thermal Insulated Packaging Company. Wool fibers absorb moisture from the air to minimize humidity and condensation and help maintain stable temps.

Supporting food entrepreneurs

Resources and infrastructure provided by Ranch Foods Direct allow agricultural producers to do what they do best: grow great food for all to enjoy!



After losing 5,000 trees due to a sudden freeze last October, Steve Ela, owner of Ela Family Farms of Hotchkiss, was forced to eliminate his fruit CSA this year. Fortunately, he still plans to make the fruit butters and sauces that are so popular at Ranch Foods Direct. "We are definitely doing our processed products," he confirmed recently. "They are an important part of our zero food waste goal and also give us an outlet for fruit we can't take to markets. Between drought and hail, we have fruit that just won't sell and it will go into those processed goods. We will have less inventory this year, but we will make what we can." The cold snap that damaged his orchards drove temps to a new record low for October of 3 degrees. But prior to that, it had been unseasonably warm, making trees particularly vulnerable because they never had a chance to "harden off." All is not lost however. Through an innovative adopt-a-tree program, Ela's was able to replant. Communicating production challenges to loyal customers is part of how he hopes to survive increased weather variability in the future.

The same day Kevin and Laura Poss pulled their combine into the field for summer wheat harvest, they also invited grain enthusiasts out to visit the farm. As the owners of Grains from the Plains, sharing their farming dream is important to them. Kevin is a fourth generation farmer who grew up helping his father farm some of the same land he farms today. Laura grew up in New Jersey and developed a passion for organic farming during an internship in college. They are now raising seven children on the plains near Hugo on a farm they call Sunflower Acres. The SoCo Virtual Farmers Market makes it possible for them to sell directly to customers, with SoCo organizers meeting them halfway to get their products delivered through the Peak to Plains Food Hub in Colorado Springs. "I really like the SoCo Market and what Katie Miller's doing," Laura said. "We're really excited to market directly to people. We enjoy that connection, and when you sell in bulk, you miss out on that." Their goal now is building a commercial mill so they can supply more bakeries and restaurants.



Getting out of the **BOX**

Most people have probably heard the term "boxed beef." But what exactly is it? And why is it important? In Christopher Leonard's sweeping history of the modern meat industry, *The Meat Racket*, he explains how a company called Iowa Beef Packers implemented the idea of boxed beef in the 1960s and 70s. Rather than send beef carcasses to stores to be cut up by skilled butchers, the large meatpacking company began breaking down carcasses on their own factory floor and sending them out trimmed and cut into big pieces (or primals.) Unfortunately that change had many negative implications, according to Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate. For one, it made skilled butchers and customized meat cuts largely a thing of the past. "They sold it as a way for big retailers to save on labor costs, but in the end they had to illegally bribe the grocery store execs and union officials to force them into de-skilling their industry in that way." It also hurt traceability: now the meat was coming from very large plants processing thousands of animals a day with no way to know where it originated. Food safety was another issue. Traditionally dry-aging carcasses for six days was considered an effective intervention step to control the growth of pathogens. In the name of speed and volume however, big packing plants were now cramming beef into boxes within 36 hours. Soon, the packers added massive cooking operations as a way to make potentially contaminated beef saleable.



MIX UP YOUR MEAT BASKET

Support whole animal butchering

Beef tallow for high-temp roasting, frying and searing. Liver from cattle fed a healthy diet. Hamburger grind with liver and beef heart added for extra nutrition. Those are some of the unique items at RFD.



Flaken ribs were featured during last month's open house at the Peak to Plains Food Hub. Flaken ribs are Korean-style short ribs thinly sliced across the meat and bone, resulting in an affordable cut that cooks fast while remaining tender and flavorful. At Ranch Foods Direct, you can get flaken ribs and other cuts pre-marinated for easy and convenient grilling that's sure to impress.

The rise of boxed beef explains in part why whole animal butcher shops like Ranch Foods Direct are so rare. Most butchers of any size and scale are dependent on receiving boxed beef from the big packers. To offer meat directly from one specific ranch, a shop like Ranch Foods Direct must slaughter, process, package and sell all parts of the animal, not just the steaks. But having a direct connection from ranch to retail proved its worth during the coronavirus pandemic. There are many benefits for workers and consumers. Whole animal butchering creates opportunities for craft butchers to do creative and varied work rather than making the same cut over and over on an assembly line in a big plant. The resulting meat comes in a much wider variety of hard-to-find cuts, including nutritious organ meats. And proper aging imparts tenderness and flavor that elevates every cut.



Alan, the newest butcher to join Callicrate Cattle Co, started his career at age 18 at Wyoming Legacy Meats. "That's where I got hooked on carcass beef," he says. He later worked at a retail meat counter that sold boxed beef but found it dull.



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BETTER THAN CHIPS: Eating keto or low-carb? Ranch Foods Direct has tasty snacks for camping, picnics or grab-and-go road food. Try the salami or the cheese and jalapeno summer sausage made in-house from Callicrate Beef and Pork. Or how about crunchy chicharrones (shown below) aka fried Callicrate Pork skins.



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