

# Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

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"Maybe the most sacred space in your home is not the yoga room, or the altar with the candle, or the chair by the window where you meditate and pray. Maybe the most sacred room in your house is the kitchen."

— Peter Bolland, humanities professor and author of *The Sacrament of Food*

## In pursuit of a healthy ranch

*James Original is creamy dressing done right*



The creator and namesake behind James Original Ranch Dressing and Dip is a self-professed salad fanatic who grew frustrated buying mass-produced versions and decided to make his own instead using high quality healthy ingredients and no junk fillers.

After moving to Colorado Springs from Denver three years ago, James spent months perfecting his recipe, doing extensive research on healthy food choices, seeking out sources of minimally processed cooking oils and high quality dairy products, and making his own mayonnaise and yogurt from scratch.

The star of ranch dressing — and the source of its creamy tang — is buttermilk, the liquid left over after cream is churned into butter. When James discovered Sawatch Artisan Foods, he felt like he'd won the lottery.

"I searched high and low. It's very hard to find real buttermilk,"

**Sawatch Artisan Foods, the source of dairy ingredients for James Original Ranch, also provides Ranch Foods Direct with hand-rolled European-style butter and cave-ripened cheeses.**

he recalls. "What you actually get in the mainline stores is a fermented milk or a vinegar milk, but I wasn't satisfied with that. Plus, I took it a step further: I wanted an organic A-2 milk."

A-2 is a specific form of milk protein considered superior for gut health and ease of digestion. Advanced testing has revealed only certain cows produce it.

James followed a similarly determined path with every ingredient in his creamy spread, which is available in the produce cooler at Ranch Foods Direct. A light low-cal version features Greek

yogurt he makes himself from A-2 milk and olive oil. The regular mayo-based offerings were a bit trickier to develop because they require a neutral-flavored oil. He settled on emulsifying organic eggs with high oleic safflower oil. "I wanted to go with something unrefined. The way the oil is extracted is very important," he says. "It either has to be cold pressed or expeller-pressed, not chemically extracted." High oleic refers to the basic composition of the oil, which makes it more stable, slower to degrade, and healthier for the heart. High fiber organic guar gum serves as a natural thickener.

"I set out to make the ultimate ranch — ranch so good you can live on it," he says. "Being in

Ranch Foods is a great fit. I'm a big meat eater, but it's very important to me where and how my meat is sourced. Same with dairy. It's about high quality food and getting back to what's good for our bodies."

## LEARNING TO BAKE WITH BARLEY

Jordyn Bunting, a research assistant at Oregon State University, spends her time exploring how naked (or hull-less) barley can be more widely adapted for use in flour and baked goods, in hopes of making it more viable as a low-water commercial crop. She recently reported on her multi-year project, which is funded by the federal government as part of a broader public health campaign. The prime benefit of this type of barley is that it doesn't need to be refined, or "pearled." Leaving grain whole is important because the outer layer — the bran and germ — contains vitamins like B and E as well as valuable phytochemicals and healthy fats. It is where the grain's pigments are stored, and these pigments function as antioxidants in the body. Barley is commonly thought to be brown or golden, but it can also be blue, black and even purple. The black hue in particular holds up well during cooking and baking, resulting in a charcoal-colored batter with uniquely beneficial health attributes, Bunting says.

Barley will probably never replace wheat-based dough entirely, in part because barley gluten behaves differently than wheat gluten, she explained. Barley dough is stickier, flatter and more difficult to shape, which means the upper limit for barley in a workable dough is typically around 40 percent. However, a creative workaround is to cook the barley as a whole-grain porridge and then fold it into wheat-based dough. "It increases the fiber and gives it more crumb and moisture, resulting in a custardy texture," she says. "You could also hydrate the barley and wheat flour separately from each other, prepare the wheat dough, and then fold in the barley to help with getting more volume. So there are techniques to get around these issues."

Learn more about her work at [BarleyWorld.org/orei-project](http://BarleyWorld.org/orei-project)



## Real cereal is whole grain

*New line of local products honors integrity of the kernel*

*Local food advocates Dan Hobbs and Nanna Meyer package their wholesome grain products, including cream of wheat, muesli and blue corn biscochitos, in beautiful reusable tins. As their rallying cry goes: no plastic and no white flour ever! Limited selection in store now.*

During his first 15 years in business, Dan Hobbs grew seed for other companies. In 2012, he launched Farm Direct Organic Seed to distribute direct through outlets like Ranch Foods Direct. Meanwhile, UCCS nutrition professor Nanna Meyer founded the UCCS Grain School to spread awareness and appreciation for the beauty, sustainability and healthfulness of regionally grown grains. Three years ago, they merged their efforts into Hobbs and Meyer Farm and rebranded their products under the name Pueblo Seed and Food Co. The couple currently grows grains, garlic and other crops on 15 acres near Cortez.

Their initial offering of products pays homage to a time when grain was treated with greater respect. "Because of my upbringing as a ski

racer in the Alps, the base of my diet came from heritage grains in various forms, consumed in porridges and cereals as well as breads, crackers, and cookies," Nanna recalls. "These products are all made from seeds we grow. We want the flavors, textures, and wholesomeness to surprise, delight and nourish you."

**UCCS Summer Grain School in the Field, scheduled for July 23-24 in the San Luis Valley, will include a screening of the documentary film, Day Zero, in which RFD owner Mike Callicrate discusses how large scale industrialized agriculture has degraded and depleted critical water sources across the region. (Available for streaming on Amazon)**







The EL CHAPIN taco truck has added a new location at 5850 Championship View next to Dart Wars, according to owner Luis Guerra, left. The location will feature freshly grilled Callicrate meats all summer long. Open every day 11-7 except Sunday. Find a full menu online at [ElChapinFoodTruck.com](http://ElChapinFoodTruck.com).



## STEAK AND ASPARAGUS

- 1 lb Callicrate beef steaks
- 1 lb fresh asparagus, trimmed
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper

Make a simple balsamic marinade by combining 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar with 1 tablespoon prepared mustard. Reserve 2 tablespoons. Put the rest in a plastic bag with the steak and allow to marinate. Place asparagus in shallow microwave-safe dish; add 1/2 cup water. Cover and microwave on HIGH 3 to 6 min until crisp-tender. Drain. Add reserved marinade to asparagus; turn to coat. Grill steaks.



Colorado Coffee Merchants owner Eric Umerhofer knows the perfect "roast point" is different for every bean. He brings the same care and attention to FRIDAY STEAK NIGHT, featuring exceptional beef and attentive service in his intimate shop at 302 E. Fillmore. The Callicrate filet is accompanied by a thoughtfully curated selection of wines and made-from-scratch desserts by Steffi's Confections. No reservation required. Or drop in for a cocktail at the bar. It's a cozy place to unwind.

## A BUTCHER HANGS UP HIS APRON

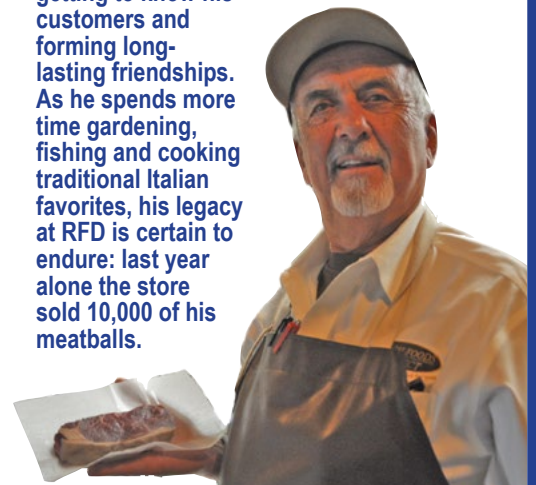


JOHN NICOCIA'S Italian meatball recipe is still being made weekly and the antique collared bells he inherited from his Ciclian forebears remain on display next to the door on the south wall of the Fillmore store. But, John, who is now in his early 80s, finally hung up his butcher's apron for good in April, concluding a long and dedicated career after several years working behind the fresh meat case at Ranch Foods Direct.

Before coming to Colorado Springs, John spent long days serving customers, first at a meat shop in Los Angeles where he also did caterings for hundreds of people, and, later, in Oregon, where he worked for an old-style packing house with six retail outlets. "As a manager, I worked six days a week 11 hours a day for 30 years," he recalled recently. "I love meat cutting. It's in my blood. But I've been on my feet too long. My legs are giving up."

He is now passing the torch while conceding full-service butcher shops are increasingly rare and institutional wisdom lost: "You can't learn the meat business overnight. It takes years of experience."

While John always took great pride in how the meat was displayed and answered endless questions about various cuts, what meant the most to him was getting to know his customers and forming long-lasting friendships. As he spends more time gardening, fishing and cooking traditional Italian favorites, his legacy at RFD is certain to endure: last year alone the store sold 10,000 of his meatballs.



# Grab and grill

*The store has lots of options for ushering in the grilling season with locally sourced beef and pork!*

✓ Multiple flavors of housemade sausages, including Chef Monika's favorite, the smoked cheddarwurst

✓ New: marinated pork tenderloin!

✓ Grab-and-grill section, plus full-service fresh case on Fillmore

**Shop online @ [RanchFoodsDirect.com](http://RanchFoodsDirect.com). Shipping and curbside options available**

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