

FEBRUARY 2026

Community Profiles

“What we learn from history is that most people don’t learn from history.”

— Warren Buffett

Eat Read Local

How one supporter of the local food scene stays connected and seeks out quality products



Matt Sayer describes himself as a fan of both Ranch Foods Direct and Matthew Schniper’s local Side Dish food blog, launched on the Substack platform in March of 2023. He shared his enthusiasm at a recent Side Dish mixer held at Goat Patch Brewing. (Ranch Foods Direct collaborates with the brewery by providing keg storage space inside the Peak to Plains Food Hub.) Also attending the event were Mike and Amanda Bristol, long-time Ranch Foods Direct customers and owners of Bristol Brewing, another excellent local brewery that operates a taproom inside the beautifully restored Ivywild School. Matt talked about how much he appreciates seeing independently owned businesses network together to support each other’s mutual growth, influence and long-term success, and how it strengthens the local community.

WHEN OR HOW DID YOU START READING THE SIDE DISH WITH SCHNIPER FOOD BLOG?

I started following Matt’s newsletter because Ryan Hannigan, who publishes *Focus on the Beer*, at one point linked to Matt’s newsletter. And I really liked Matt when he was at the *Colorado Springs Independent*. After it shut down, I didn’t realize he’d started his own thing. And then I saw Ranch Foods Direct was a sponsor, and I was like, “That’s great, seeing Mike and other locals, like the Bristols, keeping Matt going so he can continue to cover the local food scene.” It was nice to see how everyone stepped up. And now Matt’s got a flywheel spinning, as one of the bigger voices in the community, so that’s very exciting. I appreciate knowing Ranch Foods Direct was in on the ground floor in making it happen.

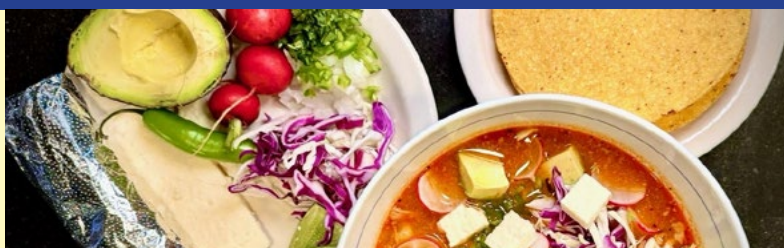
YOU SAID YOU’RE A FAN OF RANCH FOODS DIRECT. WHY? HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

It’s the best meat around. I still remember the first time I went to the east-side location. I had a new smoker, and I wanted to christen it with a brisket. I had just walked in when owner Mike Callicrate came through the door. He said, “I want you to come and meet my butcher.” Then he showed me pictures of the cows. Then he walked me over to the carcass cooler, and told them to cut up a brisket for me right then. When he asked them to trim off the fat, I was like “No, no, I want the fat!” (Laughs.) But you know, it was just such a great feeling, being there buying beef from a local guy. And since Andy’s Meat Market shut down, there’s really no other competition out there. I admire Ranch Foods Direct for making it happen, for keeping it local. I love that. And by the way, I completely ruined that first brisket. I regret it. But it was the first thing I made on that smoker, so you know, what can you do? Live and learn.



SideDishSchniper.com

Side Dish With Schniper facilitates a monthly recipe collaboration between Ranch Foods Direct and local chefs. Find the latest recipe, pg 4.



Food as medicine, food as health

During the pandemic, gerontologist Erin Martin used the extra time stuck at home to start sketching out a plan for how to get better quality food to her elderly patients through existing healthcare delivery models. That idea turned into Fresh RX, a local food distribution program that allows doctors to prescribe healthy food to Medicaid or Medicare patients with type-2 diabetes and then tracks the results. Initial outcomes were impressive. Since then, she's become one of the most visible leaders in the "food-is-medicine" movement, testifying to Congress, participating in national healthcare summits and speaking to diverse groups around the country, including several in Colorado.

DO MOST PEOPLE YOU MEET KNOW ABOUT FOOD-IS-MEDICINE? IF NOT, WHAT DO YOU TELL THEM?

It's still new to a lot of people. I usually try to start with the basics. There's three major parts to it: food, education, and data. I talk about how we can elevate the food-is-medicine space by including local farmers and having really robust nutrition education to empower people. The food-is-medicine movement is growing, just like the regenerative agriculture movement is growing. It's still small, but we're getting closer to where maybe one out of 10 people recognize these terms.

IS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S CAMPAIGN TO "MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY AGAIN" (MAHA) INCREASING VISIBILITY?

It absolutely is. It's become more of a national mainstream conversation. People are starting to pay attention to what's in their food, or even just realizing they need to be asking that question. Regenerative agriculture is getting talked about quite a bit within the MAHA movement, along with restoring local food systems, restoring our health, and connecting those dots. The initial MAHA strategy report (on making children healthy again) is a national leadership document, and at the end of that report it connects everything back to soil health. So that sent a big signal.

YOU'VE BEEN TO COLORADO SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, MEETING WITH FARMERS AND HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS. HOW DOES COLORADO COMPARE TO OTHER STATES IN ADOPTING THIS?

The thirst for food-is-medicine, and for local food systems, is everywhere. For farmers focused on soil health, they see a lot of parallels to human health. I love that more farmers want to explore that connection.

People think of Colorado as being progressive in a lot of ways. Unfortunately, the state's food-is-medicine Medicaid waiver is really small. The state could actually do a lot more if it was expanded. Food-is-medicine was also included in the state's Rural Health Transformation Program (a federal grant that allocates \$50 billion to states over 5 years, including \$200 million to Colorado.) Right now it's up in the air whether those funds can be used to pay for food or not. It does pay for building infrastructure around being able to provide food-is-medicine.

IF THE STATE IS HAVING BUDGETARY PROBLEMS, IS THAT AN ISSUE?

There are budget problems everywhere, so the question becomes, what are we going to prioritize? We can't really afford not to pay for these programs. We spend millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars, just on amputations every year. We can afford to pay for regeneratively grown food that prevents these costly health interventions.

FRESH RX, THE PROGRAM YOU STARTED IN TULSA, FOCUSES ON REGENERATIVELY GROWN PRODUCE. HOW DOES MEAT FIT INTO THESE PROGRAMS?

Meat is included in some of the medically tailored grocery programs and meal plans. In the past, meat was demonized, butter was demonized, and then there was the uproar over margarine. Now people are realizing vegetable oils might be more of the crux of the problem with heart disease. So people are starting to be more aware of this and getting back to eating meat. But the quality of the product is also important. Stephan van Vliet, a researcher at Utah State, is teasing out differences based on how the meat was raised, conventional or regenerative. I think as we start to see which has better omega ratios and is less inflammatory, we're going to start using that in more food-is-medicine programs. Unfortunately, in the past, these programs were not always focused on the quality of the food or where it came from. That's what I like to call food-is-medicine 2.0.

IT'S INTERESTING HOW THESE PLANS INTERSECT WITH THE BROADER HEALTH AND WELLNESS SPACE.

Even though these programs usually fall within Medicaid and lower income insurance, we're starting to see them more in commercial insurance and even employer insurance too. We need to include healthy people who want to optimize their health, not just focus on chronic disease. Everybody wants access to this. It doesn't necessarily have to be prescribed by medical institutions. Holistic health practitioners are always asking me how they can offer this to their patients.



Bundle up and save

At \$6 a pound, this wholesome ground beef offers quality and value, explains rancher Mike Callicrate

HOW DOES CALLICRATE GROUND BEEF STACK UP PRICE-WISE WITH BEEF OVERALL?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average cost of beef nationally for all cuts is \$10.08 a pound. The national average for ground beef specifically is \$6.68 a pound, and we're offering a bundle sale at \$6. We want to give people something healthy, local and affordable. The economy isn't that good for a lot of people right now, with many struggling to feed their families. We want everyone to have access to a nutritious local product.

WALK US THROUGH THE PROCESS THAT GOES INTO MAKING GROUND BEEF AT RANCH FOODS DIRECT. HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO OTHER GROCERY STORE BRANDS?

We use the end cuts like the chuck and the round — essentially everything but the steaks and roasts — and add beef trim to get the lean-to-fat ratio of 80-20, which we think is the ideal level. Most of the nutrition's in the fat. When it comes to the big meatpacking companies, they go out and search the world for the cheapest lean they can find and import it into the U.S. at half of our U.S. cost-of-production, then blend it with their waste fat, and, then they add 10 to 12 percent lean finely textured beef, also known as "pink slime." They can do that, without putting it on the label, because USDA classifies it as "beef," even though we don't know how this ammonia-washed filler impacts the gut microbiome. (For ABC News coverage on this, visit the link below.)

<https://noblull.mikecallicrate.com/2012/03/12/70-percent-of-ground-beef-at-supermarkets-contains-pink-slime>

IT SOUNDS LIKE WHOLE-ANIMAL, MOM-AND-POP BUTCHER SHOPS ARE AT A COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGE IN THE MARKETPLACE.

Most small plants simply can't compete with the low-cost structure of the big packers. And the big plants have high-volume outlets through the fast food chains and government contracts. The government is the single biggest purchaser of ground beef in the country. What they buy goes to the military, school lunch programs and food pantries.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY THERE'S A COVER-UP IN THE GROUND BEEF BUSINESS?

Consumers at the grocery store don't know the origin of the cattle, the number of animals in a pound of ground beef, or the additives and inclusion of pink slime in the product. Until recently, the government allowed imported product to be brought into the country and re-labeled as "Product of the USA." We finally got that stopped, but the change only happened on January 1, after many years of loud complaints from producer and consumer groups. We still don't have mandatory Country of Origin labeling at the meat case, which means most of the time consumers don't know which country the meat actually came from.

FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAMS EXIST IN MOST STATES. AREN'T THOSE HELPFUL TO PRODUCERS?

They are, if the government funds them. And school administrators are often pressured to buy on price. A lot of times they feel like they can't justify serving a higher priced, locally produced product. Two Colorado ballot initiatives that passed in November (LL and MM) designated some of the funds go for local food purchasing. We haven't seen any evidence they've acted on that yet, and neither have the other food hubs we work with. We're waiting for the state to follow through on that.

Callicrate cows grazing on summer pasture



STOCK YOUR FREEZER & SAVE \$6 per lb

80/20 Ground Beef Bundle Sale

Available in 10-lb & 20-lb bundles

10 lb bundle 80/20 Ground Beef \$60	20 lb bundle 80/20 Ground Beef \$120	10 lb Organ Blend Bundle Ground Beef with Heart & Liver \$60
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Bundles only. Not valid on single packages.
February Freezer Sale - While Supplies Last

Featured Recipe

Traditional Pozole



Recipe by local chef Mario Vasquez
(and based on his grandmother's recipe)



2- to 3-lb Callicrate bone-in pork shoulder roast
1 pig's foot
1 large yellow onion
1 can white hominy
3 bay leaves
1 Tbsp. Mexican oregano
¼ C. broth (or Callicrate broth bomb)
¼ C. salt
8-10 quarts water (depending on the size of your soup pot)

For the Chile Sauce:
2 or 3 dried chile de arbol
5 oz. dried chile de ristra
1 Tbsp. cumin
10 garlic cloves

Clean the dry chile de arbol and chile de ristra pods by removing the stems and seeds, then soak in hot water until the chiles are soft. (You can also soak the clean chiles overnight in cold water.) Cut the pork shoulder into large cubes and remove any excess fat cap. Open the can of hominy and strain the water out. Rinse the hominy until the water is clear. Clean and cut the yellow onion into quarters and remove all the garlic cloves from their husks. To build the soup base: in a large soup pot, add the pork shoulder, pig's foot, hominy, bay leaves, onion, salt and water. Give a stir to keep the pork shoulder from sticking together. Bring to a boil. Using a ladle, skim off the white foam that rises to the top. Reduce to a simmer and add the broth. Cook for 3 hours, until the meat starts to become tender.

To make the chile sauce, place soaked chile pods, garlic cloves and cumin in a blender. Ladle in some of the liquid (about 1-2 cups from the simmering soup to get the blender going) and blend until smooth. The consistency should be like hot sauce rather than a paste. Strain the sauce through a fine sieve and add 2 cups of the chile sauce to the pozole. Add the Mexican oregano to the soup, and cook for another hour. If you have some chile sauce left over, save to add more to the pozole later, as desired. After 4 hours of cooking, the meat should be tender enough to fall apart in your mouth but still hold its shape. Taste the pozole and add more salt if needed. Remove the bay leaves and serve in a large soup bowl. Garnish with desired toppings.

Slow Cooked Deeply Loved



CALLICRATE
BEEF & PORK
RESPONSIBLE • RESTORATIVE • REAL



At the end of 2025, Ranch Foods Direct was awarded best local butcher shop in the yearly survey conducted by Fox 21 News Colorado. The station is host of *Loving Living Local*, a popular TV program that often features Ranch Foods Direct.

Community Profiles

Distributed by:



Two retail locations in Colorado Springs

Flagship store: 1228 E. Fillmore

719-623-2980

Food hub: 4635 Town Center Drive

719-559-0873

Retail hours at both locations:

Monday through Saturday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Or shop online. Shipping available.

www.ranchfoodsdirect.com

Building a community around local food

More store updates
posted on Facebook



Edited by Candace Krebs
candacejk@aol.com