

# Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

April 2023

"This is the real secret of life — to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play."

— Alan Watts

## Moon Shot



*They left their corporate jobs with a goal: make pickled peppers more approachable*

In 2019, Khai and Diem Vuu started Moon Peppers

Pickling Co in Colorado Springs, offering a pepper to satisfy every taste, from mild caribe to hot habenero. Carrots and cauliflower are next.

**FOUNDING INSPIRATION:** "We were out eating something one night and thinking it needed more spice to it," Khai recalls. "And we were remembering that our grandparents used to always pickle, but they never pickled with spice. So we thought, hey, let's use their brine and put our own spicy twist on it. We started pickling with serranos. That was a little too much spice for some people. The caribe is a Caribbean pepper we chose because it has the perfect flavor profile and heat index to go with our brine."

**NICE DICE:** "We are small batch. We slice and dice the peppers by hand. We don't use any preservatives, and the natural capsaicin in peppers is great for gut health," Khai explains.

**ON SHOPPING RANCH FOODS DIRECT:**

"We love the store," Diem says. "It's full of talented individuals you can't find anywhere else. There's a story behind every item, and it's a community that we're supporting. We love that. I eat a lot of meat; I'm from Texas after all. My background is Vietnamese, so I like to make spring rolls. I slice the meat, cook it in butter, then wrap it in rice paper with cucumbers and herbs and maybe some microgreens and a little Vietnamese fish sauce. And of course we add our peppers! They balance so well together with Ranch Foods Direct meat."

### SPRING ROLL IN A SKILLET

- 1 pound ground pork sausage
- 5 cups shredded cabbage and carrots
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp ginger, minced
- 1 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tbsp cold-press sunflower oil
- 1/4 cup chopped green onions

In a large skillet over medium heat, brown meat, stirring and crumbling, until cooked through. Add the cabbage and carrot mix, garlic, ginger, soy sauce, and oil to the skillet with the sausage. Cook a few minutes, until cabbage has softened to desired texture. Remove from the heat and top with the green onions, sunflower seeds and, of course, some moon peppers!



# Meet Ben Hoffer, head chef at Shovel Ready



Mike and Ben, above, at SHOVEL READY, open daily 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., except for Mondays, at 315 E. Pikes Peak Ave inside The Well food hall.

**WHY SOURCE BEEF AND PORK FROM RANCH FOODS DIRECT?** We have a great partnership with Mike Callicrate and Ranch Foods Direct. With me growing up here and having cooked all my life in this town — I was actually born in Eisenhower Hospital, which isn't there anymore, but it was less than ten minutes from here — I don't think there's enough of that being fostered. People are now seeking out other industry professionals who are striving for that same level of promoting what we can do right here in Colorado.

**WHAT DREW YOU TO THE CULINARY FIELD?** My parents were both really good cooks, so I was a little bit spoiled, but I didn't realize it until I got out into the world. My dad owned and operated Patsy's Candies in Manitou for a good portion of my childhood. That was my first job when I was 12 — making funnel cakes, popcorn, cotton candy and Chicago dogs — and I got into restaurants after that. I fell in love with food working at the Craftwood Inn in Manitou. I decided to go to culinary school in Pittsburg and never looked back.

**HOW DID YOU END UP AT SHOVEL READY?** I've known (executive chef) Jay Gust since I graduated from culinary school 22 years ago. Three months ago I was helping him out at Pizzeria Rustica, and that's when he dropped this opportunity in my lap. Since then we've opened the restaurant and developed the menu. It's been a whirlwind. We are a federally funded six-week culinary mentorship and workforce development program, teaching students how to cook and run a restaurant and then placing them in local small independent restaurants when they're ready. It's an amazing opportunity to mentor and pass on what I've learned and also solve the problem of having a labor pool for the industry.

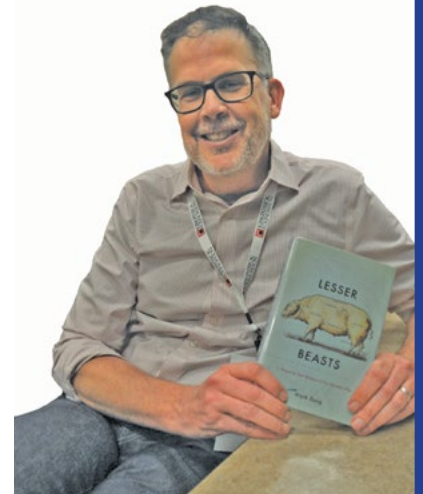
**FAVORITE RFD ITEMS?** The beautiful trotters from the pigs and chicken feet — I make a lot of ramen broth — and the tongues and cheek meat. I'm buying the weird stuff! I do a lot of ethnic cooking, like lengua tacos with the tongues. I could go to a carniceria (Mexican meat shop) and find those cuts, but at Ranch Foods Direct I know the animals and the land were treated with respect. That's big for me.



# Rallying for responsibly raised pork

March 1 was National Pig Day.

Who knew? Turns out there's a surprising amount to learn when it comes to pigs, both historically and in the modern day, starting with the way most of them are currently raised. Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate was invited to share his insight at a special day-long educational event in Oklahoma City, hosted by the Kirkpatrick Foundation, as part of a panel that included local farmers Nate Beulac and Jason Ketchum and Will Harris, owner of White Oak Pastures, who appeared by video-conference from Georgia. **Conference organizer and veterinary ethicist Lesa Staubes (right) began the day by describing how the majority of pigs are birthed in metal crates and spend their entire lives in steel buildings with slatted floors and ammonia-saturated air and no exposure to Vitamin D-enhancing sunlight.** Mike followed up by discussing the why: consolidation among a few large corporate (and sometimes foreign-owned) companies that dictate prices and production methods. He ended the day by joining the panel to discuss the viability of raising pigs outdoors and selling the meat locally. "I'm not anti-technology," explained Harris, who added "my journey began by giving up practices I didn't like. It added costs back to my production system, so I was less profitable, but I enjoyed farming more." The two hog farmers from Oklahoma were enthusiastic about their small diversified farm but hold down full-time jobs to support it. Another speaker, agricultural economist Bailey Norwood, said his research shows if you put regular Americans together in a room with producers to discuss the issue and potential solutions — a citizen's assembly of sorts — he's convinced gestation crates would be banned. But that's not how the political system works. Meanwhile, farmers are pressured financially to conform to highly mechanized systems. "It's hard to farm and not lose a lot of money. I think farmers are very conflicted," Norwood said.



**PIG TALES** - While living in Asheville, NC, author and historian Mark Essig stumbled across an intriguing fact: 150 years ago, pigs were being drovered from north to south through the Blue Ridge Mountains to provide food for southern plantations. Pig drives, he learned, were similar to the early cattle drives that defined the West. That whet his appetite to learn more about the complicated love-or-loathe relationship humans always had with pigs. Eventually hunting turned to herding, and foraging to grain finishing. Today's large-scale corporately controlled confinement production system satisfies a big demand for cheap pork, but at a high cost to society, he concludes. • Economist Bailey Norwood's consumer surveys show the majority of consumers believe livestock shouldn't unduly suffer. However their "consumer self" comes into conflict with their "citizen self" when presented with convenience or a cheaper price. • The last open hog market in Oklahoma closed in 2016; now 95 percent of hogs are raised on just 33 farms, some of which contain as many as 5,000 animals in one barn. According to pastured pork producer Nate Beulac, only 12 restaurants in the entire state of Oklahoma buy and serve regeneratively raised pork. Fortunately the Springs has a local option: Callicrate Pork.

**NOW OPEN DAILY AT TOWN CENTER STORE AND FOOD HUB: New fresh meat case featuring on-site expertise from Ranch Foods Direct's head butcher Billy Cox**



**Pick up fresh produce from Ahavah Farm's Friday farm stand open from 3-4 p.m. inside the food hub! Veggie share info at [AhavahFarm.com/CSA](http://AhavahFarm.com/CSA)**

### **FRIDAY PEAK TO PLAINS FOOD HUB OPEN HOUSE**

Friday, March 31, Noon to 5 p.m

*Free hamburger cook-out with other delicious food samples and special sale prices on selections throughout the store!*

**COMING IN APRIL** El Chapin is adding a second food truck at the Fillmore location serving Callicrate burgers and fries cooked in beef tallow!

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### **Natural Meat Market**

**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:

Mon - Fri 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Sat 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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