

Food for Thought

People • Products • Purpose

March 2023

"When we recognize water as truly sacred, rather than biological, economical, or even political, how does this transform our actions and perspectives? How do we reclaim water's beauty and blessings?"

— Southwestern writer Leeanna Torres

Sharing the green

Think global, act local. That popular slogan is put into practice everyday by Emerge Aquaponics, Ranch Food Direct's year-round supplier of fresh lettuce. Emerge is not just a business; it's part of a nonprofit ministry. "My wife always says it's the lettuce that changes the world," explains Türe Riker, training director and volunteer coordinator during a tour of the farm. The climate-controlled geothermal greenhouse in Black Forest was created as a model that could be replicated around the world for the purpose of spreading economic opportunity and self-sufficiency. More than 20 systems have been built in multiple countries over the last 10 years, always from simple materials that are easy to obtain locally and with local partners who are trained to take over ownership and management. The pandemic was a time to fine-tune and standardize the growing system, but since then new installations have resumed, most recently in South Africa. Aquaponics recirculate water, using much less of it than conventional methods, while fish in tanks provide natural fertilizer. Depending on the season, it takes eight to ten weeks to grow the greens. Emerge is also experimenting with growing tomatoes and cucumbers. Around 15 percent of the farm's weekly production is donated to charity. During the pandemic it was much higher. "People would come by and we'd give them bags of lettuce. And they would thank us for giving them hope. Sometimes we just talked and prayed with them. It was an incredible time," he recalls. "It was a testament to the transcendent impact we can all have."



Learn interesting insights about developmental projects around the world and how aquaponic systems work during free tours of the Emerge greenhouse. Public tours are offered every Thursday afternoon at 3:30. It's easy to make reservations online at [EmergeAquaponics.com](https://emergeaquaponics.com). Find fresh heads of Emerge lettuce in the produce cooler at RFD.



Finding the gold in blue

*Honoring the past,
preparing for the future*

Aaron Lowden of the Acoma Pueblo east of Albuquerque was educated in the "Western way of knowing," as he describes it, but he later felt called to start re-learning the ancient tribal practices of growing heritage grains in diverse plant mixtures with minimal irrigation. While re-immersing himself in the land, he was also reconnecting with how to honor the sacred quality of food, life and community. "We are taught that when you put a seed in the ground, it's like a child; you always take care of your children," he said. "We are thankful for the food we are blessed with. We owe our lives to it."

Lowden was the kick-off speaker for the annual University of Colorado-Cororado Springs Grain School Online, which started February 2 and continues through April. He is active in the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance and the Indigenous Seed Keepers Network and serves as a tribal councilman. He's worked on youth outreach and educational development for the National Park Service and Acoma Ancestral Lands Program and is helping establish a local seed bank.

The pueblo relies on traditional crops like blue corn and amaranth, prepared through processes like parching and nixtamalization, which is known for giving tortillas improved texture and flavor. It also confers health benefits: researchers have credited it with a reduced rate of osteoporosis among Southwestern women. It improves bioavailability of the nutrients, highlighting the timely wisdom of the old ways. While the hard flinty blue corn is not well-suited to modern industrial processing, traditional preparation methods make it digestible and delicious.



Lowden linked the erosion of these traditional crops and practices to the changing climate, rife with wind, wildfire, drought and growing water scarcity. This idea first dawned on him after he planted Hopi blue corn in the traditional Hopi style — digging down into the earth with a pole until he hit moisture and depositing the seed there — and watched those plants sprout more quickly than irrigated corn

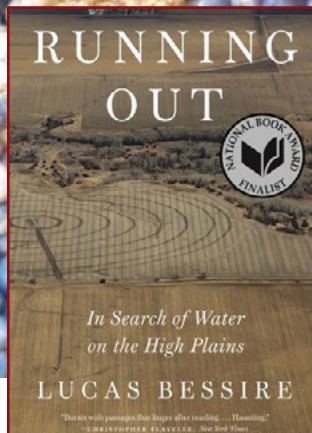
grown nearby. It confirmed to him that the ancient varieties were better adapted and more productive in the local environment. He realized those old varieties were worth preserving, especially as the Southwest becomes warmer and drier and severe droughts are more frequent. "I always tell the young people you are honoring the past and providing for the future by reviving these seeds and reclaiming these traditional practices," he said.

DID YOU KNOW? The Callicrate on-farm slaughtering process requires 90 percent less water than industrial-scale meat processing.

Growing food and valuing water



VINTAGE GRAINS Ranch Foods Direct carries responsibly grown and responsibly harvested stone-ground heritage grain products from UCCS Grain School founder Nanna Meyer and cooperative development specialist Dan Hobbs, owners of Pueblo Seed and Food. Beautifully packaged in reusable tins! A great way to sample blue corn, rye and other underappreciated water-conserving grains. Seasonal selection, subject to availability.



In 2015, anthropology professor Lucas Bessire journeyed back to southwest Kansas to explore his farming roots and re-connect with his father, all under the guise of studying the area's aquifer depletion. What he found was a "water-mining mafia mentality" on a massive scale. In his book *Running Out*, he concludes the rapidly draining aquifer will likely never return, yet a shift away from "malignant or cannibalistic" growth at all costs is still possible.

When Forbes business writer Chloe Sorvino set out to write about the modern meat industry, one of the sources she turned to was Mike Callicrate, owner of Ranch Foods Direct. He in turn steered her to long time agricultural economist John Ikerd, who has proposed the idea of community food utilities that serve the public interest rather than just feeding corporate profits. Under this model, state and federal funding that currently goes to farm subsidies would be used instead to purchase food directly from local and regional farmers.

Mike, who flew to Washington D.C. in February to appear at the national Food Not Feed Summit (photo below) organized by Farm Action, believes the upcoming farm bill reauthorization is an opportunity for reform. "The U.S. needs to stop incentivizing

commodity feed production that is depleting our precious water supplies and instead support the production of healthy food for local communities. For too long government regulators looked the other way as a handful of corporations came to dominate the market," he says. The evidence shows up in everyday impacts like egg shortages and high egg prices. "The rebuilding of our local and regional food systems is long past due," he says. "For us to be able to feed ourselves with these new regenerative production systems, we must have government support. It can't just be a few hospitals or schools, it has to happen on a broad scale."



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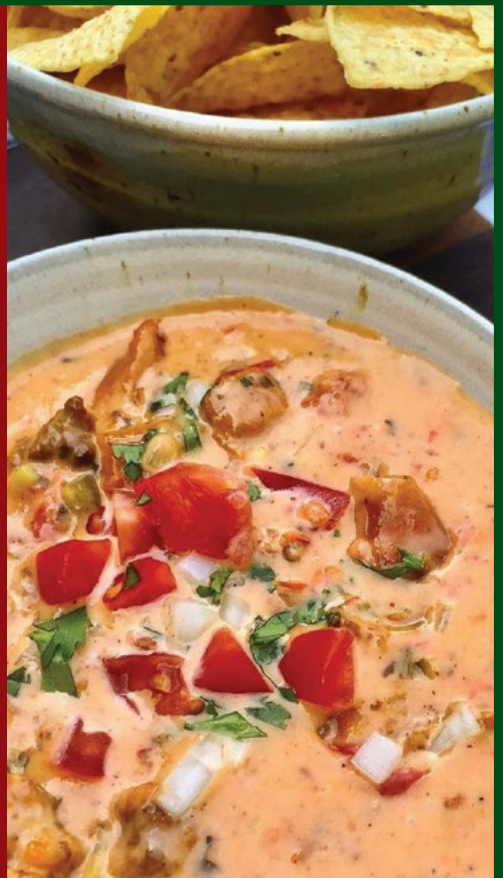


A creative workforce program
at The Well in Colorado Springs!

MARCH MADNESS DIY QUESO

1½ c pico de gallo, extra for garnish
1 tbsp salted butter
1 tbsp flour
½ c heavy cream
½ c pale ale
12 oz Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
4-5 tamales, chopped
(cooked and hot)
Salt & pepper to taste

In a medium sauce pan over medium heat, combine butter and flour, stirring to make a roux. Once the mixture forms a golden brown paste, add pico and stir until the veggies soften, approximately two minutes. Next, add cream and ale, stirring until the flour paste dissolves and the sauce becomes thick. Continue stirring bringing the sauce to a soft boil for 2-3 minutes. Stir in shredded cheese and chopped tamales. (Make sure tamales are fully cooked and husks removed before adding.) Stir until the cheese is combined and the sauce is smooth. Season to taste and serve.



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Two retail locations in Colorado Springs!

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