

Community Profiles

"The best fertilizer is the footsteps of the landowner."

— Confucius

Bucking the trend

How can ranchers buck the trend of declining herd numbers? Fewer cows mean higher prices for consumers and concerns about the nation's food security. Eastern Colorado rancher Kit Pharo found his niche with smaller framed, productive, range-ready cattle and now sells more than 1,000 bulls a year to other ranchers. But he questions whether the next generation will be willing to take up the reins unless cattle producers can find ways to make their business more profitable. "In 1970, it took 28 calves to buy a pick-up," he recalls. "Today it takes 58 calves, even with record high cattle prices."

YOU HAD SOME CUSTOM PROCESSING DONE BY CALLICRATE CATTLE COMPANY. HOW DID IT GO? DID YOU HAVE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE?

Very positive. These were animals we had processed to sell under our new Tenet Certified Beef program. It was a very good experience. It was nice that it encompassed everything from the slaughter to the packaging to the delivery of the meat.

TALK ABOUT WHY IT'S IMPORTANT THAT RANCHERS HAVE ACCESS TO CUSTOM PROCESSING SERVICES.

In rural America, it's critical. The Callicrate processing plant is about 90 miles away from us, but it's still as close as we can go from where we're at. They can get us in if we have an emergency situation, like if an animal gets a broken leg. If you can't get in anywhere for two months, you've lost that animal. I think it's also critical the way Ranch Foods Direct takes everything directly to a retail store. It's a model that encompasses the whole process from ranch to retail.

DO YOU THINK WE'LL SEE MORE RANCHERS GOING DIRECT TO THE CUSTOMER WITH THEIR OWN HOME-RAISED BEEF?

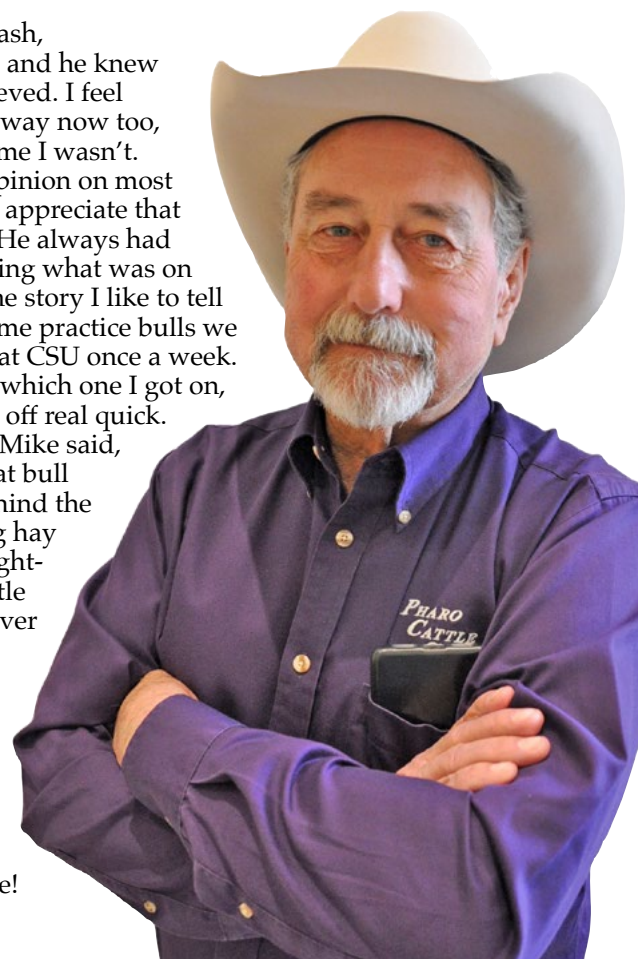
I don't know. I'm amazed — really I'm shocked — that the consumer has such a high demand for beef right now at these record-high prices. That says a lot for our product; people really want it. And I think probably the demand is going to increase until some economic function makes them say they can't spend as much on meat anymore. But if you know where your meat came from, and how it was handled and processed, I think that's huge. If I'm going to eat an expensive piece of beef, I want the best I can get.

YOU SPEAK TO RANCHERS AROUND THE COUNTRY AND THE WORLD ABOUT HOW TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL WITH THEIR BEEF PRODUCTION AND MARKETING. WHAT'S THE MAIN MESSAGE YOU'RE TRYING TO LEAVE THEM WITH AT THESE EVENTS?

For the rancher at the cow-calf level of production, I'm focused on them being profitable so the next generation wants to come back. We need to have a good business to come back to. If you need a town job to support the ranch, our kids don't want that. They'd rather have a town job and go do what they want on the weekends. I think at this point the worst thing happening to the rancher right now is these record high prices, in a way, because it can become so easy to think this is going to last forever. But the last time cattle prices went up and then dropped, in 2016, they dropped faster than they went up. That may or may not happen again, but if it does, it will destroy a lot of ranches.

YOU'VE KNOWN OWNER MIKE CALLICRATE SINCE YOU WERE BOTH ON THE RODEO TEAM AT COLORADO STATE RIDING BULLS. WHAT WERE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF HIM BACK THEN?

Mike was brash, opinionated, and he knew what he believed. I feel like I'm that way now too, but at that time I wasn't. He had an opinion on most things, and I appreciate that in anybody. He always had a way of saying what was on his mind. One story I like to tell is we had some practice bulls we used to ride at CSU once a week. I'm not sure which one I got on, but I bucked off real quick. Afterwards, Mike said, "Hey Kit, that bull was back behind the chutes eating hay before the eight-second whistle blew." I'll never forget that. (Laughs.) I'm not sure I would have said the same to him. But it was probably true!



'Caring about animals means caring about your meat source'

It's not hard to spot Susan McIntyre when she's out driving around town. That's because she's in a bright pink mini-Cooper covered in paw prints with a dog and cat waving from the back window. Susan is the founder and owner of Playtime Petsitters, a local favorite and winner of dozens of awards. The cheeky title she's given herself – "chief tummy rub officer" – reveals the playful humor she brings to her work. But she's absolutely serious about buying humanely raised meat. That's what first brought her to Ranch Foods Direct and keeps her coming back.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A RANCH FOODS DIRECT CUSTOMER?

Since I moved here 20 years ago.

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT THE STORE?

I can't remember for sure, but it was one of two ways: either through meeting the owner of Gigi's Animal Lovers Gift Shop, in Manitou — she would only buy meat for her dog from Ranch Foods Direct. She was one of first great animal people I met when I moved here. Or the old Cy's Drive-in, when they used to get hamburgers from Ranch Foods Direct.

DO YOU BUY HUMAN FOOD OR PET FOOD AT RANCH FOODS DIRECT?

So far I've just always bought stuff for me. But I just got back from a national pet sitting and dog walking conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, and they were talking a lot about raw pet food. I thought I knew a lot about pet food, but I learned more about the merits of raw. Next time I'm at Ranch Foods Direct I plan to check that out.

SO WHAT PRODUCTS DO YOU BUY AT RANCH FOODS DIRECT?

Anything and everything. I know most people focus on the all-natural organic aspect. But my focus is, if I have to eat meat, fish, cheese, and milk, I want as little harm done to the animals as possible. I want it to be humanely raised, cruelty free, and I want to know the animals got to do what they were designed to do and were treated with respect. They shouldn't be kept in conditions where they are pumped full of fear. That's why I go to Ranch Foods Direct. That's why I'm willing to spend 18 times more on pet food than most people do.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ALL THE BUZZ AROUND EATING MORE PROTEIN?

I actually know more about pet nutrition than human nutrition. Cats are carnivore. They need to eat a very high quantity of protein and very little carbs. It needs to be either canned or raw, but it needs to be wet food. They are designed to tear and swallow. They need more moisture, whereas dry food is ten percent moisture at best. They need to get most of their moisture from their food. Cats that eat dry food are almost always on the verge of dehydration. And I'm learning it's pretty much the same for dogs. In the wild, they do eat a few dry things, but they need moisture. If you can get raw food that's all-natural, high quality, with all the nutrients in it, that is healthiest for their bodies. What started me on this recently was my cat was diagnosed with irritable bowel, and that led me down the path to exploring a raw and goat milk diet. A lot of kitties end up with kidney disease because they don't get enough moist food. It's more expensive, but it's healthier, and you'll have fewer vet bills. And they'll eat less.

TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS.

About 35 years ago, I started in the pet industry by home-delivering all-natural, holistic, human-grade dog and cat foods. It really does make a difference. I've seen dogs and cats grow their hair back on a healthier diet. From there, it morphed into pet sitting and dog walking. I feel like I got lucky. May 1st will be 29 years, and, I'm 60, so I've been doing this half my life. I've made friends with mice, rats, ferrets, rabbits, horses and goats, you name it. They are all cool, they're all smart, and they have hearts and minds just like people do. Even fish and turtles.

IS IT HARD TO MEET DEMAND? IS IT GROWING?

I've been at it 29 years, and I have a staff of 18 people. This is all we do for a living. More and more people are going with pet sitters and dog walkers rather than boarding. Most animals are happier, healthier and safer in their own home. At home, they're not catching diseases or infections, which happens even in kennels where they work really hard to avoid it. I'm kind of a workaholic. At the conference I just got back from, I won the contest for personal record for number of visits in one day. Mine was 18 visits. That's when I was starting out, and it was just me. I also won for the longest in business, aka the stubborn old fart award.



For more info go to PlayTimePetSitters.com

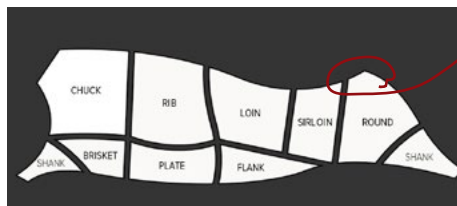
Featured Recipe

Grillades and Grits



Recipe by Local Chef Eric Veidt
The Margarita at Pine Creek

This recipe was inspired by a trip Eric and wife Cathy took about 15 years ago to New Orleans for Jazz Fest. "The dish has become a staple at The Margarita during the colder months, and at our annual Mardi Gras event," explains Chef Eric. "We utilize the beef top round, which on its own can be slightly tough, but with a few hours of braising, it's melt-in-your-mouth tender." He counts Ranch Foods Direct as his preferred source for burger meat and other cuts, as needed.



FOR THE CLASSIC BLACKENING SEASONING:

- 2 Tbsp. paprika
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. ground cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp. freshly ground white pepper
- 1 tsp. fresh ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. dried thyme leaves
- 1 tsp. dried oregano leaves

FOR THE GRILLADES:

- blackening seasoning
- pinch of salt
- 2 lbs. thin sliced (1/4 inch) Callicrate Beef top-round cutlets
- 1/2 C. all-purpose flour
- 1/4 C. vegetable oil
- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 C. small diced onion
- 1 each red and green bell pepper, diced
- 1 C. diced celery
- 2 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 4 bay leaves
- 1/4 tsp. dried thyme leaves, crumbled between your fingers
- 16 oz. can roasted, diced tomatoes
- 1/2 C. dry red wine
- 2 C. Ranch Foods Direct beef stock

Preheat oven to 325°F. Combine blackening seasoning and a little salt in a small bowl and stir to blend. Season the pieces of beef evenly on both sides with the seasoning mixture. Place the flour in a shallow bowl and lightly dredge the beef in the flour, shaking to remove anything extra. In a large wide Dutch oven, heat oil over medium-high heat. When hot, add the meat in batches and cook until browned, about 1 minute per side. Transfer to a baking sheet or large plate and repeat.

Once beef is seared, add a little more oil and butter to the pan. Add the onions, bell pepper and celery and cook, scraping the bottom and sides to loosen any browned bits, until the vegetables are softened, about 4-5 minutes. Turn to medium heat and add garlic, bay leaves, dried herbs and bloom for about a minute, then sprinkle in 2 Tbsp. flour and mix. Add tomato, red wine, stock and bring to a simmer. Return the beef to the pan, and taste for salt and pepper, but go lightly as the flavor grows stronger as it reduces. Cover and transfer to the oven. Cook until the grillades are fork-tender, stirring occasionally, about 2 hours. Serve over your favorite creamy grits, rice or grilled toast.

IN STORE NOW: Corned beef flats and points to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.



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80/20 Ground Beef Bundle Sale

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80/20 Ground Beef

\$60

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80/20 Ground Beef

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Bundles only. Not valid on single packages.

DID YOU KNOW? ... As of early 2025, the U.S. was importing 59 percent of its fresh fruit, 35 percent of its fresh vegetables and around 20 percent of its beef. "We've become a net importer of food," says Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate. "So much for 'feeding the world.' Now we can't even feed ourselves." **SHOP LOCAL!**

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:

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