

Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

May 2023

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about the progress and prosperity of our community."

— Farmworker organizer and activist Cesar Chavez

Hub2Hub

Ranch Foods Direct supplies beef and pork to expanding startup food hub in Denver

First generation farmer and East Denver Food Hub co-founder and CEO Roberto Meza is president of the National Young Farmers Coalition and serves on the state board of agriculture.

WHY SOURCE FROM RANCH FOODS DIRECT? We just really believe it's important for people to understand where their food comes from — there's actually a story behind it, and a lot of energy goes into producing it.

We should revere it, almost as something spiritual. We love the ground beef and pork. Personally I eat a lot of burgers myself. And the flavor of eating local allows me to build a connection and experience the supply chain and the relationships in my food web. It's also important to realize beef plays an important role in the regenerative cycle. There's been a lot of misinformation given to people in our community that meat is bad, but it's really about how it's grown and processed.



WHY ARE FOOD HUBS IMPORTANT?

There's a lot of enthusiasm for farm-to-table and local procurement, yet nobody really knows how it works and what you need in order to make it a success. All these great ideas are floating around, but rootlessly. And there's no way to anchor them unless you pay attention to those critical details of the supply chain. Without that, none of this interest manifests into anything substantial. That's why we started the food hub, so we are able to support our partners in their vision of local food. Without something like this, there's no way you can bring the farm to the community.

WHAT'S NEXT? There are still a lot of challenges. It's really hard to be like Mike (RFD's owner) and be the only trailblazer out there making it happen. We need to focus on more loans, more technical assistance, more resources, and how do we reprogram the market to embrace the values to support these farmers who are trying to transition to more regenerative, sustainable practices? One thing we've done at the state level is to create the Restore Colorado fund. If food purchasers choose to opt in, we tag an extra one percent charge to their bill, which goes into a pool to help farmers adopt more regenerative practices.

East Denver Food Hub is converting shipping containers into solar-powered cold storage units that don't require access to the electrical grid. Roberto Meza, above, stands in front of one of the units at his food hub in Denver.

Food hubs make it easier for cities to buy local

Representatives of Denver's good food purchasing program toured the Peak to Plains Food Hub this spring. Here's feedback from tour coordinator Marion Kalb.

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE HIGHLIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS FROM THE TOUR? I was very impressed by the staff at both retail stores and those involved in processing the meat. They clearly have a passion for what they do and are invested in the business. Our group appreciated the opportunity to observe the butchers at work, and we are all more knowledgeable about where meat cuts are located on the animal. One way the Peak to Plains Food Hub is different from others we've visited is that the anchor business is completely vertically integrated — amazing! — and producing meat products on a large scale, as well as working with other farmers in the region to help supply more than 300 CSA members year-round. We were also impressed with the gourmet meat pies (made by Matt Campbell of Mountain Pie Company) and how Ranch Foods Direct assisted in helping this business get started.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE FOOD HUBS TO GOOD PURCHASING GOALS? Food hubs like Ranch Foods Direct are critical in increasing the amount of Colorado products that are available for purchase by institutions. Institutional markets generally require large amounts of products, multiple deliveries per week, and the buyers like to purchase as much product as they can from one source. Food hubs are more likely to meet these requirements than just one farm or ranch operating independently.

DROUGHT, URBANIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION ALL PUT THE SQUEEZE ON COLORADO FARMERS. AFTER WORKING ON THE

GOOD FOOD PURCHASING INITIATIVE FOR SEVERAL YEARS, DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GETTING CLOSER TO THE GOAL OF PURCHASING 25 PERCENT OF FOOD FROM REGIONAL SOURCES BY 2030? OR IS IT BECOMING MORE DIFFICULT? ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT LOSING MORE FARMS OR DO YOU FEEL OPTIMISTIC? I think the future is a mixed bag. We already know that some vegetable farmers are farming fewer acres or no longer farming water-intensive crops. At the same time, we expect to work more with food hubs in order to pursue values-aligned purchasing. We all have a responsibility to find out where our food comes from and the challenges involved in producing what we eat — and keeping farmers and ranchers in business through policy advocacy and voting with our food dollars.

ANY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING YOU'VE SEEN HAPPENING IN DENVER SO FAR? In this past legislative session, \$4 million was set aside for food pantries to purchase fresh produce, with an emphasis on local sourcing. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science has developed a salad bar, with local and organic products. They also have a BBQ station featuring Colorado beef and bison. The Tasty Food Program, which serves the Office of Children's Affairs, the Denver Sheriff's Dept., Denver Public Schools and the museum, meets many of our Good Food Purchasing Program standards. As we continue with our assessments and data collection, we expect to see more values-aligned purchases in the future.

DO WE KNOW WHAT PERCENTAGE OF DENVER'S FOOD CONSUMPTION CURRENTLY COMES FROM LOCAL OR REGIONAL SOURCES? Right now it's around 8 percent.



Marion Kalb is the institutional food program administrator for the City of Denver.

New Horizons



LAUNCHING IN 2024: FUEL FARM EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS

- 38% of farmers in Pueblo County are 65 or older
- Farmer and Farm Entrepreneur focus with innovative, sustainable practices
- Precision drone technology, Aquaponics, Greenhouse Operations, USDA Organic
- Wholesale and Retail marketing and distribution



Ranch Foods Direct in line to supply a new food hall launching in Pueblo this month

Nathan Stern, above, was drawn to Pueblo by the chance to refurbish a historic building and turn it into a modern food hall that could incubate new restaurants and train the next generation of culinary professionals. What he found most compelling about the city was its proximity to agriculture. "That really resonated with me," he said while speaking at the Pueblo Food Summit earlier this spring. "I knew this was the right community." The new Fuel and Iron food hall will include a commercial kitchen, space to incubate six separate restaurant concepts, 28 workforce development housing units located above the ground floor and an adjacent one-acre urban farm. Fuel and Iron will also operate three apprenticeship programs. Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate has always championed small business development of this sort, incorporating it into the Ranch Foods Direct business model through both direct and indirect support of dozens of enterprises, including Mountain Pie Co., owned by Matt Campbell (shown at right) Sourdough Boulangerie, El Chapin Food Truck, Goat Patch Brewing, Ahavah Farm, SoCo Farmers Market and more. He's also currently involved with a community workforce development project at The Well. "This is what it's all about: growing and expanding local food infrastructure," he says. "Our goal has always been to build supply chains all the way to the consumer rather than stopping at wholesale, so more of the food dollar goes back to the people who produce and do the work, the makers, creators and stewards of the land and livestock."



RFD owner Mike Callicrate stands in front of the former Holmes Hardware in Pueblo, located at 400 S. Union, which was recently restored and converted into the Fuel and Iron Food Hall, with space for several new dining concepts.



Matt Campbell, right, hosts a tour for a group from Women Involved in Farm Economics. Matt's equipment allows him to shape and fill 1,000 mini-pies in 45 minutes. He also makes sausage rolls, broth and soups inside a USDA certified kitchen at RFD's Town Center food hub.

Just in time for summer, top rated El Chapin has added a new food truck at the 1228 E. Fillmore store serving Callicrate burgers, hand-cut fries and shakes!



ONE PAN BAKED MEATBALLS AND PASTA

16 oz package uncooked tubular pasta
24 ounces marinara sauce
1 cup milk
2 cups water
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon oregano
1 teaspoon salt

6-8 spears asparagus cut into one-inch pieces
Papa John's fully cooked meatballs (made in house)
2 cups shredded Italian style cheese
Grated parm and chopped herbs (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 425. In a 9x13 baking dish stir together uncooked pasta, marinara sauce, water, milk, spices and meatballs.

Cover tightly with aluminum foil and bake for 40 minutes. Uncover; stir, add asparagus. Cover the dish and return to the oven for a few minutes. Remove and sprinkle cheese over the top, then bake uncovered for 5-10 more minutes, until cheese is melted and bubbly. Cool for at least 15 minutes before serving to allow sauce to thicken up.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT is printed and distributed by:

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DIRECT

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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.

Shop online. Shipping available.

www.ranchfoodsdirect.com