

Food for Thought

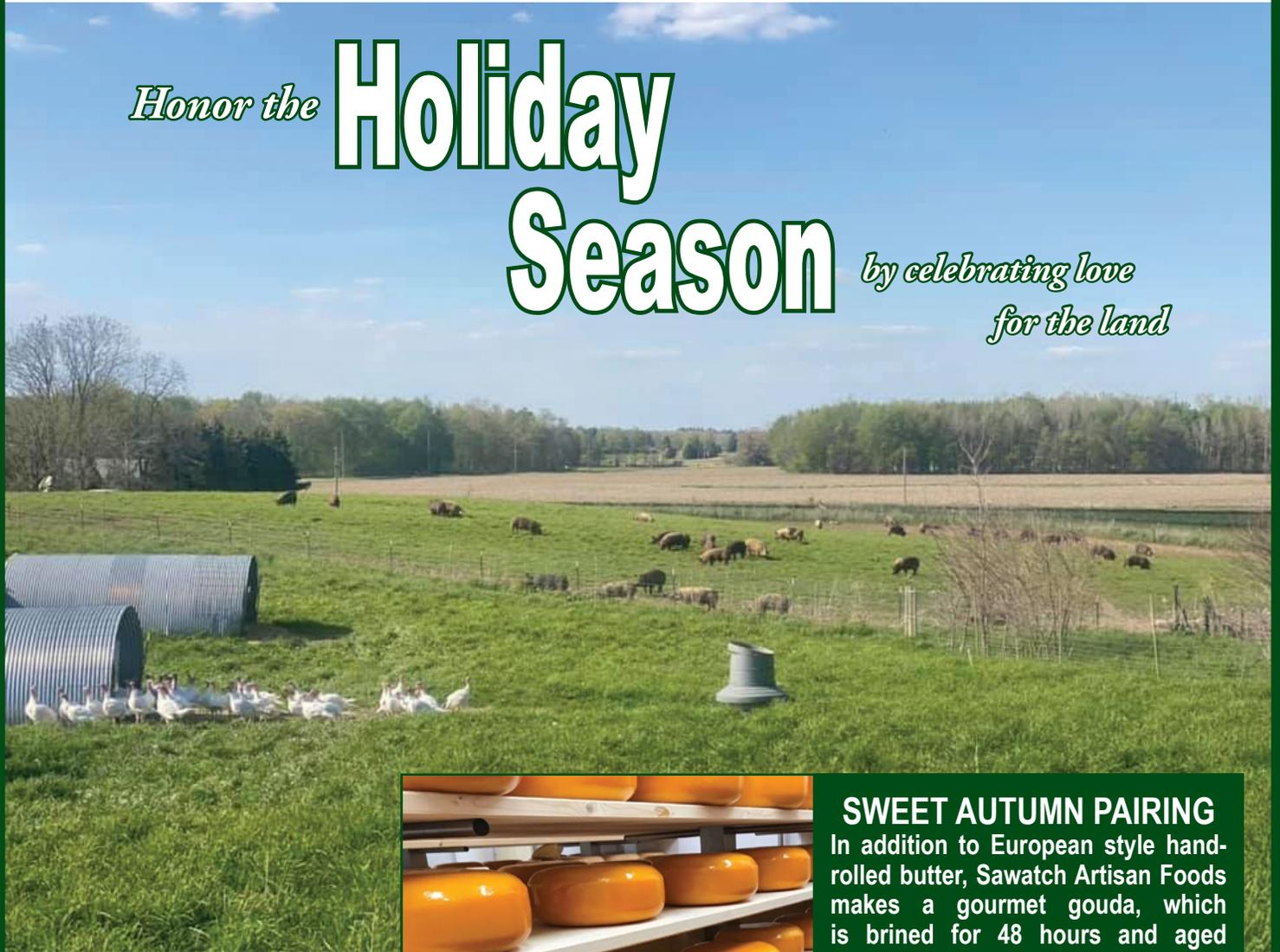
People • Products • Purpose

November 2021

“The value that we are willing to exchange for our food is an investment in the existence of food in the future.” — *Ben Clark, organic farmer*

“The table laden with food is meant to recall the altar of the Temple.” — *Author Lauren F. Winner*

Honor the **Holiday Season** *by celebrating love for the land*



At Gunthorp Farms of Indiana (shown above) livestock are rotated across the landscape in a regenerative management style similar to the production practices at Callicrate Cattle Company. Pastured turkeys are a rare treat; sign up early for the fullest selection of Gunthorp turkeys and Callicrate hams as you make preparations for the holidays.



SWEET AUTUMN PAIRING

In addition to European style hand-rolled butter, Sawatch Artisan Foods makes a gourmet gouda, which is brined for 48 hours and aged for 3 to 18 months on traditional Dutch pine planks (available now at Ranch Foods Direct.) Gouda pairs beautifully with apples for a perfect fall flavor combination that puts a new twist on many dishes. A quick internet search divulges apple-and-gouda dip, crostini, grilled cheese and Thanksgiving stuffing, as well as classic stuffed pork chops or chicken breast. It's also an interesting addition to a macaroni-and-cheese casserole.

Little local Eden

Long-time gardener and Ranch Foods Direct customer Jenn Panariso felt called to start the online farm stand that became One Eleven Neighborhood Farm right before Covid hit. "As I did my research, I came to find out so many other farmers were switching to the model I wanted to do, because they had to." In addition to setting up a Saturday farm stand at nearby RFD vendor Colorado Coffee Merchants throughout the summer, she also delivered fresh produce to Ranch Foods Direct's Fillmore store, where it was extremely popular all season long. Her urban acreage in Colorado Springs consists of 2,000 square feet with four hives and five fruit trees. "It doesn't sound like a lot, but you can get so much food off of that. We even grew hops and partnered with Goat Patch Brewing to make a beer with it," she says.



Nature's simple sweets

Ranch Foods Direct vendor Stephanie Lyman, owner of Steffi's Confections, has a stockpile of local apples — many of them from One Eleven Neighborhood Farm — and honey at the ready as the holiday baking season begins.

APPLE INSPIRATIONS: In addition to doing caramel apples for Halloween, she'll be making hundreds of pies in the week leading up to Thanksgiving and Christmas. "I'm also hoping to do an apple cinnamon babka with fresh-ground spices from Gather Food Studio (2011 W. Colorado Ave. 719-308-2992.)" A chocolate version is also in the works. Her turnovers are such a big hit she now makes them year-round.

COCOA BOMBS ARE BACK! By all indications, last year's break-out treat will be just as popular this year. "What sets mine apart is I use 60 percent dark single-origin chocolate from Colombia that I really like for a nice rich flavor, and I make my own hot chocolate mix from high quality ingredients instead of using a pre-made mix." In addition to chocolate, she also hopes to make white chocolate chia bombs and possibly a salted caramel.

WHO DOESN'T LOVE THIS CLASSIC? "One new thing I've started doing is my giant chocolate chip cookies. I call them my quarter-pound cookies, and by weight they are almost half chocolate chips." These hearty cookies are about four-inch in diameter and dunkily delicious.

OTHER UPCOMING HOLIDAY TREATS: Look for festive holiday stollen, English toffee and smoked almond honey nougat, plus assorted Christmas cookies and grab-and-go mixed cookie gift boxes.

WANT A SPECIAL ORDER? Go to Stephanie's handy online store at SteffisConfections.com to peruse her complete menu, buy online and schedule pick-up at Colorado Coffee Merchants (302 E. Fillmore 719-473-8878) located right down the street from RFD's Fillmore store! A few of her items are also available for shipping.

ON WHAT IT'S MEANT TO WORK WITH RANCH FOODS

DIRECT: "It's such an awesome outlet. They helped insure that nothing I grew was going to waste and gave people access to local produce who couldn't come to my farm stand on Saturday mornings. It's amazing how it all ended up falling into place; it wasn't something I tried to orchestrate or plan, but just from having community conversations, it worked out for several of us along the Fillmore corridor to collaborate together."

ON WHAT'S TO COME: "I'd like to try to continue growing during the off-season," she says. She and her husband set up a commercial greenhouse they got from friends, and she'll be using row cover to insulate the ground. "I'm not sure what that will look like yet, but I'm hoping to grow some things like salad mix over the winter. It all depends on the weather." She also plans to grow more of her most popular items (poblano peppers and carrots, to name a few) next year.

FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOODS: "Something my husband and I do, being Italian, is to make big batches of pasta sauce and have Italian Christmases, with things like Italian sausage and spaghetti and cheese ravioli. I personally like my sauce a little spicy — Arrabbiata style it's called — so we make sure to include plenty of red pepper flakes to give it a little kick. We go to Ranch Foods Direct for the Italian sausage."



OTHER FAVORITE RFD PRODUCTS: "My husband loves the Wagyu beef and the steaks, and I love the pork steaks. We make those on our smoker. Another favorite is the honey caramels from Steffi's Confections. One thing I really love as a gardener is the biochar. It's been a great soil amendment and helps to kick-start the growing season. And Amy's Que Vidita deLaMore soap, made with Ranch Foods Direct products like beef tallow and biochar — ever since I started using her stuff, I don't have to put on lotion nearly as much in our dry weather!"

Feast with fresh fungi

Austen Brinker, owner of Fungus Farm Colorado, continues to bring beautiful gourmet mushrooms to the Ranch Foods Direct Fillmore store, one of his original outlets since starting the venture in 2020. Sometimes the shape, size and variety changes, but never the quality. Going into the holidays, fresh, locally grown shrooms are a wonderful addition to any table.

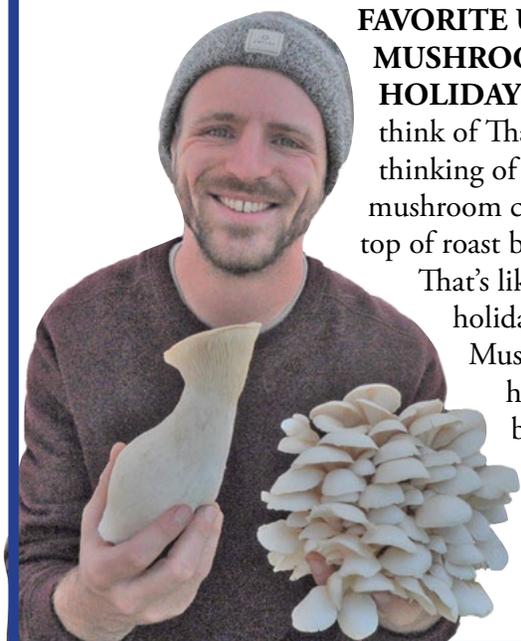
WHAT'S NEW? "We've added a handful of new strains; the pioppini is my new favorite. It has a savory beef flavor so it tastes a lot like steak, with an asparagus texture to it. So it's a very different type of mushroom. It's tall and thin with a gold cap; I leave it whole when I stir-fry it and just cut off the bottom, so they're like little mushroom straws. A lot of times I'll do them straight-up as part of a veggie sauté medley, with some asparagus, squash and quinoa. Another thing I like to do is to put zucchini squash, beets and potatoes together and roast them in the oven and then add some sautéed mushrooms at the end. "

MIX AND MATCH: Austen's mushrooms are exotic and diverse. The chestnuts take the longest to fruit, while the shiitakes take the longest to colonize. Regardless of how differently they grow, it's a good strategy to mix different varieties together in the kitchen. "The flavors compliment each other, and it's nice to get some different textures in whatever you're making," Austen says.

FAVORITE USE OF MUSHROOMS AT THE HOLIDAYS?

"When I think of Thanksgiving, I'm thinking of a good, warm mushroom cream sauce on top of roast beef or steak.

That's like the perfect holiday meal for me. Mushroom sauces have always been one of my favorite things."



HOMEMADE SOURDOUGH, MIXED MUSHROOM AND BACON STUFFING

Butter for the baking dish
1 1/4 lb. (roughly 12 cups) sourdough bread, crusts trimmed, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/2 lb. shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and coarsely chopped
1/2 lb. oyster mushrooms, coarsely chopped
1 lb. cremini or button mushrooms, thinly sliced
4 Tbs. sunflower oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
3/4 lb. bacon, cut into 1/2-inch dice
1 large onion, finely diced
5 garlic cloves, finely chopped
4 to 6 cups broth, as needed
1/2 cup chopped parsley
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh sage
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh thyme
2 eggs

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 13-by-9-by-2-inch baking dish. Spread the bread in an even layer on a large baking sheet. Bake, stirring a few times, until light golden brown, about 12 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool. Transfer the cubes to a very large bowl. Increase the oven temperature to 375°F. In a large baking dish or on a rimmed baking sheet, combine the mushrooms with 3 Tbs. of oil and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper. Roast, stirring several times, until soft and golden brown, about 30 minutes. While the mushrooms are roasting, in a large, deep sauté pan over medium heat, warm the remaining 1 Tbs. oil. Add the bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown and the fat has rendered, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all but 2 Tbs. of the rendered fat in the sauté pan. Set the pan over high heat, add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add 3 cups of stock, parsley, sage and thyme, and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer. Add the roasted mushrooms and bacon to the bowl with the bread. In a small bowl, whisk the eggs and then whisk in a few Tbs. of the warm stock mixture. Add the eggs and the rest of the stock mixture to the bread, season with salt and pepper and stir to combine. The dressing should be very wet; add more stock as needed. Scrape the bread mixture into the prepared baking dish. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and continue baking until the top is golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes more. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes before serving.



BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP is good all by itself but also works well as the basis for other dishes. Here are a few ways to transform it into something new:

- ✓ **PASTA SAUCE:** Whisk 4 cups warm soup with 2/3 cup grated Parmesan, then toss with a pound of cooked pasta and 6 strips of diced cooked bacon.
- ✓ **CORNBREAD:** Prepare and bake one box of cornbread mix according to package directions, but replace the liquid with an equal amount of butternut squash soup instead.
- ✓ **CURRY:** Simmer 4 cups soup, add one bag of frozen mixed vegetables and 1 tablespoon of curry powder. Heat through and serve over rice.
- ✓ **MASHED POTATOES:** Boil 4 medium-sized potatoes til tender, then mash with 4 tablespoons butter, 1 cup soup and 1/2 tsp salt.

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