

Food for Thought

People • Products • Purpose

September 2022

"A lot of human hobbies, from knitting sweaters to building model airplanes, are probably rooted in the same human desire to control an entire process of manufacture... It's the antidote to alienation, most business psychologists agree."

— Barbara Kingsolver in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

Raising the bar

A soap maker comes clean about the wacky science experiment behind his small business

Blake Byers had always wanted to learn how to make old-fashioned handmade bar soap, so when his daughter needed a fundraising project to pay for STEM camp, making and selling soap seemed like a great choice. In what felt a little like a wacky STEM experiment of its own (STEM, of course, stands for science, technology, engineering and math) Blake coaxed his two kids out into the yard on a winter day to use snowmelt from the roof to extract potassium hydroxide from hardwood ash, which they then combined with olive oil to make their first bar. Even he was a little amazed at how well it actually worked. Two batches later they'd made enough money to cover the cost of camp, and Blake was well on his way to starting a new company called Clean RD. After a fortuitous introduction to Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate, Blake began using 30 percent beef tallow in every bar along with natural ingredients like pine resin, bio-char, natural clay dyes and essential oils. "I love it," he says of the tallow. "It's so good. It combines really well and doesn't leave a funky smell. It's 100 percent my custom recipe as far as the number of oils and amount of lye I use. I can do 72 bars at a time using a big pinewood mold that I set up in my basement."



Right now Ranch Foods Direct is the exclusive retail outlet for Blake's soaps, and he likes the philosophies behind the company, such as using every part of the animal and regenerating the land with compost. Early in his career, he studied soil science at Utah State University, and together with a fellow graduate student started a student-run CSA, which is now one of the largest student organizations on campus. "We ended up reaching out to AmeriCorps, the criminal justice system, and nutritional epidemiologists that were going around to elementary schools studying student intake of produce — the whole thing really blew up." Now Blake is a registered dietitian who consults with several elder care facilities and senior meal programs.

Nutrition to him isn't about fads or what's trendy, it's about developing a natural intuition for what the body needs. In another experiment he's done with his kids, he whips up smoothies made from produce grown in his big home garden and asks them to close their eyes and concentrate on what happens when they drink it. "You can feel your cells screaming for joy when you really nurture yourself," he says. "I think it's really just about getting in touch with nature again."

Look for Blake's soap display at Ranch Foods Direct. "Learning to make soap took some reading, but thousands of years ago people were figuring this stuff out," he said. "It's been fun." His favorite Ranch Foods Direct product is the Callicrate ground beef.

Food only grows where the water flows

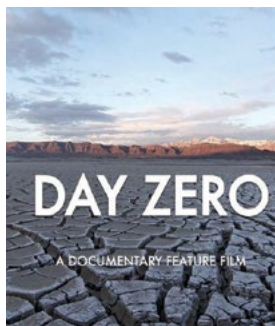
As water supplies diminish, lack of profitability pressures farmers to cash out

In the historic San Luis Valley, an ancient irrigation ditch called an acequia is not just “a linear waterway in the landscape,” according to landscape architect and multigenerational farmer Arnie Valdez; it’s a communal feature with rich social, ethical, ecological and spiritual significance within the local community.

As energy-efficient gravity-fed channels with no mechanized components, they are perfectly designed to fit their environment. And yet, they’re not well-suited to modern concepts like water rights and conservation easements. As a result, old traditions of water sharing are giving way to privatization that fragments the landscape and erodes the agrarian way of life, he says.

Valdez spoke about Southern Colorado’s unique agricultural heritage during a public forum held in conjunction with the latest educational road show hosted by the Colorado Grain Chain, a nonprofit made up of artisan bakers, brewers and distillers. It was also the kick-off event for the most recent edition of Grain School in the Field, an immersive interactive learning opportunity presented by the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. Valdez has spent decades fighting to keep the local acequias flowing near San Luis, the oldest

town in Colorado. But he’s not alone in his concerns over seeing water transferred away from farms to feed urban growth.



“The water needs to stay with the land,” observes Christine Salem, a heritage grain enthusiast from northern New Mexico who attended the forum. “Once the water is gone, the farms are gone. We’ve lost that water to development.”

Documentary filmmaker Christi Bode Skeie set out to capture the strain caused by diminishing water supplies in her 30-minute film “Farm to Faucet.” At the grain forum, she explained that her curiosity about Colorado’s water supply-and-demand gap intensified when she moved from Parker to the San Luis Valley in 2017.

Ironically, she made the move shortly before water developers began putting together a controversial plan to buy up ag water rights in the valley to sell to her old suburb. “I think we’re really at an inflection point in society right now over what values we hold,” she said in a short introduction to the film. “Bluegrass uses the same amount of water as it takes to grow crops. We have to think about that.”

Her documentary interweaves diverse perspectives, including an Arkansas Valley farmer who felt forced to sell off his water after years of financial stress; current farmers who have managed to hold on to their own despite economic pressures; and



Christi Bode Skeie’s documentary *Farm to Faucet* is available for on-demand viewing at [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org). It originally aired on Rocky Mountain PBS on May 15. *Day Zero* is another documentary that broadens the lens beyond the Great Plains to show the ramifications of water shortages on other continents like Africa and Asia. It’s available for streaming on Amazon and Netflix.

an investor behind the plan to move water out of the San Luis Valley and sell it to the Front Range for a hefty profit.

Water shortages and the impact on food production is a worldwide concern. Another recent documentary, *Day Zero*, broadens the lens beyond the U.S., taking viewers from Callicrate Cattle Company in the Central Plains to parts of Africa, India and beyond that are also wrestling with the impending water crisis. Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate, who appears at length in the film, wants everyone to watch it to better understand why transforming the food system is so urgent. "Why are we subsidizing corn grown with aquifer water to make high fructose corn syrup and ethanol gas? Why doesn't the government incentivize barley, which

uses less water and makes very nutritious feed? It's just a massive march of folly," he says. "Lately there's been a lot of discussion about wealthy individuals like Bill Gates buying up farmland. The question we need to think about isn't why they are buying land, the question is why are farmers selling? The skill of farming is multi-generational, and these farmers know every square inch of their property. If someone comes in and simply rents that land out to the highest bidder that likely won't be the same person who can make it better — because there's no real vested interest there. It's more like voluntary slave labor. These films help us understand why farmers need fair prices and access to the market, so they can remain on the land, and why the water needs to stay with the farmland, if we want a sustainable future."

Water for food? Or commodities?

According to Mark Bittman, New York Times columnist and author of *Animal, Vegetable, Junk*, fully 60 percent of all calories available in the U.S. today are in the form of highly processed foods.

Hardy heritage grains grown in Colorado are hand-threshed by Pueblo Seed and Food Co and made into crackers, cookies, and cereals including the muesli shown in the inset. Available in store now!



A bit of nutritional anthropology

In the 1940s, health and dental pioneer Weston A. Price traveled the world looking for evidence to explain why some populations were healthier than seemingly more advanced Western societies. The data he collected led him to two conclusions. First, he found there wasn't anything inherently wrong with eating grains; it was the milling and refining process that made white flour unwholesome. His second conclusion: all healthy diets included at least some animal products. If meat was not available, these populations compensated by consuming large amounts of dairy products or seafood.

TRIVELLI'S HOAGIES reopened at their original location at 2739 N. Nevada Ave with a grand opening splash on August 20. Don't forget Steve and his crew are now open every weekday serving Philly style cheese steak sandwiches stuffed with mounds of thinly sliced high quality Callicrate Beef! (Steve also runs a separate east-side location at 6827 Space Village Avenue.)



DOLLY PARTON'S COLE SLAW
There's a popular slaw salad recipe going around on the internet that's credited to singer Dolly Parton. Various food bloggers have made tweaks to suit their individual tastes. This version is updated for fall with the addition of a crunchy apple in place of carrots. A simple but scrumptious side dish for late summer-early fall cookouts!

1 medium head cabbage, minced
1 medium onion, finely minced
1 apple, minced
1/2 bell pepper, finely minced
1/4 cup sweet pickle juice
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
1 tbsp pickle relish
1 cup mayo
2 tbsp sugar (if desired)
1/4 tsp black pepper
1 tsp salt

Mix together in a large bowl. Chill until ready to serve. Serves 10-12.

Find a fresh selection of new deli and prepared items at Ranch Foods Direct on Fillmore!

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