Food for Thought
People · Products · Purpose
September 2025

"Even if I knew tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."
— *Martin Luther*

Fall is the season to buy in bulk and save

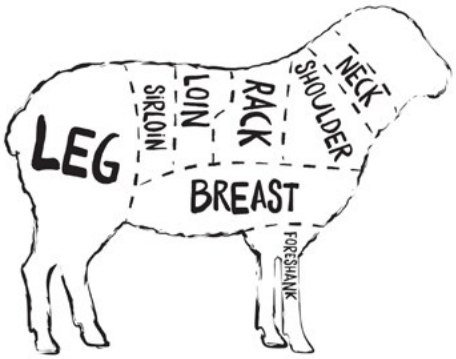
Ranch Foods Direct introduces new "lamb pool" option

$11.89 per pound

Ranch Foods Direct customers can now buy lamb in boxed bundles, featuring meat from lambs raised on fresh barley sprouts by a young ranch couple, Stephen and Sarah Simon, who live near Quinter, Kansas.

The couple moved back to Stephen's multigenerational family ranch from Colorado 12 years ago. Sarah was a teacher for 12 years but has now turned her focus to raising their two kids, Oliver and Autumn, and marketing the family's lamb. She publishes an informative farm blog on their website at SimonSheep.com.

Lamb is a relatively lean meat that was more common a century ago when early generations of the Simon family raised sheep on the Kansas high plains. While that tradition continues, Stephen has also introduced new innovations. He invented the Infinity Pasture, a hydroponic system for growing barley sprouts year-round to provide high quality livestock feed. He also has plans to make use of any wool that isn't fine enough to send to a mill to be made into yarn.



He ordered a machine that will compress the leftover wool into pellets that can be used as a natural fertilizer in place of Perlite-type soil amendments.

The Simons host farm tours on a regular basis to spread the word about their forward-looking farming techniques. Their long-term goal is to expand into agritourism, with cabins and an RV park (including a place to stall horses for those traveling down Interstate 70 with equines in tow) and offer training programs for sheep enthusiasts.

"We need more opportunities for young people to experience what it takes to raise sheep without making a big financial commitment upfront," Stephen observes.

Most of all, they are motivated to make healthier food options available to more people. "One thing driving me toward better quality food has been eating with my father-in-law at our local senior citizens center and seeing what gets served," Sarah said. "We want to be part of a system that respects the whole process — from pasture to harvest to plate — instead of treating it like a supply chain."

NEW IN-STORE: Lamb Pool joins Cow Pool and Pig Pool as bundle options for customers who want to save by buying a cross-section of the whole animal to fill their freezer.

Why food monopolies matter

Author Austin Frerick chronicles the return of a new robber-baron era

Austin Frerick is the author of Barons: Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food Industry, an absorbing account of how seven companies grew to become among the most powerful in the world. Originally from northern Iowa, Austin spent years studying economic policy and anti-trust history as an academic fellow at Yale University. During one of his numerous speaking engagements this past summer, he talked about the important role of independently owned companies like Ranch Foods Direct and lauded owner Mike Callicrate's efforts to bring attention to corporate concentration in the food industry, adding "Mike has been a mentor to me." Here's more.

THE STORIES YOU TELL IN YOUR BOOK, ABOUT DIFFRENT FAMILY DYNASTIES, ARE VERY COMPELLING. DO YOU WORRY THAT BY FOCUSING ON INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES, IT COULD DISTRACT FROM THE NEED TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM AS A WHOLE?

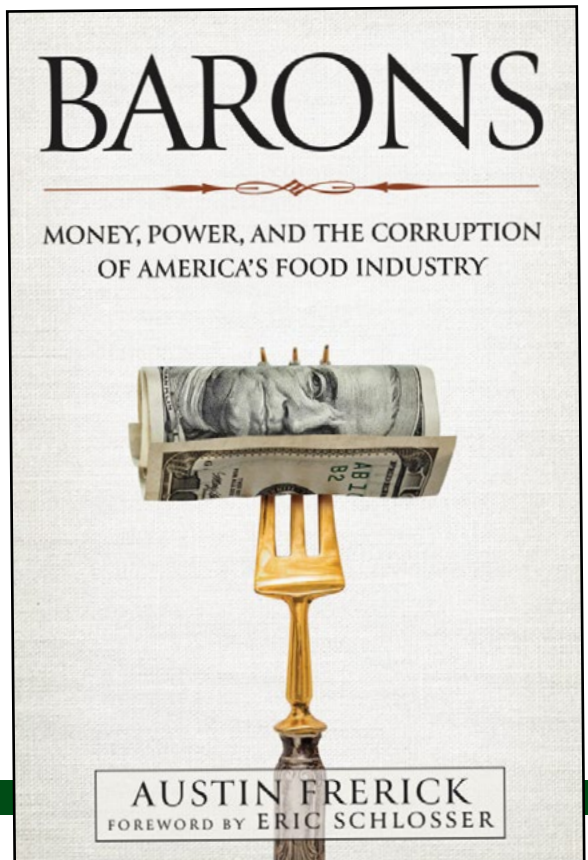
We have to understand how we got to this moment. Each of these barons are really just narrative devices to tell structural stories. For example, my grain chapter, on Cargill, is really about telling you how we ended up with a farm bill that chooses favorites. Initially, I actually wrote a whole different version of this book that never saw the light of day. It was really just too intellectual, and I realized people need story, they need characters, they need drama, they need emotion. So I think of the chapters as concepts. I also want to say that everything I use in my book is in public documents or news stories, and I'm using a lot of their own words. Also, I've seen how much wreckage there is from monopolization. So many people reached out to me with their personal stories of going bankrupt, who didn't realize until they read this that the barons rig the system to their advantage. I've had a lot of industrial hog farmers reach out to me. I don't want to blame any farmer for doing industrial hogs, because if you're a farmer with hogs, that's what you had to do. But I want everyone to understand that every day that we don't do something, another business or another ranch goes bankrupt.

IT'S NOT JUST FOOD AND AGRICULTURE WHERE CONSOLIDATION IS HAPPENING, RIGHT? IT'S IN EVERY SECTOR OF OUR ECONOMY.

That's why I intentionally used these modern-day robber baron stories: to show we've been here before. This is all Teddy Roosevelt stuff. Right now people are shutting down. They don't feel like they can change anything, the system just seems so broken. By making these characters almost like cartoons I wanted to show people we know what to do here. We dealt with this in the meat industry a century ago. We have the playbook. My goal here is to show people how we got here, because I want people to feel empowered that they can do something. And to show how uniquely bipartisan this issue is.

TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW COMPANIES LIKE RANCH FOODS DIRECT FIT INTO THE BIGGER PICTURE.

They are the future. They *have* to be the future. Restoring that middle-class company, that middle-class family farm, that's been gutted. The story of America right now is the collapse in the middle. Economic systems that are very stable, robust and healthy happen when Middle America thrives. That's what I want to get back to. That's where innovation comes from, that's where the best products come from. Never forget, the goal of any corporate executive is monopoly. That's where the profits are. We're simply at another laissez-faire moment in history, when we've allowed the markets to get overly consolidated. Now we have to think about how to restore competition.



DON'T SUCCESSFUL SMALL COMPANIES OFTEN BECOME LARGE COMPANIES? I'M THINKING OF HOW IOWA BEEF PROCESSORS BECAME IBP, A NATIONAL AND EVEN GLOBAL PLAYER.

Yes and no. IBP only became that big through acquisitions, and by getting around certain laws. We had a really good anti-monopoly framework in this country that held for a really long time, which allowed farmers to be prosperous, along with rural America and middle-class America. Think about people working in a slaughterhouse. When the book ***The Jungle*** came out a century ago, workers were being exploited, and we decided, as a society, *this is not right*. We made decisions and did certain policy things that elevated middle-class jobs, so people like my grandpa could work at a slaughterhouse and buy a home and live the American dream. But what's happening now is corporations have systematically attacked those protections. Now we are back to the era of ***The Jungle***. But if we took certain steps once, we can take them again.

WHERE DO YOU BUY MEAT?

It's funny, that's a question everybody asks me. It depends. I'm always hesitant to tell people the answer, because my personal consumption doesn't change the system. We need to make structural changes. My goal is to change the meat at Dollar General. The point is every American is entitled to good meat, not just the rich, not just those who can afford it. That's what I want to get to.

WHAT'S THE MOST FRAGILE PART OF THE FOOD SYSTEM RIGHT NOW IN YOUR OPINION?

I think it's industrial animal production. You've seen it with the egg shortage earlier this year. Chickens are just too genetically similar. It's like playing Russian roulette, when you put that many animals together in a crowded metal shed, you are just asking for a disease outbreak. That's the scariest thing to me, that what you saw happen with laying hens will just continue to happen. My big fear is a swine flu epidemic coming out of industrial hogs. The benefit of diversity is it builds resilience. When you don't have that, the system is very fragile, and it also becomes very expensive.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?

What gives me hope is this system is not sustainable, and the politics of fixing it are really, really good right now. Someone's going to come along, some Teddy Roosevelt type, and they are going to fix this. The thing is, the system is not even making cheap food anymore. Food is expensive. You as the customer are being gouged at the store, you are paying a lot for what is just crap. The amount of different pockets of America I've been giving talks where this hits home has really shown me there's something here. We live in a powder-keg moment. The reason Make America Healthy Again got so powerful is the failure of previous administrations to do something. There is a validity of anger it tapped into. And yes, it's a weird coalition of people. That's how things always happened in American history is when odd bedfellows got together. That's why companies like Ranch Foods Direct are so crucial. They are what I call proof-of-concepts. We have to have those, so when moments of reform present themselves we can scale them up. Or copy-and-paste them around the country. It's not about making Mike Callicrate into a baron, it's about having a bunch of Mikes out there.

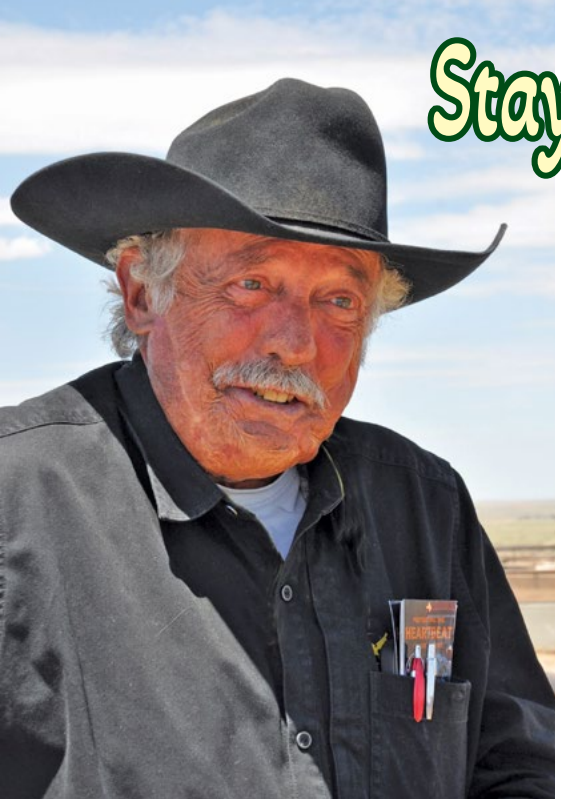
WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I notice I talk more about solutions now because I've learned so much from the different audiences I've spoken to. It took me five years to write this book, but now I want to write it all over again. I've explained why the system's broken, now what can we do? I think we need to use this moment in time to do some deep thinking about what our food system should look like.

"As of 2023, JBS listed forty-three different meat brands that it sold in America alone. This list included several high-end brands that give the illusion of sustainable family farms... This false image comes at the expense of actual beef cattle ranchers... It used to be the norm in the meat industry to bid on animals destined for the kill line, sort of like how one might try to buy an item on eBay. These markets were capitalism at its finest, and they often empowered farmers to secure the highest price for their cattle... But with their newfound market power, JBS and their peers have increasingly pushed to have prices for feedlot cattle set ahead of time via purchase contracts."
— Excerpt from Chapter 6: The Slaughter Barons

SEE IT ON SCREEN: Documentary program *A More Perfect Union* covers JBS' listing on the New York Stock Exchange and why it's controversial. Find it on YouTube.

Staying true to American ranching



Roger Hines grew up on a ranch in Missouri. Although he's had a long and successful career in salvage and demolition services, he never left ranching behind. As owner of J-H Cattle Company, he produces red Wagyu cattle and sells the beef at farmers markets, through a butcher shop in Joplin and, on occasion, as a cooperative producer for Ranch Foods Direct. His views are well-aligned with the Callicrate mission.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN RANCH FOODS DIRECT OWNER MIKE CALLICRATE?

I've known him since the early 1990s. I've followed him over the years as he fought the corrupt meatpackers, and I love it. I love his ideas about taking beef from farm-to-table. That's the best way to do it. It's the only way you know what you're getting. These big companies don't want the word getting out about what they're doing.

AS A BEEF PRODUCER, WHAT DO WISH CONSUMERS KNEW ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

I wish they knew about the pink slime that gets added to ground beef, and about the imported beef being labeled as Product of the USA. Cattle are being brought in from Brazil, Australia, Argentina, Zambia, as well as meat in shipping containers. The USDA inspector looks at it from a distance, maybe with binoculars, then it gets put in a different package and suddenly it becomes Product of the USA. It's criminal.

DO YOU THINK THE MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY AGAIN MOVEMENT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It's already making a difference. I think a lot of things in America are making a difference. People are waking up to what's happening. Can they fight these big corporations that have so much lobbying power? That's very hard to do. They write the rules. But I do think the young people especially are waking up to it.

TELL US WHY YOU GOT INTO RAISING JAPANESE WAGYU CATTLE? DO YOU EXPECT DEMAND TO GROW?

It's catching on more and more. It's got the Omega 3 fat that studies show can actually lower cholesterol. When you cut into this beef, you can tell the difference from a straight Angus. It's very healthy, very good tasting. Here's another thing about it. If you cook a regular steak, you have about 20 percent gristle, so there's some waste. Maybe the Wagyu price is a little bit higher, but look at what you're getting. You eat every bite. More people are learning about it and wanting it.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE CUT OF BEEF?

The flat-iron steak. It's so good — the taste, texture, and tenderness. You don't want to cook it too fast and melt the fat, because you want that fat to stay in there while it cooks. But it's hard to ruin a good Wagyu steak.

While out looking at cattle, Roger Hines and Mike Callicrate are joined by J-H's butcher Jerrod Miksell.

Healthier farm, healthier life

Ranch Foods Direct is part of a movement across the country of farmers and ranchers changing the way they farm and market their crops. Kansan Gail Fuller has been at the forefront of adopting soil health practices for many years. He was a featured speaker and facilitator at the first Advancing Food-is-Medicine Summit held last year in Colorado. He recalled that when he launched his own on-farm educational field school in 2012, it was the first time he attended a farm meeting where anyone actually talked about food or health. Getting to that moment was part of a journey that included missing a family celebration for what turned out to be his dad's last birthday, because he was too busy to leave the field. "That's what the modern system of farming does to us," he said. He paid a price for pioneering the adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices, when his drought claims were denied by the federal crop insurance program. Although he eventually prevailed in the dispute, the 20-month appeals process took a heavy toll; he lost his operating line of credit at the bank and was forced to sell off assets to stay afloat. Eventually he made the agonizing decision to sell what was left of the family farm and make a fresh start. Now he and his wife Lynnette run Circle 7/Fuller Farms, raising diverse livestock and food crops on 60 leased acres for direct-to-market in southeast Kansas. Lynnette also works for the Ecdysis Foundation, an ambitious research project studying how to expand regenerative farming across North America.

YOU'VE SAID YOU STOPPED USING THE TERM "REGENERATIVE" TO REFER TO HOW YOU FARM. IS THERE A DIFFERENT TERM YOU PREFER TO USE INSTEAD?

I'm a farmer, an agro-ecologist. How did we screw up the labels so bad that now we have to call corn "non-GMO corn?" It's corn. The stuff we call corn today is not.

YOU MEAN BECAUSE IT'S GENETICALLY MODIFIED TO BE HERBICIDE TOLERANT, WHICH DOESN'T NATURALLY OCCUR IN NATURE?

Right. I want to take my label back. I'm just a farmer. Farmers grow food. That's what I do. Language, labels, all that — until we put integrity back in the system, all of it is just words. They don't mean anything.

ARE YOU SUGGESTING SOMETHING LIKE USDA'S OLD TAG-LINE, "KNOW YOUR FOOD, KNOW YOUR FARMER?"

Sort of. But the consumer has to be educated enough to ask the right questions too. That's where the term "greenwashing" comes in. Does the system really want people to educate themselves? Because if they do, that's a form of empowerment.

WHAT GIVES YOU OPTIMISM?

Watching my grandkids explore nature instead of watching a video game. That gives me optimism. People asking questions. That gives me optimism. Seeing young people that don't know why the system is broken exactly, but still have a better vision for how to live. Am I seeing enough of it? No. I need to see more. I'm not a very patient person.

I UNDERSTAND YOU FOLLOW RANCH FOODS DIRECT FOUNDER MIKE CALLICRATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA. WHY? WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT HE'S BEEN ABLE TO DO?

When the large cattle processors took the industry over in the 1990s, it was Mike who stood up. By himself. And he was taken out. I was feeding cattle at the time, and I lost thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars during a very short time-frame, like a lot of us did. But nobody stood up with Mike. Back then he was just a manager running a feedlot, he wasn't the Mike Callicrate he is now. Up until then, he was just another rancher. I had the same thoughts he was having, that this wasn't right, but I just turned it into anger, and took it out on my farm, and on myself. I didn't have time to stand up, or at least I didn't think I did. I saw what they did to Mike. Why would I want to stand up? But in fact, I did go through the same thing when I stood up against the crop insurance agency. So I ended up going the route Mike did. It's easy to see how depression can set in when you live through something like that.

But look at what Mike is doing today. I know, for me, losing everything is the best thing that ever happened to my career. I wouldn't be thinking about food, or living the way I am now, if it weren't for that. We needed that push. I don't think I would have ever been brave enough to do what I've done. I look at Mike, and I see the same thing. It's a pretty cool story, what he's built from the ashes. I would guess he's a lot happier today, doing what he's doing now, than he was back then.

Am I happy now? Yes. Farming is way harder than it should be. There's still too much stress. But I feel like I'm in a good place. The farm and I are healing together.

Food summit organizers identify policy priorities

One of the most essential roles for enhancing local and regional food systems in Colorado, according to organizers of the Colorado Food Summit, is "middle-of-the-supply-chain infrastructure," a position similar to the one fulfilled in Southern Colorado by Ranch Foods Direct's Peak to Plains Food Hub.

This was a key takeaway from a series of of listening sessions held around the state in recent months, as Food Summit organizers work toward hosting the next state-wide summit in the spring of 2026.

"It's an incredible process to synthesize and make sense of what we've heard, but it was relatively consistent across the state," reported Libby Christensen, OSU's statewide food and agriculture specialist. In addition to the need for middle-of-the-supply-chain infrastructure, researchers also identified several other needs, including education of the broader public about the current food system, a strategy to address labor shortages and workforce development, and maintaining momentum in the midst of rising costs and funding constraints. More than 1,000 people weighed in with input.

The Colorado Food Summit is designed to bring together food influencers from across Colorado to identify actionable steps and policy priorities. The last event — held in 2023 — included 750 participants. It was considered the largest collaboration of food-system representatives in state history.

The original summit, held in Denver in early 2020, grew out of the proliferation of food policy councils in different regions and communities, according to Christensen, who is personally involved in the local food movement as owner-operator of a craft distillery in Steamboat Springs.

Several of the top policy priorities identified by CSU's food systems team are also issues that Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate has been advocating for years.

Encouraging or requiring procurement of local products by institutional purchasers such as schools and hospitals was identified as a tool to provide economic, social and environmental benefits. In addition, the group wants zoning policies that support new infrastructure by making licensing and building regulations less onerous for small businesses. A corollary to that is ensuring state policies are flexible enough to be implemented as effectively in rural settings as urban ones.

Yet another policy priority is safeguarding agricultural lands and water from urban growth and development, a concern Mike has spoken out about in numerous blog posts, interviews and podcasts.

PEAK TO PLAINS FOOD HUB

The Peak to Plains Food Hub is an urban oasis, offering walking trails, raised-bed gardens and the occasional glimpse of wildlife. The warehouse and grounds provide a drop-off-and-pick-up location for Ahavah Farms CSA, s keg storage facility for local favorite Goat Patch Brewing, and event space for Ranch Foods Direct customer appreciation and vendor markets like one this summer that attracted more than 400 people. But federal funding cuts could put more of the nation's food hubs in financial jeopardy. According to a recent report, food hubs rely on grants for 84% of their capital. Mike believes including a year-round meat processing component could be key to their survival.

Rob, left, grills up burgers for a customer appreciation event in July. MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Peak to Plain's next cook-out and vendor showcase is a harvest festival set for SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11.

Featured Recipe

Filipino Pork Adobo

SIDE DISH SCHNIPER
News & Recipes at SideDishSchniper.com

RANCH FOODS DIRECT
Good Food ... that's good for you!

Recipe created by Chef Katie Fisco of Baon Supper Club in collaboration with Ranch Foods Direct and Side Dish With Schniper

HOW TO MAKE FILIPINO PORK ADOBO WITH ARUGULA SALAD

Recipe provided by Chef Katie Fisco

2 lbs. Callicrate pork belly, butt or shoulder (diced medium)
½ cup soy sauce (can sub low sodium)
4 Tbsp. coconut vinegar
½ head garlic
2 Tbsp. cornstarch (for velveting)
5 dried bay leaves
4-6 oz. white or yellow onion (diced)
1 Tbsp. peppercorn
1-2 Tbsp. honey (to taste)
2 C. water
kosher salt to taste

Combine the pork, half the soy sauce, half the coconut vinegar, half the garlic and all the cornstarch and bay leaf. Marinade for at least an hour. Drain marinade, then brown the pork until it's crispy all around. Remove pork and brown the onions. Once onion and garlic are browned, turn off heat and deglaze pot with coconut vinegar. Scrape the bottom of the pot and add pork back to it. Add peppercorn and the marinade liquid. Add the water, making sure meat is mostly covered. Add honey. Let simmer on low to medium heat until meat is tender, roughly one hour. Once meat is tender, add the remainding soy sauce and adjust for taste, adding salt to the dish if necessary.

FOR THE SALAD:
8-10 oz. arugula
1 large grapefruit (supreme)
½ C. jicama (shredded)
2 Tbsp. garlic chips (consider looking up a recipe to slice, fry and make your own)
2 Tbsp. pepitas
¼ C. olive oil
1 tsp. kosher salt
ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE DRESSING:
2 Tbsp. grapefruit juice
1 tsp. stone ground mustard
1 tsp. vinegar
¼ C. olive oil
1-2 tsp. salt

TO ASSEMBLE THE SALAD:
Whisk olive oil into mustard. Gradually add remaining dressing ingredients. Taste and adjust seasoning to preference. Lightly dress the arugula, then arrange the other salad ingredients on top. Dish serves 4-5.

After Hours

Chef Zevon Burnett debuts an intimate after-hours dining experience at the store on Fillmore

THE SETTING: The Fillmore store's center table, typically an island stocked with local products, is now being cleared every Sunday afternoon, reset and transformed into the "Rancher's Table," an intimate dining experience limited to just 10 to 12 guests. Elegantly lit with edible tallow candles and glistening with stemware, it becomes the ideal space for shared group discussions as well as intimate one-on-one conversation. The unhurried pace allows diners to get up and leisurely peruse the shelves. "Being here for this," one diner murmured, "I feel like I'm seeing this place in a whole new light."

Here, a few highlights from the inaugural "Ranchers Table" dinner offer a sneak peek at what lucky guests can expect

THE FOOD: Six inventive tasting courses arrive from the kitchen accompanied by a series of unique and thoughtfully curated wines. If the first dinner is any indication, there will be no skimping on portions, nor on the details that make a dining experience highly memorable. The inaugural dinner started with a showstopper charcuterie board made from a long wooden plank the chef repurposed from an old door at the Peak to Plains Food Hub. Rich beef dishes were interspersed with locally foraged ingredients like wild mushrooms and edible thistles (in this case, flash-fried in airy-light panko crumbs and served on a decadent saffron cream sauce.) The custom-made pottery was as distinctive as the food. Even the water felt elevated. Turns out it was being poured from a gleaming hand-forged pitcher crafted from a single piece of copper, which imparted a subtle minerality.

THE CHEF: Appearing unobtrusively after each course, Chef Zevon discussed aspects of each dish and shared glimpses of his background cooking in some of the world's most famous James Beard and Michelin-star restaurants, from California to New York to France, including The French Laundry and NYC's The Cut. More revelations await; no two dinners will be exactly alike. But all will feature Callicrate meats, which he ranks as among the best he has tried anywhere in the world. Each dinner is $150 per person. Call the store or stop by to make a reservation.

FOOD TO POWER

11TH ANNUAL HARVEST CELEBRATION

Join us as we celebrate all things food in the Pikes Peak region! Hear about the state of our food system directly from the farmers, grocers, chefs, and advocates who help put food on tables everyday.

- Farm-fresh food & drink
- Local food vendors and speakers
- Collard Greens Cook-Off
- Family-friendly activities
- Raffle prizes
- Music, games, dancing, and more!

$10 tickets

SATURDAY, SEPT 13, 2025

1 PM - 4 PM

at Food to Power's

HILLSIDE HUB

1090 S. Institute St.

Ranch Foods Direct will have an information table and product samples at the event.

Stop by and say hi!

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Flagship store: 1228 E. Fillmore

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Retail hours at both locations:

Monday through Saturday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Or shop online. Shipping available.

www.ranchfoodsdirect.com

For store updates follow us on Facebook

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