

edible ASPEN



sowing wild oats

the case for dirt

out of the cellar

pandemic promise



DAN BAYER

Farming requires long-term vision, whether preparing soil, planting trees, or, in this image, harvesting oats, which is just one step of a multiyear grain trial. Slowing down, appreciating, and connecting to that which nourishes us is central to our goal in this relaunch of *Edible Aspen*. Bon appetit.

On the Cover

By Dan Bayer

Whimsically imperfect and yet often recognizable, the language of landscapes can be perceived at any scale. So when the opportunity came to photograph specific varieties of the local foodscape, I decided to establish their individual identities in a set of classic portraits (see page 40). As if to render them as characters in a play, each one is given the spotlight to tell its own story. The cover image featuring oats sets the tone for the simple and yet regal manner in which these portraits came about. The textures in the kernels could be mountains and valleys seen from above, the stalks appearing as the waterways that feed the oats in much the same way rivers do land in which they grow. The miracle of such staple items of food made me stop and look twice and give them their due in a photograph. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did.



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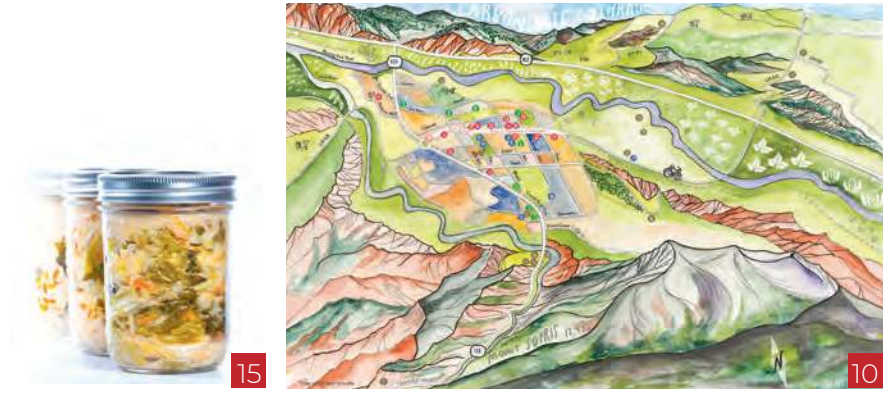
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FLEXIBLE BY NATURE

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DAN BAYER

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edible ASPEN

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DANIEL BAYER has been photographing life in the Roaring Fork Valley for about 23 years and has tackled subjects far and wide. But one that he has not had the chance to dive into until now is the farming scene. “I looked at this opportunity as a totally blank canvas in which to test the limits of my 30-plus years as a photographer,” he says. “It’s uncharted territory for me and that is really exciting considering how timely it is.”

CHRISTINE BENEDETTI fell in love with the North Fork Valley as a reporter for the *Aspen Daily News*, and has met many of its farmers, winemakers, and goats. COVID prevented her from making a trip for this issue, but she still got to talk to food growers about their unexpectedly good summer. Benedetti explores all aspects of the pandemic’s impact on the regional food industry in “Flexible by Nature” (page 32). An Aspen-based freelance writer and editor who still reports for the *Aspen Daily News*, she was previously editor in chief for *Aspen Magazine* and has written for numerous publications nationwide.



KATIE KISSANE and **PAUL VIOLA** of Kissane Viola Design were captured by *Aspen* over two decades ago, when they brought their experience in Manhattan’s magazine industry to many local publications. In New York City, the pair art directed a number of magazines in the luxury food and beverage industry, including *Food Arts* and *Wine Spectator*. Their passion for wine and food makes KVD a perfect fit to help relaunch *Edible Aspen* with their design vision.

WOODY TASCH is a pioneer of impact investing. In 2009, he founded the Slow Money Institute, following the publication of *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered*. Localized slow money groups have catalyzed \$75 million to over 750 organic farms and local food businesses. Previously, Tasch was chairman of Investors’ Circle, through which \$220 million has been invested in sustainability-oriented early-stage companies, and founding chairman of the Community Development Venture Capital Alliance. Among other books, he authored *SOIL: Notes Towards the Theory and Practice of Nurture Capital*.



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A Fresh Start

When the Farm Collaborative's Eden Vardy first approached me about becoming the editor of *Edible Aspen*, I was honestly surprised. I don't consider myself a gourmand in the way most people understand the term—I rarely dine out, and when I do, I am not one for dishes with unusual ingredients that take up two lines on the menu.

I do, however, have strong opinions about—and a healthy cultural connection to—food, thanks in large part to being brought up in a half French, half Czech family. My parents were religious about sitting down together at meals, which were always made from scratch, and they had no tolerance for food waste. At my parents', grandparents', and other relatives' tables, meals were simple—things like *řízek* (breaded pork cutlets) on the Czech side, and in France, salad courses of just greens and homemade vinaigrette—but bountiful and flavorful. I try to instill these connections with my own kids, knowing that what and how they eat when they're young will shape their entire lives.

What I came to realize was that Eden and the Farm Collaborative's vision of food was quite similar to mine—yet wildly more ambitious. Local, seasonal, and regenerative cuisine may be increasingly popular here in the Roaring Fork Valley, but it's still niche—whereas in Europe in general, people have always eaten what's grown or made nearby, with emphasis on regional specialties and small producers. Educating kids about where their food comes from, and how good food relies on harmony with nature—that totally resonates with me. But what clinched my interest was the interwoven connection between food and climate—this idea that the way we grow and distribute food could be an answer to humanity's greatest challenge. (See page 22 for Eden's explanation of this.)

The magazine that you hold in your hands reflects that vision. It explores climate and soil and kids, while also helping you get to know your local farmers and all the other amazing food entrepreneurs in our area. It's about finding your next great meal, which sometimes happens at home. And it's about how food shapes us, our families, and our beliefs.

We would like to thank Lisa and Sam Houston, the magazine's previous publisher and owners, who through their generous donation to the Farm Collaborative made this venture possible. Their belief in our mission and Lisa's guidance, advice, and support in getting this magazine off the ground are immeasurable.

Welcome to the new *Edible Aspen*.

Catherine Lutz
Editor



A family meal in Canet-Plage, France.

notable edibles



EAT ▶

Goody Basket

One surefire way to discover the breadth of local food is to sign up for **The Source**, a delivery service that connects customers with the region's farmers, ranchers, dairy producers, and other food artisans. A basket can include seasonal produce, Rock Bottom Ranch eggs, Jumpin' Good Goat Dairy cheese, a loaf from Carbondale's Shepherd Breads, and delightful treats like honey, a Jen's Café (Basalt) power bar, and the best caramel-peach jam ever. Source co-founder Dri Liechti, whose Craft Coffee House also supplies goods, takes seriously her role as connector: 80% of profits go to the suppliers and donated goods go to those in need. To order: [TheSource.delivery](https://www.thesource.delivery).



HEAL ▶

Body and Spirit

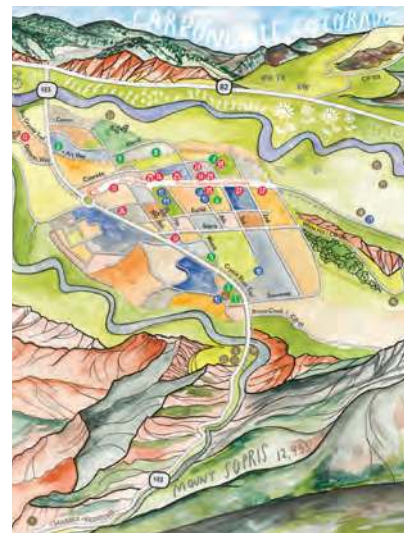
Vera Herbals has been manufacturing herbal remedies and holistic wellness products from its lab and storefront in Carbondale since July 2019. But husband and wife owners Tyler Bell and Nicole Wallace have deeper experience with herbal and hemp extracts, medicinal mushrooms, loose leaf teas, and more—and they use a 2,000-year-old spiritual process in making them. “We believe the approach to wellness isn't just physical—it also has some energetics,” says Wallace. “We encourage that along with taking our products; we also do meditations and intentions with each batch of product.” Found in stores from Basalt to Glenwood and at [VeraHerbals.com](https://www.VeraHerbals.com).



▲ DRINK

Mountain Water

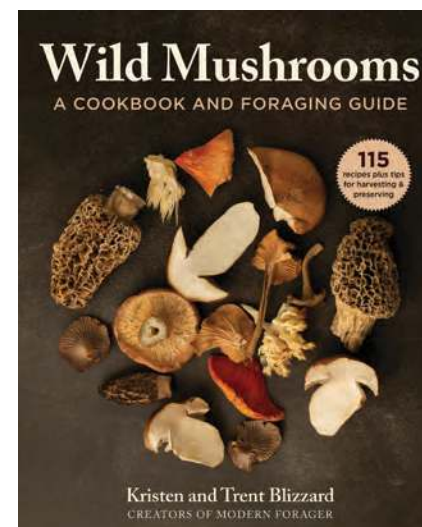
Launched in summer 2020, **LIFT Vodka** started with a novel idea: Why not take advantage of Aspen's pure mountain water to produce a clean, premium drinking vodka? Using treated water sourced from the City of Aspen and non-GMO, gluten-free corn ethanol, LIFT is “one of the smoothest vodkas you'll try due to the high minerality of our water,” says LIFT co-owner Zach Neiditz. Combined with elevated alkalinity, that makes for a clean, sugar-free alcohol that healthy, active Aspenites can appreciate. Find LIFT valleywide at liquor stores and 35 restaurants and bars. More at [LIFT.vodka](https://www.LIFT.vodka).



◀ VISIT

Carbondale Ag Map

Visitors to Carbondale can now explore the area's local food and farming culture by using a new map and guide produced by Carbondale Tourism. The **Roaring Fork + Farm Map**, available at Carbondale's visitor center as well as local hotels, restaurants, and businesses, includes listings of eateries that emphasize local ingredients, brewers and distilleries, public gardens with edible plants, and farms and ranches that sell their products locally or have visitor experiences. The map's artwork was designed by local artist Sarah Uhl.



◀ LEARN

Tasty Shrooming

Glenwood Springs residents Kristen and Trent Blizzard spent a year driving all over country hunting mushrooms, cooking and photographing 115 mushroom recipes from 25 experts, and then writing all about it for their recently released book: **Wild Mushrooms: A Cookbook and Foraging Guide**. The book is focused on how to best preserve and cook the 14 most common culinary mushrooms nationwide—nine of which can be found in Colorado, explains Kristen, who along with foraging and life partner Trent also runs the Modern Forager online community. It also covers three common medicinal mushrooms and offers foraging and cooking tips from the mycology buffs, along with profiles of them. Available at [Modern-Forager.com/book](https://www.Modern-Forager.com/book) (author-signed copies) and on Amazon.

DINING NEWS ▶

Downvalley

Honey Butter, a new restaurant from the owners of Slow Groovin', takes over the former Red Rock Diner space in Carbondale. Serving traditional diner fare with a focus on fried chicken, it's open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Jaffa Kitchen**, a Middle Eastern deli, is set to launch before Christmas in Basalt's Orchard Plaza by City Market, serving traditional sandwiches, soups, and salads with an emphasis on shawarma, rotisserie meat cooked slowly on a spit. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In Willits, **Ocean Seafood & Raw Bar** since last summer occupies the former Smoke space. Owned and operated by local restaurant veteran Mario Hernandez and his family, the Mediterranean-style seafood restaurant serves lunch and dinner.



◀ DINING NEWS

Snowmass Village

The **Daly Diner** opened in the Snowmass Center in September, serving breakfast and lunch ranging from shared nibbles to soups and salads to burgers and sandwiches. In Base Village, **JŪS Snowmass** debuts in the One Snowmass building, focused on cold-pressed juice blends and smoothies, plus healthy breakfast and lunch selections. JŪS owners are also opening **GG's Market**, offering grab-and-go items, snacks, and other conveniences in the former Clark's Express space. **Sundae Artisan Ice Cream** opened a Base Village location last summer, offering up small-batch ice cream, fresh waffle cones, hand-packed take-home pints, and custom ice cream cakes. Aspen Skiing Co. takes over the Base Village beachfront space formerly occupied by State 38 with a pop-up, **Village Tasting Room**, open for lunch and après-ski and featuring shared plates, craft beers, and a wine program. Slow Groovin' BBQ on the Snowmass Mall is being rebranded as **Slow Groovin' Chophouse**, an elevated iteration focusing on new steakhouse dishes, original appetizer favorites, and an expanded wine, whisky, and Scotch menu. On Snowmass Ski Area, Skico has taken over Gwyn's, now **High Alpine Marketplace**, continuing market-style lunch options at various stations, and **Alpin Room**, a sit-down restaurant drawing on Alpine mountain dining traditions.

EAT ▼

Good Plan(e)t Food

What do you get when you combine the talents of a certified nutritionist and a vegan chef, who are both health coaches? Vegan meal delivery service **Good Clean Food Delivered** is the brainchild of locals Lisa Cohen (the nutritionist) and Kelly Hollins (the chef), whose signature weekly service includes breakfast smoothies, Buddha bowls, and other healthy plant-based entrees—all packaged in returnable glass jars and other reusable or compostable containers. With a mission to nourish people and the planet, Cohen and Hollins also personalize meals with tips on how to prep, stretch, or pair them, depending on clients' desires—and are available during delivery and otherwise for questions. Delivery offered throughout the Roaring Fork Valley and in Boulder/Denver. See recipes and order at goodcleanfoodco.com.



DINING NEWS ▶

Aspen

This winter, the Little Nell rebrands its après-ski bar, formerly known as Chair 9, into the **Wine Bar**—open daily by reservation from 3–7 p.m. and serving a wide variety of wines, charcuterie and cheese boards, and a full bar menu. Overseen by Nell Wine Director Chris Dunaway, the space is available later for private, customized wine dinners by one group per night.



DRINK ▲

Spirited Spirits

Aspen is now home base for **Doña Vega**, an award-winning, year-old mezcal company that produces two of the Oaxacan agave spirits, an Espadín and a Tobalá. Company founder Sonya Vega Auvray, a pandemic transplant with her family from New York, tried 22 farms before choosing her production partner in Oaxaca—a fifth-generation, woman-owned and -run business. Organic and handcrafted, Doña Vega promises a quality, less-smoky spirit that's approachable and suitable for all. Served in several Aspen and Snowmass restaurants; more at DonaVega.com.



Harvest in a Jar

Centuries-old Korean tradition gets local chef's twist.

By Geneviève Joëlle Villamizar

My first taste of kimchi had been at 30,000 feet, aboard Korean Air. Sour, salty, raunchy, it ended up in my napkin. A decade later, I'm once again eyeballing a pile of washed-out vegetable matter squatting in vile, red-orange juices. Skeptical, I spoon up a tiny bite. Cabbage and root veggies squeak in my teeth. A smoky, nasal-clearing fire blossoms. I devour a larger bite with gusto, rolling it across all surfaces of my tongue: salty, sour, umami rich. Flip Wise, executive chef at Aspen's Betula, had made it.

"I added horseradish for a more earthy spice, rather than just a chile spice," Wise explains. "Layers, you know?" Wise also uses unchlorinated water in his kimchi, important because "bacteria equals flavor."

Traditionally, harvest season means it's canning time—capturing the pleasures and flavors of the growing season in Mason jars for winter joy. Centuries ago in Korea, autumn gave rise to kimchi season, fermenting napa cabbage and other freshly harvested vegetables in massive earthen pots. Buried in the ground, the subterranean stashes remained perfectly chilled beneath the snow, ready for partaking.

Today, with a Wise take on traditions, you too can pack a stash of fiery, fermented flavors to warm up your winter.

FLIP WISE'S HORSEY KIMCHI

Fresh ingredients are key to kimchi. Outside of local harvest season, look for them at Mana Foods or Skip's Farm to Market.

FILLS SIX 16-OUNCE MASON JARS

BRINE

½ cup kosher salt
2 cups unchlorinated water (spring water is fine)

KIMCHI

1 head napa cabbage, sliced
¼ cup dried shrimp or 1 package tuna bonito flakes
1 cup grated carrot
1 cup grated daikon
½ cup grated hakurei turnip
1 head garlic, grated
1 bunch scallions, cut into ½-inch pieces
¼ cup grated horseradish
2 tablespoons grated ginger
3 tablespoons fish sauce
2 tablespoons sweet rice flour
½–¾ cup gochujang chile paste

Rinse cabbage in cold water and submerge in brine solution for 6–8 hours.

Drain cabbage, reserving liquid. Bring 2 cups water to boil, drop in bonito flakes or dried shrimp. Take off heat and let soak.

In large bowl, combine cabbage, carrot, daikon, turnip, garlic, scallions, horseradish, ginger, and fish sauce.

Strain bonito flake or dry shrimp broth and return liquid to the saucepan. Whisk in rice flour and bring to simmer as it thickens. When texture is smooth like gravy, take off heat and stir in gochujang chile paste. *Optional: For extra spice, add fresh sliced chiles and/or gochugaru chile flakes.* Let cool and then combine thoroughly with cabbage mix.

Pack kimchi into large plastic container. Add enough reserved brine to completely cover veggies. Cover top with plastic wrap. Set aside to ferment in a cool dry spot out of direct sunlight, 5–10 days. Check daily, "burp" kimchi by lightly mixing and submerging veggies. Start taste-testing after 5–7 days; when flavors have an aromatic, yeasty, and pleasurable acidic pungency, place mixture in fridge and let cold-ferment another week.

Pack into Mason jars and store in fridge for up to a year. 🌶️



DAN BAYER

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Photo by Chelsea Self - Post Independent

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Practically Impractical

Confined to her cabin, an adventurous home baker takes a wild journey toward lockdown gratification. By Mitzi Rapkin



DAN BAYER

Early in 2020 I flew back to Aspen from North Carolina with 200 grams of my friend's 10-year-old sourdough starter, intending to integrate these adopted microorganisms into my baking life. But when COVID-19 indefinitely confined me to my 420-square-foot home/newly consecrated work office, three days of crafting the spores and yeast into bread seemed like too long of a journey toward gratification. Uncertainty in the world had me desiring near-immediate satisfaction.

Yet, along with wanting what I couldn't have (nights with friends, skiing on the mountain, a Lysol-free life), I sought out the impractical in my impractically small kitchen. If we were all home in lockdown, the comfort-food reputation of, say, mashed potatoes, was of little comfort—a tuber wasn't going to solve anything emotionally. I needed to journey to frivolity in the kitchen since everything in our external world was constricted to the essential. Whimsy was off the societal table, so I kept it on mine.

I tuned in to Milk Bar bakery star Christina Tosi's Instagram feed. I stayed up until the single digits of the morning concocting things that were completely and utterly unnecessary. Nougat, caramel sauce, popcorn cupcakes. Rainbow sprinkles from scratch? Got them down. Lemon curd: Nailed it. Ice cream cones: Fill these babies up! I dug my perpetually stained fingers into made-from-scratch fortune cookies, frosted flakes, and French canelés made in molds that necessitated a melted-beeswax-and-butter coating.

If gummy bears in ice cube trays, made with too much gelatin, was the low point (disgusting, inedible, and grossly slippery), then graham crackers were a high I'm still riding today. It's not just that these underappreciated cookie alternatives don't have animal collagen in them, but that the homemade version tasted so much better than store bought.

Because let's face it: Homemade sprinkles aren't worth the \$6 natural food coloring required to make them. But the brilliance and simplicity and the soft-yet-crunchy constitution of the homemade graham cracker are a wonder for the palate to behold. Combine them with marshmallows (on the list to make at home) and chocolate for their most well-known iteration. Top them on ice cream if you're feeling crazy. Or simply eat them off the baking tray.

Graham crackers are ridiculously easy to make, a hit even at breakfast, popular with the under-5 crowd, and honestly practical. And as we hunker down again for a winter of staying safer at home, they strike just the right balance of comfort and whimsy.

CHRISTINA TOSI'S GRAHAM CRACKERS

Found at christinatosi.com

MAKES ~ 12 CRACKERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2 tablespoons butter, melted | 1 cup flour |
| 1 tablespoon oil | (whole-wheat preferred) |
| 2 tablespoons milk | ¼ cup light brown sugar |
| 2 tablespoons honey | ½ teaspoon salt |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | ¼ teaspoon baking soda |
| | ¼ teaspoon baking powder |
| | Pinch cinnamon |

In a bowl with spoon or spatula, mix together butter, oil, milk, honey, and vanilla. Add in dry ingredients and mix until a sticky, homogenous dough forms. Pat into a rectangle, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, heat oven to 300°F.

Dust a surface lightly with flour, remove dough from refrigerator, and roll out to ¼-inch thickness. Transfer to a greased baking sheet.

Bake sheet of dough for 5 minutes. Remove dough from oven. Using a spatula, dull butter knife, or pizza roller, cut dough into squares, rectangles, or whatever you like. Prick dough with fork tines if you like that look.

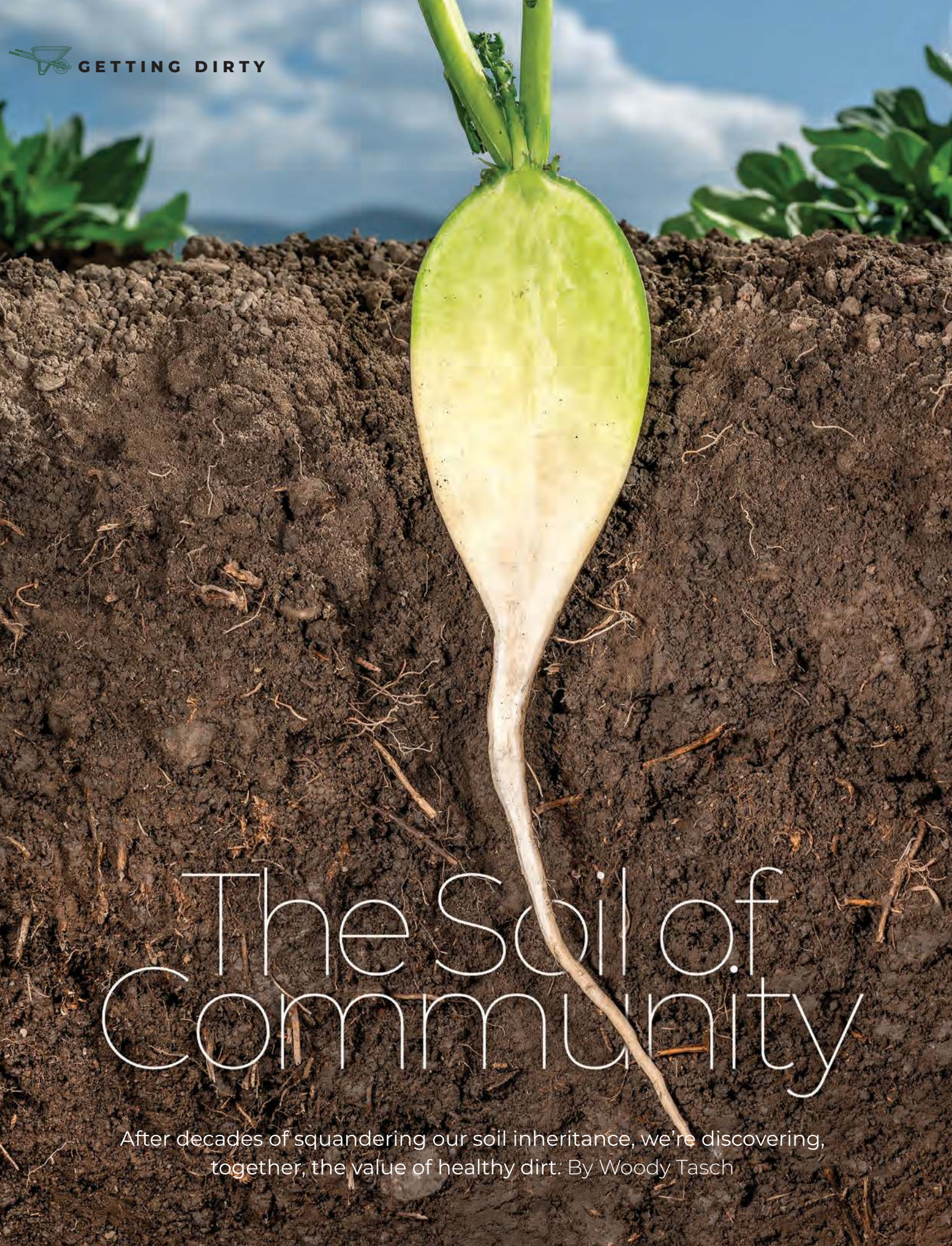
Bake cut dough for 10 minutes more. Remove from oven and, while still warm, create space between cut crackers.

Bake for a final 5 minutes—a total of 20 minutes. Allow to cool fully before removing crackers from sheet pan. 🍪



The parade of time, measured by clocks, sundials, and the passing of seasons, reigns supreme over the fleeting existence of all living things. The rustling sound of grasses in the breeze silenced by the season's change to hibernation and renewal signals that winter has arrived across the land as the light wanes.

BY DAN BAYER



The Soil of Community

After decades of squandering our soil inheritance, we're discovering, together, the value of healthy dirt. By Woody Tasch

It was FDR who said, "A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself."

I came upon this quote early in my education about such matters. Looking at soil not through the eyes of a gardener, a farmer, or a biologist, but through those of angel investors and foundations who were looking for ways to address climate change, I was amazed by what I found. What I've continued to learn in the years since, collaborating with thousands of folks around the country—including many in the Roaring Fork Valley—is that soil is, indeed, as important to the health of the nation as FDR's remark suggests.

Now, it must be said, particularly at a time of extreme incivility and distrust, that, based on competing worldviews and the related interpretation of data, it may be possible for two equally patriotic individuals to disagree about the meaning of the decline of the family farm and the consolidation of the agricultural sector in large, industrial farms. It may also be possible to disagree about the significance of the decline during the 20th century in the number of plant varieties in commercial cultivation. Or about the impacts of tillage on hundreds of millions of acres and the application of hundreds of millions of tons of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Or about the vulnerability of increasingly long and complex supply chains in the food system. Or about the role of ruminants and manure. Or about the safety of GMOs and raw milk.

The room for disagreement is far smaller, I'd like to imagine, when it comes to the following proposition: *Soil teeming with life, good; lifeless soil, bad.*

Just how good the good is and how bad the bad is ... well, that is the question. It's a question that has attracted the attention of everyone from Leonardo da Vinci to Charles Darwin. Da Vinci said, "We know more about the movement of celestial bodies than about the soil underfoot." Darwin spent the last years of his life observing earthworms in his fields, which observations he published in the 1881 book *The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms, With Observations on Their Habits*.

It's hard not to be taken aback by the magnitude of our inheritance when it comes to soil fertility. This is, truly, the realm of teeming. The realm of almost incomprehensible biodiversity. Bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, mites, microarthropods—there can be 10,000 to 50,000 species in less than a teaspoon of soil. That's species. In terms of individuals, there are more microbes in a teaspoon of soil than there are humans on Earth. An acre of fertile soil on an organic farm can be home to more than a million earthworms.

MacArthur Fellow and geomorphologist David Montgomery estimates that soil microbes account for half the weight of all life on Earth. He has studied the historic correlation between soil erosion and the decline of civilizations—and offered solutions on how to bring soil back to life.

In the course of creating the so-called miracle of modern agriculture, we in the United States have been squandering our inheritance when it comes to the soil. Massive amounts of it—hundreds of millions of tons per annum—are eroding, much of it ending up, replete with agricultural chemicals and all manner of runoff, in the oceans. In the Gulf of Mexico, it has created a dead zone the size of Rhode Island. It also turns out that plowing vast acreages of grain crops releases soil carbon into the atmosphere, as opposed to farming in ways that not only keep but also build organic matter in the soil, actually sequestering carbon. Who knew?

The good news is that many farmers do, in fact, know, and they are being joined by an increasing number of consumers who recognize the value of nutrient dense, local, organic food—not as a luxury, but as an essential component of personal, community, and bioregional health. And now, these farmers and consumers are also being joined by the growing number of local investors and donors who appreciate the same.

What we are all doing, together, is enormously hopeful. At a time of systemic dysfunction on so many levels, we are putting our hands into the soil—the actual soil, the soil of community, and the soil of a restorative economy. 🌱

Woody Tasch is the founder of the Slow Money Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to catalyzing the flow of capital into local food systems through local groups. Slow Money most recently created a crowdfunding platform, beetcoin.org, to help grow soil groups around the country. Tasch's latest book, *AHA! Fake Trillions, Real Billions, Beetcoin and the Great American Do-Over*, was recently released in free online installments (available at beetcoin.org); it will be published in print in 2021.



FILM MAKES CASE FOR DIRT

A documentary streaming on Netflix offers hope for reversing climate change—and, as narrator Woody Harrelson says in the film, "the solution is right under our feet."

Based on a book by Josh Tickell, *Kiss the Ground* draws on a variety of soil experts and scientists, along with inspiring real-world stories and lush cinematography, to make the case that healthy, carbon-rich soil—and fixing the damage that's been done to it for decades—holds the key to reversing climate change.

Directed and produced by Sundance Award-winning filmmakers Josh and Rebecca Tickell of Big Picture Ranch. kissthegroundmovie.com



The Aspen Center for Environmental Studies' Rock Bottom Ranch practices regenerative agriculture, including rotating its vegetable plots, like this field of greens, every year.

The Challenge Is the Opportunity

Producing food has changed our climate, but regenerative agriculture offers the tools to change it back. By Eden Vardy

Food. It's humanity's third fundamental need after air and water, but the first where creativity comes in. The way we source, grow, prepare, and eat food is the basis of our culture, which is part of the foundation that builds societies. Food, in its essence, is what brings people together, and it often defines us.

While food is essential—for our bodies individually and for our identities collectively—the way we deal with it today is also the

source of many of humanity's challenges. According to the World Resources Institute, more than half of global greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to food production and distribution, when taking into account things like land-use changes, fertilizer and pesticide production, methane emissions from meat animals, packaging, refrigeration, and food waste. In other words, food itself and how we're managing it may be the biggest culprits in causing climate change.

From watching our farm's water source drop to record-low levels in early July to tasting the smoke-filled air from record-setting wildfires in August, I have had plenty of opportunities this year to reflect on the local impacts of a warming climate. Reducing carbon emissions is perhaps humanity's most urgent need, as our current trajectory poses an existential threat to our very survival. And while most of the world's governments have set out ambitious targets to reduce our carbon emissions to lessen the effects of climate change, a major instigator is often left out of the equation: food.

But there is much to be hopeful for in turning this around, and the solutions are delicious. Paul Hawken's Project Drawdown demonstrates that 13 of the top 20 solutions for reversing climate change rest in our food system. It turns out that agriculture techniques that focus on the health of soil—which directly translate to the health and flavor profile of our food—not only reduce carbon emissions, but also pull carbon out of the air and store it in the ground. Our greatest culprit in causing climate change can also be our biggest ally in solving it, by leveraging climate-friendly agriculture strategies to put carbon dioxide back in the soil, where it belongs.

Several time-tested agricultural strategies are proving to offer low-cost, high-yield ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

- **Rotational grazing:** This system for raising livestock mimics herd flow patterns in nature, with clustered animals intensely grazing on one area at a time, stimulating root growth, followed by poultry that eat bugs from the manure and essentially sterilize the pasture for the grazers. Each action stimulates soil health in its own way, while this natural cycle precludes the need for chemical antibiotics and fertilizers, which degrade soils and thus their ability to sequester carbon.
- **No-till methodologies:** When a field is plowed, nutrients and microorganisms in the soil are activated, but carbon is released into the atmosphere and soil erosion is stimulated. Reducing or eliminating tilling keeps carbon in the soil and prevents erosion—and there are plentiful strategies for successfully growing food without tilling.
- **Cover crops:** Literally covering the soil, cover crops are plants grown specifically to benefit it. Cover crops like clover, ryegrass, radish, and mustards help manage soil quality, fertility, erosion, and weeds.
- **Planting trees:** Everyone remembers from science class that trees take in carbon dioxide, but on a farm they do a lot more. Alley cropping is an increasingly popular technique that involves planting trees with large alleys between rows. The trees provide balance for the cultivated land that mimics what happens in nature, such as providing shade to decrease heat stress.

These land management strategies help put or keep carbon in the soil. This contributes to healthier soil, which is essential for keeping farmland arable for future generations. In this way, farming capitalizes on a challenge and turns it into an opportunity.

Maps compiled by University of Wisconsin-Madison scientists in 2005 showed that 40 percent of the land on Earth is dedicated to agriculture. While the land-use changes that placed this much land

into agriculture most certainly have had a devastating impact on the climate, the fact that so much land is in active cultivation provides a tremendous opportunity. By growing the movement toward what is often called regenerative agriculture, or agriculture focused on soil health, yes, we can turn around climate change.

So, when you intentionally seek out and buy locally grown and raised food that's produced in a way that focuses on the health of the soil, you are doing more than supporting your health and local farmers—you are also playing a small part in reversing climate change. 🌱

Eden Vardy is executive director of the Farm Collaborative, which manages a 15-acre regenerative agriculture farm and learning center at Cozy Point Ranch. Vardy was appointed by Governor Jared Polis as a representative for agriculture on the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission, and was awarded one of the two slots as a 2020 Eisenhower Fellow for agriculture.



As it flows toward Carbondale, the Crystal River is often tapped dry by late summer due to agricultural diversions, adding to the climate challenges farmers face.

DAN BAYER



Architect-turned-farmer Skip Doty produces an abundance of fruits and vegetables destined for his stores at Early Morning Orchard in Palisade.

OLIVE & WEST

Local Bounty

Skip's Farm to Market keeps it fresh year-round. By Linda Hayes

Every day is a good day at Skip's Farm to Market in Basalt. Tuesdays and Fridays are the busiest. That's when the bulk of the organic produce, grass-fed meat, and artisanal goods that General Manager Dalene Barton curates weekly—from 100 or so local and regional ranchers, farmers, and makers—arrives at the door.

Wednesdays, Barton's newsy update on what's fresh and available goes out to nearly 600 folks on the store's ever-growing e-mail list. Saturdays, freshly baked sourdough from Carbondale's Shepherd Breads shows up for sale. Sundays, a "closed" sign hangs on the door, following a summertime tradition of shuttering while the Basalt Sunday Market takes place down the street, so as not to compete with other farmers selling their products there (a hallmark of the store's concept since it opened in November 2017).

But the best days are when owner Skip Doty pulls up in his truck to deliver everything from peaches and plums from his orchards to peppers, corn, heirloom tomatoes, and more from his fields—and five solar-powered greenhouses—in Palisade, collectively run by Farm Manager Kaye Davis under the name Early Morning Orchard.

Then, customers get to experience Doty's jovial, hands-on nature, and he gets to hobnob and inquire about what interests them.

"It's all about the people," says Doty. "Day to day, what keeps us going is talking with them, seeing what they want and trying to provide it."

Getting to that point didn't come easy. Twenty-plus years after ending a decades-long career as an architect in Aspen, after purchasing a plum orchard in Palisade in 2007 ("I learned what not to do in that orchard," he laughs), after expanding Early Morning Orchard over time, buying the Buttermilk Fruit Stand in 2012 and running that, and showing up weekly at the Basalt Sunday Market, Doty was toying with a next step.

"We considered doing a CSA setup [to deliver produce], but thought, 'Let's do something different. Let's plant our flag and take a big flying leap of faith and build up other people as well.'"

With Barton, an herbalist by trade who looks at food as medicine, on board as assistant manager and Doty's architectural skills coming into play for plans for the barely 500-square-foot space, Skip's Farm to Market store came together quickly. Wood farm tables, shelving,

and crates were crafted to display hardy fruits and vegetables, as well as bags, bottles, boxes, and otherwise packaged goods in much the same way as they would be at an outdoor farm stand. Refrigerators and freezers for perishables and proteins were set along the back wall.

One by one, vendors were meticulously researched and vetted. "Skip wanted things to be as local as possible," says Barton. "Trying different foods and building relationships with farmers and food producers from the Roaring Fork Valley to Grand Junction was how it started."

Over time, that focus has expanded to regions in New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, and Mexico, which allowed for increasing offerings while keeping the carbon footprint relatively low.

Promoted to general manager last spring, Barton also oversees a pair of Skip's Farm to Market outposts that have opened in the past two years—the first in December 2018 in Silt, which doesn't have a traditional grocery store nearby, then in charming downtown Fruita, which had previously been what she describes as "a food desert." Ironically, both Western Slope towns are relatively close to some of Colorado's most productive agricultural land.

"Skip just has a nostalgia for old, off-the-beaten-path towns," Barton says.

Torin Eggen, a trained chef with like sensibilities and a passion for quality food, has stepped up to oversee the Basalt store. Together, he and Barton source for the winter season, when a new crop of produce—peppers, winter squash, apples, and pears, for instance—comes available. Together with Skip, all acknowledge the prescience of their focus on sourcing local in these times, and are grateful for unprecedented customer support this past summer.

"Especially now, people really want to know where their food is coming from, that it's well-grown and clean," says Skip. "It's not just a job for us. It's a win-win for everybody." 🍅



Doty, in his Basalt store, always has something to smile about.

DAN BAYER

shelf life

Favorite local picks available at Skip's Farm to Market:

- Liquid Gold Colorado Mountain Honey, *Silt*
- Winter squash, *Early Morning Orchard, Palisade*
- Beets and turnips, *The Farm Collaborative, Aspen*
- Mountain Botanicals, *Basalt*
- Smoked salmon, *Kaleb's Katch, Gypsum*
- Sage and rosemary, *Osage Gardens, New Castle*
- Creamy top milk, *Rocking W Dairy, Olathe*
- Ground beef, *Rock Bottom Ranch, Basalt*
- Microgreens, *7 Castles Micro Farm, Basalt*
- Jalapeño cheddar brats, *Mountain Primal, Emma*
- Pasture-raised eggs, *Potter Farms, Fruita*
- Short ribs, *High Wire Ranch, Hotchkiss*

Find It

SKIP'S FARM TO MARKET

227 Midland Ave., Basalt
970.927.7650
basalt@skipsfarmtomarket.com

119 E. Aspen Ave., Fruita
970.858.3597

701 Main St., Unit C, Silt
970.876.4121

Flavors of the Valley



While testing and translating restaurant recipes for *The Aspen Cookbook*, an editor gets into the secret minds of chefs. By Amanda Rae

On a warm August evening, my tiny apartment kitchen is a disaster zone. The cooktop is slicked with oil, cinnamon sugar sticks to the counter (and my bare feet), and a mixing bowl smeared with batter residue begins to crust over. Amid all this, though, is one pretty picture: a half sheet pan holding 40 perfectly round, golden-brown donut holes. I have to get them out of my apartment so I don't eat them all.

Forty-five minutes later, I make my sixth and final delivery, to a colleague from SkyWest Airlines whom I haven't seen since we were furloughed in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. As I hand over a grease-smudged paper bag, a socially distanced smile makes the entire, messy process worth it.

That was my third attempt to perfect the W Aspen cider donut recipe for *The Aspen Cookbook*, a project I'd been working on nearly nonstop since May. Young Professionals Network Aspen, a subcommittee of the Aspen Board of Realtors, had hired me as editor of the cookbook, sales of which benefit a relief fund for restaurants affected by the crisis.

We gathered more than 100 favorite recipes from 69 Roaring Fork Valley chefs. Nobody realized that the recipes would need major work for home-cooking success. Through much research, communication, and trial and error, I was able to fill in the blanks on missing ingredients and incomplete instructions and shrink enormous proportions to yield recipes useful to home cooks.

I was testing Victoria+co's Australian pavlova—a finicky meringue that ultimately made me realize my oven's control board had burned out—when Chef Vinnie Bagford of Bamboo Bear

called. I had inquired about his vegetable pho broth: How might we translate ounces of cinnamon sticks and black peppercorns into measurements a home cook would understand?

"It's less about measuring and more about the ratio of ingredients for a balanced dish," he told me. The timing was ironic. Baking, of course, requires precision, determination, and a bit of luck (especially at high altitude). Yet Bagford's message—that chefs cook by feel and intuition—added to the challenge of the project.

During four months of editing, testing, and packaging recipes, my relationship with each dish progressed. When Caribou Club Chef Miles Angelo sent photos of sheets of notebook paper with his handwritten wild mushroom tamale recipe, I transcribed the copy.

Midway through preparing the masa mixture, I panicked. Salt was absent from the ingredient list! I texted him and got an instant reply. We refined the recipe further. I tested it again, and increased the filling proportion. Finally, he admitted, "I just kind of eyeball it."

Local diners will recognize many dishes: Chef Miguel Diaz's Artichoke Bruschetta at Ellina; Chef Chris Lanter's inimitable Colorado rack of lamb *au jus*, on the Cache Cache menu for 20 years; and Piñon's Ahi Tuna Tacos, a staple since owner Rob Mobilian helmed the kitchen as founding chef in 1988.

Alone in my apartment, working on this project connected me with the restaurant world more than ever before. Getting into the minds of Aspen chefs and putting their creativity on paper for posterity nourished me through a tough time. As an uncertain winter unfolds, I hope *The Aspen Cookbook* (\$45 at AspenCookbook.com) does the same for our community.

Kristy Bates, director of nutrition services at Aspen Valley Hospital, is one of 69 chefs who contributed recipes to *The Aspen Cookbook*. See next page for Bates's award-winning soup recipe.



PHOTO BY WILL McDONALD



ROASTED CARROT COCONUT GINGER SOUP WITH TOASTED COCONUT AND BASIL

From Aspen Valley Hospital Nutrition Services Director Kristy Bates, this creamy vegan soup has been a staple at the hospital's Castle Creek Café for at least 15 years. In January 2020, Bates's version topped with a tropical-herbal garnish was named champion of Soupsköl 2.0 at the Aspen Art Museum.

SERVES 4-5

- 2 pounds carrots, unpeeled
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 6-7 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 medium yellow or white onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger, divided
- 1 can (about 15 ounces) coconut milk
- 1 quart (4 cups) vegetable broth

TOASTED COCONUT BASIL GARNISH

- ¼ cup unsweetened dried coconut
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves

ROAST THE CARROTS

Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or coat with cooking spray.

Chop carrots into 1-inch chunks. Transfer to a large mixing bowl. Drizzle 1 tablespoon oil over carrots, add 1 tablespoon brown sugar, and 1 pinch each salt and pepper. Toss to coat.

Spread carrots evenly onto prepared baking sheet. Add 3 to 4 sprigs thyme. Roast 20 minutes. Toss carrots, rotate sheet, and roast another 15 to 20 minutes.

COOK THE SOUP

Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a Dutch oven or large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. When hot, add onions and cook until translucent. Add garlic and 1 tablespoon ginger. Cook 2 to

3 minutes until aromatics begin to brown. Add coconut milk and vegetable broth. Let flavors meld while carrots finish cooking.

When carrots are browned slightly around the edges, transfer to soup. Simmer 2 to 3 minutes until warmed through.

MAKE THE TOASTED COCONUT BASIL GARNISH

Toast coconut on an ungreased baking sheet in a 400°F oven about 5 minutes. Watch carefully to avoid burning! Cool.

Stack, roll, and slice basil leaves (5 to 6 at a time) to chiffonade.

FINISH THE SOUP

Transfer soup to a food processor or high-powered blender. Add remaining 1 tablespoon ginger and thyme leaves (stripped from sprigs). Carefully blend, venting lid to allow hot steam to escape, until smooth. Taste and season with salt, if necessary. Divide among serving bowls and top with Toasted Coconut Basil Garnish.

Soup may be refrigerated up to 6 days or frozen up to 3 months. Reheat before serving.

WILL McDONALD

WILD MUSHROOM TAMALES

Served with smoked elk, charred leeks, apricot jam, and red wine-garlic sauce, this savory tamale stuffed with wild mushrooms "is a true hunter-gatherer dish," says Caribou Club Executive Chef Miles Angelo, who has been preparing it there for 20 years.

MAKES 14 TAMALES

MASA

- 2 cups water
- ¼ cup diced yellow onion
- 2 large Roma tomatoes, halved
- 1 large jalapeño, seeded, halved
- 4 cups masa harina (Maseca brand preferred)
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 18-22 dry cornhusks, for tamales/ties

WILD MUSHROOM FILLING

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¾ cup diced white onion
- 5 cups sliced wild mushrooms
- ¾ cup dry white wine
- 4 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

PREPARE THE VEGETABLE BROTH FOR MASA

Add water, onion, tomatoes, and jalapeño to a medium saucepan over high heat. Once boiling, lower to medium and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 25 minutes. Remove from heat.

Purée vegetables and liquid in a blender or food processor until smooth. Measure 3 cups mixture, adding hot water if necessary. Set aside.

COOK THE WILD MUSHROOM FILLING

Melt butter in a large sauté pan over medium heat. When sizzling, add onions and mushrooms. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 10 to 12 minutes.

Raise heat to medium-high. Deglaze pan with wine and cook 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until all liquid is absorbed. Add thyme and season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat and cool completely.

MILES ANGELO

MAKE THE MASA

Soak 18 to 22 cornhusks in a large bowl or roasting pan of warm water for 10 minutes. (If some tear, extras will be needed.)

Combine masa harina, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.

In a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, whip butter on medium-high speed until fluffy, about 3 minutes.

Add dry ingredients and mix on low speed until fully incorporated. While mixing, slowly add vegetable purée until a moist, smooth paste forms. (Add more masa, 1 tablespoon at a time, if dough is sticky.)

ROLL AND COOK THE TAMALES

Drain cornhusks and pat dry. Tear 28 thin strips from 4 or 5 husks. Lay out 14 whole husks on a clean, flat work surface.

Using wet hands, spread ⅓ cup masa in a 4-to-5-inch-long rectangle centered on each husk. Top with mushroom filling, distributing evenly atop masa. Facing long edge, fold/roll husk around masa and filling to create a log. Use cornhusk strips to tie both ends securely. Repeat with all tamales.

Add 1 to 2 inches water to a large stockpot lined with a metal steamer basket over medium-high heat. When boiling, stand tamales upright, leaning against side of pot. Drape a clean, wet kitchen towel over tamales (to trap steam) and cover with a lid. Steam tamales about 80 minutes, replenishing water periodically, until firm and husk peels away easily and cleanly.

Tamales may be refrigerated up to 1 week or frozen (cooked or uncooked) up to 6 months.





Au Naturel



A natural wine movement is growing locally. By Kelly Hayes

Do you know what's in your wine?

If you're one of a growing number of diners who order the wines marked by an "N" on the list at Meat & Cheese Restaurant & Farm Shop, the answer is, simply, the juice of organically grown grapes.

"I kind of look at them as 'unfussed-with' wines," laughs proprietor Wendy Mitchell about the natural wine program she has instituted at her popular eatery and provisions shop on Aspen's Restaurant Row. "The list is about 40 percent natural wines. We put a blurb about them on the menu and came up with a little 'N' on a glass [icon] to show which wines on our list are natural."

In recent years, a growing movement has evolved amongst artisan winemakers to ensure that what goes into their bottles is a purer reflection of what is naturally grown in the vineyards. Winemakers like Marcel Lapierre of Morgon, France, and more recently, Chris Brockway (Broc Cellars) in California, have made everything old new again, using ancient, traditional winemaking techniques to produce wine as gently and as naturally as possible.

The movement uses the moniker "natural wine," though until recently, when French authorities codified the *vin méthode nature*, there was no overarching definition of just what that meant. Philosophically, these winemakers focus on producing wine from grapes grown free of pesticides in organic vineyards, with no additional additives (though some

use tiny amounts of sulfur for preservation) and no artificial flavors. And the wines are made using minimal manual intervention. Simply, grapes are fermented using wild yeasts in the most "unfussed with" way possible.

"My big natural moment came when I was making cheese in Paonia at our Avalanche Cheese farm and I started to understand farming practices," Mitchell says. "Our cheesemaking approach was less about tech and more about taste. It led me to look at the wines we were drinking and what some of the big companies were doing, what their farming practices were."

Many commercial wines today are sourced from vineyards that use pesticides. And legally, over 70 different components can be added to wine for fining, preserving, flavoring, or coloring, etc. With no ingredient-label laws currently in place for wines, it's difficult for consumers to tell what exactly is in a given bottle.

Chris Schaetzle represents the Natural Wine Company locally, supplying natural wines to a number of outlets along with Meat & Cheese, including Of Grape & Grain in Aspen and Sopris Liquor & Wine in Carbondale.

"Natural wine is not a fad or a trend," he says. "Rather, it is a philosophy that goes back to the beginning of winemaking. It is about how winemakers can best express the character of their vineyards and their grapes."

The approach appealed instantly to Mitchell, who started putting natural wines on the menu in fall 2019, working with distributors like Craft Wine Colorado and the Natural Wine Company to taste and source the wines.

"Last year, I went to Santa Barbara on a wine trip and visited with a number of small producers who were really passionate about their natural wines," she says. "I thought, 'We need to support these artisan winemakers.'"

About a dozen more natural wines were added to the list this fall, Mitchell says.

And the difference can be found in the glass.

"There is a brightness to these wines. They have a tension, a verve," Schaetzle enthuses.

Or, as they say in the natural wine blurb on the Meat & Cheese list, "some funk."

Naturally. 🍷

"Natural wine is a philosophy that goes back to the beginning of winemaking. It is about how winemakers can best express the character of their vineyards and their grapes."

— Chris Schaetzle, Natural Wine Company

A LITTLE SPARKLE

In one corner of Meat & Cheese's wine list are a limited number of natural wines that feature a bit of fizz, not unlike a Champagne or a prosecco. Called "pét-nats," short and cute for *pétillant naturel*, they refer to wines that are bottled while still undergoing the first round of fermentation. Colorado is represented in this arena: Buckel Family Wine produces a Syrah-based sparkler in its new Gunnison winery.

Bubbles form in the bottle. The French call this process *méthode ancestrale*. Most of these wines have a crown cap, like a beer bottle, and fizz when opened.

Shake your pét-nats at your own peril.

Natural wines from Meat & Cheese and Sundance Drug and Liquor in Snowmass Village



DAN BAYER

A photograph of two people walking away from the camera in a large, open field. The person on the left is wearing a blue jacket and jeans, carrying a black crate. The person on the right is wearing a plaid shirt and orange pants, also carrying a black crate. In the foreground, there are rows of green plants, possibly strawberries, growing in a field. The background features rolling green hills and mountains under a clear sky. A fence is visible on the right side of the field.

flexible by nature

From field to fork to food pantry, the local food industry has been meeting pandemic challenges head-on.

By Christine Benedetti | Photos by Dan Bayer



Above: Dining al fresco in downtown Carbondale with social-distancing requirements. Right: Packaging CSA shares at Erin's Acres. Far right: Drive-through food distribution sites have been very busy since the pandemic began.



“We thought [demand for food distribution] would be a couple weeks. We had no idea that it would last this long.”

—Hannah Berman, Aspen Skiing Co. sustainability manager

It's a Monday in mid-August and the heat hangs over Carbondale like a down blanket, trapped by the smoke from the Grizzly Creek Fire. It's stifling, and yet a half-dozen volunteers are wading through it, transporting boxes of food into cars pulling through the Third Street Center's parking lot.

“I was sick of yelling at my TV, so I decided to volunteer,” says a tall man wearing a T-shirt that reads “Make America Kind Again.” He's sweaty and enthusiastic. It's his first shift with LIFT-UP, a Rifle-based nonprofit that provides humanitarian assistance from DeBeque to Aspen. For several decades, the organization has given food to residents in need through its food pantries, but when stay-at-home orders were instituted in March because of COVID-19, it shifted its model to drive-through distribution service. Similarly, Aspen Skiing Co. and Aspen Family Connections jumped into action, working with Food Bank of the Rockies to provide mobile pantry services to Basalt and Aspen, respectively.

In mid-April, the line for food stretched out of this Carbondale parking lot down several blocks toward Main Street. At its peak, the location was serving almost 190 cars during a two-hour shift, according to LIFT-UP. On this day, many of the vehicles pulling through have children in the back seat.

In the upper Roaring Fork Valley, those numbers are much higher. SkiCo employees volunteer every Thursday in Basalt to provide food boxes to an estimated 300 families, and in Aspen, volunteers hand out food to roughly 200 cars every Wednesday. Snowmass Village offered a food drive every other week through the summer.

“We thought it would be a couple weeks,” says Hannah Berman, SkiCo's sustainability manager, who has been supporting company

food distribution efforts since March, including a 20-week period over the summer when it served 100 to 200 families in Glenwood Springs and Rifle. “We had no idea that it would last this long. Our leadership is incredibly committed to this, and we're not going away until demand is met.”

Katherine Sand, director of Aspen Family Connections, echoes that. “We feel that it's essential that we continue,” she says.

Many of the same families return weekly, organizers say. But what they're being given has changed. Bags of nonperishable goods are standard, but at many of the distribution points, each car is also handed a box of fresh produce. In Carbondale, most of it is sourced within 100 miles of the Roaring Fork Valley. During the summer, that means items like Olathe sweet corn, kale, and tomatoes. Local meat is sourced whenever possible.

“The veil was pulled back on how many food-insecure people there are in our area,” says LIFT-UP Executive Director Angela Mills. “And we want to ensure that food pantry clients are receiving locally sourced, nutrient-dense fresh produce, meat, and dairy.”

To do that, LIFT-UP, through its Farm to Food Pantry program, augments food boxes provided by Food Banks of the Rockies, which distributes food in Colorado and Wyoming through partner organizations, like LIFT-UP, Aspen Family Connections, and SkiCo. Food Bank of the Rockies benefited from a \$3 billion federal coronavirus food assistance program that purchased fresh goods from regional farmers, but for three weeks when this didn't come through, it turned to local growers to fill in the gaps.

Food Bank of the Rockies and its three local partners will continue to provide food weekly as long as there is a need—and it's still

“tremendous,” says Sue Ellen Rodwick, its Western Slope director. By late fall, 4,000 families were still being served monthly from DeBeque to Aspen.

“We're lucky to be in a place that has a lot of resources,” says Berman.

Meanwhile, LIFT-UP has faced its own challenges with the massive increase in food demand, including questions about whether it was properly handling the greater volume and allegations of discrimination against Latino clients.

Uncertainty Is Certain

The pandemic magnified food insecurity in communities, but it also exposed failures in the country's megalithic food system. Being able to pivot quickly to local food producers demonstrated a real opportunity.

Getting more farmers on more land is key to a more sustainable food system, says Gwen Garcelon, who founded the Roaring Fork Food Alliance. “With climate change, our food system is so fragile,” she says. “From what we've been told, we can expect some disruptions and we're starting to see that. COVID has allowed us to be more aware of that in ways we hadn't before.”

People were quick to start victory gardens when the virus hit, turning pieces of their yards into produce patches. But, sometimes amateur gardens will taper off after a few failures, says Garcelon. To address this, she and a team of volunteers developed a mentorship system, matching Colorado State University extension agriculture students who needed volunteer hours with aspiring gardeners throughout the valley. Thanks to the program, 20 new

gardens between Rifle and Aspen were built this summer, and extra produce from the gardens is donated to LIFT-UP.

“I just dropped off an armload of squash today,” Garcelon says. “I'm amazed at how much we are producing compared to what I was able to do on my own.”

Food production for farmers of all kinds this summer hasn't been a challenge. If anything, demand has.

“By definition, we have to be flexible,” says Erin Cuseo, who runs Erin's Acres, a family vegetable farm that offers community-supported agriculture (CSA) harvest subscription shares. During any given year, farmers deal with weather events, market prices, pests, and drought. They're adaptable by nature. “The food shortages at the beginning that we saw, that doesn't apply to us. It wouldn't affect how much we can grow here, and it is more of a monocrop issue.”

If anything, Roaring Fork and North Fork valley farmers saw increased demand for their products. Cuseo's 30-share CSA sold out earlier than normal, with many people more eager to pay and solidify their spot up front. She saw an uptick in first-time customers as well.

“It's been strange, but also been heartwarming to form relationships with people who are hesitant to go to the grocery store,” she says.

A handful of farmers interviewed for this article all used similar words to describe COVID-19's effects on the trajectory of their business, in this order: uncertainty, pivot, roller coaster, great, gratitude.

Zephyros Farm & Garden in Paonia earns revenue several ways: selling nursery starts early in the spring and then shifting to produce and floral sales throughout the summer. Sixty-five percent of its produce sales come from farmers' markets in Telluride, Carbondale, and Aspen, and that's remained steady this year. Its fresh flower compo-

“There’s a renewed interest in local food production. People are getting to know their local food system again, and it’s a good thing overall for local farms.”

—Don Larcau,
Zephyros Farm & Garden



Farmers were busy this past year with high demand for local food. Harvesting potatoes (left) at Rock Bottom Ranch and beets (above) at the Farm Collaborative.

ment, however, has taken a hit as weddings have mostly been canceled and demand for floral arrangements declined, though it still sells its popular flower CSA.

“In general, farmers are having really big years,” says Don Larcau, who has owned the 35-acre farm with his wife, Daphne, for 17 years. “There’s a renewed interest in local food production. CSAs were fading, but people are getting to know their local food system again, and it’s a good thing overall for local farms.”

Down the road from Zephyros, the Gillespie family owns 130 acres known as The Living Farm, run by third-generation farmers Lynn and Tom. Their three children are starting to transition into roles as the fourth generation to run the farm in the 80-plus years the family has owned it. The farm is home to cows, sheep, poultry, and pigs, as well as greenhouses and gardens, and its products are sold wholesale and commercially, as well as through its CSA program. The business is unique in that it also operates a restaurant and five-bedroom inn on Grand Avenue in downtown Paonia, sourcing farm-fresh and organic produce, meat, cheese, and eggs from its property and neighbors.

“It’s been a wild ride,” says Lynn Gillespie. “The first thing I noticed [in March] is that people were wanting to buy food and buy

meat. It’s interesting that people came back around saying ‘local food is a good source for me.’ The grocery stores emptied and that was a wake-up call for a lot of people. On the production side, we put in a few more gardens, because we knew we needed to grow more food.”

Expecting this trend to continue, she doubled her fall crop plantings, seeding more cabbage, squash, and potatoes early on, knowing that come winter it will be in demand. Her husband also doubled poultry production to 4,000 chickens and turkeys—“it’s amazing how fast the birds are going,” she says.

The café component was a different experience. At first it was shut entirely due to health code restrictions, and then after they were allowed to reopen, one employee tested positive for COVID-19. The Gillespies gave all their employees the choice to come to work or not because of the pandemic.

“These people are my family and close friends,” says Lynn. “We could shut the restaurant, but we can’t shut down a farm. You have to water, and there was extra stuff to pick up but nobody to do it.”

Still, they made it work and tried to roll out the rest of the summer, with adaptations. She says it won’t be a banner year, but her goal was to simply keep everyone employed. “I’ve never had a season quite like this in 34 years,” she adds.



Jerome Osentowski gathers mushrooms at his Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute above Basalt.

What Slowdown?

“Heartbreaking” is how Molly and Barclay Dodge described the news they would have to close their restaurant, Bosq, following public health orders in March. They immediately set up a GoFundMe page to help support their staff, and a few weeks later adapted quickly with prix-fixe takeout dinners that included creative add-ons like vacuum-sealed spicy margaritas.

“It was family style, and people wanted ethnic food, like taco night—or we threw in Moroccan,” says Barclay Dodge. “Instead of just doing what was expected from us, which is farm to table, we did things they couldn’t make at home.” The couple and their daughter then safely hand-delivered the food to customers.

With the onset of the pandemic, restaurant owners were stressed, worried, and scrappy in terms of their response. Businesses shifted to takeout and delivery if they could, and Governor Jared Polis’s loosening of alcohol-delivery regulations helped many to at least limp along, keeping their lights on and their employees paid.

“We had a unique situation because of our grocery side of the business, and our retail side did pretty well. The numbers were stronger than a normal offseason,” says Wendy Mitchell, who owns Meat & Cheese Restaurant and Farm Shop, noting that people opted for her locally sourced products over shopping at regular grocery stores.

For Dodge, by the end of August, the tone had shifted.

“We were anticipating the worst, along with restaurants around the country struggling. Then most of the country came to us,” he says. “It’s a phenomenon. A lot of us are doing really well, if not better than years past.”

Bosq focuses on using local ingredients to craft unique menu items. Earlier in the summer, the restaurant experienced a delay in some of the product lines, but farmers soon caught up with plantings.

The expansion of outdoor dining last summer allowed restaurants to augment revenues when COVID regulations limited indoor capacity to 50 percent. Some reported being up 10 to 15 percent over previous years, which may be attributed to expanded outdoor seating. Mitchell says she was tracking 7 percent behind last summer, and decided to do take-out and curbside delivery only for the winter.

Restaurant and bar sales in Aspen were down 17 percent through August, compared to 2019, while Snowmass restaurants saw a 20 percent decline in sales taxes collected through September, according to reports from both towns.

While many are able to still make a profit serving food, those that rely heavily on late-night liquor sales have suffered, with the closing of bars and last call for alcohol at 11 p.m. (For much of the summer, last call was 10 p.m.)

Many people who are reluctant to dine in restaurants half full of strangers are turning to professionally prepared in-home meals. While catering businesses have suffered as parties essentially stopped, private chefs have seen a boom in business.

“It was a really busy summer,” says private chef Alex Karlinski, who runs Harvest Roaring Fork. “It just turned around halfway through. It’s not the dinner parties that are typical in the summer with larger groups, but families that want a break or don’t want to eat out. They are super safe and concerned about their own health.”

During the summer, Karlinski sources as much as she can from local farmers’ markets and didn’t have any issues with her supply line. In addition to the markets, she sourced from Skip’s Farm to Market and Two Roots Farm, which have farm stands unassociated with farmers’ markets.

“When I am given the opportunity, I make a meal almost completely around what I can buy locally,” says Karlinski.

Winter Is Here

Winter, however, loomed over everyone. There was the uncertainty of the disease and its health impacts. It’s when fields fallow and production slows. But some see this as the biggest opportunity for the local food system. People are quick to brush off sustainable, year-round local production at western Colorado’s higher elevations, but Don Lareau of Zephyros says this is where the opportunity lies.

“It’s not because people don’t want to buy them, but they don’t want to pay the actual costs that it takes to grow these things in the winter,” says Lareau, referring to winter greens like kale and chard. “It could become a new market if people want to pay for it. ... The things we can produce in our local foodshed aren’t the sexiest foods. But do people really want a local food system? If they do, people would be eating a lot more greens.”

Pitkin County Commissioner Greg Poschman, who helped implement both LIFT-UP’s Farm to Food Pantry program and the CSU mentorship program for local gardeners, says one of the most important developments besides feeding people is proving to the farmers “that we have their backs and want to help them.”

That translates into the winter season, too.

Fresh tomatoes may be gone from LIFT-UP’s weekly food boxes, but Mills says “we can provide people with Colorado eggs and meat year round.”

The restaurants, too, planned for the winter with flexibility. Many have outdoor tents or covered patios, which are essential for a business like Bosq’s, whose capacity shrinks to 18 with COVID-19 limitations of 50 percent capacity.

Nobody knows what’s to come, but for those in the food industry, adaptation has always been integral to success. COVID has proved no different.

“Disruption brings opportunity,” says Poschman. “COVID has made changes in the way we do everything. And we’re going to create something of permanence even after COVID has passed.” 🍷



Left: Harvesting radishes in the COVID era at the Farm Collaborative. Above: At Erin’s Acres, farming is a family affair.



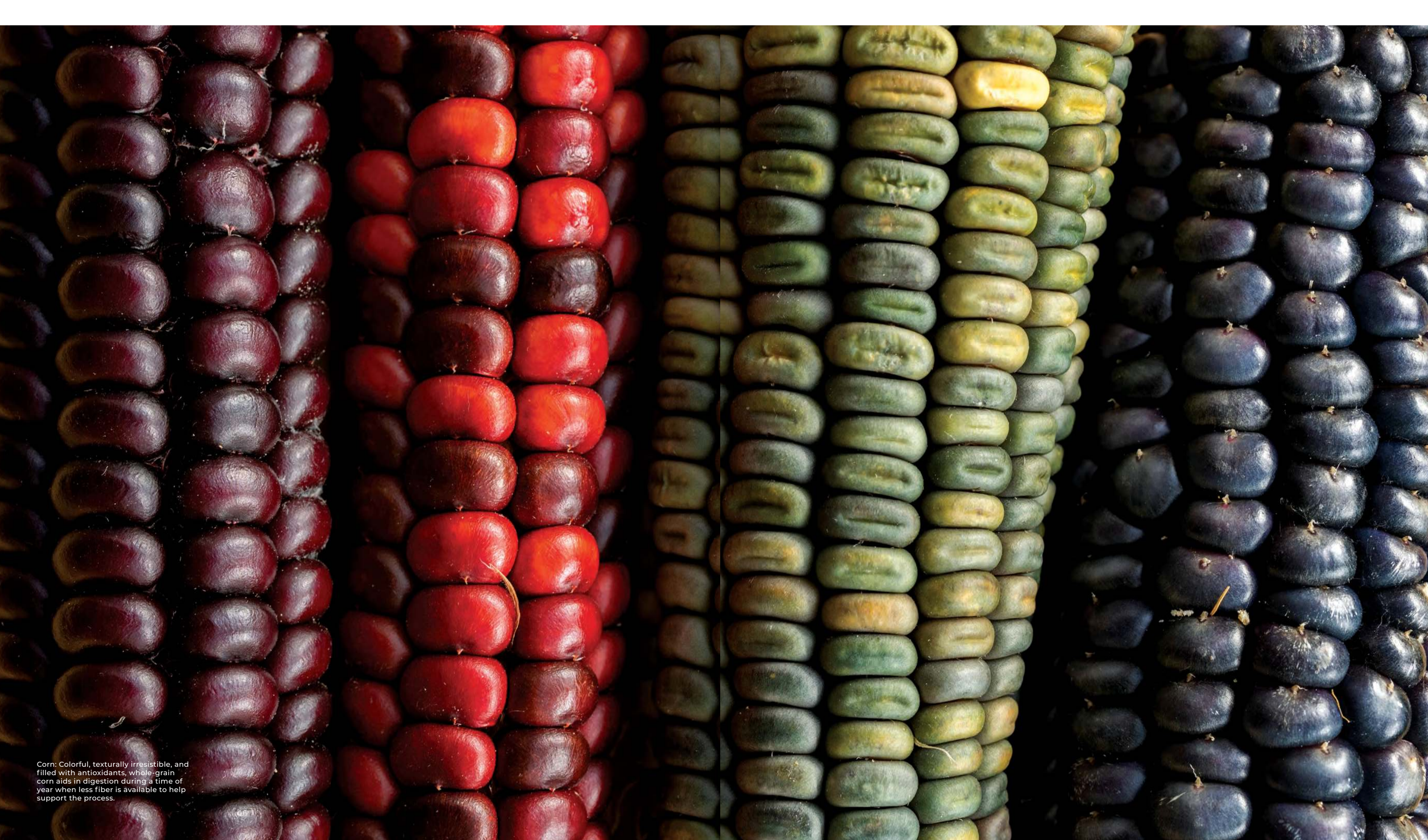
Garlic: A well-known member of the Allium genus, garlic predates its cult status in the culinary world with exceptional antibacterial and antiviral properties dating back thousands of years.

When considering the choice of which vegetables and grains to store over the winter months, nature has already made that decision for us. For the seasonal variations in food are characteristic of how nature gives us what we truly need when we need it. In this photo essay, we celebrate how we, too, are kept whole with “Keepers.”


Photos by Dan Bayer




Keepers



Corn: Colorful, texturally irresistible, and filled with antioxidants, whole-grain corn aids in digestion during a time of year when less fiber is available to help support the process.



Squash: Appearing pumpkin-like amid a family portrait with its siblings, kabocha squash is an excellent source of beta carotene, which can be converted to vitamin A, important for healthy white blood cells and an active immune system.



Potatoes: Perhaps the best-known storage crop, potatoes fill the body with energy that can then be stored—much like the potato itself—and used throughout the winter.



Purple cabbage: Taking on the look of a windblown cape of a superhero, cabbage saves the day as a vitamin-C-rich food source (rare during the winter season) that can store up to five months in the right conditions.



Leeks: Plants like leeks protect themselves the way we protect ourselves, through antibacterial and antifungal properties that prevent illnesses during the winter months when we need the most immune support.

Tony Vagneur examines an old potato shed on Missouri Heights in September 2020.



DAN BAYER

Garden Variety

Farming and ranching in the Roaring Fork Valley have always required grit, adaptation, and a robust backyard garden.

IF YOU WERE A LATE-1800S MINER LOOKING TO DIVERSIFY A LEAN DIET, THE ROARING Fork Valley was not a land of agricultural plenty. Farmers traveling west in search of fertile lands usually passed right through the Rockies toward richer terrain in coastal states. Which isn't to say that nothing grew here. It just required grit, an understanding of the limitations of arid land, a subsistence mentality, and a nod to the fact that determination was as important as seeds and rain.

But despite finicky soil and a short growing season, the valley eventually became a respectable producer of enough variety to keep the population fed, and for some to make an income. Now, after decades of the local economy shifting away from farming toward skiing, tourism, and real estate, there's a tangible swing back to growing food closer to home.

BY MITZI RAPKIN

Right: Doing business at Tagert & Williams Hay and Grain around the turn of the century (Aspen Historical Society, Shaw Collection photo). Below: Loading potatoes for export in Snowmass, 1921, and tending to a backyard garden in Aspen, 1945 (Aspen Historical Society photos).



Ranchers use a binder tractor to harvest a field of oats in the 1950s, in the McLain Flats area with what today is known as Brush Creek Village in the background. Aspen Historical Society, Ringquist Collection photo.



Mining dirt

“The miners lived on a monotonous diet of bread, salted pork, and canned goods. Their foodstuffs came from Leadville on jack trains, and the prices were high,” wrote Lysa Wegman-French in *The History of The Holden-Marolt Site*. In 1882, the Pitkin County clerk reported to the state agriculture office that “there was little produced” in the region, and the 1885 Aspen directory, which listed residents’ names and occupations, had nary a farmer in the bunch.

“The population of Aspen worked in the mines, kept the family going, and grew food to get by,” says Lisa Hancock, vice president and curator for the Aspen Historical Society.

An intrepid few who didn’t want to make a living underground dug into the ground instead—tearing down sagebrush to make way for planting and developing irrigation systems for their fields.

Prevailing crops in the upper valley were hay, wheat, oats, barley, rye, and alfalfa—destined to go down the gullets of livestock or to be shipped to other parts of the country as cash crops. The humble potato began to emerge as a commodity that could be eaten locally and sold throughout the state and beyond.

At the end of the 19th century, truck gardening—crops raised to be sold at local markets—began to take hold. This allowed farmers to diversify their crops, and cold-weather vegetables like peas, parsnips, radishes, lettuce, onions, turnips, beets, squash, cabbage, and carrots began to make locals’ meals more colorful.

Cows, pigs, and chickens added meat, milk, butter, cream, and eggs to the local food economy, and some growers—mostly downvalley—successfully experimented with fruit trees, berries, and bees. By fall 1889, the *Aspen Weekly Chronicle* indicated how far the sage-filled landscape had come: “A trip from Glenwood to Aspen ... at the present time is particularly striking from the fact that one passes through a most beautiful and fertile farming country, where the farmers are now reaping and threshing their grain.”

Peak potatoes

Railroads came to Aspen to haul silver ore from its mines, but after that economy went bust from the 1893 devaluation of silver, farm goods and livestock became the valley railways’ primary passengers.

And while Aspen’s population plummeted in the time known as the Quiet Years, farmers and ranchers—now the bulk of the population—developed markets farther afield, mainly cattle and potatoes destined for Denver and locations in the East. Still, life for farmers was hardscrabble.

“Aspen became a community operating on a zero-based economy. Residents raised as much of their own food as possible,” explains the book *The Quiet Years*.

But as the automobile and agricultural mechanization took hold in the 1910s and ’20s, they gave these rugged folks more tools to achieve success. Where Pitkin County registered 141 farms 1919, by 1935 that number had jumped to 206 farms with more than 80,660 acres in production.

That was a banner year for farms in Pitkin County, where 18,800 acres were dedicated to hay—more than twice the amount in 1919. Also in 1935, the Colorado Cooperative Crop and Livestock Reporting Service counted 15,060 sheep—triple from 10 years earlier—plus 2,000 more head of cattle than a decade prior, and enough cows to produce more than 335,000 gallons of milk, which was sipped, churned, aged into cheese, frozen into ice cream, and fed to pigs.

The now-mighty potato, though on the decline, was cultivated on 900 acres. Only potatoes, which had become the cash crop of the valley in the 1910s, were on the decline in Pitkin County—cultivated on 900 acres.

“The land provided”

Many who were born between the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II a decade later remember the hard work their families put in to reap food from the land. As larger farms were on the wane, the backyard garden, so popular from the mining days, remained a reliable source of produce.

Cherie Oates of the Gerbaz ranching family grew up on South 7th Street in Aspen and remembers her mother’s acre-sized garden.

“The land provided,” she says. “We had carrots and potatoes and beets, turnips, rutabagas, parsnips. We would can our green beans, which was great for soup. Most houses had a root cellar.”

Continued on page 59

PITKIN COUNTY FARMS AND CROP YIELDS

1893

(Farms not counted)
0 acres harvested

1923

156 farms
1,305 acres oats
8,408 acres hay
1,438 acres potatoes

1954

82 farms
700 acres oats
7,900 acres hay
120 acres potatoes

1983

(Farms not counted)
400 acres oats
7,400 acres hay
0 acres potatoes

2017

(Farms not counted)
2,500 acres alfalfa
and other hay

GARFIELD COUNTY FARMS AND CROP YIELDS

1893

(Farms not counted)
4,200 acres oats
9,700 acres hay
1,200 acres potatoes

1923

844 farms
2,624 acres oats
31,003 acres hay
4,243 acres potatoes

1954

677 farms
2,330 acres oats
33,530 acres hay
250 acres potatoes

1983

(Farms not counted)
1,300 acres oats
37,800 acres hay
0 acres potatoes

2017

(Farms not counted)
23,400 acres alfalfa
and other hay

Wild Oats: A simple grain and an antique machine could

hold the key to a missing piece of the local food economy.

**INTERVIEW BY CATHERINE LUTZ
PHOTOS BY DAN BAYER**

In September, Cooper Means harvested a field of oats at his Shining Mountain Farms, which sits on Pitkin County Open Space land that he farms under its agricultural lease program. He used a 1945 combine, part of the Farm Collaborative's equipment library, to reap the grain and separate its seeds from its husks. Up until a few decades ago, this process happened on farms and ranches up and down the valley all the time. Means, who is also agriculture director of the Farm Collaborative, explains the significance of his grain trial today.

Cooper Means has a farmer's patience: His oats crop is the fourth year of a heritage grain trial.

Used to harvesting grain by hand, Means felt the magic of watching oats pour from the combine's hopper.



Q How did you get the idea to plant oats? And why oats?

My goal is heritage bread, and bread wheat is far more expensive to seed than oats. I've been working this field for four years to get it ready for grain, and the oats are the first crop I've harvested. It's all a progression to plant the bread wheat. Oats were a low-cost way to cut my teeth on the project. They're easy to grow, readily available, and fast-growing to shade out the weeds. They're also helpful in establishing a no-till system. I want to do grains because it's a large missing piece of the local food economy. Consumers can find local meat and veggies, but have no options for locally produced grain. Researching the *Aspen Times* archives when conceiving this project, I found some encouraging content. Grain production in this valley used to be done on a fairly large scale. And with all the interest and education now around local food, I think it can be economically viable.

Q Why did you use an antique combine?

In the 1930s and '40s farming became totally mechanized and centralized. Large-scale operations became the only grain growers and production of small combines stopped. There was nothing of the size I was looking for. But a number of old combines have been kept in good shape and working order. Through internet research I found an equipment seller in Michigan who salvages parts and puts together working machines. The other really cool thing about the one I chose is the wide range of crops it can harvest, from the tiniest alfalfa seed to a giant fava bean.

Q From planting to harvesting, what moments stood out as highlights or lessons learned?

One lesson I'm always learning is that, in farming, things will always go wrong. Things will break, and if you take it as a bad thing and get frustrated you won't be farming for very long. If I embrace things that go wrong, I can be happy and pleased with my process. With the combine, I really expected things to go wrong. And it broke in one way or another 10 to 12 times. But the beauty of that machine is it's all very logical and accessible—just gears and belts and things like that, not like a modern combine—so there was nothing I wasn't able to fix in 45 minutes.

“I want to do grains because it's a large missing piece of the local food economy.”

Q What is the significance of your grain trial?

The significance is that I believe a lot of land in this valley isn't being fully utilized and could easily be. A lot of people grow hay for an agricultural tax break but not for the product itself. I believe we can achieve this same goal for the landowner while producing food for the valley—and hopefully improving soil through multi-year management programs. We are so fortunate to have this opportunity through Pitkin County's agricultural lease program—that did a lot to make this a possibility.

Q How did you feel when you successfully finished the harvest?

For years, I've been harvesting grain by hand. It's extremely labor intensive—cutting it with a scythe, bundling it into shocks, threshing, and winnowing. Two years ago, I was able to do 60–80 pounds and it took me 100 hours of work. So, running a combine and watching hundreds of pounds of grain pour out of the hopper felt like magic to me. It was this incredible thing, because I had put so much effort into this project that I've been dreaming about for 10-plus years. And it felt like, “OK, there is an abundance here. There is a significant quantity of food.”

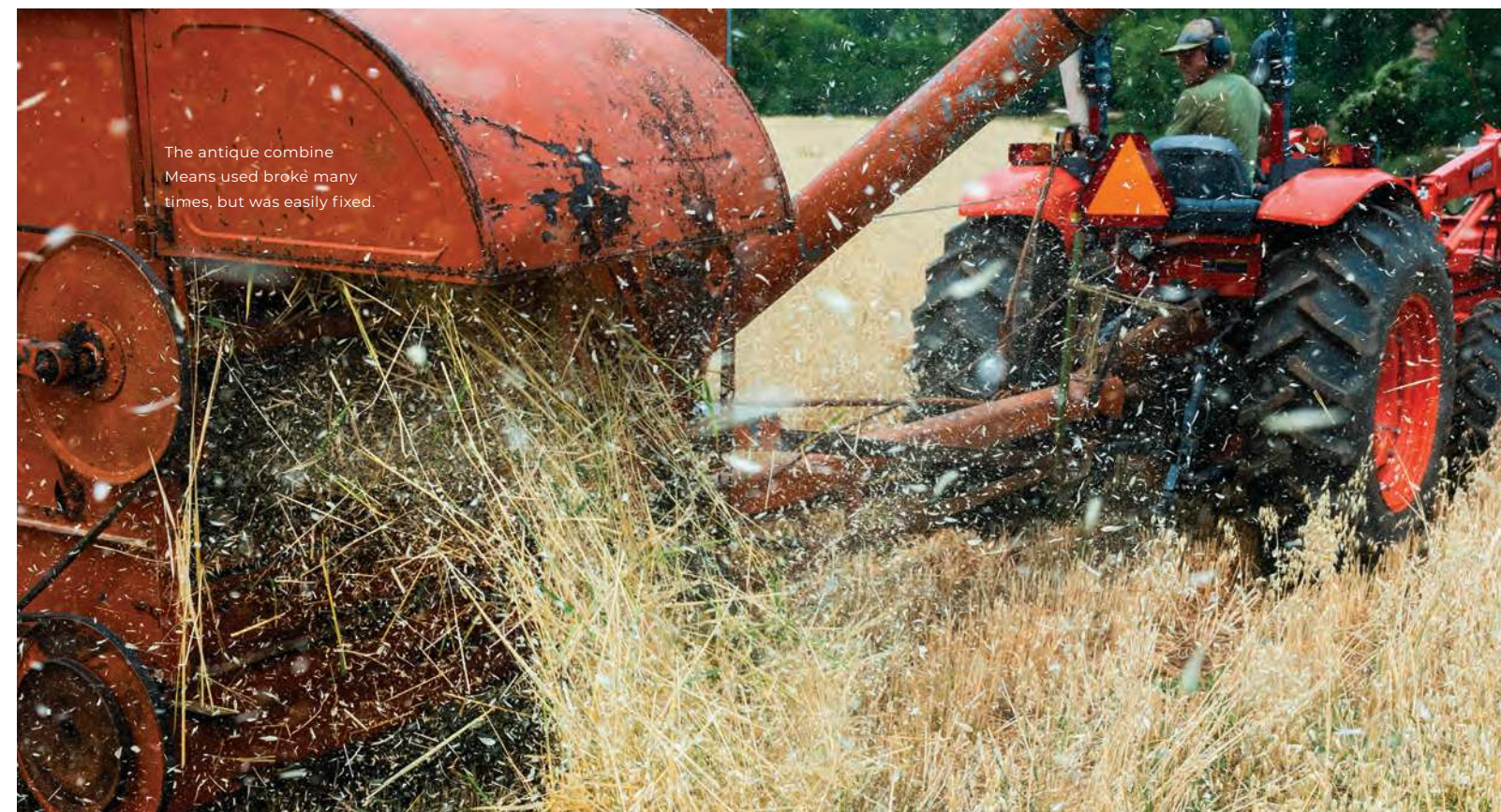
Q When can people expect locally raised oats in their breakfast bowls?

I harvested 9,000 pounds of oats and have one more step in the process to get it to a product ready for consumers. I'm hoping to get equipment to do that this winter, and shooting for spring to have oats for people to eat.

Q When did you realize you wanted to be a farmer?

The moment that triggered my love for agriculture happened at Sustainable Settings, when they were operating on the Aspen Community School campus in Woody Creek. I was 10 or 11 years old, and that's where I would spend my recess. Years later, when Sustainable Settings moved to its new site on Highway 133, I did a mentor apprenticeship there. I distinctly remember this point when Brook [LeVan, co-founder and executive director] had me eat a Brussels sprout right off the stalk. It brought me to this connection: that we were building soil, getting it ready for next year, and at the same time we had this bounty of food. The whole experience made me realize that this is the essential thing I could do with my life: produce food to sustain myself and others. 🌱

“I believe a lot of land in this valley isn't being fully utilized and could easily be.”



The antique combine Means used broke many times, but was easily fixed.

Beets and turnips have left the cooling earth and await their turn to be transformed again in the kitchen. What colorful ingredients can you grow for dinner?

DAN BAYER



love local food



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This is what traffic jams in Aspen looked like through the 1960s, when sheep were driven from their summer range into the mountains. Aspen Historical Society photo.

Continued from page 51

At her family's ranch, in what became known as Gerbazdale on the upvalley end of Snowmass Canyon, potatoes and wheat were grown en masse for commercial purposes. In 1943, her family switched from cattle to sheep because more sheep could graze per acre in the high country—and wool was a hot commodity.

For personal use, Oates's grandparents kept chickens, turkeys, milk cows, and pigs. They made their own sausage and cheese, foraged for chokecherries and mushrooms, and Oates's mother churned butter.

Jim Nieslanik recalls a similar existence growing up on a ranch near Glenwood Springs in the 1940s. "We raised pork, but we couldn't afford to eat beef because we had to sell it to generate income," he says. "We also ate deer and elk because there was always quite a bit around. My mom would can venison and elk meat in jars."

Trips to town for food were limited because almost everything could be found in the garden, on the ranch, or in the wild. What food needs the Nieslaniks had were bartered for with eggs his mother brought to the store.

Tony Vagneur's family had five ranches between McLain Flats and Woody Creek, where for generations they raised cattle and grew hay and some potatoes. "Anything you could grow in the dirt people were growing, but as a crop to make money there weren't that many options," he says.

Agriculture in Pitkin County mostly declined after the peak year of 1935. By 1952, the county had lost 109 farms (about half) and more than 28,000 acres of ranch and farmland. That year, 720 acres of oats and 160 acres of potatoes were harvested alongside 46,420 acres of hay—two-and-a-half times more than in the mid-'30s—which illustrates the comparative value of food for animals. (See "Making Hay," page 64.)

"The direction was always simplification," says Vagneur. "You could bust your tail to grow potatoes, but why would you do that if you could put 30 or 40 more cows on your property? It was much easier and more profitable."

Oats overtook potatoes in popularity for similar reasons, explains Vagneur. Potatoes had to be individually dug out of the ground, bagged and hauled to a potato cellar, then sorted by size and

bagged for shipment. "These 150-pound farmers were hauling 100-pound bags to the railroad cars, where with oats, two or three guys would go out, cut them, and put them into bundles. Then you'd hire ski bums to stand up the bundles and haul them to the threshing machine."

Farming comes full circle

Once skiing and the tourism that accompanied it took off in Aspen, farmers and ranchers found they could supplement their incomes during downtime with winter ski area jobs. Eventually, many sold their land to lucrative development opportunities rather than continue to eke out livings on short growing seasons.

In an October 1963 article about the booming economy of winter and summer recreation, *The Aspen Daily Times* noted, "There won't be any boom in agricultural employment and output in Pitkin County in the near future."

Meanwhile, improved highways and transportation across the country allowed food to travel farther, lessening the need for home-grown goods.

Fast forward to today's local foods resurgence. Small-acreage farmers dot the landscape from Cozy Point to Glenwood Springs and beyond. This is partly attributable to Pitkin County, which, under a program started in 2015, leases nearly 400 acres of open space to 16 agricultural leaseholders. A majority of that land is used for hay and cattle, but two leaseholders on 20 acres grow vegetables to sell and raise cattle, sheep, and chickens.

If the legacy of all the farmers and ranchers that came before them have anything to teach, it may be that the land can be as productive as we imagine.

"Every town needs a 40-acre farm in this valley," says Jerome Osentowski, who's been teaching and growing for 33 years at his Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute above Basalt. "If you hire farmers and you grow food for schools, for the communities, for the hospitals, and if it's a community effort ... we could change the future of food." 🍷

Growing local food. Building soil.

Across Colorado, communities are coming together to support organic farms and small food businesses.



Slow Money groups based in Aspen, Boulder, Durango and Salida are making 0% loans. To date, 43 loans totaling \$720,000 have been made. Pictured above are some of the recipients (Clockwise from top left): Ollin Farms, Longmont; Jones Farms, Hooper; Native Hill Farm, Fort Collins; Topp Fruits, Hotchkiss; Two Roots Farm, Basalt.

SLOWMONEY

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Wild & Healthy

Colorado cuisine is just like us. By Ali Margo

When I began hosting Thanksgiving a few years ago, I decided to put a Mexican spin on the traditional menu: turkey roasted in red adobo sauce, shrimp and green chili stuffing, and pineapple jalapeño cranberry sauce. I recognized you'd more likely find this meal in New Mexico than Colorado, and it left me wondering: What is Colorado cuisine?

In Aspen, we have a culinary scene that's as diverse and renowned as any major city's, with restaurants serving everything from Nobu sushi and French fusion to various flairs of Italian and even Vietnamese. But what a truly local culinary experience? What will make our kids think of home? And what do we serve friends and family that captures the essence of the Rocky Mountains?

What comes to my mind is wild game. My husband, Ryan, hunts elk every fall, a serious production that takes several weeks from meal planning to camp setup and the actual hunt to butchering. They call elk "ghosts of the forest" as they are notoriously elusive and difficult to hunt.

When Ryan came home triumphant for the first time in a decade with two 800-pound bull elk stuffed into his pickup truck last October, I decided not to hide it from our 3-year-old son. I figured there was value in learning where his food comes from, and exposure to the reality of hunting from an early age might be less traumatizing. The elk looked eerily lifelike, their eyes open, large heads still intact with jagged antlers sticking out of the back.

"Why is Sven in the back of Papa's truck?" Levi asked, referring to the reindeer character in the movie *Frozen*.

I calmly explained Papa hunts for elk, that those are real animals, that they are in fact dead, and that we planned to eat them. Levi shrugged it off, his young brain shutting down the complexity of such an idea, as well as the challenges it might pose to the human conscience.

We had enough meat to last over a year: tenderloin, ground meat, sausages, rump roast, and more. Though much leaner, elk can be used for almost any beef recipe. Whenever I host a special meal, especially for friends or family from out of town, I go straight for elk.

For a really special meal, I go for the backstrap, the most tender and flavorful cut of elk, maybe with raspberry jalapeño jus that I let the meat marinate in all day. I'm lucky my kiddo will eat just about anything, but for picky eaters I can serve ground elk as a simple patty on a bun, as taco filling, baked into lasagna, or in meat sauce with spaghetti.

Levi might be too young to understand why we're eating Sven for dinner, but my parents—East Coasters who retired to Steamboat

Springs and have never so much as caught a fish—get squeamish around the idea of killing your own food.

"Yikes," was all my dad had to say when regaled with stories from Ryan's hunt, a plate of elk fajitas in front of him. Mom commiserates with facial expressions that require no words, a grimace so exaggerated it's Oscar worthy.

Still, they didn't hesitate to eat it. I like to think they feel some pride for their son-in-law having the prowess to pull the trigger, and an appreciation for food harvested only a few miles from our family table.

I suppose what defines local cuisine is food made from local ingredients, with flavors inspired by local culture and lifestyle. By my own interpretation, Colorado cuisine is wild, flavorful, and healthy—just like us mountain folk. 🍷

Ali Margo is a freelance writer who lives in Basalt with her family and two pugs. She also feels bad for the elk, but is grateful for the year's supply of meat.



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**Meat and Cheese Restaurant
and Farm Shop**
meatcheese.avalancheaspen.com

Plato's at the Aspen Meadows
aspenmeadows.com

Prospect at the Hotel Jerome
aubergeresorts.com

SO Café
aspenartmuseum.org

Spring Café
springcafeaspen.com

The Monarch
monarchaspen.com

RESTAURANTS, SNOWMASS VILLAGE

**The Crêpe Shack
by Mawa's Kitchen**
thecrepeshack.com

TORO Kitchen & Lounge
viceroysandresorts.com

RESTAURANTS, DOWNVALLEY

Brass Anvil
brassanvilcarbondale.com
Carbondale

Craft Coffee House
facebook.com/craftbasalt/
Basalt

Dos Gringos Burritos
dosgringosburritos.com
Carbondale

Fatbelly Burgers
fatbellyburgers.com
Carbondale

Free Range Kitchen & Wine Bar
freerangebasalt.com
Basalt

**Landmark Cafe at
The Way Home**
wayhome.co/dine
Carbondale

Phat Thai
phatthai.com
Carbondale

**Riviera Supper Club and
Piano Bar**
rivieraglenwood.com
Glenwood Springs

Silo
silocarbondale.com
Carbondale

The Kitchen at Ironbridge
ironbridgeclub.com
Glenwood Springs

True Nature Organic Café
truenaturehealingarts.com
Carbondale

WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS

Farm Runners
farmrunners.com
Hotchkiss (Distributing to Roaring
Fork Valley, North Fork Valley,
Grand Valley, Uncompahgre
Valley, Telluride, Crested Butte,
and Gunnison.)

LOCAL FOOD MARKETS

Mana Foods, Carbondale
970-963-1137

**Meat and Cheese Restaurant
and Farm Shop, Aspen**
meatcheese.avalancheaspen.com

Roxy's Market & Café, Aspen
roxysmarket.com

**Skip's Farm to Market,
Basalt/Silt/Fruita**
skipsfarmtomarket.com

The Beat, Carbondale
thebeatgrocer.com

**The Station by Farm Runners,
Hotchkiss**
farmrunners.com

CHEFS & CATERERS

Eat {Provisions}
icookyoueat.com

Epicure Catering
aspen-epicure.com

Field 2 Fork Kitchen
field2forkkitchen.com

Forage Sisters
foragesisters.com

Harvest Roaring Fork
harvestroaringfork.com

Naked Food / Aspen Chefs to Go
aspenchefstogo@gmail.com



Members of the Stapleton family unload hay from a horse-drawn sled to feed cattle on the Stapleton Ranch, circa 1915. Aspen Historical Society, Vagneur Collection.

Making Hay

During mining era and beyond, hay was an important Aspen-area crop.

By Eliza Burlingame

“Never lose sight of the value of a hay patch,” advised the *Aspen Democrat-Times* in October 1912. “Even if it is small, it is worth more than other farm crops; indeed, a necessity unless much money and time are to be lost.”

Around the turn of the 20th century, hay—grown in the summer months while herds grazed in alpine meadows—fed livestock throughout the winter and provided a potential cash crop.

From Owl Creek to Brush Creek and Woody Creek up to Snowmass Creek, a handful of farmers and ranchers remained as silver mining came to an abrupt halt around 1893. Families who had been supplying the boom town became a steadying economic force during the next several quiet decades. The area’s glacially formed landscape that had allowed for prosperous mining enterprises was also ideal for agriculture: Fertile soil in U-shaped valley bottoms allowed for crop cultivation and livestock forage, and the Roaring Fork River and its tributaries fed irrigation ditches.

An 1885 article in the *Rocky Mountain Sun* described the area as offering “particular advantages to the ranchers, as it is so near to the Aspen market.” The railroad became a lifeline that broadened the market, enabling ranchers to ship their crops as far as Denver and even the East Coast.

The same article described the Stapleton ranch in Owl Creek as “one of the finest in the valley,” calling the Stapleton patriarch one of “the most prosperous ranchers.”

Ranching families relied on all hands to succeed in the high-stakes, high-altitude climate. Children provided free labor; women supplemented ranch incomes with vegetable gardens, dairies, and other goods for sale. Neighbors often pitched in to help with strenuous projects and significant harvest efforts. With a short growing season and long, cold winters, these hearty folks often depended on knowledge from similar conditions experienced in their central and northern European homelands.

Potatoes and oats were foodstuff staples, and smaller-scale vegetable and fruit production rounded out harvests. However, livestock, especially cattle, proved profitable—and thus, hay was essential. Ranches put up hundreds of tons of hay each year. With one cow consuming about three tons of hay per winter, the Vagneur family ranch, for example, needed about 900 tons of hay to feed its optimum herd.

Livestock ranches with rare surplus would split hay harvests with neighboring operations or store for the following winter. Any hay sold for profit fed the community’s countless horses, cattle, burros, sheep, and pigs, while supplementing ranchers’ incomes. Ranchers would occasionally put out hay for hungry elk during deep snowfalls, whether out of the goodness of their hearts, or through government subsidies. This tradition, alongside a vibrant agrarian legacy, continues today. 🍷

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