

## Farmers help bed and bread clubs dish up fresh foods

*Elise Oberliesen, freelance writer from Colorado*

FRASER, COLO—Melting snow and the seasonally retired chairlifts in the Winter Park and Fraser area oft bring skiers and snowboarders to that sad juncture when it comes time to stow away bulky gear into closets and sheds. And that last ski train, with its familiar whistle, chugs out of town until next season.

Hey, that just means veggie season heating up! Soon the guests at Wild Horse Inn Bed and Breakfast can delight in fresh foods huddled up on their plates. With salad bowls bursting in spring mix or delicately arranged roasted beets with olive oil a-drizzle, guests will soon enjoy sweet creations and revel in knowing much of it is locally grown.

Innkeeper Christine French has a few spring time favorites. “I love the arugula, and fresh strawberries. Early spring veggies come in around May; we love spinach time!,” said French, who owns the 10-room inn with husband John. Nestled in the pines, the inn is located in Fraser, Colorado, near the world-renowned Winter Park ski area, Sol Vista and nearby western entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park.

What will this year’s harvest bring? That depends, says the inn’s chef Dace Voit, as he refers to the harsh growing season reminiscent of mountainous farming. Mother Nature has final say on the season’s bounty. Voit said produce runs from local farmers, Carol and Joe Morales shuffle in from about May to October or November. “The growing season is much shorter than on the Front Range and on the planes,” said Voit. “It depends how long winter lasts.”

Located on the northwestern slope of Colorado, the Morales run Morales Farms Inc., on their 176 acre farm located in Granby, Colorado. Why the couple, in their upper years, continue this labor of

love that supplies fresh locally grown vegetables to 50 area restaurants, including the inn, has to do with the pleasure it brings them. No small undertaking, but rather an impressive effort with great purpose, farming affords the couple a knowing that they’ve done their part to sustain a community with wholesome fresh veggies.

At about 8,300 feet, the Morales are intimately connected to the word challenge. The harsh environment has brought many lessons, says Carol Morales. “We’ve had our successes and our failures due to the environment,” she said. We can lose the whole crop in one cold night.” Although it’s not certified organic, Morales Farms follows strict guidelines and Carol said they produce their vegetables naturally.

Innkeepers like the Frenches who work directly with the farmer have a better chance at pleasing even the pickiest of palates. “Foodies comment that they love the foods we use,” French said. “It’s important to use fresh foods because that’s what makes the food stand out.”

The chef is keenly aware of what it takes to bring high quality to the cuisine and to the customer. When possible, Voit prefers working with a farmer over a purveyor because he knows he can put together a better tasting menu. “If I have an option of working with Carol, I do,” said Voit. To punch up the flavor, Voit said he stocks up on Carol’s fresh tarragon every chance he gets. “I try to buy it and use it up,” he said.

When people stay at the inn they that want to know that the quality is good, said Voit. Customers can quickly size up the value of their accommodations when the foods burst with flavor and freshness. “Her cabbage is probably the best, it has a sweetness to it,” said Voit. “It’s not a taste easily found

at the local grocer,” he said.

Carol gets to know her customers personally, whether she delivers fresh zucchini, swiss chard, or sugar snaps. It requires her to manage the finer details. And she enjoys the challenge of giving area chefs exactly what they need. “Having an intimate relationship with the chef, [knowing] whether they want beets the size of golf balls or turnips the size of a softball,” said Morales.

Voit likes working with Carol’s spinach. He said it has a rare quality about it. “The mineral content in the soil lends itself to a real Earthy flavor,” Voit said. “The leaves are hearty because of the harsh climate and they stand up better in the cooking process.”

### **Waking up with flavor**

Imagine waking up to the dancing aromas of ginger pumpkin pancakes or orange stuffed French toast. Soon enough, your taste buds will know all about immediate gratification. “Breakfast is not to be missed around here,” said Christine French. Her husband John does most of the breakfast cooking. And his specialty is called, “John’s Famous Breakfast Potatoes,” said French. Get ‘em while they’re hot, they may disappear!

John sautéed the dish in olive oil, fresh garlic and onion, garlic salt, Korean black pepper, and sea salt to give the dish its expressive flavor. “In the summer when there’s fresh herbs, he uses Rosemary and Thyme,” Christine said.

### **Want to sleep in?**

No problem. Just order a picnic basket and French will have it delivered right to you, complete with cereal, fruit and baked goods. In the basket you may delight in the yummy white chocolate raspberry muffins, cinnamon rolls or lemon scones.

Besides wonderful cuisine and cheerful hospitality, the inn won’t disappoint. Upon arrival the beauty

and fortitude steeped in the rugged mountains will jumpstart tired bones after walking through the welcoming doors. Sturdy construction and the 400-year old logs wrap the mountain lodge from floor to ceiling. High-rise ceilings may have you searching for a long rope to swing from ceiling post to ceiling post like Tarzan.

Each room, with unique flair is within themed décor. With wild horses in mind you will find rooms appropriately named, from Buckskin, to Palomino, or my favorite, the Appaloosa. Décor jostles between rustic mountain flair to signature Santa Fe styling. And with a look that feeds the eyes the way the food feeds the palate, taking in each savory detail. The elements delicately juxtaposed make this space one of a kind.

For privacy seekers who desire a more undisclosed location, the property offers three cabins that peek out of the woodland surroundings. It makes a magical setting no matter the season. Cast against the jagged, giant Rockies, where sky and the land greet one another, in these parts, you will soon realize you’ve stepped right into God’s country.

Relaxing at the inn is not hard to do. Wary travelers won’t want to miss a chance to soak away the day’s stress in an authentic claw-footed tub, should you be lucky enough to get this room assignment. Otherwise, jetted tubs will do the job just fine. Regardless, rooms are nicely appointed with features that make the stay inviting. Bring a favorite read because the many fireplaces offer just the right grounds for snuggling into a book. Room and cabin rates vary, but French said prices range from \$150-275 per night.

*For more information visit them online at [www.wildhorseinn.com](http://www.wildhorseinn.com).*