

Feast Upon a Fan Favorite

Local bison offers big flavor and nourishment

BY AMY HIGGINS

San Luis Valley REC Board Corporate Secretary Stephen Valdez and his family have a long history of farm and ranch life. The family ran a commercial cow-calf operation in La Jara for several years before purchasing their first bison in 2017, putting Big River Bison on the map. Today it is a 1,500-acre hay production and bison operation.

“We take great pride in our practices and love the memories we are creating while doing so,” Valdez says. “It is important to us to ensure customers know exactly where their meat is coming from and how the animals were handled/raised. Our main goal is to keep improving and growing each year so that we will be able to continue this operation for generations to come.”

Bison meat is low in fat, and high in iron, protein, and Omega 3 and 6. In addition, there are no low-level antibiotics, hormones, drug residues or preservatives, Valdez says. This month, he shares bison chili recipes including this one shared with him by fellow San Luis Valley REC board member Creede Hargraves that have been a fan favorite at the local Colorado Farm Brewery. For more information and to purchase, visit bigriverbison.com.



DID YOU KNOW?

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Smoked Bison Red Chili

Recipe and photo by Creede Hargraves

- 6 dried ancho chilies, stemmed and seeded
- 6 guajillo peppers, stemmed and seeded
- 6 chipotle peppers, stemmed and seeded
- 2 pounds ground bison
- 2 large, sweet onions, diced
- 3 large jalapeños, seeded and diced fine
- 3 roasted poblanos, peeled, seeded and diced
- 3 (4 ounce) cans medium hot, diced green New Mexico chilies
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1/4 cup ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons Mexican oregano
- 1/2 cup ancho powder
- 1/2 cup red chili powder (Valdez prefers guajillo, if you can find it)
- 2 quarts beef or bison stock
- 2 (15 ounce) cans diced tomatoes
- 1 (15 ounce) can pinto beans, with liquid
- 1 (15 ounce) can black beans, with liquid
- 1 (15 ounce) can garbanzo beans, with liquid
- 1 (15 ounce) can red beans, with liquid
- 1 (3 pound) bison chuck roast, smoked, pulled apart, fat removed

Optional Toppings

- Queso Fresco, crumbled, to taste
- Cotija cheese, to taste
- Cilantro, chopped, to taste
- Green onions, to taste

Take the stemmed and seeded ancho chilies, guajillo peppers and chipotle peppers, rinse them off and then place in a saucepan with just enough water to cover them. Cook until they are rehydrated and fall-apart tender. Place the chiles and liquid they were boiled in into a blender and puree. Set aside the puree.

In a 12-quart stock pot, brown the ground bison, then add the chopped onions and cook until the onions are translucent. Add the jalapeños, poblanos and diced green chilies. Add all the spices. Add the 2 quarts of stock and bring to a boil. Add the diced tomatoes and all the beans. Return to a boil and let simmer for 30 minutes. Add the bison chuck and return to a boil. Add the chile puree. If you want more liquid, add more stock. If you want to increase the heat, add one 1/2 teaspoon cayenne at a time until the desired spice is achieved. Serve with corn muffins — Valdez opts for atole corn muffins.