

# PLANET JACKSON HOLE

## Cooking with Conscience

Chefs we love not just for how they cook, but also for how they care.

BY ANNIE FENN, MD

A few months ago, *The Planet* awarded Wes Hamilton Best Chef Championing Sustainability for the Best of Jackson Hole issue. We recognized Hamilton for his holistic approach to creating great food while taking care of his employees, striving to source ingredients locally, reducing food waste, and amping up the nutritional value of food at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort's Kids' Ranch.

Leaders like Hamilton have paved the way for a new generation of chefs in Jackson Hole turning heads not just for how well they cook, but for how much they care. Supporting local farmers and producers, these chefs are taking the food movement's mantra of eating locally and sustainably to a whole new level. By creating a family atmosphere within their kitchens, they are making the livelihood of their employees more sustainable. And by understanding how their food service impacts the community, they are helping solve our problems of food waste, excess trash, and food insecurity.

I asked a sampling of our chef community about how they put sustainability first, what they are psyched to cook right now, and the struggles of being a chef in a mountain town. Keep an eye on these chefs (and many more out there) as they continue to define what it means to be a cook who cares as much about his community as what's on your plate.

## Questions

1. Being a chef in Wyoming is especially tough 9 months of the year. How do you source ingredients seasonally in the depths of the Jackson Hole winter?
2. What are you most proud of when it comes to your foodie footprint, i.e.: the best choice you've made to put sustainability first?
3. What's the hyper-seasonal summer ingredient you are most into now?
4. How do you maintain a family atmosphere in your restaurant kitchen?
5. Is there a vegetable you consider totally under-appreciated? How should we prepare it?

### CHEF HOLLIE HOLLENSBE, THE KITCHEN



1. I think it's important to have a good relationship with your vendors. I keep in touch with them constantly to learn what products they carry seasonally and year-round. Now Vertical Harvest, which Fine Dining helps support and raise money for, will be a great way to get great fresh produce here in the winter, which I'm really looking forward to.
2. Our use of Carter Country beef. All of Carter Country beef is Black Angus, all natural, grass/corn feed, free range cattle. We buy whole cows from Carter Country so we get a variety of different cuts of meat that we can be creative with. It's a very exciting thing for us. On The Kitchen menu we serve as an entree, "Carter Country Steak," which gives us the freedom to switch up different cuts of meat throughout a season. Right now we are using a ribeye. When that's gone, we will switch to top sirloin, or filet, etc.
3. I know it sounds simple, but for me it's heirloom tomatoes. Tomatoes are best in August but are delicious June through September, too. Aside from the amazing flavor and nutritional value, there are so many varieties that all have such different flavors. To name a few: grape, cherry, yellow, golden, roma, hot house, heirloom, hybrid, beefsteak, better boy, mandarin, green... I like that each variety has its own flavor profile—some are sweet, some are fruity, some are more acidic, and some of them are combinations.
4. I frequently chat with my staff to make sure they feel happy and secure in their positions, and I never hesitate to praise my crew when they've done a good job. I also let my staff know that their ideas and opinions are important to me. We have a quote of the day on a white board that we update and change every day to allow staff to, well, speak their mind. One that Helen [my sous chef] put up was "You call it a one night stand, I call it an audition!" Yes, we keep it light and fun because let's face it—a kitchen staff is working when most other people are playing. When you work really hard for long hours at a time, having fun and laughing is always the best medicine. Oh and after a big push, I do high kicks and a little cheer for everyone.
5. Celery. First off, it's healthy, with loads of Vitamin K, potassium, Vitamin C and dietary fiber. It's also rich in flavor and can be used as a wonderful thickener in salsas and sauces. Try pan searing Roma tomatoes, celery, onions, jalapeno, garlic and salt and pepper until the onions turn translucent, deglaze it with some tequila, if you want to get fancy, and then blend it in a Vita-Prep, blender, or Cuisinart. It adds a wonderfully crisp flavor to the salsa, perfect for summer. In the winter I add large chunks of celery to stews, braised meats, or slow cooker meals. It absorbs flavor and holds up well for leftovers. **PJH**

DIGGING VALLEY'S RIP FOOD MO

