



# FOOD SYSTEMS

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

## Colorado Producers During COVID-19:

A closer look at

**James Ranch**

**Durango, CO**

[www.jamesranch.net/](http://www.jamesranch.net/)

*The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on many unexpected challenges to producers and food supply chains across Colorado. This fact sheet series provides an in-depth look at changes and adaptations experienced by commodity groups and individual producers.*

The James Ranch is a 450-acre family-owned ranch founded in 1961 that has expanded extensively from its initial cattle operation. The ranch now offers consumers 100% grass-fed beef, artisan cheese, whey-fed pork, raw milk, eggs, organic produce, flowers and herbs. They also operate a tree farm. The ranch hosts a fresh market and restaurant 7 days a week, with culinary offerings from their harvests. They also offer various tours and events, including a weekly winter “meet and eat,” where consumers can hear stories from regional farmers, ranchers and producers who provide products to the restaurant and market.

Since agriculture was designated an [essential business](#) at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the James Ranch has continued its daily operations. The business has, however, seen a shift in consumer demand from state and regional sales to more localized sales.



*The James Ranch Market offers organic produce, and local artisan products from other farmers.  
Photo courtesy of James Ranch*



*James Ranch Red Angus beef cattle feed on low lignin grasses and clovers and gain 2-3 lbs/day. Photo courtesy of James Ranch*

### **COVID-19 Impact**

The James Ranch has experienced little disruption in its supply chain because they produce most of their own inputs. As a 100% grass-fed operation, they use no chemicals or fertilizers, and their feed inputs are minimal.

They purchase extra hay to sustain cattle only during the winter months. As of June 2020, none of the ranch's employees have contracted COVID-19. However, Becca James, who runs the ranch's dairy and cheese operation with her husband, said that preventing disease transmission has added an extra layer of work in terms of cleaning and sanitation. Most of their interactions with the public occur at their fresh market and restaurant, so they have focused heavily on improving practices at those venues.

“The sanitation protocols and limiting the number of people in the market and restaurant add complexity,” James said. “The customer service aspect is tricky, because some people are much more concerned than others, so we've been dealing with a wide range of attitudes towards the precautions we have put in place.”

Market sales have shifted for the ranch. James stated that when the pandemic started, sales from the Denver-based customers dissipated, and the ranch's restaurant and cheese sales decreased. Initially, the restaurant was open to the public for outdoor seating, but eventually the health department closed such venues amid COVID-19 concerns. On the other hand, the ranch has seen an increase in retail sales from local customers at their on-farm market and in the natural food stores that sell their products in Durango. They have also experienced a significant increase in beef sales to local consumers, and James says the ranch ran out of some cuts of meat in July, but are now fully restocked.

### ***Looking towards the future...***

“People are really wanting local food security,” James said. “They want to know where their food is coming from, and they are stocking up.”

Although there have been some shifts in demand from the pandemic, it has created the opportunity to help customers value local food security. The ranch has seen increases in meat and produce sales as Americans were initially forced to cook and eat at home.

“I think this pandemic has shown us that a decentralized food system is, in fact, a more secure food system,” James said. “If people can support local farmers and ranchers, it will benefit their core community in a big way, and not just economically.”

-

See more 'Voices from the Field' stories at  
[foodsystems.colostate.edu/covid19/voices-from-the-field/](https://foodsystems.colostate.edu/covid19/voices-from-the-field/)

*This article was written by Sarah Ehrlich, Martha Sullins, and Becca Jablonski.*