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Harris Ranch: Pioneering the Farm to Fork Experience

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By V. Sheree Williams

This holiday or whenever you are feeling the urge to drive from San Francisco to Los Angeles or vise versa, here is one road trip stop suggestion, Harris Ranch. Located in the agricultural town of Coalinga, Harris Ranch is a well known destination for anyone needing a bit to eat or wanting a great place to stay as a way of breaking up the city to city adventure.

Established in 1937 as Harris Farms, each year thousands of visitors take a little detour off Highway 5 to dine at the Harris Ranch Restaurant, grab some treats for the road from the bakery or a stock up on the company's award-winning beef from its full service meat counter. As one of the largest fully integrated beef producers in the Western U.S, Harris Ranch's beef is by far some of the best that you will ever experience whether at one of the restaurants or out of the grocery store. Brad Caudill, vice president of marketing, says "50 years ago the Harris family had a vision that they wanted to be the West's premier brand of quality beef – and that dedication to quality and consistency is as strong today as ever."

Harris Ranch takes great pride not only in the end product but the entire process of producing beef that is natural, a cut above USDA standards and most importantly made from cattle that has been humanly and sustainable raised. This is not only a requirement of Harris Ranch but of its network of ranching partners who are part of the "Partnership for Quality (PQ)" program.

A recent tour of the restaurant with executive chef Anthony Hagans opened my eyes to just the amount of teamwork it truly takes to keep this well-oiled operation that serves an average of 1,500 entrée a day going. Produce from Harris Farms, which covers 17,000 acres and grows 35 different commodities, was visible in the prep and storage areas and essential in providing a true farm-to-fork experience. "Since we first opened Harris Ranch Restaurant in 1977, we have proudly been featuring our premium Harris Ranch beef and fresh-from-the-farms vegetables, fruit and nut crops on our seasonal menu. I guess that makes us a real pioneer in the whole "farm-to-fork" movement which is so popular currently," says Caudill. Crops of almonds, grapes, pistachios, oranges, garlic, asparagus, onions and more all make their way into the kitchen and on the menu throughout the year.

Although this beef country, not to worry, the restaurant offers a selection of delicious options that include chicken and seafood as well as vegetarian. So the Grilled Chicken Breast with Italian Salsa & Fresh Mozzarella might be right up your alley as well as the Mountain Oysters and the Crab Cakes & Grilled Lisbon Lemons. But if you are a beef lover and have room for steak, be sure to check out the Hickory Smoked Salt & Brown Sugar Rubbed Ribeye with Whiskey Butter which is 14 ounces of juicy perfection or the Osso Bucco Short Rib with Blueberry BBQ Sauce & Warm Spinach Salad. Pair any of the entrée selections with a glass of Harris Ranch wine and you have turned this stop over into a first class dining experience that just happens to be off the beaten path.

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Finish off with a dessert recommendation from one of the employees who most likely has been with Harris Ranch for more than 20 years and therefore knows the menu backwards and forwards.

After dining and if you decide an overnight stay would also help with the recharge process, walk over to Harris Ranch Inn right there on the property for an available room. Enjoy a dip in the pool, a spa treatment at one of the three spas or a workout in exercise room. Yes, it is truly one of the most relaxing stops you'll ever experience while on the road.

Lastly, be sure take a quick visit to the Country Store for an assortment of gourmet foods and souvenirs and then drive over to the Harris Ranch service station that sells more than 3.5 million gallons of fuel annually to fill up and be on your way.

This Fourth of July and Labor Day, have your own farm-to-fork experience at home by stopping by the Beef to Go Kiosk July 4-7 and August 30 – September from 11 am – 5 pm for deals on a variety of quality steaks as well as produce at its small farmer's market. For more details, click here to get the scoop on Cuisine Noir's blog, The Culinary Scoop.

Try these Harris Ranch recipes for Korean BBQ Short Ribs and Grilled Skirt Steak Summer Salad.

For high resolution photos, POP materials or to arrange an interview with Harris Ranch Beef, please contact Brad Caudill at Brad.Caudill@HarrisRanch.com or by phone: 800.742.1955

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