

Eaton ranch will share way of life with guests

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Tucked into the warm and peaceful folds of Wawawai Canyon sits Eaton Ranch; a fifth generation ranch that prides itself on living off the land and raising natural, grass-fed beef.

In July, the Eatons will add a new feature to their ranch as they open up a season ranch guest house for people to experience what it is like to live in the canyon, eat in-season foods and beef free from hormones, antibiotics and steroids. They use the term "season ranch" to signify experiencing the seasons through nature and local foods.

"People can kind of live off the land," said Nikki Eaton who oversees the new venue. While her husband Joe manages the cattle, Nikki is preparing to open the ranch and land for the enjoyment of others.

"I love people. I would love to bring people here," she said.

In the past, people have expressed a desire to see the Eaton's home and the area in and around Wawawai Canyon. Natural springs feed small creeks that water the fruit trees and berry bushes that grow untended. There are abundant birds, insects and wildlife with various opportunities for hiking and proximity to the Snake River.

The land to food connection is very important to the Eatons. Nikki decided she wanted to share that connection and the wholesomeness of the lifestyle with others. Thus, the idea of the season ranch was brought up.

Down a dirt and gravel lane, past free-roaming chickens, an old swine barn and a pen of Angus and Charolais cows and calves, backed up against a stand of trees along a spring-fed creek sits the guest cabin. The cabin came mostly pre-assembled from Birky's Better Built Barns in Spokane.

The 12 x 20 foot cabin has a six foot porch and will fit four adults or a single family. The bathroom facility sits separate, a short hop from the cabin.



Guest Cabin on the Eaton Season Ranch at Wawawai Canyon.

"It's just cool," Eaton said, "you can have quite the little wonderland."

Guests at the Eaton Season Ranch are given local food to prepare for their meals. Eaton supplies foods from the herd, garden and canyon. What she doesn't have, she gets from local stores and businesses, some as close as a neighbor's organic garden or Wawawai Canyon Winery.

"I think it's great to get it as fresh as you can," she said. Items such as milk and bread she plans to buy from the local co-op. "We like to support the local (economy)."

Especially for families with children, Eaton will include items such as tuna fish for sandwiches and mac and cheese, but for the most part she wants to keep it as local and fresh as possible.

"Natural if not organic."

The season ranch will offer more than a taste of the local agriculture. The Eatons will give guests the opportunity to try ranch lifestyle if they so chose.

"People can come and do wrangling activities," Eaton said.

In the winter months while the cows are at the ranch in Wawawai Canyon, guests can help with various chores from pitching hay, riding, roping, mending fences and, if the timing is right, watching calves being born.

In the summer the herd is moved to grassland pasture around Harvard and Emida, Idaho, with possibly only a few stragglers staying in the canyon for a time. Guests may not get as much of a taste for ranch life at this time of year, but there are still plenty of opportunities for the outdoorsman or naturalist. The Eaton's 3,000 acres in the canyon offer plenty of chances for hiking, boating, swimming and fishing.

Even when the cattle are away there are eggs to collect and chores to be done. Children are welcome to pick fruit and play with the animals and the Eatons' children, Molly 7, Samantha, 4, and Clayton, 2.

Eaton Season Ranch will be open all year round except for October hunting season. The first guests are already booked for mid-July. Near the end of July, Eaton is planning a shindig for people to see what the ranch is all about. August 12 they will be part of a ranch tour that is open to the public.

www.eatonseasonranch.com