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Grow

## Bison-ranch byproduct is a gardener's loam on the range



By **Kristen Browning-Blas** *The Denver Post*

One of the byproducts of raising bison is huge piles of ... buffalo poop.

For most of their lives, the shaggy beasts at Diamond Tail Ranch graze on wild grasses, embodying a complete food-to-fertilizer circle.

But once they come in for "finishing," the chips can pile up in the feedlot.

"Yeah, they generate a lot of waste," says Scott Butcher, manager of Diamond Tail Ranch in northern Colorado. He oversees more than 700 bison cows and their calves on the ranch in the Laramie River Valley.

Even though the animals fight fences the way a toddler struggles against sitting still at a restaurant, they spend up to 120 days penned and fattening up before they are sold for slaughter.

Mike Duncan, whose family has owned the ranch since 1979, saw potential for profit in the poop. Rather than letting it get into nearby water sources or having it hauled away, he learned to compost the chips into what he calls "America's first fertilizer."

To help leach out salts that would burn the roots of garden plants, the buffalo chips are mixed with wood chips and left to compost for a year in pyramid-shaped piles 200 yards long and 6 feet tall. The finished compost is then sifted to remove debris, packaged and marketed as BuffaLoam, a bacteria-free, all-natural compost.

After about four years of large-scale composting on the ranch, Duncan is marketing BuffaLoam to home gardeners in local garden shops and natural-food stores. A 2-pound bag is about \$4; an 8-pound bag is \$12.

Highlands Garden Center nursery manager Patrick Merz recommends BuffaLoam for indoor and outdoor use. The center uses it as a soil amendment for tomatoes and house plants.

"It's the only one that's buffalo-based," says Merz, who says he carries the product because it's local and affordable. "I'd say it's equivalent to earthworm castings, even a little better."

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### Where to buy BuffaLoam

**Country Fair Garden Center**, 2190 S. Colorado Blvd., 303-757-4949

**Highlands Garden Center**, 8080 S. Holly St., Centennial, 303-694-1782

**Highlands Ranch Ace Hardware**, 9579 S. University Blvd., Highlands Ranch, 303-683-6300

**Nick's Garden Center**, 2001 S. Chambers Road, Aurora, 303-696-6657

**Paulino Gardens**, 6300 N. Broadway, 303-429-8062

**The Flower Bin**, 1805 Nelson Road, Longmont, 303-772-3454

**Sturtz & Copeland Florists**, 2851 Valmont Road, Boulder, 303-442-6663

**Vitamin Cottage Natural Grocers**, various locations

**Whole Foods Belmar**, 444 S. Wadsworth Blvd., Lakewood, 303-935-5000

Free-Range bison thrive at Colorado's Diamond Tail Ranch. There, they feed on native grasses. The byproduct goes into BuffaLoam plant food. [buffaloam.com](http://buffaloam.com)

