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13

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15

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DIG INTO THESE STORIES:

- 2 **PASTURE TO PACKAGE:** How cheese is made
- 3 **A CHEESE-LOVER'S GUIDE** to beer and cheese pairings
- 4 **SIX COOL DRINKS** to beat the heat
- 4 **MAKING THE CUT:** The art and science of distilling
- 5 **TASTE OF THE SEA:** An oyster flavor guide
- 5 Make **ETHICAL SEAFOOD CHOICES** with this advice
- 6 **FIGURING OUT FUNGI:** Flavor guide for cooking with culinary mushrooms
- 7 **THE BITTER WITH THE SWEET:** A Texas grapefruit farmer's organic journey
- 9 **GRAPEFRUIT CLEANING HACKS** worth the squeeze
- 9 **HOW TO GROW MICROGREENS** at home
- 10 **MAKING THE GRADE:** Old State Farms' pure maple syrup



- 10 Sweet and savory **RECIPES WITH MAPLE SYRUP**
- 12 Three restaurant-quality **PASTA SAUCE RECIPES** for the home cook
- 13 Nine tips for **COOKING PERFECT PASTA**
- 14 Learn why **FARM-FRESH EGGS** are best
- 15 Maxie B's bakes the **OLD-FASHIONED WAY**



14



KEVIN DIETZEL bonds with new calf gRand and her mother, Gerhild.

The art of 21st-century cheese production at Lost Lake Farm

BY HEATHER K. SCOTT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHRYN GAMBLE

About an hour north of Des Moines near the town of Jewell, Iowa, and perched along the banks of a lake drained in the late-1890s, Kevin and Ranae Dietzel's 80-acre farm is edged by a tall stand of 100-year-old oaks. Standing in a tiny patch of chilly, mid-afternoon sun, a thermos in hand, Ranae shares that the long-gone lake is the inspiration for Lost Lake Farm's name.

The Dietzels both come from farming backgrounds; in fact, Ranae's parents live in the same county on the hog farm where she grew up. Their Radcliffe, Iowa, homestead is where the Dietzels' first cow and namesake of their award-winning Ingrid's Pride cheese now enjoys a well-earned retirement. "She's so fat," says Ranae with a smile, and one of her two children happily nods a knit-capped head in agreement. "My parents love her."

A cheesemaker who farms, or a farmer who makes cheese?

The Dietzels have always wanted to live this life, but farming is expensive and complex, more so if you're starting fresh. But, when these two put their heads together, the result was an impressive combination of skills and backgrounds. Ranae holds a Ph.D. in sustainable agriculture and is an agronomy data scientist for Syngenta in Slater, Iowa. Kevin has a B.A. in biology, has worked with Cornell University as a soil research technician, and was grazing coordinator for Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Today, Kevin is able to devote himself full time to farming and cheesemaking. "It's a constant push-and-pull," he says of the work. "Am I a cheesemaker who farms? Or, a farmer who makes cheese?" Most days, he gravitates to the latter.



Lost Lake Farm's wide selection of cheeses includes Camembert, Emmentaler, Cheddar and Lost Lake Blue.

From the ground up: Pasture and nutrition philosophies

"We may not be certified organic, grass-fed, natural or any other labels you find on food. But we do follow our own rigorous standards," says Kevin of the farm's field philosophy. With

the land we live on," he says contemplatively, before cracking a smile and adding, "Besides, weeds aren't necessarily bad. The cows like them, especially the dandelions."

Lost Lake Farm's pastures are covered in seven core species of plants — a diverse mix of perennial grasses, legumes and forb that all contribute to the Dietzels' complex cheese varieties and flavors. They don't till, use pesticides, or employ synthetic fertilizers (their cows take care of that job).

Living in Iowa means the farm's 100% forage-fed cows graze about seven months out of the year. When the muddy earth firms up and fields are established, Kevin practices rotational grazing and will move the herd twice daily, giving the cows fresh greens and keeping them in select areas with the aid of portable electric fencing. The system also ensures the grass isn't overstressed and prevents the cows from picking up parasites.

Herd hierarchy & contented cows

"I think happy cows make tastier milk," Kevin quips. And today the herd is definitely happy. "This is great weather for cows — their sweet spot is 20 to 60 degrees." A pair of cows snuggle together on the ground nearby, contentedly chewing their cud and watching the Dietzel children play. Another coffee-colored New Zealand Frisian rubs her neck loudly and energetically on the fence. "These are our 'teenagers,'" says Ranae, as more cows stroll over. Not true teens, but almost as rambunctious, these are instead weaned calves, roughly eight months old.

At Lost Lake Farm, calves stay with their mothers longer than at standard dairy farms where they're often separated as



"I think happy cows make tastier milk," Kevin quips.

a cadre of enviable labels of his own — including being a state-certified agriculturalist or "staatlich anerkannter Landwirt," recognition he received through a biodynamic farming apprenticeship in Germany, Kevin is well-versed and passionate about regenerative, ecological farming. "Our goal is always to improve

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early as six weeks. Instead, calves are socialized into the larger herd before transitioning to this paddock. Kevin later mentions that during the weaning process, mothers share milk between their calves and the farm until the transition is fully made to farm-milking only.

Ranae points out two big, brown heifers with short horns and longer, fluffier coats in a separate area designated for milking cows. “Those two Brown Swiss are our newest cows,” she says. “There’s definitely a hierarchy here. We have a couple that think they’re in charge — and a few wild ones,” she adds, nodding back toward the younger calves. Most of the cows are raised on the farm from birth, and all 20 animals are free to roam outdoors as much as possible.

The farm’s approach is likely why these cows remain so healthy. “Vets don’t need to come often,” Kevin explains. Instead of pushing for high milk production quantities, the farm focuses on quality production from their animals and aims for minimal intervention — and maximum nutrition.

Cheese is a series of happy accidents

A farmer’s life can be hard, but farming in the Midwest is even harder. The hours are grueling, the work exhausting, and the weather can be brutal. But Kevin and Ranae seem to have found a comfortable working balance between tending the land, minding the animals, raising a family — and making and selling their own cheese.

Kevin’s journey to award-winning cheese-maker began at the kitchen table where he first started as a hobbyist, tweaking recipes from books and taking copious notes along the way. “Tasting and figuring out what I like — and making each process my own,” has been the key to Kevin’s process, and his success.

“Experimentation sometimes leads to happy accidents,” Kevin reports. This is how he discovered the recipe for Lost Lake Farm’s Emmentaler. Kevin has always taken good notes, which makes those preliminary happy accidents something he can go back to and replicate again and again. This process is what also led him to Lost Lake Farm’s first breakout recipe: Ingrid’s Pride, a cheese similar to mozzarella. A fast favorite, Ingrid’s Pride won Best in Show at the Iowa State Fair in 2018.

Although Kevin no longer makes Ingrid’s Pride (it’s a labor-intensive, stretched cheese), he continues to brainstorm and explore new ideas and reaches out to cheesemonger friends throughout the state for input. “Everyone in Iowa likes provolone and Cheddar, but I want to be a bit more creative,” he says. Striving to have cheese for every purpose, the farm currently makes Iowa Alpine, Emmentaler, a white Cheddar, Farmstead Feta, Lost Lake Blue, Camembert and Burrnt Oak. The latter of which is a Morbier-style cheese traditionally made by layering ash into the cheese — in this case, ash from a 200-year-old burr oak tree that once stood on their property.



Zen and the art of cheesemaking

The afternoon shadows lengthen as Kevin and Ranae talk about their milking parlor. The cozy, enclosed area comfortably houses four cows at a time, which Kevin milks every day, except on cheesemaking days when a part-time employee helps. The process takes about 30 minutes for each foursome. The milk is then stored in a large, refrigerated tank in the adjacent cheesery connected to the milking parlor.

It’s time for Kevin to check on cheese he started processing earlier this morning, and he leads the way past the milking stall, through a heavy door, and into the cheesery’s entryway. Here, he carefully takes off his coat and work boots and slips into a pair of clean, white rubber galoshes, a hairnet and a surgical mask before entering the cheesemaking room.

The room hums as Kevin begins scooping curd from a pasteurization vat into hoops set in stacked rows across a stainless steel table. Behind him, two large windows capture bucolic pasture views as several cows walk by. A steady dripping of whey punctuates Kevin’s speech as it drains into large white buckets just below. This precious liquid is collected and used to soak oats for the farm’s pigs.

“I’m working on an aged, stronger blue,” Kevin says, as he moves back and forth from the cheese vat to the worktable, ladling fresh curds into the molds. This process started before sunrise when Kevin first pulled milk from the tank into the cheese vat, and although already late-afternoon, he’ll continue processing this batch into the evening.

The farm uses only pasteurized milk for its cheese and employs an LTLT (low temperature, long time) process, which Kevin explains is slower and gentler on the milk, retaining flavor and nutrients. The cheese Kevin is “hooping” now will sit and drain for several days, before he moves it into plastic storage tubs stacked atop shelves nearby.

“You can make a great cheese, but how it’s preserved or packaged can make or break it,” he says while opening the door to the aging room. The space, not much larger than a walk-in closet, is carefully regulated for precise humidity and temperature levels. “The taste and texture of cheese can change so much over time — this can work for you or against you,” he adds while gesturing to the rows upon rows of cheese sitting on metal shelves.

This little room — seemingly the smallest space on Lost Lake Farm — holds a treasure trove of cheese, the result of the Dietzels’ years of experience and hard work. The sales from this room’s wares support day-to-day farm costs. In turn, the farm’s cows contribute to Kevin’s cheesemaking, building a beautiful and successful yin-and-yang balance.

“I always wanted to be a farmer,” Kevin confides, as he starts to hose down the floor of the cheesery. “But the whole reason we got into this life was to start a small dairy farm. I love being a farmer who makes cheese.” ●

PASTURE TO PACKAGE: HOW CHEESE IS MADE

“The beauty of farmstead cheese is that every batch is a little bit different,” says Kevin Dietzel of Lost Lake Farm’s cheesemaking process.

Based in north-central Iowa, about an hour north of Des Moines, Lost Lake Farm employs regenerative and ecological farming practices with their 80-acre farm and 20 dairy cows. A full-forage farm, the healthy natural diet of the farm’s cows contribute to Kevin’s and his wife Ranae’s award-winning artisanal cheeses.

As Kevin prepares a new batch of Lost Lake Blue, he shares his basic step-by-step process:

- 1 MILK PREPARATION AND PASTEURIZATION: To begin the cheesemaking process, Kevin initiates transferring the milk from the refrigerated milk tank via a pipe into a cheese vat. Once in the cheese vat, the raw milk is heated through an LTLT (low temperature, long time) process until it is pasteurized.
- 2 FERMENTATION AND ACIDIFICATION: Cultures are added to the milk to promote fermentation. Many cheesemakers use freeze-dried cultures for this stage; it’s the only way for a small producer to get the same reliable microbial strains in each batch. An important first step, no matter the type of cheese being made, acidification also prevents bad bacteria from growing during the cheesemaking process.



- 3 COAGULATION: Still very much a liquid, the enzyme rennet is added to acidified milk, transforming it into a semisolid. In this step, the curds, or the protein solids, are beginning to separate out from the whey, which is liquid.
- 4 CUTTING THE CURD: As the curds and whey continue to separate and ferment in their vat, a long knife or special curd-cutting tool called a cheese harp (much like a handled window screen with wider cross-hatching) is used to separate the curd into squares in order to create more surface area for continued drainage of the whey.



- 5 PROCESSING THE CURD AND DRAINING THE WHEY: Cut curds are cooked, stirred and washed, a process that continues to separate curds and whey. For a drier cheese, like a Cheddar, more time is spent in this step cooking and stirring. Softer cheeses, like Camembert, are barely processed or cut at all.
- 6 SALTING AND SEASONING: If salt was not added directly to the curd prior to processing, the cheese may be dry-salted during this step. Sometimes, if making wheeled cheese, the molded cheese is brined or rubbed with salt.

- 7 SHAPING: After the cheese is fully drained, salted and seasoned, additional shaping and molding take place.



- 8 AGING AND PACKAGING: Finally, the cheese is finished or aged. For some cheeses, ambient molds are added during aging which lend additional flavor to the cheese. The amount of aging prior to packaging depends on the type of cheese.

Pale ale and cloth-bound Cheddar

Coated in lard and then wrapped in cheesecloth so it can breathe while it ages, this very earthy, fruity cloth-bound Cheddar has a bit of blue mold, which adds a unique and slightly funky flavor and aroma.

Alluvial Brewing Company's Lutris Pale Ale from Ames, Iowa, with Bleu Mont Dairy's Bandaged Cheddar from Blue Mounds, Wisconsin



THIS CHEDDAR PLAYS WELL WITH STRONGER PALE ALES.



Hard apple cider and aged sharp Cheddar

With some minerality on the front end and a bit of sweetness on the back end, a dry hard apple cider works particularly well with an aged sharp Cheddar. For the best result, look for cider options that have just a kiss of sweetness and aren't too tart.

Eden Specialty Ciders' Harvest Cider from Newport, Vermont, with Shelburne Farms' two-year Cheddar from Shelburne, Vermont

"THE ENZYMES OF THE CIDER ARE AN IMPORTANT COMPLEMENT TO THIS CHEESE."

A cheese-lover's guide to beer and cheese pairings

BY HEATHER K. SCOTT • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHRYN GAMBLE

“Many people don't think of beer and cheese as an intuitive pairing, but the complexities are just as rich and varied as cheese and wine,” says Darren Vanden Berge, manager, cheesemonger and beer purchaser at The Cheese Shop in Des Moines, Iowa.

With so many interesting beers and cheeses to try, Vanden Berge offers some advice when it comes to pairing these complex and pungent flavors.

When looking for profiles that work well together, Vanden Berge focuses on two essential elements: complexity and intensity. The key is to find harmonious and balanced complementary tastes. “I like to find flavors that raise each other up,” Vanden Berge says.

The following suggestions will point you in the right direction. Soon, you'll be savoring pairings that you'll love.

Saison and washed-rind cheese

Historically brewed in oak barrels for farm-hands, saisons are the original wild ales. Complex and hoppy with a citrusy, herbal aroma, a saison's acidity and clean finish pair well with a soft, rich washed-rind cheese such as Muenster, Fontina or Époisses.

Crooked Stave Artisan Beer Project's Vieille Artisanal Saison from Denver, Colorado, with Jasper Hill Farm's Willoughby from Greensboro, Vermont



"THIS EARTHY AND SLIGHTLY PUNGENT CHEESE ALMOST HAS A PEANUT-BUTTERY NATURE."



Milk stout and blue cheese or triple-cream cheese

Matching a deep, rich stout with an equally robust cheese can be tricky. “For this pairing, both drink and cheese need a strong, bold flavor profile,” Vanden Berge says. “The chocolatey, aromatic nature of a stout blends well with the pungent-yet-velvety quality of blue cheese.”

Blue: Against the Grain Brewery's 35K Stout from Louisville, Kentucky, with Jasper Hill Farm's Bayley Hazen Blue from Greensboro, Vermont

Triple-Cream: Bell's Brewery's Special Double Cream Stout from Kalamazoo, Michigan, with Tulip Tree Creamery's Trillium from Indianapolis, Indiana

"SERVE THESE STOUTS SLIGHTLY BELOW ROOM TEMP - A WARMER GLASS WILL BE ROUNDER."

Husband and wife share experiences constructing EIGHT-BARN CHICKEN FARM

COLLIN SPLINEK
Fremont Tribune

Editor's note: This story first published in Summer of 2020 in Backbone.

For the Camenzinds, the chicken farm was perfect.

While Case Camenzind grew up on a farm and got a degree in business administration specializing in real estate and land use, his wife, Joscelyn, was raised in Omaha and has a love of animals, attending veterinary medical school for a year.

“This is kind of just, the shoe fits,” she said. “It's agriculture and animals, so it works for both of us.”

At the end of May last year, the Camenzinds' dream came true as their eight-barn chicken farm about 5 miles north of Fremont opened for operation.

The farm, which has been in the works since 2015, aims to provide the Lincoln Premium Poultry and Costco chicken plant in Fremont with two million chickens a year. The Camenzinds, who have been together since high school, live just east of the farm with their two young children.

“We were one of the first to know about it because the plant wanted to go on my dad's land just across the highway by Nickerson,” Case Camenzind said. “So we've been excited about it since Costco considered building out here.”

The first step for the barns involved looking at what fields the Camenzinds owned and which ones fit, Case Camenzind said.

“We tried to put a site just north of where we live where we can commute to our barns within a reasonable distance, but that site didn't go well, so we decided to move here north of Fremont to put together a site,” he said. “This location fit all the requirements, which there were many of.”

Although the Dodge County Planning Commission approved the farm with additional requirements in January 2019, the Dodge County Board of Supervisors voted 4-2 to reject the application after neighbors expressed concern.

Initially, the Camenzinds tried to get as many barns as they could in the site to use more manure. Compared to cow manure, chicken manure is much denser and requires less for the same job, Case Camenzind said.

“We were excited about the chicken side of it, but our motivation is the litter,” he said. “So we wanted to do the 10 barns, but the county and neighbors felt like 10 was too many in this spot, so we dropped a couple of

barns.”

But the next month, the hearing room was filled with supporters of the Camenzinds, including family members, friends and members of the Dodge County Cattle-men organization. The board unanimously approved the farm.

“Toward the end of the meeting, we asked all the supporters in the room to stand up, and three-quarters of the room stood up in favor of supporting us, so that was pretty powerful,” Case Camenzind said. “It was kind of hard for the supervisors to turn us down, I feel like, so that was awesome.”

Although the farm didn't change any water flow directions, the Camenzinds added 900 trees and shrubs around the site to create a vegetative environmental barrier.

With the farm approved, the Camenzinds met with an underground construction crew and the project began on Aug. 22, 2019. It was met with delays due to moisture after the flooding, Case Camenzind said.

Each barn, which is 600-by-63 feet, will have a minimum of about 42,000 chickens, totaling about 336,000 chickens per flock.

“It depends on the stocking density, which will change for each flock for us potentially,” Joscelyn Camenzind said.

After the buildings were constructed, the floors were laser leveled to prepare for the birds and the poultry litter treatment and wood shavings were put down.

“We do have two full-time employees, and then between Joscelyn and I, helping on the busy portions, which is generally the first 10 days of having your birds and the last two to three days of having the birds,” Case Camenzind said.

“It'll take all of us those days,” Joscelyn Camenzind added.

The farm will receive the birds when they're about 24 hours old, Joscelyn Camenzind said.

“When they come in, they will be in the center of the house, so 25% on the ends will be curtained off,” she said. “They will stay in the center of the house until they're about 10 days old, and then we open it up and they get the rest of the barn.”

With the baby chicks in the middle, the area will be kept at 90 degrees, tempering off to about 67 degrees when they're older, Case Camenzind said.

Each barn includes a series of high-tech sensors that can keep track of humidity, static pressure and carbon dioxide and ammonia levels. Case Camenzind said it can adjust the temperature and light based on



Joscelyn and Case Camenzind's on their chicken farm about 5 miles north of Fremont. The operation opened at the end of May 2020.

the age of the birds too.

“All of our barns are connected to the internet, so we can access each one of these barns from our phones and make adjustments from our phones if need be, and Costco has access to these as well,” he said. “These are scales that are in the barns, so the birds walk across the scales and that tells Costco kind of roughly how big the birds are so they know when they're picking them up.”

Costco can also monitor when they need to send more feed to the farm by using scales on the feed bins, Case Camenzind said.

The first 10 days for the chickens are more labor-intensive, as they have to get the chicks accustomed to the feeders and water, Case Camenzind said.

“After 10 days, then it's just going to be a matter of babysitting,” he said. “They will have the whole barn off at that point, but we will section it off into quarters just to keep them from flocking together real bad.”

“And that way, it's easier for us to monitor how much water is being consumed in each quarter of the building, make sure that they're getting enough feed too as well,” Joscelyn Camenzind added.

When the chickens are about to reach their weight, which is about 6.25 pounds for a rotisserie, Costco will schedule a pickup time with the farm, Case Camenzind said.

“We don't know exactly how the eight-barn pickup is going to go, but they're supposed to start picking up around midnight for the sites,” he said. “And then as far as

how long it takes or how many barns they're going to pick up at once, we don't know exactly yet.”

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Case Camenzind said he was disappointed they were unable to hold an open house for the farm.

“I really wish that we would have been able to show this much more to the community, as we've only been able to show it to the closer neighbors that we have contact with,” he said. “So we're sorry that we didn't get to do a big open house, but it is what it is.”

Even with the farm's setbacks in the planning stages, Joscelyn Camenzind said the process taught her an important lesson.

“I feel like, more than anything, with every goal that you set, there's always going to be some speed bumps in the road,” she said. “You just have to find a way to keep going, stand back up again.”

Case Camenzind also said the process has taught him resilience, with many parts being delayed.

“Before starting, there were some cost increases that were a little hard to swallow sometimes, but Costco stepped up on a lot of that,” he said. “But overall, Costco and Lincoln Premium Poultry have made us more aware that they're going to be a good company to work for.”

For Joscelyn Camenzind, she said she was just happy to work full-time in agriculture.

“Before this, we had been waiting and waiting and working toward this for a long time,” she said. “So this opportunity is life-changing for us.”



GRAPEFRUIT SHANDY

MOST BARS OR HOME MIXOLOGISTS can easily whip up this quick summer cocktail. Ben Heller, operations manager at 17th Street Barbecue in Murphysboro, Illinois, suggests pairing a quality beer with freshly squeezed lemonade.

Though a traditional shandy is typically half beer and half lemonade, Heller prefers the added complexity of grapefruit. A lager will suffice in this recipe, but Heller recommends a pale ale.

“A little bit of hops goes well with citrus,” Heller says. “Just make sure the beer and lemonade are cold before you pour them into a frosted mug.”

Myriad versions have been invented since this drink first appeared in the 1850s, so there are plenty of options, but this recipe couldn’t be simpler.

- 5 oz cold lemonade
- 1 oz freshly squeezed grapefruit juice
- 6 oz cold pale ale or lager beer
- lemon twist, for garnish

In chilled pint glass, stir together lemonade and grapefruit juice; pour beer on top. Serve cold with a lemon twist for garnish.



TERERÉ

ELIZABETH JOHNSON, chef and owner of San Antonio’s Pharm Table, discovered she loved yerba mate tea during her travels to South America. Especially popular in Paraguay and North Argentina, yerba mate has a caffeine-like effect and some beneficial antioxidants.

One typically sips the refreshing tea through a bombilla or filtered straw. If you don’t have a bombilla, steep tea in water and strain before adding to a glass.

- 1 pink or red grapefruit
- ¼ cup loose yerba mate tea
- 8 oz filtered water
- fresh mint and/or lemon verbena sprigs

With vegetable peeler, remove 1 long strip peel from grapefruit; place in large iced tea glass. Add tea to glass; tilt glass so that tea sits to the side. Place bombilla or filtered straw, if using, on opposite side of glass from tea. Fill glass with ice. Squeeze ½ cup juice from grapefruit, then pour into glass with water; add sprigs of herbs. Let steep 10 minutes before serving.

*** CHEF’S NOTE:** This traditional drink can be enjoyed throughout the day by continuing to add grapefruit juice and water to the steeped tea leaves.

In pitcher, add about 4 cups filtered water and infuse with grapefruit, lemon and/or orange slices and sprigs of herbs. Squeeze 2 cups grapefruit juice from about 3 grapefruits. Add 2 parts water to 1 part grapefruit juice to tea in glass, adding ice as needed.

OLD PAL

MYLES BURROUGHS, a Seattle bartender and owner of Bevy Co., has an affinity for the classics, especially when they’re made with quality whiskey. He enjoys paying attention to every detail required to create a balanced and smooth cocktail, down to best sugar for the job.

He says, “For a stirred cocktail, the goal is to avoid transferring heat to the contents inside the glass. Any insulated tempered or crystal glass will do the job, or a simple Mason jar will do the trick in a pinch.”

- 1 oz Campari
- 1 oz dry vermouth
- 1 oz rye whiskey
- lemon twist, for garnish

In a tall glass or Mason jar, add Campari, vermouth and whiskey, then fill with ice; stir vigorously 30 to 45 seconds or until very cold.

Strain into old fashioned or whiskey glass over 1 large ice cube. Garnish with lemon twist.



Sample these six summer sippers

PHOTOGRAPHY BY QUINN POER, RYAN HUMPHRIES AND ZACH STRAW



MOSCOW MULE

MARIKA JOSEPHSON, owner of Scratch Brewing Company in Ava, Illinois, says their ginger beer would stand out in a Moscow Mule. She adds that, because it contains alcohol, it isn’t as sweet as nonalcoholic versions, so some simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water stirred until sugar dissolves), might need to be added.

Customarily, this cocktail is served in a copper mug, and enhances the flavor. Others say it simply looks good with condensation

dripping down the shiny outside. Amy Mills, owner of the barbecue mecca 17th Street Barbecue in Murphysboro, Illinois, shares her recipe for the quintessential Moscow Mule.

- 2 oz vodka
- ½ oz freshly squeezed lime juice
- about 6 oz alcoholic or nonalcoholic ginger beer
- lime wheel, for garnish

Fill copper mug with ice. Add vodka and lime juice, then stir. Pour ginger beer on top; gently stir to combine. Top with lime for garnish.

SPARKLING GRAPEFRUIT GRANITA

PASTRY CHEF SOFIA TEJEDA of San Antonio creates the perfect spring and summer dessert recipe for a hot Texas day with this bright grapefruit granita. The blush pink adult slushy calls for any brut or dry pink sparkling wine, but Sofia prefers a Spanish cava.

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1 pinch salt
- 2 cups fresh pink or red grapefruit juice (from 3 to 4 grapefruit)
- 2 cups dry rosé sparkling wine such as cava

In small saucepan, combine sugar, water and salt; heat to boiling over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Pour mixture into 13-by-9-inch glass or ceramic baking dish. Stir in sparkling wine and grapefruit juice. Carefully place dish in freezer. Freeze 4 to 5 hours or until frozen, scraping granita with fork after 1 hour to break up ice crystals, then every 30 to 45 minutes or until granita appears slushy.



CHILL OUT
SERVE GRANITA IN CHILLED GLASSES OR BOWLS.

WHISKEY SOUR

BARTENDER AND OWNER OF SEATTLE’S BEVY CO., Myles Burroughs suggests, “If you’d like to elevate this Whiskey Sour, stir in a teaspoon or so of your favorite jam or marmalade, reduce the amount of simple syrup slightly and add a pinch of sea salt.”

- 2 oz bourbon whiskey
- 1 oz fresh lemon juice
- 1 oz simple syrup (equal parts cane sugar and water stirred until sugar dissolves)
- brandied cherry and lemon wedge, for garnish

Into cocktail shaker, add whiskey, lemon juice and simple syrup, then fill with ice; cover with lid and shake vigorously. Strain into old fashioned or rocks glass filled with fresh ice. Garnish with cherry and lemon wedge.



The art & science of distilling

BY JULIANNE BELL

There is a particular art involved in the distilling process that determines the bold flavors and unique aromas of the spirit in your glass. Although seemingly straightforward, this ancient method requires a touch of science paired with knowledge and practice in order to yield the high-quality flavors we enjoy in craft spirits like whiskey.

The process: Making cuts

The distillation process allows distillers to collect different chemicals according to their various boiling points. As the wash

(in the case of whiskey, a fermented grain-based liquid that is similar to beer) heats up in the still, it condenses and flows out into containers. Making cuts refers to the process of switching out the container collecting the distillate, separating it into four different stages: foreshots, heads, hearts and tails.

One of the hallmarks of a seasoned distiller is the ability to gauge the right moment to transition between those stages. Distillers make a creative choice based on what flavors are desired in the final product and what style of spirit they’re making.

The foreshots

First to come out of the still are the foreshots, before the temperature reaches 175°F. The foreshots not only taste awful, but they are full of toxic chemicals such as methanol, so it’s crucial to separate them out.

The heads

Next up are the heads, which come out around at 175°F to 185°F. The heads contain traces of substances that can dramatically

affect the flavor of the finished product, so they’re set aside. In modest amounts, they might add some complexity to spirits like whiskey and gin.

The hearts

After the heads, it’s time for the hearts. The hearts usually evaporate between 190°F and 205°F, and are rich in ethanol and have the best flavor. If not cut soon enough, unwanted tastes, aromas and bitterness from the next stage, tails, could arise, so distillers will make the cut as early as possible to preserve the hearts’ purity.

The tails

Finally, at around 205°F, the tails condense out. Like the heads, these contain some unpalatable flavors, so they’re usually removed from the rest of the distillate. Because water boils at 212°F, the tails are mostly water and will dilute the rest of the spirit if not cut properly.

From here, the distiller can bottle the clear spirit unaged or add the distillate to



At the end of the distillation process, the clear spirit will be transferred to casks for aging. Photo provided by Westland Distillery.

casks, allowing the spirit to age for whatever amount of time is necessary to achieve the desired complexity.

The heads and tails, known as “feints,” can be discarded, but because the feints still contain some of that sought-after ethanol, they are sometimes recycled into a new batch of fermentation mash and re-distilled. ●



AN OYSTER FLAVOR GUIDE

Learn all about selecting, shucking and eating oysters

STORIES BY DEANNA FOX • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLER DARDEN

Had “Tex” Metcalf, the sales and logistics manager for Cherry-stone Aqua-Farms, is affectionately called an oyster sales “shaman and guru” by his colleagues because of his detailed knowledge of the oyster industry.

“There are four factors that help me recommend a particular oyster: appearance, regionality, flavor and ‘shuck-ability.” says Metcalf.

SHUCKED

Shucking – the act of prying open an oyster’s shell and freeing the muscle that keeps the oyster attached to the shell – is an art only perfected with plenty of practice. Expert shuckers can open a dozen oysters in roughly a minute, but for most, it is an arduous task that takes time. Having oysters that are easy to shuck means lower labor costs for wholesalers and restaurants looking to quickly serve oysters for hungry seafood enthusiasts.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A GOOD OYSTER

Oysters should be kept cold, but not submerged in ice or an ice-water slurry. When searching for an oyster, make sure they are nestled on top of ice or at least in refrigerated storage without sitting in water. Oysters should be closed tightly, and “too much cold or moisture can make them open up,” says Greg Coates, the hatchery manager at Cherry-stone Aqua-Farms. He suggests asking your fishmonger when the oysters came into their store and to avoid oysters that have been sitting for more than a week. To confirm the origins of the oyster, ask your fishmonger for the shellfish tag that would have come with the container of oysters when shipped to the store.

Oysters that come shucked should have a viscous, shiny liquid surrounding the flesh known as “liquor.” The presence of liquor lets you know that the oyster is freshly shucked. If the oyster looks dry or without any liquor, it’s been opened and shucked for a while, and you should avoid eating it.

KNOWING YOUR LOCALES

There are some identifying phrases and terms that relay the flavors of an oyster before you even taste it. Some oysters come from estuaries, locations where freshwater rivers and inlets meet saltwater bays or the ocean. These oysters will have a milder taste due to the lower salinity in the water compared to sea-harvested oysters, which will have a more prevalent salt flavor.

TRICKS FOR SHUCKING

Shucking an oyster with ease comes with practice, but you can get the hang of it with your first dozen. Wild oysters will generally have a thicker shell and can withstand an aggressive approach. Farm-raised shells may be thinner and delicate which can chip more easily, leaving hard, unpleasant deposits in the oyster.

Nestle the oyster with the deep cup-side of the shell face-down in a kitchen towel, holding it in your non-dominant hand. Start at the hinge of the oyster, where the shell is usually thicker. With a proper shucking knife, first use the tip, and then the broad side of the knife, to break the hinge until it pops open. If it seems too difficult to manage starting at the hinge, you can move slightly to the side of the hinge, then move towards the hinge to pry it open.

Carefully run the knife between the top and bottom shells to separate and dislodge the top shell, making sure to scrape the oyster muscle off the top half of the shell. Discard or recycle the top shell.

Loosen the adductor muscle which keeps the flesh secured to the shell. Some shuckers turn the flesh upside

Watch House Point – These medium-sized oysters are a brand of Cherry-stone Aqua-Farms. They are grown at Watch House Point on the Eastern Shore, near the sea, and have delicious saltiness with a crisp melon finish.

Misty Point – Misty Points are popular on raw bar menus along the Eastern Seaboard. They are known for being exceptionally plump with a sharp briny flavor as soon as they hit your tongue.

Chunu – Chunos pack a highly salty punch in a small package. Diminutive in size and popular on menus, Chunos are a smaller version of Misty Points.

Fanny Bay – These oysters from the waters of British Columbia are firm, mild and great for cooking.



“Factors such as weather and food availability contribute to an oyster’s growth spurts and shell thickness.”

down to present the round, plump side of an oyster. Be sure to maintain as much oyster liquor in the shell as possible.

HOW TO SERVE FRESH OYSTERS

Hardcore oyster aficionados will insist they be served as soon as possible after harvest, completely naked. A squeeze of fresh lemon or quick dash of hot sauce are common pairings, as well as traditional sauces, such as mignonette, cocktail sauce and rémoulade, which complement the oyster’s intrinsic sweet or acidic characteristics.

POPULAR OYSTERS TO TRY

While there are only five species of oysters cultivated in the U.S., there are dozens of varieties. Here is a sample of oysters more commonly found in North America.

Totten – Deeply cupped and the size of walnuts, these Northwest oysters are brightly flavored with a smooth, vegetal finish.

Glacier Point – These oysters are harvested off the Alaskan shore, offering a high salinity with a thick shell that make them stand out from other West Coast oysters.

Belon – Originating in Brittany, France, but cultivated in the U.S. as well, these have a bright minerality and soft texture.

Blue Point – Legendary along the Long Island, New York, coastline, Blue Points are juicy with a clean finish and hail from the Great South Bay.

Raspberry Point – The bright green shell of a Raspberry Point oyster from Prince Edward Island contains a meaty, dense oyster with salty-sweet flavor.

Pemaquid – The cold water of Maine’s Damariscotta River produces a bracing, assertive and salty oyster that is more plentiful in late spring and through fall.

Wellfleet – Wellfleets, from Cape Cod, Massachusetts’s shore, are classics often found at raw bars around the country. They are balanced, sweet and crisp with a salty tang on the finish.



How to make ethical seafood choices

Perhaps no edible industry is as contentious as seafood when it comes to sustainability. For decades, mislabeled fish, faulty information and bad harvesting practices have given seafood a bad rap in terms of ethics and environmental conservation, but new data reveals how aquaculture and wild harvesting have worked in tandem to introduce new environmentally friendly fishing practices.

Most of the debate has involved farmed seafood, which tend to generate high levels of carbon emissions and waste and require chemicals and antibiotics to guard against illness. Farmed fish, which are kept in ponds inland and in floating tanks or nets offshore, also create the risk of spreading disease or creating issues of invasive species when contaminated water breaches its confines or fish escape into the wild.

While there are many terms and labels indicating levels of sustainability, here are a few practices and indicators to look out for:

Buy local

Perhaps one the best sustainability measures a consumer can make is to buy food that is produced locally. For seafood and fish, that can be a challenge for those living inland, but purchasing seafood harvested by U.S.-based companies in domestic waters ensures that the seafood has been vetted by stringent regulations and protocols. Consider becoming a member of a Community Supported Fishery (CSF). Similar to Community Supported Agriculture programs, or CSAs, one provides an upfront payment for a regularly-scheduled seafood supply based on the local daily catch.

Look for the blue check

When seafood is marked with the “blue check” label from the Marine Stewardship Council, it indicates that the fish or shellfish you are about to purchase was raised or harvested using environmentally conscious practices. These fisheries go through stringent assessments before earning certification.



Keep it varied

Introducing many types of seafood into your diet encourages non-reliance on “popular” fish like cod, salmon and frozen tuna. Shellfish are more eco-friendly to harvest and have lower levels of mercury and heavy metals than larger fish.

Understand the lingo

There are a lot of terms that may suggest an “ethical” fish and shellfish choice. Some may be conflated or confusing, and some of them are purely for marketing purposes. “Responsible” and “sustainable” are different qualities placed on fishing practices which may lack legitimacy unless paired with certification. Sustainability in the seafood industry includes a practice that limits harvesting to avoid overfishing, reduces waste and carbon produced from the harvest, and provides a living wage to the people who harvest the seafood. “Organic” is a term limited to the feed and medications introduced to the fish or shellfish, but the term does not indicate sustainability.

Not all good choices come with stamps of approval

While sustainability certification cannot be bought, the process towards eco-certification is expensive and timely, and some of the most popular brands of seafood do not carry certifications because of monetary expense. Five years ago, the International Institute for Sustainable Development reported that only 14% of all worldwide seafood carries eco-certification. Buying from reputable fishmongers who have standing relationships with fisheries and aqua farms helps to ensure you are getting fish that supports smaller companies that follow practices as close to official certification as possible. ●

RÉMOULADE

“OUR RÉMOULADE is a classic recipe based on what you would find in New Orleans,” says Russell Molka, the restaurant manager of the Seafood Eatery at The Oyster Farm at Kings Creek. The Cape Charles, Virginia, restaurant serves rémoulade made by chef Linda Wessells alongside fried oysters.

- 2 cups mayonnaise
- ½ cup Creole mustard
- 1Tbsp chopped fresh parsley leaves
- 2 tsp Creole seasoning
- 2 tsp minced fresh garlic
- 1tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1tsp Tabasco sauce

- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- salt, to taste (optional)

In medium bowl, stir all ingredients except salt until well combined; add salt to taste, if desired. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour to blend flavors. Store rémoulade in tightly covered container in refrigerator up to 1 week.



COCKTAIL SAUCE

COCKTAIL SAUCE is a fairly simple recipe often presented glamorously. The version served at Rudee’s on the Inlet Restaurant & Cabana Bar in Virginia Beach, Virginia, is a must for the raw bar or fried oyster platter.

- 1 cup ketchup
- ¼ cup refrigerated prepared white horseradish
- 1Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1tsp Tabasco sauce

For best results, to blend flavors, prepare at least 1 day before serving. In medium bowl, stir together all ingredients until well combined. Store in airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 week.



Pictured from left, Cherry-stone Aqua-Farms oysters: Misty Points, Watch House Points and Chunu.

Figuring out fungi: Flavor guide for cooking with culinary mushrooms

BY JAMES NAPOLI
PHOTO BY CAITLIN ABRAMS

Many Americans grew up knowing mushrooms as either a topping on their pizza or an ingredient in a can of Campbell's soup. As more varieties of specialty and gourmet mushrooms are being cultivated for sale in grocery stores and farmers' markets than ever before, it's the perfect time to dive into the fascinating world of edible fungi. Here's a guide to the flavor profiles and uses for seven popular culinary mushrooms.

1 White Button

White buttons are the most widely consumed mushrooms in the United States. Compared to wild and gourmet varieties, white buttons have an extremely mild flavor. They're also versatile and easy to prep. They can be sliced raw and tossed in salads, pickled, marinated and grilled on skewers, breaded and deep-fried or cooked in gravies and stir-fries. Because of their mild flavor, white buttons are enhanced by delicate fresh herbs such as thyme, tarragon and oregano.



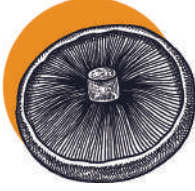
2 Cremini

Cremini, white button and portabella are all the same species of mushroom. White buttons are cultivated the earliest, portabellas are the largest and most mature, and cremini are a brown strain that are harvested in between the two extremes. Also marketed as baby bellas, cremini mushrooms are more dense and flavorful than white buttons, but they can be used interchangeably in recipes.



3 Portabella

A common ingredient in Italian cooking, portabella mushrooms are large, rich and meaty. They're often used to add depth to pasta dishes and sauces, and they can stand in for meat in tacos and fajitas. Hand-sized portabella caps make the perfect vegetarian substitute for meat patties. They benefit from a brief marination before placing directly on the grill or skewered for kabobs. Stuff them for a main-dish entrée; remove the stems, but don't discard them. Use them to season stock for a pan sauce, gravy, risotto or soup another day.



4 Shiitake

Depending on how they're prepared, shiitake mushrooms can have a delicate, meaty or crispy texture. Fresh shiitakes have a savory umami flavor and slightly smoky aroma. They can be eaten raw, but their caps tend to be tough, and their stems are very fibrous and woody, so remove these and use for stock or to ferment. They're well-suited to a range of cuisines and can be roasted, fried, sautéed, added to soups, thrown on a pizza or used as a meat substitute in vegetarian dishes.



5 Oyster

Oyster mushrooms have a tender consistency and mild, briny flavor that, when cooked, is slightly reminiscent of seafood. While they can be found in clumps on rotting logs and dead trees, they're also among the most commonly cultivated mushroom varieties. Oysters are not the best candidates to eat raw as they are known to have a slightly metallic flavor. But cooked oyster mushrooms are extremely versatile and can be substituted for white, cremini and shiitake in most recipes. Quick and easy to prepare, they make a delicious addition to pasta, risotto and stir-fries.



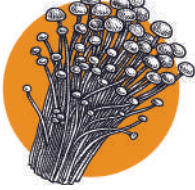
6 Maitake

Also known as hen of the woods, maitake mushrooms possess an earthy aroma, woody flavor and unique, wispy, but firm texture. They can be cultivated or foraged in the wild, where they're often found growing in large clumps at the base of oak trees in late summer and early fall. Maitake can be used raw, cooked or dried to add umami to soups and sauces. The simplest way to enjoy them is sautéed in butter, garlic and white wine.



7 Enoki

Commonly used in the cuisines of Japan, China and Korea, enoki mushrooms have a crisp and slightly crunchy texture and delicate flavor. Wild varieties form packed clusters on ash, elm, mulberry and persimmon trees and turn golden to brown, while commercially produced enoki are white from being grown in the dark. They're available canned, but they can also be eaten raw which adds a crunch to ramen and other soups, salads and sandwiches.



CHIMICHURRI MUSHROOM STEAK SANDWICHES

CHEF JOHN STOCKMAN of St. Paul, Minnesota, likes to keep a jar of this chimichurri in his refrigerator at all times. "What you don't use on the sandwiches, slather on toast, spoon over potatoes or grilled vegetables, toss some into pasta salad, or just use it as a dip," he says.

CHIMICHURRI

- 3 large garlic cloves, minced (1½ Tbsp)
- 2 red chiles (such as Fresno or red Thai chiles), seeded and chopped (about 3 Tbsp), or 1½ Tbsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 1½ cups extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup fresh parsley leaves, finely chopped
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp salt, ½ tsp ground black pepper

MUSHROOM STEAKS

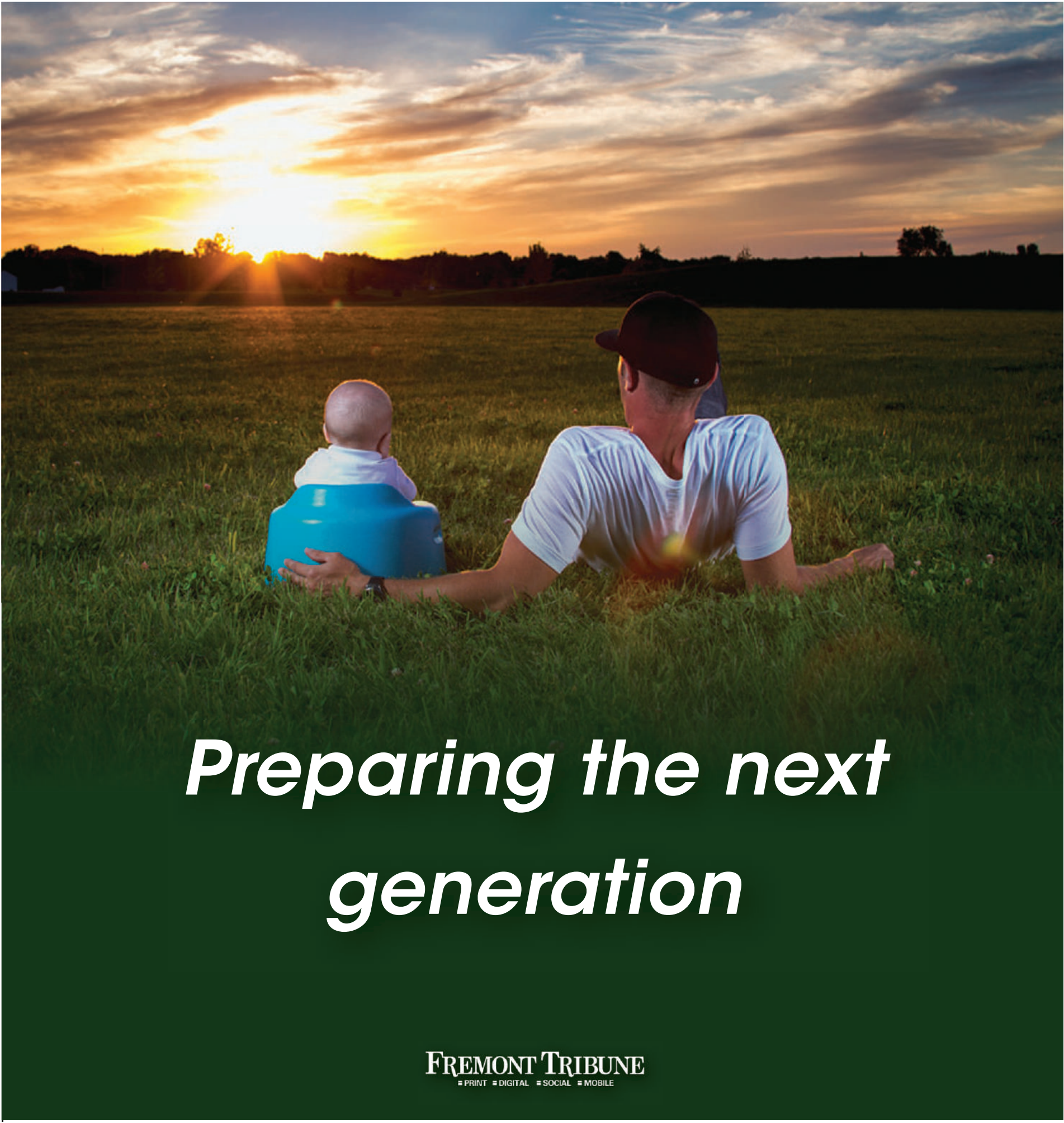
- extra virgin olive oil
- 3 to 4 lion's mane mushrooms (about 1 lb), cut into ½-inch-thick steaks
- 3 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves
- 1½ tsp salt
- 1½ tsp ground black pepper

- 4 vegan buns
- vegan mayonnaise, fresh baby arugula leaves and sliced tomatoes, for garnish

At least 2 hours before serving, stir all chimichurri ingredients in a medium bowl until well-combined; cover and refrigerate. Set out 15 minutes before serving to bring to room temperature.

In 12-inch skillet, add enough oil to lightly coat bottom of skillet; heat oil over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. Meanwhile, on platter or cookie sheet, sprinkle mushrooms with thyme, salt and pepper. Place enough mushrooms in skillet to cover bottom, but do not overcrowd; cook 3 to 4 minutes or until browned. Turn mushrooms, then cook 3 minutes longer. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook mushrooms 4 to 5 minutes longer or until any liquid has evaporated. Repeat with remaining mushrooms, adding more oil as needed.

Toast buns; spread mayonnaise on cut sides of buns. Top bottom half of buns with arugula, tomato, mushrooms and a generous portion of chimichurri; replace top half of buns to serve. Cover and refrigerate any leftover chimichurri up to 1 week.



Preparing the next generation



Dennis Holbrook is the president and owner of South Tex Organics, the largest organic citrus and vegetable grower in Texas, with more than 500 certified acres in operation.



The bitter with the sweet: A grapefruit farmer’s organic journey

BY NINA RANGEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY REBECCA BRITT

On a cloudy, damp day in March, the smell of wet earth and fermented fruit hangs thick in the air at South Tex Organics farm in Mission, Texas, as a layer of grapefruit rots on the grove floor. Acres of carefully tended plants dropped their fruit due to the freeze that had swept Texas a few weeks prior, blanketing the ground in plump orbs of sweet citrus now unfit for harvest and sale.

The unprecedented – and unpredictable – climate challenges associated with farming are an ongoing reality for those who dedicate their livelihood to the agricultural industry. For Dennis Holbrook, this is no exception.

One could say his journey as president and owner of Texas’ largest organic citrus and vegetable business has been in his cards since birth. Although his vision for the family business had always included exponential expansion, the rigorous additional effort required to provide organic certification is a relatively new aspect.

Humble beginnings

Dennis Holbrook’s parents visited Mission, Texas, for the first time in November 1954 and fell in love. The couple settled down in Mission in 1955 and immediately began work in the Texas citrus business, purchasing a small number of their own groves as well as managing several acres for absentee landowners and investors.

Throughout young adulthood, Dennis Holbrook operated insecticide and herbicide spray rigs for the family business, eventually mixing the chemicals that went into spray application airplanes. In 1977, he purchased the grove-management company from his father and began to craft a path for himself in Mission.

Preemptive measures

For the next few years, Holbrook developed maintenance systems and purchased more land to grow the business. With each harvest, he began to notice that his properties were consuming more water.

Holbrook conducted tests on the soil, eventually concluding that the quality of the earth used in the company’s groves and fields had been all but depleted of beneficial organic matter. He began to research alternative growing methods

that would replenish the soil without putting any groves out of commission.

Mother Nature’s influence

Converting from decades of chemical-assisted farming to organic growing methods is no small task. The certification process requires rigorous research, planning, record-keeping, inspections and assessments — not to mention a significant annual monetary investment.

Today, South Tex Organics is the largest organic citrus and vegetable grower in Texas, with more than 500 certified acres in operation. The farm grows primarily Rio Star grapefruit that features a blush peel with a deep red pulp seven to 10 times redder — and considerably sweeter — than the famous Ruby Red variety.

Wait and see

Holbrook believes in being a steward of the land, even in arguably one of the most tumultuous industries in existence.



Before and after the freeze that hit South Tex Organics from February 13 to 17. After photo by Nina Rangel.



“Farming is a risky business,” he says. “We are literally the biggest gamblers there ever was, because so much of what we do is contingent on things we have no control over.”

The region’s citrus groves that occupy nearly 27,000 acres in and around Mission, Texas, currently bear the battle scars of the most unpredictable variable: weather. This year, winter ravaged the Lone Star State from February 13 to 17, hitting the area’s citrus crop with a financial loss greater than any other industry. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service economists estimate Texas citrus crop losses of at least \$230 million as a direct result of the storm.

Fortunately, Holbrook says, South Tex Organics had seen consistent demand for the Rio Star fruits the farm is known for since the beginning of the season, and most of the farm’s haul had already been harvested by the time the storm blew in. Unbelievably, South Tex Organics lost less than 5% of their 2021 grapefruit harvest.

Freeze aftermath

One could say that standing between two groves in Mission — one operated by South Tex Organics, the other operated by another local farm that had been unable to harvest its fruit before the storm — is surreal. The tree canopies in both groves are brown and dry, leaves brittle to the touch. But in the grove to the left, a sea of orange covers the ground.

The majority of the South Tex Organics’ fruit might have escaped the storm, but acres of citrus groves remain devastated, in need of rehabilitation to remain productive for future seasons. Holbrook says it’s too early to tell how much damage has been done and that his team can only hedge the trees to remove the majority of the damaged limbs and foliage and then take a “wait-and-see approach.”

In the meantime, fields of red and white onions await harvest, bouncing back from the record temperatures in champion form. Holbrook learned how to cultivate the root vegetables as another source of income after a different big freeze — this time in 1989 — devastated a large portion of his citrus operation.

As a casual bystander, one can easily see the richness of the soil without even touching it, a comment that evokes a sense of pride from Holbrook.

“As a farmer, I feel my responsibility is first to the land and second to the consumer,” he explains. “I have a responsibility to be a steward of the land, caring for it as best I can, so that we can continue to provide a food source to our consumers for years to come.” ●

EDITOR’S NOTE

AFTER THE DEVASTATING FREEZE that took hold of his crop, along with the rest of Texas, we reconnected with Holbrook for an update on the state of his groves as well as his business.

While pandemic-related health concerns and the growing demand for food high in vitamin C proved to be a positive for South Tex Organics this past year, Holbrook’s main worry remained for his employees, whose lives, as a result of the freeze, were somewhat uprooted.

“Because we can’t really do anything in our citrus groves until we see what the trees are going to manifest, there is not a lot going on,” Holbrook said. “Fortunately, we are a whole lot more optimistic about our crops than when the interview took place. But we have people out of work which is a challenge to figure out ways to support them.”

Still, Holbrook feels appreciative and continues to stay positive. He understands the devastation some of his fellow Texans have had to endure, a fortune he does not take lightly.

“Compared to those impacted by everything, I am grateful for our blessings.”

FAMILY TREE: AMERICA’S GREAT GRAPEFRUIT

BY ROSANNE TOROIAN • ILLUSTRATION BY HEATHER GRAY

It may seem strange to consider a fruit’s lineage, but the grapefruit we know and love today is an interesting result of hundreds of years of evolution, careful breeding practices and, above all, organic accidents and serendipitous discoveries. Though similar, the different varieties that appear in our produce aisles today offer various flavors and applications.

Though generally interchangeable, white and pink or red grapefruit each have slightly different qualities best suited for certain applications in your recipes.

Here are a few popular varieties commonly found in grocery stores today, and inspiration for ways to incorporate the fruit in your sweet and savory creations.

White or Yellow Grapefruit

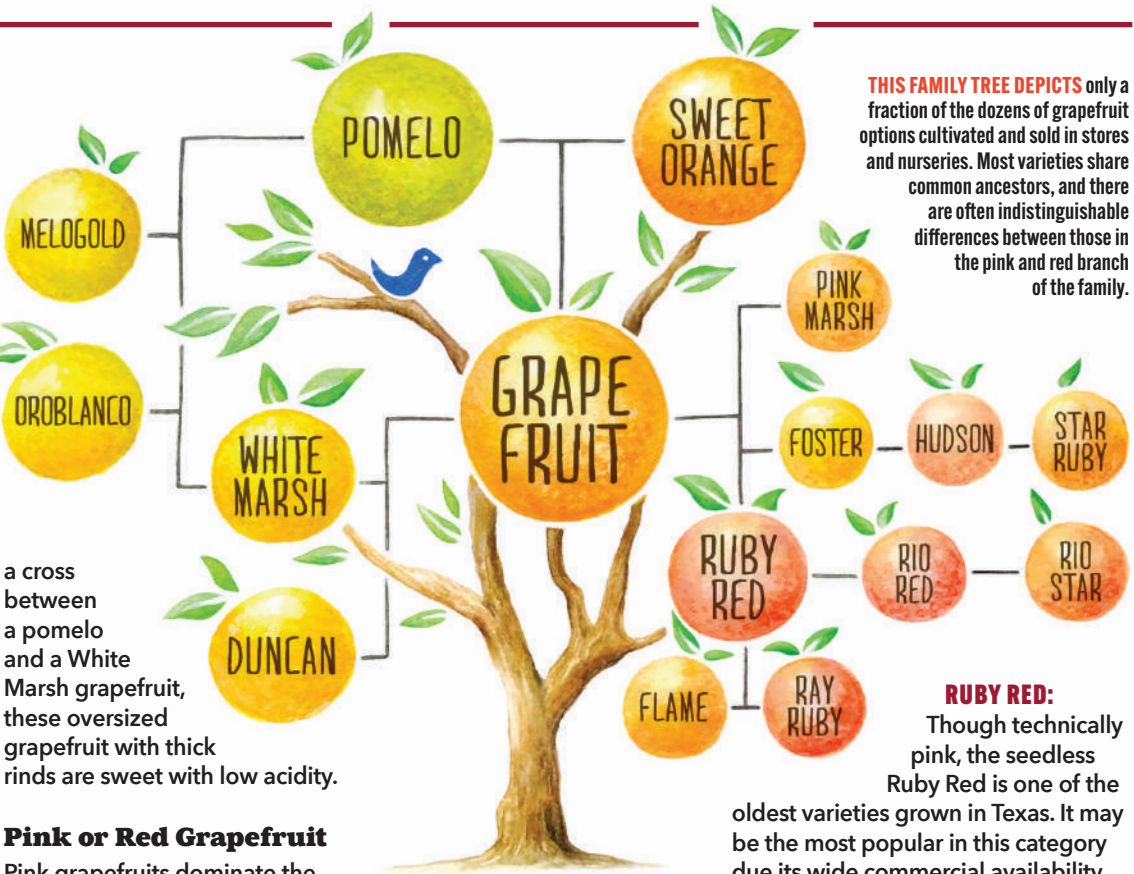
White grapefruit’s tart, slightly bitter and distinctive flavor sets it apart from other citrus including its pink counterpart which tends to be sweeter and milder. The

white grapefruit adds a subtle tang to both savory and sweet dishes, and its higher acidity lends itself to applications where a stronger grapefruit flavor is desired. Try white grapefruit in marinades, vinaigrettes, baked goods, ice cream and cocktails, or use the fruit in contrast to pink grapefruits and oranges in a citrus salad.

DUNCAN: White and very seedy, this is the closest ancestor to the original grapefruit raised in Florida from the Caribbean. Today it is primarily used for juice and processed segments.

WHITE MARSH: This seedless white variety is likely the most popular in this category thanks to its quintessential sweet-tart flavor and fragrant scent.

MELOGOLD & OROBLANCO: These white-fleshed hybrids were developed and patented by the University of California, Riverside. Each



a cross between a pomelo and a White Marsh grapefruit, these oversized grapefruit with thick rinds are sweet with low acidity.

Pink or Red Grapefruit

Pink grapefruits dominate the grapefruit section in most markets. Their irresistible pink hue adds a pop of color to any dish or drink. Though suitable for most recipes that call for grapefruit, think pink for fruit platters, salads and salsas, glazes and sauces, jams and marmalades, sorbets and granitas and any drink of choice including smoothies, non-alcoholic spritzers and cocktails.

PINK MARSH: This accidental pink mutation was discovered from the limb of a White Marsh. Many future cultivars stemmed off the Pink Marsh including the Ruby Red variety, which later sprouted many of the desirable deeper pink or red varieties grown in Texas today.

RUBY RED: Though technically pink, the seedless Ruby Red is one of the oldest varieties grown in Texas. It may be the most popular in this category due its wide commercial availability, sweet-tart flavor and juicy flesh.

RED VARIETIES: The 20th century brought many new variations with striking bright-red interiors and sweet pulp with a hint of sour. Common reds are marketed with the names Ray Ruby, Flame and Rio Star, the primary crop sold by South Tex Organics which is a hybrid of two other reds, the Rio Red and Star Ruby.



Lukas Fricke poses for a photo on his family farm in Ulysses.

Farmer’s idea sparks second career

MATT LINDBERG
The Columbus Telegram

Editor’s note: This story first published in Summer of 2020 in Backbone.

Growing up on the family farm just outside of Ulysses, Lukas Fricke loved being born into an agricultural lifestyle. From an early age, he relished cleaning up the pigs, power washing the hog sheds and, naturally, climbing hay bales whenever he was in search of an adventure.

“We would stack them really high and my dad would take me up there,” Fricke recalled.

But when his parents brought home and set up the family’s first computer, a young Fricke was in heaven. He toyed with the machine constantly, attempting different things that even his parents didn’t quite understand.

“He was interested in technology from the time we got our first computer here,” recalled his mother, Lori. “He was always on it trying to do stuff.”

Fast forward years later, today Fricke is 26-years-old and part of the sixth generation of his family helping run the farm with his older brother, Brenden, and mother. But he hasn’t put his love for technology and adventure to the side. Instead, he combined them with his passion for agriculture by developing a product he believes will take the industry to new heights: ChorChek.

ChorChek is essentially a software and hardware solution that works to bring transparency and traceability to commercial agriculture. It uses blockchain technology and small data to streamline farmers’ processes and data collection. Blockchain technology is a structure that stores transactional records, also known as the block, of the public in several databases, known as the “chain,” in a network connected through peer-to-peer nodes. It has become quite popular in recent years with cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

ChorChek uses a combination of app and hardware that can be downloaded on a phone or through a company controlled device. Animal caretakers use the device to be able to input metrics that are being tracked in the barns and yards.

ChorChek also harnesses the power of LoRa – a signal type that allows for sens-

ing devices to use little power and be able to transmit small packets of data for very long distances.

“Most of our devices don’t need to be plugged in or have access to Wi-Fi or cellular service,” Fricke said.

The goal is to create a system that can be bought and set up by any age or producer. The devices help also measure feed, water, room temperature and other inputs.

Fricke said it’s fairly easy to install the ChorChek devices inside a barn, noting “it shouldn’t be rocket science.” When a farmer logs onto his or her website, he or she can add the specific parameters to his/her operation and his/her barns that best fit his/her daily chores. After that, he or she can use the app on a personal cellphone day in, day out.

“We’re helping bridge the gap between the farm gate and the consumer’s plate in a producer-friendly fashion,” Fricke said. “We took existing quality insurance standards that most modern animal livestock producers use and we put them into a software system, made it a lot more user-friendly for people to look at that data and we worked to create measures that are allowing us to verify that data. Good husbandry involves good daily choring and a passion for those animals.”

The software has been a long time coming for Fricke, and in a way, something he might have been destined to do. He credited his late father, Jan, for sparking his love for farming and instilling in him a strong work ethic.

“He was a quiet force of nature – that’s the way I would describe him. He was a really good guy who never got mad; he always had good advice and was a



Lukas Fricke is the founder of ChorChek, which uses a combination of app and hardware that can be downloaded on a phone or through a company controlled device. Animal caretakers use the device to be able to input metrics that are being tracked in the barns and yards.

hardworking person,” Fricke said. “He always strived to do the best job he could and take care of things as best he could.”

His dad was always thinking ahead.

“He was an entrepreneurial farmer – he was always looking at different ways to do things and always trying to improve things,” Fricke said. “He would implement new farming practices, like new ways of raising pigs. My dad was always trying to do the next best thing and was just really forward-thinking.”

While going through school, Fricke was also getting a great grasp of technology. His parents nurtured and encouraged him to follow his interest in it while keeping him heavily involved in the farm alongside his older sister and brother. He also participated in several ag-related activities, such as Future Farmers of America and 4-H in Butler County.

So after graduating from David City Public Schools, it was no surprise Fricke elected to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to pursue his passions for tech and agriculture. There, he double majored in animal science and applied science while also minoring in agribusiness. While at UNL, he participated in the highly-regarded Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program that is focused on helping people transform the resources of the nation’s strength in agriculture into the next big idea.

Through that program, Fricke met Lincoln businessman Jerry Prange. Various established Nebraskans with different business backgrounds had been invited to participate in a fireside chat. Prange and Fricke weren’t mentor-apprentice in the program, but they still met through mutual friends back in 2018 at that chat.

“We hit it off,” said Prange, a Nebraska native who has worked in technology for the last 30 years by helping craft all sorts of development systems and is still involved in farming after 35-plus years.

Fricke and Prange are now business partners with ChorChek. Fricke is the acting president who takes pride in handling the tech and being in the field, while Prange is CEO and key when it comes to business management and building key relationships.

For Prange, getting involved with Fricke was a no-brainer decision. He said he and his wife decided to support him financially because they think highly of him and the product, adding that they appreciate the mission of what ChorChek is aiming to change.

“We believe in what Lukas has set out as his dream,” he said. “And Lukas is an extremely well-spoken, very bright young man. He works very hard day to day, is not afraid to get his hands dirty. He has a great sense of family and responsibility.”

ChorChek is a completely separate venture from his family farm; however, he is involved in both full-time. Like farmers across the world, Fricke

said he has seen firsthand the negative effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the agriculture industry as a whole.

“In rural America, it’s different. We are so interconnected,” Fricke said. “This year is a different sort of struggle, especially with COVID-19. How we move forward, that’s going to be a big issue.”

Oddly enough, Fricke said he believes current times further strengthen why they’re working to bring ChorChek to the forefront. Society’s curiosity about where their food is coming from was already growing, and he expects that to continue at a rapid rate. Good farmers, like his family and all of their neighbors, he said, deserve to be compensated for their efforts and commitment.

“My personal belief is farmers aren’t paid enough, especially during this time we’re going into,” Fricke said. “We see a lot of outside forces profiting off of our story and off of our good job, so what we’re trying to do is help farmers collect their data easily, verify and authenticate that data. And then, we want to be able to create a means to profit off that data and have them be able to link their raw product with their story data and their passion that went into creating that.

“This makes sure farmers are doing a good job and being good stewards of the land and practicing good animal husbandry because farmers do a good job.”

ChorChek is focused on pork right now, though people are testing the process on poultry and beef. The duo also is currently beta testing on three Nebraska farms (including Fricke’s) and one out of the state. They plan to bring it to the market sometime later this year (visit ChorChek.com for more information).

To this day, Fricke is constantly inspired by his late father. Jan passed away in 2019, but his spirit remains strong on the farm and through ChorChek.

“One thing my dad said was, ‘if you did nothing wrong and you did good, then you got nothing to worry about.’ And that’s in your personal life, farming life and in this business, that’s what I’m taking,” Fricke said. “I didn’t have to develop this business in this state or stay in this area. I don’t have to work on the farm, but being able to work with my family and raise products and creating this software, that makes me happy. And at the end of the day, you’ve got to do what makes you happy.”

Farmers are unsung heroes in the world, Fricke said. He’s hopeful ChorChek can usher the industry into a promising future much like GPS-based applications in precision farming did years ago. What drives him is helping good farmers around the world, including those in Nebraska he considers neighbors, friends and colleagues.

“I like to do right and feed everybody. I think that’s something we focus on every single day – doing right and feeding people. It really is a passion,” he said. “By doing right and feeding people, we all move forward together ... It is truly an ecosystem.”

Matt Lindberg is the managing editor of The Columbus Telegram. Reach him via email at matt.lindberg@lee.net.

FARM GIRLS FOR LIFE

Platte County sisters enjoy horses, hard work and learning life lessons

HANNAH SCHRODT
The Columbus Telegram

Editor’s note: This story first published in Fall of 2020 in Backbone.

Driving past the home of Andrew and Lynette Klug in rural Columbus, passersby are likely to see any of the couple’s teenage daughters doing what they love: Riding horses.

Having grown up on a farm/cattle feedlot in Platte County, the four Klug sisters would, naturally, be accustomed to the outdoors and agriculture. What’s most notable about them, though, is their passion for horses and animals in general.

Olivia, 18; Whitney, 15; Emma, 13 (almost 14); and Madilyn, 11, each learned to ride a horse starting around age 8. They’re all, of course, involved in 4-H for beef and horses. There is a fifth Klug sister who is 25-years-old and resides in Texas.

The younger sisters have four horses – Honey, Riley, Trigger and Leroy.

“I love horses. They teach you a lot, a lot about responsibility,” Olivia said. “And then through the industries that you get involved in and (the) associations, (you) learn all about leadership and communication skills.”

Olivia noted that she and her younger sisters are responsible for taking care of the horses, as well as the other animals.

“We have to feed horses, dogs, cats,” Emma added. “We clean out

their pens every once in a while. We ride our horses almost every day. We wash them sometimes.”

As the Klugs have their own a feedlot, the teens also help wash and work with the calves, Whitney said. Washing also includes blow-drying the animals and brushing them out.

“I like to show cattle when we have them,” Whitney said. “We don’t have them right now, but we’ll get some here in the next couple months.”

Living and working on a farm also means pitching in often.

“I help Dad and Grandpa when they need help,” Whitney said, noting that their grandfather lives nearby.

As the oldest sibling still living at home, Olivia is involved with organizations besides 4-H.

“I’m currently vice president of the NRHyA, which is National Reining Horse Youth Association,” Olivia said. “In NRHyA, there are five officers from all over the United States and we kind of help lead the youth center in the face of the U.S. I’ve been an officer for two years. I was a treasurer last year (and) then I was a delegate for two years.”

According to the NRHyA’s website, the organization strives to foster leadership qualities and provide opportunities for success in future career plans.

Outside of the Klug family farm, Olivia, Whitney and Emma attend Scotus Central Catholic in Columbus, where they’re involved

in cross country, track and the musical. Emma also plays the flute.

“I like it for the background stuff. Not (being) front and center,” Whitney said about participating in musicals. “But, yeah, I love it; it’s fun.”

Olivia, who is in her senior year at Scotus, noted that she’s scaled back on extracurricular activities to allow for more time and energy on the family’s horses. She tentatively plans on attending a college outside of Nebraska and joining an equestrian team.

Madilyn attends St. Bonaventure School, also in Columbus.

“I like playing with the animals,” Madilyn said, shyly. “I like riding the horses around. I like spending time outside and playing with the cats and our dog -- I like to play with him, too.”

Olivia also holds a job as a COVID-19 symptom screener at Columbus Community Hospital; she works at the emergency room entrance on the weekends and at the Columbus Family YMCA during weekdays.

Olivia turned 18 a day before the interview for this story, though she didn’t have a big celebration for it.

“Not a whole lot,” she said. “I rode some horses and I worked then hung out with some friends.”

Emma enjoys hanging out and spending time with the animals as typical teenagers do.

“I like to hang out (and) I like my all my animals,” Emma said. “I love cats. I’ve got like about 20. And I’ve got our dog Cooper and my horse, Leroy.”

The cats stay outdoors and shelter in a barn on the property.

“(Karen) has very, very blue eyes. They all used to have blue



Pictured are four of the Klug sisters of rural Columbus, Emma, Whitney, Madilyn and Olivia.

eyes,” Emma said, informatively. “But then, when they got older, they just (changed). They love hunting, the older ones.”

A few days before an August evening interview, one of Emma’s cats had a litter in a bush in front of the Klugs’ home.

“Usually the other cats will have them like in barns and stuff where they’re being protected,” Emma explained.

The farm has been in the Klug family since the 1950s, with Andrew being the third-generation owner.

Growing up on a farm has taught his daughters to deal with both success and failure, as well as being tough while also enjoying the good times, he said. Qualities learned on the farm have been especially beneficial during the trying times of the COVID-19 pan-

demic.

“It’s helped them cope with the disappointment ... they lost shows on horses and cattle,” Andrew said. “Olivia missed out on a full month, month-and-a-half of leadership opportunities to network and meet new people that would have helped her personally, academically (and) professionally and that was all taken away. So, I think that’s helped them cope with that.”

The sisters cited being in touch with agriculture daily and learning more about life than what can be taught in a classroom as reasons they enjoy living on the farm.

“We have a lot of opportunities that most people wouldn’t have living in town,” Olivia said.

Hannah Schrodt is the news editor of The Columbus Telegram. Reach her via email at hannah.schrodt@lee.net.

DON'T WASTE YOUR WASTE

BY LAURA STAKELUM
FEATURE PHOTO BY ALEX WORKMAN

Healthy soil is the key to a great garden. As young plants break out of their seeds, they dig their roots deep into the ground looking for nutrients. That's where composting comes in. It is a cheap, easy and versatile way to nourish your soil without harsh chemical fertilizers.

SO, WHAT IS IT?

Composting simply involves storing organic waste products and waiting for them to break down for garden use. Often called "black gold" by farmers and gardeners alike, produce clippings, yard waste and a wide variety of ingredients decompose and transform into a rich fertilizer resembling garden soil through composting.

WHY COMPOST?

Composting keeps chemicals out of your garden by providing a natural source of nutrients to your soil. The healthier the soil, the more effectively it retains water. Putting your waste to work not only helps your garden, but it also helps protect the environment by keeping excess trash out of landfills and waterways.

WHAT CAN YOU COMPOST?

A healthy compost pile can include a wide variety of organic matter: shredded paper and newspaper, coffee grounds and tea



bags, grains, eggshells, grass clippings, hair and fur, sawdust from untreated wood, straw, wood ash, cardboard, vegetable and fruit trimmings and leaves. It is recommended that a compost pile not include meat, fat or dairy, as they might attract pests. Because they can create an unpleasant odor, onions and garlic should also be avoided, as well as pet waste and plants or weeds treated with pesticides.

GETTING STARTED

There are a variety of ways to get started with composting. One easy step is keeping an airtight canister in your kitchen. As you peel potatoes or chop the tops off other veggies, toss them into the canister instead of the trash. Once a week, empty the canister into your backyard compost pile.

Your backyard compost pile is customizable to your needs. If pesky animals are a



problem, take a large plastic garbage can with a lid and drill holes all over to allow for air flow. Open it only to stir or dump your kitchen canister.

Ideally, you want a mix of greens for nitrogen (including grass clippings, produce scraps and coffee grounds) and browns for carbon (dead leaves, twigs, paper). The best ratio for the pile is two parts brown to

one part green with the moisture content comparable to a damp sponge. Even if you don't follow these measurements, your compost will eventually break down – it will just take a little longer.

After adding your browns and greens, use a pitchfork to turn your compost pile. Many garden stores sell tumbler-style compost bins that can be turned to mix. These also help maintain the moisture and heat needed for composting.

Another option for composting is vermicomposting, or worm composting. This can be done indoors or outdoors in mild temperatures, so try to avoid a metal bin because it can get too hot or too cold. Red wigglers, a species of worm recommended for vermicomposting, live in a multi-level bin elevated from the ground. The worms will enjoy their feast before moving up to the next level within the bin, leaving behind a supply of nutrient-rich, odorless worm castings that can be used in the garden. With the exception of citrus, citrus peel, and the same restrictions of meat, fat and dairy products, no composting ingredients are off-limits with this method.

READY FOR THE EARTH

When compost is ready, it will look like smooth, dark garden soil. You should not be able to see any recognizable items in the final product. The odor should be earthy, not sour, and when complete, the pile will be about one-third of its original size. If any of these factors are missing, it means the compost pile needs more time to break down. During warmer months, a compost pile can be ready for use in just a few months.

If you notice your pile is slimy or has an odor, it means more browns need to be added. If your pile is in a sunny spot, you might need to add water to maintain the necessary moisture level.

Next time, think twice before ditching your scraps, and instead, use them to reap the benefits of the gardener's black gold.

AT HOME WITH FEAST AND FIELD

Don't cut corners: These household tips will make the most of your grocery staples

Grapefruit cleaning hacks worth the squeeze

BY NINA RANGEL • PHOTO BY HEATHER GRAY

Aromatic, delicious and full of beneficial nutrients, grapefruit is a vitamin-packed superfood with surprising superpowers in the home. We're talking about the wonders of grapefruit, but in this article, the recipes are for homemade, all-natural, all-purpose cleaning supplies. The perfect multitasker, a grapefruit tackles all of your household needs to make your abode sparkle.

Grapefruit not only smells fresh and sweet, but it also it cuts grease and cleans grimy things. Citrus peel contains d-limonene, a powerful solvent for dirt; citrus pulp is full of mild citric acid that cuts through grease and limescale.

We've rounded up a collection of DIY hacks that highlight the versatility of the humble grapefruit as an environmentally friendly, nontoxic cleaning aid.

KITCHEN

For a like-new kitchen faucet or cutting board, wipe it down with the juicy half of a grapefruit. Allow it to sit for five to 15 minutes for the citric acid to work its magic, then rinse off with water.

To make an all-purpose cleaner, use a vegetable peeler to remove the clean outer peel from a grapefruit, then coarsely chop. Add it to a glass jar, then pour white vinegar over the peel until they are submerged. Screw the lid onto the jar and allow the mixture to sit for about a month, occasionally shaking the jar to mix. Pour the liquid through a mesh strainer, then funnel into a spray bottle; discard the peels. Use the solution to clean countertops, stovetops and appliances.

Deodorize the garbage disposal by tossing pieces of grapefruit rinds, with their pith and pulp if you like, directly into the kitchen sink drain. With cold water running, turn the disposal on and off two or three times.

Or, for another grime-fighting hack, combine chopped up grapefruit peels with water in ice cube trays, then freeze. Toss a few down the drain at the end of the day before running the disposal. The ice will dislodge built-up grime, and the peels will leave the drain smelling fresh.

Remove grease buildup on your pots and pans by rubbing a mixture of kosher salt and grapefruit juice on gunky areas. Let sit for five to 10 minutes, then scrub the grease off with a damp sponge and rinse with water.

BATHROOM

Eliminate mold and mildew on tile, sinks and counters with a homemade bathroom cleaner using vinegar, grapefruit juice and Borax. In a spray bottle, add one cup of vinegar and a half cup each of fresh grapefruit juice and Borax; shake gently until blended. Spray it on

any affected areas and leave it on at least 15 minutes or up to an hour before wiping away with a damp sponge. Discard any unused cleaner; prepare a smaller batch if you're only scrubbing a few surfaces.

A citrus salt scrub makes cleaning the bathtub a cinch, thanks to the abrasive nature of salt and mild acid in grapefruit. Just splash some water in the tub and sprinkle a layer of kosher salt on the bottom. Cut a large grapefruit in half, and use the cut side to scrub your tub. Rinse with warm water. Repeat this process every two weeks for the best results.

THE REST OF THE HOUSE

Remove clothing stains by soaking soiled duds in a solution of two parts white grapefruit juice mixed with one part baking soda; allow it to sit for 30 minutes before adding it to your next load of laundry.

Insects such as spiders, ants, fleas, mosquitos, and cockroaches have been proven to be highly sensitive to smell, especially citrus. Prevent creepy crawlies in your space by placing dried grapefruit peels by windows, door cracks or anywhere else ants and other unwanted bugs could enter.

Create a refreshing carpet or rug cleanser with a powdered odor zapper. In a medium bowl, combine two cups of baking soda with one cup Borax and one tablespoon finely grated grapefruit zest. Allow the mixture to sit un-

YOU CAN ADD A LITTLE GRAPEFRUIT TO COMMON CLEANERS TO TACKLE YOUR TOUGHEST CHORES.



covered several hours or until all of the moisture has evaporated and the powder is dry to the touch. Mix it well before storing in a tightly sealed glass jar. Sprinkle the cleanser onto dirty carpets and let it stand at least 10 minutes, allowing the powder to absorb odors and loosen dirt. Vacuum the surface well and enjoy your fresh, pristine carpet.

Utilizing the zesty fragrance and natural cleaning powers of the pulp and peel of the grapefruit is a no-brainer for any DIY cleaning enthusiast. You'll not only be using fewer harsh chemicals in your home, you may also save a little bit of cash, too. ●



How to grow your own microgreens

BY SUE MUNCASTER

If you've visited a local café or perused your farmers' market recently, you've surely come across a tangled nest of flavor-packed microgreens sprinkled atop your avocado toast. These gorgeous greens are actually a superfood with up to 40 times more vital nutrients than their fully grown counterparts. Microgreens and microherbs are the seedling versions of leafy greens, vegetables and herbs. They are a few days older than sprouts, but are younger than "baby greens."

For the freshest greens at your fingertips, here are the basics for growing at home. First, you'll need:

- **Trays or shallow containers (2-inches deep or so) with holes for draining water.**
- **A cover to block light during germination, such as a plastic lid or piece of cardboard.**
- **Potting mix, soil or a growing medium (such as coconut fiber or hemp for roots to grab on to if growing hydroponically).**
- **Find a sunny spot. You can grow your microgreens near a window if it gets four to six hours of sunshine a day, or consider an LED grow light to shine more rays.**
- **A warm location — 70 degrees is ideal.**
- **A spray bottle for spritzing.**
- **Choose your seeds: Buy seeds that offer a colorful mix of sweet, spicy and nutty flavors.**

To plant the seeds, cover the bottom of your container with an inch or two of potting soil or a nonsoil medium, and scatter a layer of seeds evenly on top. If using soil, press seeds gently into the dirt, cover with a thin layer of soil, and then spray with water to moisten. If using a nonsoil medium, simply sprinkle seeds on top of the medium and spritz with water. Place a lid over the top to create a dark environment for sprouting, and mist daily until you see seeds germinating. This will take approximately three days. Once sprouted, you can remove the lid and place the plants in a sunny spot. Spritz the sprouts and soil whenever it appears to be drying out.

The best time to pick your microgreens is when the first leaves appear, seven to 14 days after planting, depending on the variety. To reap the maximum nutritional benefits, flavor and color from your greens, only harvest what you need immediately before use. Snip just above the soil level with your scissors. Wash very gently and give them a whirl in a salad spinner to dry. Microgreens can be wrapped loosely in a damp paper towel placed inside a plastic bag. They will stay fresh for about five days in the refrigerator.

You can now buy Old State Farms' infused syrups in the Feast and Field online shop! Scan this with your mobile device to get yours.



Althea and Joseph Burkett on Old State Farm's 80-acre farm in Venango County, Pennsylvania.

Making the grade: Old State Farms' pure maple syrup

BY GRETCHEN MCKAY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZACH STRAW

Joseph Burkett knew nothing about maple syrup when he and his wife-to-be, Althea, decided to try making it on his father's gravel driveway 20 years ago. Tired of being cooped up inside all winter, the couple thought it might be fun to get out in the March sunshine to collect some sap from his dad's grove of 20 sugar maple trees in Meadville, Pennsylvania, and try their hand at cooking it down into syrup. "We had no idea what we were doing," Burkett recalls, "just that, if you drill a hole in a tree and put a bucket under it, something would come out."

That 2001 effort was rudimentary: They simply built a fire, set a cinderblock in the middle, poured the watery sap they'd gathered into a pan and set it on a block to boil for hours. When they finished reducing the liquid on the stove, they ended up with a few gallons of syrup. "It was spring, when there's not much else to do," he says, laughing.

A singular pastime turned lifestyle

The next year, the newly married pair, armed with a copy of Ohio State University's North American maple syrup producers manual, went big. They tapped 1,000 trees and made 250 gallons of syrup. And Old State Farms was born. "If you're going to try to make it, you need to make it worth it," Burkett says.

At Old State Farms, the Burketts collect the sap with a plastic tubing system and vacuum pumps that are standard among today's sugarmakers. Buckets take too much time and effort to empty when you're tapping hundreds of maples, and tubing — which carries sap directly from the taps to large collection tanks — is kinder on the environment. "Trucks are hard on the woods and the ecology of the forest," he says.

Today the Old State Farms' sugarhouse produces 1,200 to 1,500 gallons of artisan syrup a year. It taps about 3,500 trees spread over 80 acres in Venango County, making it a medium-sized producer in Pennsylvania.

From sap to syrup

Maple sugar season lasts six to eight weeks each spring, but it's intense. So much of the process is weather-dependent. You need nights below freezing followed by days above 40 de-

grees in order to get a strong sap run. Sap generally starts to flow in mid- to late-February; this year, the season started on February 28. Thanks to modern technology, Burkett can turn 750 gallons of sap into 15 gallons of syrup in an hour. The process begins with running the sap through a sock filter before going into a reverse osmosis machine that "squeezes" out 75% of the water. Then it's into a stainless evaporator, the pans of which sit above a firebox fueled by mixed hardwood. As water is removed from the sap, the natural sugars be-



"It's the chance to cooperate with nature by harvesting a natural resource..."

come more concentrated. They also caramelize, becoming darker and more flavorful. Once it gets going, Burkett feeds the fire every half hour to keep the evaporator humming. As the water evaporates, clouds of sweet-smelling steam waft throughout the room, and the sap thickens. The choice to use logs instead of fuel oil to boil the sap is an admirable one. It takes longer to heat the evaporator and it doesn't get as hot. You also have to wait until it burns out when you're

done sugaring — not to mention splitting and stacking the wood. But, it's a clean, renewable source of energy, says Burkett, and economical, at least for him. "We have access to a lot of tree tops that are too small for saw logs."

The syrup reaps the benefits, too: Because the syrup takes longer to cook over fire, it develops a more complex, robust maple flavor. As the sap boils, he periodically draws some off to check the sugar content with a hydrometer while also keeping an eye on the digital thermometer; an alarm wails if it reaches 220 degrees. Every so often, he defoams the pan with drops of organic safflower oil, as you would a pot of hot jam with a pat of butter.

If the syrup overcooks — there is no off switch on a wood fire — it gets too thick and has to be diluted with more sap. But Burkett is careful, never straying from his perch in front of the thermometer for more than a moment. Later, when it's time to bottle, he'll reheat the syrup to 190 degrees, filter out the "sugar sand" and grade it for color and flavor before pumping it into the canner. The syrup is hot-packed, 15 gallons at a time, into plastic jugs and bottles, each of which gets an elegant label created by local artist, Rachel Brosnahan, of Singing Sparrow Designs.

Burkett's customers prefer amber maple syrup over the delicate light. He recently started barrel-aging his syrups and infusing others with different flavors like chai, following a growing trend. It's turned out to be a lot of fun, as well as hugely popular. Already it accounts for around 25% of business.

Sweet smell of success

Still, turning sap into syrup can mean working 16-hour days as winter turns into spring. It also means missing out on his kids' basketball games and events like a close friend's recent wedding. Nevertheless, Burkett loves it. "When you smell the syrup in the sugarhouse, and the birds are singing and the sun is shining, I really reflect on what a really great blessing it is to have this opportunity. I see the daffodils blooming and know the season is about to end. I think to myself 'we've made it another year.'" ●

DID YOU KNOW IT'S A SUGAR SUBSTITUTE?

MAPLE SYRUP IS SWEETER THAN SUGAR, SO YOU CAN SUBSTITUTE 3/4 CUP OF SYRUP FOR EACH CUP OF SUGAR IN A RECIPE.



MARKED BY HINTS OF VANILLA AND CARAMEL, pure maple syrup has a lower glycemic index than granulated sugar and is a natural source of vitamins and minerals. Drizzle over oatmeal, brush on winter squash and roasted pork, chicken or salmon, thicken and toss with Brussels sprouts and stir into beverages, sauces and marinades. Maple sugar is created after the syrup boils until all of the liquid evaporates. It can be used in the same ratio as granulated sugar in baking, but it will impart some maple flavor. For a milder flavor, use a combination of the two.

MAPLE-BACON BAKED DONUTS

INSPIRED BY A VISIT to Voodoo Doughnut in Portland, Oregon, which is famous for its Bacon Maple Bar, chef Alekka Sweeney decided to create her version she's proud to share.

- 1 lb thick-cut bacon
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground nutmeg
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 extra-large egg, lightly beaten
- 1¼ cups whole milk
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- nonstick cooking spray
- 2¼ cups powdered sugar
- ¼ cup maple syrup, plus more if necessary

For easier clean-up, line large rimmed baking pan with foil. Arrange bacon slices close together in pan. Place pan in oven. Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until bacon is crisp. Meanwhile, into large bowl, sift flour, sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt.

(Set aside sifter to use later.) In microwave-safe medium bowl, heat butter on high 30 to 45 seconds or until melted. Add egg, milk and vanilla and stir with whisk until blended. Add milk mixture to flour mixture and stir just until combined. Lightly spray molds of 2 donut pans with nonstick cooking spray. Fill donut molds just over three-quarters full with batter. Bake 15 to 17 minutes or until toothpick inserted in centers comes out clean. Meanwhile, into wide, shallow bowl or pie plate, sift powdered sugar. Add maple syrup and stir with whisk or fork until smooth. Add more maple syrup if necessary, a few teaspoons at a time, to reach a consistency similar to thick pancake batter. When bacon is cool enough to handle, cut into pieces. Allow donuts to cool in their molds 5 minutes, then invert onto cooling racks to cool completely. Dip half of donut in glaze; allow excess to drip off. Place donut, glaze-side up, on cooling rack, then sprinkle evenly with bacon. Repeat with remaining donuts, glaze and bacon.



MAPLE-GLAZED SALMON

ALEKKA SWEENEY'S clients often request simple, one-pan dinner solutions, and this recipe fits the bill. The chef-instructor from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, suggests serving this dish with sliced Brussels sprouts that can be tossed in oil and roasted while the salmon bakes. Sweeney loves the play of the sweet and spicy coming from the syrup and heat from the Creole seasoning and cayenne. She suggests doubling the spice-blend recipe to have on hand. Although these ingredients complement salmon, they also elevate chicken breasts and pork tenderloin.

- SPICE RUB**
- ¾ tsp salt
 - ½ tsp garlic powder
 - ½ tsp onion powder
 - ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
 - ¼ tsp paprika
 - ⅛ tsp Creole or Cajun seasoning
 - ⅛ tsp cayenne pepper (optional)

- GLAZE**
- ½ cup maple syrup
 - 3 Tbsp brown sugar
 - 1½ Tbsp fresh lime juice
 - 2 tsp minced fresh garlic
 - ¼ tsp paprika
 - ⅛ tsp freshly ground black pepper

- nonstick cooking spray
- 1 fresh salmon fillet (about 2 lbs), preferably wild salmon, skin removed, if desired
- 1 lime, cut into wedges, for garnish (optional)

Place oven rack at closest position to source of broiler heat. Preheat oven to 375°F. In small bowl, stir together spice rub ingredients. In second small bowl, stir glaze ingredients until well blended. Spray broiler-safe large skillet with nonstick cooking spray. Pat both sides of salmon with paper towels. Place salmon in skillet; gently press spice rub on top of salmon. Cover skillet tightly with foil. Bake 14 to 15 minutes or until salmon is almost opaque in thickest part of fillet. Remove salmon from oven and discard foil. Preheat broiler. Pour glaze over salmon. Place salmon under broiler for about 2 minutes or until top is golden-brown, watching carefully. Serve salmon with its glaze and lime wedges, if desired.





**A big
thank you
to those who
handle our food
with care from
field to table**

FREMONT TRIBUNE
= PRINT = DIGITAL = SOCIAL = MOBILE

Flour Power: Pasta maker Sfoglini is committed to local grains

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY DEANNA FOX

Steve Gonzalez keeps an eagle eye over his pasta production line. Ruffled pasta shapes he calls “trumpets” stream from a glistening Italian-made pasta machine, each one a replica of the one before.

As the co-founder of Sfoglini Pasta (pronounced Sfo-LEE’ny, meaning “pasta maker”), an artisan pasta company making nearly 1.5 million pounds of pasta annually, Gonzalez can spot a misshapen or errant piece of pasta from across the room. To most people, what Gonzalez sees as a problem would be unnoticeable, but for him, being this attuned to pasta is in keeping with the Sfoglini mission.

Gonzalez met his co-founder, Scott Ketchum, a decade ago. Ketchum’s love of food and background in graphic design offered unique potential for Gonzalez’s ambitions.

The artistic, geometric nature of pasta was appealing to Ketchum, and he had initially helped Gonzalez create a business plan for a restaurant. “That’s when we saw the need for wholesale pasta instead. There wasn’t really any American-made, premium-quality wholesale pasta at the time,” Ketchum says. In 2012, the duo founded Sfoglini.

Growth spurts

They started with a \$30,000 personal investment, renting 500 square feet in the old Pfizer plant in Brooklyn to begin making fresh pasta. Sfoglini eventually moved up the Hudson Riv-

er to West Coxsackie, New York, to their current 37,000-square-foot building.

They installed an Italian-made pasta machine that begins with a hopper for flour. The pasta line is semi-automated, adding water to highly detailed specifications and applying just the right amount of pressure for each pasta shape. Human contact is still critical for quality assurance, but the high-tech approach to the old-world, hand-rolled process helps Sfoglini produce large quantities of pasta.

Once the pasta is extruded, it goes through a pre-dryer, which helps set the pasta so that it holds its shape and form. The pasta is spread across multiple looms, which are stacked before starting the 10-hour drying process. Sfoglini dries about 6,000 pounds of pasta a day, a small fraction compared to large-scale commercial pasta producers.

After the pasta is dried, it is moved into the packaging room, where a pasta silo leads to what looks like an oversized space-age funnel. The funnel has a series of chambers and weights that allow for continuous pasta distribution into boxes, totaling 1,500 boxes of pasta packaged an hour.

Local flavor, better nutrition

Flour is what sets Sfoglini apart from other pasta brands. Sfoglini uses 100% organic North American durum semolina in most products, which is a coarser flour with a gold hue. Other commodity pasta brands blend their durum flour with finer flours, which changes the texture from traditional handmade pasta. The company also experiments with everything from organic ancient-grain einkorn flour to hemp seed flours.

Sourcing from the regional foodshed is about more than just flavor for Sfoglini. Ketchum says that buying organic flours as close to home as possible meant reducing the carbon footprint of their process, as many companies ship American-grown flour to Italy to be milled and turned into pasta before importing it back into the U.S.

Bronze for the gold

Extruded pasta, like that made by Sfoglini, is produced when pasta dough is pushed with constant pressure through a metal plate with holes and slits drilled into it. This plate is called a die, and the holes correlate to specific designs, from bucatini to fusilli.



Sfoglini uses bronze dies, which are typical of artisanal pasta making and replicate the texture that handmade pasta offers. Heavy and costing thousands of dollars to produce, the bronze dies are critical to making Sfoglini’s pasta.

“People think that the good stuff is made in Italy, and for a while it had been, because they use bronze dies. But we are one of less than 10 in this country making bronze-extruded pasta, and we’re doing a great job at it,” Gonzalez says. “But I think our quality is at least comparable — if not better than — to what you’d find in Italy.”

Pasta for the people

The true reason for the company’s success and growth is the simple fact that the pasta tastes great, providing an experience that transports the diner from their home kitchens to the flavors of a Roman trattoria or Venetian osteria. Pasta can be a simple meal offering sustenance, or it can be rife with allure. Both elements play equally into Sfoglini’s ethos, right down to the naming of the company.

“I grew attached to the name Sfoglini when it was mostly for the restaurant. In the 18th century, the owner of a house or castle with a sfogline in-house knew she was worth her weight in gold,” Gonzalez says. “I was really drawn to that romance and the fact that these ladies pass on the tradition. Those things resonated with us.” ●

CASCATELLI, THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE



DAN PASHMAN, JAMES BEARD AWARD WINNER FOR HIS PODCAST, THE SPORKFUL, ENLISTED SFOGLINI TO WORK WITH HIM ON THE CREATION OF A NEW PASTA SHAPE, CASCATELLI. IT WAS RELEASED EARLIER THIS YEAR TO GREAT ACCLAIM AFTER NEARLY THREE YEARS OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.



Steve Gonzalez and Scott Ketchum

3 RESTAURANT-QUALITY SAUCE RECIPES

Franco Rua of Cafe Capriccio in Albany, New York, explains how to make a few of his favorite dishes.

BUCATINI ALL'AMATRICIANA

COOK THE PASTA JUST UNTIL AL DENTE, Rua says, and allow it to finish cooking in the tomato sauce.

- 1 lb Sfoglini bucatini, spaghetti or rigatoni pasta
- 2 to 3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 6 oz guanciale, pancetta or thick-sliced bacon, cut into 1-inch-wide by ¼-inch-thick pieces
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- 1 can (28 oz) whole peeled plum tomatoes, crushed by hand
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh oregano leaves
- pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- freshly grated pecorino Romano cheese

Heat large covered saucepot of salted water to boiling over high heat. Prepare pasta as label directs.

Meanwhile, in 12-inch skillet, heat 1 tablespoon oil over medium-low heat. Add guanciale, and cook until fat begins to render and meat becomes crisp, stirring occasionally. Add garlic and onion, and cook 3 to 4 minutes or until onion is soft and translucent, stirring occasionally. Add tomatoes with their juices, oregano, crushed red pepper flakes and salt and black pepper to taste; heat to boiling over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low, and simmer 5 to 10 minutes or until sauce thickens slightly, stirring occasionally.

Reserve some cooking water, then drain pasta. Return pasta to saucepot. Add sauce and remaining oil; toss until well combined. Add a touch of cooking water to loosen sauce, if desired. Divide pasta between plates. Sprinkle cheese over pasta to serve.



REGINETTI WITH SAUSAGE RAGÙ

“I WANTED TO CREATE A DECONSTRUCTED LASAGNE. Something very southern Italian, with ricotta and sausage, instead of a Florentine version with béchamel sauce,” says Rua.

- 1 lb Sfoglini reginetti, rigatoni or penne pasta
- 3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lb bulk sweet or hot Italian sausage
- 6 garlic cloves, chopped
- splash dry Italian white wine (such as Pinot Grigio)
- 1 can (28 oz) whole peeled plum tomatoes, crushed by hand
- ¼ cup fresh oregano leaves, coarsely chopped (about 2 Tbsp)
- pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup fresh basil leaves, torn, plus more leaves for garnish
- 8 oz fresh ricotta cheese
- freshly grated pecorino Romano cheese

Heat large, covered saucepot of salted water to boiling over high heat. Prepare pasta as label directs.

Meanwhile, in 12-inch skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add sausage and cook until lightly browned, breaking up sausage with side of wooden spoon until crumbled. Add garlic and cook 1 to 2 minutes or until liquid evaporates, stirring to loosen any browned bits from bottom of pan. Add tomatoes with their juices, oregano, crushed red pepper flakes and salt and black pepper to taste. Heat to boiling over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer 20 to 30 minutes or until sauce thickens slightly, stirring occasionally.

Drain pasta, then return to saucepot. Add sauce and half of torn basil; toss until pasta is coated in sauce. Divide pasta between plates; top evenly with ricotta. Sprinkle with remaining torn basil and grated pecorino Romano; garnish with basil leaves to serve.



CAMPANELLE WITH EGGPLANT, FONTINA AND CHERRY TOMATOES

CAMPANELLE is the technical Italian term for the pasta shape Sfoglini colloquially calls “trumpets.” The bell-shaped pasta is perfect for use in casseroles, but it works well in dishes that have small vegetables or pieces of meat. This recipe comes together in minutes. Heat up the pasta water just before cooking the eggplant, which will become jammy and soft, coating the ruffles of the trumpet for maximum flavor in each bite.

- 1 lb Sfoglini trumpets or campanelle pasta
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1 medium eggplant, cut into ½-inch pieces
- ½ small onion, thinly sliced
- 1 lb cherry tomatoes, each cut in half
- pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 8 oz Fontina cheese, shredded (2 cups), divided
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh Italian parsley leaves, chopped (about ½ cup), divided

Heat large, covered saucepot of salted water to boiling over high heat. Prepare pasta as label directs.

Meanwhile, in 12-inch skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic, eggplant and onion and cook until soft, stirring frequently. Add tomatoes and crushed red pepper flakes and cook just until tomatoes begin to soften. Add salt and black pepper to taste.

Drain pasta, then return to saucepot. Add eggplant mixture, 1 cup cheese and ¼ cup parsley to pasta. Toss until cheese melts and pasta is coated with sauce, warming on low heat, if necessary. Divide pasta between dinner plates. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and parsley to serve.





HOW TO MAKE IT AT HOME

(no stress required)

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEANNA FOX

These days, great pasta is only a box away, but for those looking to push it to the limit, making it at home from scratch is a simple process. Dried pasta is traditionally made of durum wheat and water, but fresh pasta's deep-yellow color comes from the addition of eggs, especially egg yolks. Flour serves as the glutenous base that forms strength and structure as the pasta dough is kneaded, while eggs add protein to hold the pasta together as it briefly boils in salted water.

This is the biggest difference between fresh and dried pasta: Dried pasta absorbs water slowly, so it doesn't need further structural agents to help hold its shape. Fresh pasta is already very moist, and without an egg, the pasta might dissolve in hot water.

At home, you can experiment with flavors by adding dried herbs or hot chiles into your pasta dough, but plain pasta on its own is a delightful treat.

The trick to making pasta from scratch is to work patiently. Even with slow, intentional movements, the process can take less than an hour, depending on the shape of pasta you would like to make and the amount of time you allow the dough to rest. Methodical stirring of flour into eggs results in a supple dough, free of lumps. But don't worry – if you do get lumps, you can simply work them out during the kneading process. You will simply need a bowl, fork, knife, measuring tools and a pasta roller. If you wish to forgo a pasta roller, you can use a rolling pin. The tools and ingredients you decide to use is up to you, but the technique is the same.



BASIC FRESH PASTA DOUGH

- 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly grated nutmeg (optional)
- 6 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1-2 Tbsp olive oil (optional)

In a large bowl, with a fork, stir together flour, salt and nutmeg, if using. Make a wide, shallow well in center of flour mixture, making it more of a large pond than a deep volcano. Crack eggs into the well. If you want a little more elasticity in your pasta, add the optional olive oil.

With a fork, prick the egg yolks to open them up, then gently beat the eggs together. Flick a bit of flour from the outer edge of the well over the top of the eggs, then mix with fork to combine with the eggs. Continue drawing in the flour slowly to avoid lumps. When a loose dough starts to form, the flour and egg can be beaten together with more ferocity. Humidity and the slight variance in egg volume may require additional flour be added.

Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead into a smooth ball, adding a touch more flour if dough is sticky. Wrap dough in plastic or beeswax wrap and allow it to rest in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes or up to 24 hours.

If you are using a pasta roller, on a well-floured surface to prevent sticking, roll out the dough just enough to feed into the pasta roller at its widest setting. After feeding the dough through, fold it into thirds by folding one short end two-thirds of the way over the dough, then pull the other end over to reach the fold. Pass the dough again through the pasta roller on the widest setting. Continue to roll at thinner settings until you reach your desired thickness, or about 1/8-inch thickness for most cuts.

If you are doing this by hand, roll the dough into 1/4-inch thickness. Fold in thirds, then roll again until you reach your desired thickness.

To cut long noodles, like fettuccine or tagliatelle, generously flour your sheet of pasta. Loosely fold the long side of the dough over itself every 2 to 3 inches to make a flat, spiraled "log". Cut the log crosswise into desired widths. Loosely gather up pasta and gently shake to remove excess flour. Place small handfuls of pasta in little nests on baking sheet; let stand at room temperature to dry out while heating up the pasta cooking water.

Heat a large pot of water to boiling, adding 1 teaspoon of table salt per quart of water. Add the pasta in batches and boil for 45 seconds. Use a slotted spoon or spider-style skimmer to remove the pasta from the water. Place it on a platter while the remaining pasta cooks. Do not rinse. Serve immediately.



BY DEANNA FOX

Steve Gonzalez, co-founder of Sfoglini Pasta, shares the nine commandments of cooking pasta to ensure your spaghetti night is the best it can be.

1 START WITH COLD WATER

Although it takes less time for water to boil if you use hot tap water, the energy savings on the stovetop does not outweigh the energy used to keep water hot in one's tank (let alone the water wasted from the tap while waiting for it to come to temperature), so just start from cold. It will make your pasta taste better.

2 ALWAYS SALT THE WATER

Salting the water is critical to bring out the delicate nuttiness and richness of plain pasta, or the bolder taste of flavored pasta. Though your sauce will provide intrinsic seasoning, the dish will taste flat and bland if salt hasn't permeated the pasta. The water-to-salt ratio depends on how much pasta you are planning to cook, but a general guide is, for each quart of water used, add half a tablespoon of kosher salt or one teaspoon of table salt.

3 NO OIL

Perhaps you grew up in a household that always added a splash of olive oil to the pasta pot, but break that habit now. Because oil and water are insoluble, the oil will simply sit

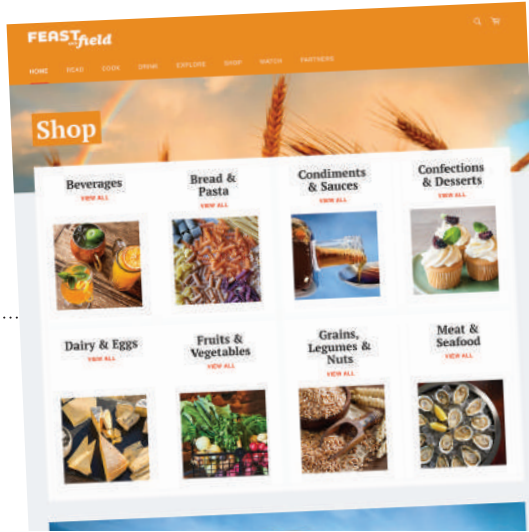
at the top of the pot, but some will get stirred into the pasta while it cooks, keeping it from fully absorbing the salted cooking water and potentially slowing the cooking process. It also makes the pasta slippery, which means those ruffles and grooves are less effective at gathering and holding sauce.

4 TURN THE HEAT DOWN

Cranking up the heat while you bring the water to a boil is fine, but once the pasta is added, turn the heat down a notch. Not only will you run the risk that pasta may stick to the bottom of the pot, but you may have starchy residue to clean up if the pot boils over. Medium-high heat is suitable for cooking pasta once the water boils, and be sure to occasionally stir your pasta while it cooks as well, especially at the beginning.

5 DON'T OVER-COOK

Al dente (meaning, "to the tooth," or firm) is the preferred texture for cooked pasta, as it holds up to even the heaviest sauce and gives each forkful of pasta body and structure. If you have a rich sauce, you can cook pasta slightly below the al dente point and let it finish cooking in the sauce to infuse it with more flavor.



6 TASTE IT

The only true way to know if pasta is done is to taste it, Gonzalez says. Sure, you can waste perfectly good noodles by flinging them against the wall to see if they stick, but fishing a noodle out of the pot and hurriedly slurping it into your mouth to test its salinity and texture is the best way to know if it is done.

7 SAVE SOME WATER

Be sure to reserve a few ladles of pasta cooking water before you strain your pasta to stir into your pasta sauce. Cooking pasta inside a strainer basket placed inside of your pot is the easiest method. Not only does the water contain salt and pasta flavor, but it also offers starch from the pasta dough. That starch thins the sauce at first, then helps to bind the pasta and sauce together adding an almost creamy element, so when you get ready to combine the two, add in a few splashes of pasta cooking water. Remember you will be adding some of the salted pasta water to the entrée, so take that into consideration when seasoning your sauce.

8 DON'T RINSE

By this stage, you've salted the water, monitored the boiling and continuously checked the

TO SALT OR NOT TO SALT?
IT IS NO QUESTION AT ALL. ONE MUST ALWAYS SALT THE PASTA POT – AND GENEROUSLY – ESPECIALLY FOR DRIED PASTA.

pasta to make sure it was cooked to perfection, so avoid taking two steps back by removing the salty, starchy coating on the outside of the pasta which allows the sauce to adhere. Skip the rinse, save the flavor and quickly add the pasta to its sauce. For cold pasta salads, it's okay to run cold water over the pasta in a colander. This stops the cooking process and removes the starchy layer, which prevents the salad from turning gummy and keeps noodles separated.

9 FINISH IN THE PAN

Ask any pastaia (the Italian term for a woman who makes pasta): It is a cardinal sin to spoon sauce over the top of plated pasta. For the best result, cook your sauce in a pot large enough to accommodate all of the cooked pasta. Use a large serving spoon or tongs to toss the pasta and sauce together. Buon appetito!



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Free-range chickens ensure freshness and flavor

BY JENNIFER BRINGLE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATE MEDLEY

For more than a century, chickens have roosted in the building that houses Patsy and Lawrence Ward's Happy Chicken Eggs. On their farm in McLeansville, North Carolina, the Wards re-furnished original structures to provide shelter for their cage-free flock of 650.

Patsy offers a few of her best egg tips and explains why happy chickens make for better, fresher eggs.

HOW ARE YOUR CHICKENS RAISED?

"We give them quality feed with no antibiotics or growth hormones," says Ward. "The chickens are in a house and a fenced in area — they're free to go in and out so they're not crowded. Three times a year, in order to keep egg production high, we rotate out and sell older chickens that are laying fewer eggs and replace them with younger chickens."

When it comes to baking, the quality of egg matters. And farm-raised is your best bet. "You're assured of the freshness, and the quality is better. You can tell a difference when you taste one of our eggs — it's a richer flavor," says Ward.

But how can you tell this guaranteed freshness? Ward explains:

"When you crack it, the egg should be intact, and the yolk should stand up and not melt down into the white of the egg. Before cracking, you can put eggs in a pot with water over them. If they float, you should throw them away, and if they stay in the bottom of the pan or stand up, they're fresh." ●



When cracked, "the yolk should stand up and not melt down into the white of the egg."



Reaping what they sow: Colorado Jack brings farm-to-table popcorn with a purpose

SPONSORED CONTENT BY NATALIE MACIAS

Colorado Jack Popcorn is proof that sowing small seeds makes a big difference. Their heart is an eagerness to give back. Their product is delicious, farm-to-table popcorn.

The enterprise is a fifth-generation family farm led by Brian Engstrom, with a mission to leave a positive imprint with their neighbors and maintain their family legacy for generations to come.

"Our ultimate goal is to create a national brand that offers a great quality snack with traceability from farm to the shelf," said Chace Engstrom-Austvold, Brian's daughter.

Colorado Jack starts where all growth begins: at harvest. While the popcorn is grown and harvested in Colorado and Nebraska, the company is in close contact with the farmers during the season of waiting — creating a relationship that ensures the kernels are well-suited for their unique blends of seasonings. "We can provide customers traceability all the way back to the farmer who grew the popcorn," said Engstrom.

Once harvested, the seeds are sent to North Dakota to be popped and seasoned. The finished product consists

of five legendary flavors including traditional sea salt and butter, caramel, white cheddar and jalapeno, and their famous Colorado mix.

However, it's not just the popcorn itself that causes customers to think fondly of Colorado Jack. Pulling back the curtain on the business, you will find that their goal is to ultimately help those in need — specifically those with disabilities — a community that is close to home for the Engstrom family.

"Our community is in need of more job opportunities for everyone and this includes individuals with disabilities," Engstrom said. "It is important to us to help keep this community thriving by helping employ part of our community in Devils Lake and Valley City."

Colorado Jack maintains a proud relationship with the Open Door Center in Valley City, North Dakota, a nonprofit organization that has been providing day, residential and vocational services to individuals with disabilities since 1959. Creating jobs for the cognitive and physically disabled was an evident choice for the business, as their son, Cullen, has autism. "Now our



online orders, small case orders and fundraising orders are produced by ODC. Each one of these orders helps provide meaningful work. We know first-hand how difficult this process can be for families to find the right home and work environment for their loved one," said Engstrom. "Now with our partnership with ODC we are able to help provide jobs for some very amazing people."

With each kernel popped and job provided through Colorado Jack — a flourishing community is formed around them.

5 Legendary flavors that will have you coming back for more!



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Baking the old-fashioned way at Maxie B’s bakery

STORIES BY JENNIFER BRINGLE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATE MEDLEY

The mixers start to whirl early in the morning inside the gleaming white kitchen at Maxie B’s. Bakers methodically pour organic flour into a large silver bowl, then crack brown-shelled farm eggs, their sunny yellow yolks stirring up tiny clouds of flour as they fall into the bowl. Soon, the mixture will go into one of the waiting ovens, warm from the cakes baked earlier that day.

The devil’s food made her do it

Owner Robin Davis founded Maxie B’s — a Southern-style bakery serving handmade cakes, pies, cookies and more in Greensboro, North Carolina — in 1985 as a frozen yogurt franchise. How the space came to be the nationally acclaimed bakery it is today can only be explained by a series of unpredictable events.

“We were remodeling my 1920s home kitchen, eating out a lot, and I was pregnant. I almost always order dessert. I’m known to look at the dessert menu first to make sure I’m able to save room,” says Davis. She found herself frequently disappointed by what seemed to be poor-quality, commercially made desserts. Davis longed for the devil’s food cake she enjoyed growing up.

“I was on this mission, and I’d go through those cookbooks trying to find the perfect cake and the perfect chocolate icing,” she says.

“I made cake after cake, chocolate icing after chocolate icing, one after another. My health-conscious husband wanted them out of the house, so I started selling the cakes by the slice out of the store.”

Her regular customers loved it, and it didn’t take long before they started requesting other varieties.

Small beginnings to big press

The popularity of yogurt was waning around the same time that the cakes were taking off, so Davis closed the original location and focused on building the concept of Maxie B’s bakery.

Then, an editor of Southern Living magazine showed up in 2011.

“They wound up doing three stories on us in 12 months, and even today, we have people who come in from Alabama and say, ‘I still have this magazine article,’” she says. “It elevated our reputation as a bakery, as well as increased the volume and launched our shipping business. Recognition by Southern Living was a very important milestone for us.”

Although that publicity certainly helped, what really made Maxie B’s business soar is its dedication to traditional



Robin Davis, right, and her team found a use for excess eggs and dairy — quiche.

Southern craft cooking. The bakery mostly sticks to the cakes and pies Southerners know well — chocolate chess pie, red velvet, hummingbird and 7UP cakes — along with other classics.

A commitment to local makes for environmental impact

The recipes aren’t the only aspect of production Davis has tweaked. In the beginning, she and her staff would make weekly runs to Sam’s Club to purchase sugar, flour and eggs in bulk. But as the business grew and the need for ingredients exceeded what they could buy from a store, Davis saw an opportunity to change the bakery’s sourcing.

“I realized that the local organic fresh movement is how I function at home,” she says. “And I really wanted the bakery to be an extension of that and support the community, so we started searching for as many local sources as possible.”

After Patsy and Lawrence Ward of Ward’s Happy Chicken Eggs introduced their eggs to Davis, she knew they exemplified the quality, local family farm she wanted to support. In nearby McLeansville, the Wards raise cage-free chickens fed with grain grown by neighboring farmers. Davis partners with sustainable dairy farm, Homeland Creamery, where she procures milk and cream, and she sources flour from Lindley Mills, a 10th-generation family organic grain mill operating in a location that has been home to grain milling since 1755. She even discovered a source for jams and marmalades under her own roof — an employee’s parents own a berry farm and supply jams for the bakery.

“We did not begin as a bakery, and it truly was a bit of an accident,” Davis says. “It wasn’t planned, and what we are now was not planned. It has just grown and evolved, and it continues to grow and evolve — we just read what’s happening, and if someone has a good idea, we run with it.” ●



Berry tips from expert bakers

Adding berries to your favorite dessert might seem like a no-brainer, but there are a few tricks to make the most of these juicy additions. Maxie B’s owner, Robin Davis, and her kitchen manager, Elizabeth Wall, share some tips along with one of her Greensboro, North Carolina, bakery’s classic berry-forward recipes.

Beautify with berries.

Adding fruit, nuts or sprigs of fresh herbs is an easy, inexpensive way to decorate a cake. Just be certain the berries or greenery haven’t been sprayed with pesticides, and be sure to add them just before serving for peak freshness.



Coat the berries.

When you’re baking with whole berries such as blueberries, coat them in flour before dropping them into your batter to prevent them from sinking to the bottom of the baked good. The flour absorbs any berry juice that bursts into the batter, so the area around the berry doesn’t become soggy, and the juices are less likely to bleed and discolor the batter.

Use buttercream with berries.

Although you might prefer the taste of cream cheese icing, avoid using it when creating layer cakes with fruit. Cream cheese icing is slicker than buttercream, so when you’re making layers with berries, the juice tends to run out the side of the cake and make a mess.

Play with flavor pairings.

Sometimes it’s good to pair berries with unexpected flavors. “We make a malted blackberry and honey cupcake that’s wicked — it’s so good,” Davis says. “We use a small family farm’s malt, and it goes into the batter. Then we core out that blackberry cupcake and put blackberry jam in the center, put malt and honey in the icing, and then drizzle honey on top and garnish with a mint leaf.”

YOUR GUIDE TO COMMON ICING TYPES

“We all know icing is the perfect finishing touch to a great cake. “The phrase ‘icing on the cake’ refers to making something that is already good even better — that’s what icing does,” says Elizabeth Wall, kitchen manager at Maxie B’s bakery in Greensboro, North Carolina.

FROSTING VERSUS ICING: ONE IN THE SAME?

The words “icing” and “frosting” are most often used interchangeably, and, in this article, we’re adhering to that linguistic standard since most dictionaries officially consider the words synonymous.

If you don’t know your fondant from your ganache, our guide to everything icing (and frosting) will ensure you pick the top topping for your next decadent dessert.

BUTTERCREAM

Just as the name implies, this popular American frosting is made by creaming butter and powdered sugar, often with a touch of milk together, creating a smooth, decadently sweet topping that’s easy to spread. Buttercream will become too soft when left at room temperature for too long, so refrigeration will be necessary when preparing a buttercream-frosted cake well in advance of serving.

GANACHE

A chocolate-lover’s dream, ganache is made by mixing heavy or whipping cream with pure chocolate (most often semisweet or dark varieties, though white chocolate can also be used) in a one-to-one ratio. Both the cream and chocolate are heated, then stirred together to create a thick, shiny topping.

CREAM CHEESE

Cream cheese icing is made by creaming butter, cream cheese, powdered sugar and vanilla extract together. Generally denser than other icings, it’s best when made with full-fat cream cheese. “Oil-based cakes, like carrot cake or red velvet, are traditionally prepared with cream cheese icing,” Wall says.

ROYAL ICING

Used mostly as a decorative frosting, royal icing is thick and pasty when wet, and dries smooth and hard. Beating together a mixture of egg whites (or meringue powder), powdered sugar and water creates the texture, and food coloring is often added to enhance the decorative effect.

FONDANT

Like royal icing, fondant is mostly used for decorative purposes on cakes. The thick, pliable sugar paste is usually achieved by mixing sugar, water and gelatin or marshmallows. Once mixed, fondant is often rolled out into a thin layer, cut and manipulated to create decorative elements for cakes.

GLAZE

Glazes are used atop everything from pound cakes to cinnamon rolls. They can be thick or thin depending on the desired end result. Basic glaze is made by mixing powdered sugar and liquid, like water, cream or milk. Once poured atop baked goods, glazes dry into a shiny crust.

FRESH BLUEBERRY PIE

RECIPE ADAPTED BY THE MAXIE B’S TEAM FROM ORIGINAL SOUTHERN RECIPE.

- 1 egg
- 1Tbsp heavy or whipping cream
- 1 lemon
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 5Tbsp cornstarch
- ¼ tsp salt
- 4 cups fresh or frozen (unthawed) blueberries
- 1 package (14.1 to 16 oz) refrigerated rolled pie crusts, at room temperature
- 1Tbsp salted butter, cut into pieces

Preheat oven to 350°F. Meanwhile, in small bowl, with fork, beat egg and cream well. Into large bowl, from lemon, grate 1 teaspoon zest. Squeeze 2 tablespoons juice into second small bowl. Into bowl with lemon zest, add sugar, cornstarch and salt; stir with spatula



until well combined. Add blueberries and lemon juice and toss gently until blueberries are evenly coated with sugar mixture.

Unroll 1 pie crust; line 9-inch glass or ceramic pie plate with crust. Spread blueberry mixture evenly in crust; dot with butter. Unroll second pie crust; cut into ½-inch-wide strips. Weave strips across blueberry mixture to make lattice top. Turn bottom crust over ends of strips, then pinch together to seal. If desired, make fluted edge. Brush lattice top and edges of pie with egg wash. Place pie on foil-lined rimmed baking pan.

Bake in center of oven 50 minutes to 1 hour or until center bubbles. If necessary, cover edges of pie loosely with foil to prevent overbrowning during last 15 minutes of baking. Cool pie slightly on wire rack to serve warm, or cool completely to serve later.



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