Placer County hires firm to market agricultural assets

Placer County is embracing its agricultural attributes.

Agricultural Commissioner Joshua Huntsinger encouraged the Board of Supervisors to select a contractor who will do agricultural marketing for Placer County.

After a competitive recruitment process, Merlot Marketing of Sacramento was selected from 10 applicants. The Board of Supervisors has approved the $79,995 contract, which will run from March 13, 2012, until June 30, 2013.

“Agriculture in Placer County is a $65 million a year industry,” Huntsinger said in a press release. “Our goal is to assist farmers in remaining profitable and increase their sales. This is a significant boost to our economy.”

Merlot Marketing will work with agricultural organizations, as well as individual farmers and ranchers to promote local products and events that feature those products. The marketing effort will use local, regional and national media to tout the benefits and uniqueness of Placer County-grown produce and products made from that produce.

The marketing program, which began in 2001, continued annually until 2009, when difficult economic times forced its suspension.

Ruining produce in the refrigerator

By Huffington Post



Keep onions out of the refrigerator .

Don’t stick that onion in the fridge. You might think that you’re being resourceful. You might think you’re stretching your dollars by prolonging the life of your produce (which, in a way, you kind of are). But what you’re really doing is making them taste worse – a lot worse.

If you think about it, refrigerating much of our produce just isn’t logical. All of the foods we eat are unique, so it makes sense that they should be treated according to their individual makeup. There’s a pretty simple rule to follow (disclaimer: it isn’t 100 percent fool-proof, because even supermarkets get it wrong sometimes): if it’s not being kept cold at the supermarket, it really shouldn’t be kept cold in your home.

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Muffins so tasty they are good to snack on

By Kathryn Reed

Breakfast is not my favorite meal to eat or fix. But for some reason when it’s fixed for me, whatever is on the plate seems to taste better. Maybe that’s because it’s not my usual cup of coffee and banana.



When I was in the Bay Area earlier this year staying with friends because I had a meeting that needed writing about the next day it was much like staying at a bed and breakfast. (I also got dinner. Thank you Carol and Ben.)

Carol was much like a second mom to me growing up. While I don’t see her as often now that mom doesn’t live nearby, we still keep in touch mostly via email.

She was even more generous by sending me home with a large baggy full of these morsels. They are great to eat anytime of day. But right out of the oven with a little butter is the best.

All the comments below are from Carol.

Empire State Muffins

(From Carol Shuey with adaptations from original recipe from Rachel Kukuk.)

Note: *Cranberries never seem to be in season when I make this recipe. I’ve tried using frozen ones, but that wasn’t very*

successful. I now use dried cranberries (Craisins). I take about ¾ cup of them, put in a bowl of water and let soak for about half hour and then I drain and chop or cut them up. If you do this first thing when you are getting ready to start making this recipe, they will almost have soaked long enough by the time you get the apples, carrots, walnuts and other ingredients ready.

2 C shredded unpeeled apples

1½ C sugar (I greatly reduce this to 1 cup or even ¾ cup)

1 C chopped cranberries

1 C shredded carrots

1 C walnuts, chopped (I reduce to ½ cup)

2½ C flour

1T baking powder

2 tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

2 tsp cinnamon (I use 1 tsp)

2 eggs

¼ C oil

¼ C orange juice concentrate (I have used just ¼ cup regular OJ and it is OK, but using the concentrate would give a stronger orange flavor probably.)

Combine apples and sugar; gently fold in cranberries, carrots and nuts. Combine dry ingredients and add to bowl. Mix well. Add oil, juice and eggs.

Bake at 375 degrees for 20-25 minutes. If using small muffins tins, bake for 15-20 minutes.

Yield: Small muffins yield approximately six dozen.

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32 wineries to choose from during Passport event

Tickets are on sale for the annual Passport wine event in El Dorado County.

The event often sells out. This year the dates are April 14-15 and April 21-22 from 11am until 5pm.

Wine lovers can enjoy 32 award-winning wineries. New to the event this year are Synapse, Shadow Ranch, Nello Olivo, Cielo Estates, Skinner and Grace Patriot.



Passport

weekends in El Dorado County usually sell out. Photo/LTN file

Each winery will feature a wine and food pairing from a Mediterranean country and many will also have art, music and barrel tasting.

To purchase tickets and see a full list of participating wineries, go online. Tickets are $70 per passport weekend for unlimited wine, food and entertainment. Designated drivers can enjoy all the festivities without the wine for $26.62 per wristband.

Creative hot drinks make cold winter days bearable

By Kathryn Reed

While spring is a week away based on the calendar, one can never really depend on that to know what the weather will be like in Lake Tahoe. That’s also why it seems like hot drinks are something that can be enjoyed about 10 months out of the year here.

I spent the past few months with friends trying different hot libations in the basin. We know we just scratched the service, so please add your top choices as a comment.



Riva Grill wins for best glasses for winter drinks. Photo/LTN

We've learned that adding room temperature alcohol to the main hot liquid just cools the whole drink down. Bartenders need to have the coffee, cocoa, cider – whatever – hotter than it's normally served at straight so it is still a hot drink by the time customers start drinking.

From the Z Bar inside the Zephyr Lodge at Northstar came my favorite winter drink of the season because it didn't involve coffee or hot cocoa. African Winter is dark rum, hot African tea, peach liqueur, lemon, and orange bitters. It was hot and refreshing at the same time. Cost – $12.

Also at Northstar, this time from the bar by the ice rink, Sue and I liked the Snow Plow over the Dirty Snowman. For $9, you get Baileys, Malibu, dark crème de cacao and hot chocolate. Careful, though, because it goes down fast.

Sue's favorite drink hailed from the Fresh Ketch in South Lake Tahoe. It's something bartender Sean whipped up for $7.50. It had butterscotch schnapps, rum, and hot buttered mix.

I thought it was like drinking a butterscotch candy. Sue thought it had a vanilla taste. She tends to favor sweet drinks – and this was one of those.

At the Ketch I had the Ketch Toddy ($10.50). This is Dewar's White Label, honey, cinnamon, star anise, ginger and fresh

orange zest. I'm the one who can do scotch and whiskey. Sue made a face and handed it back to me.

Even though Sue is not a big fan of tequila (she pronounces it *to-kill-ya*), the Mood Swing she ordered at the Beacon on the South Shore was tasty. The $8.50 drink has Cazadores Reposada, dark crème do cacao, Defrost Cinnamon Schnapps, hot chocolate and whipped cream.

The cinnamon schnapps puts it in the something "unique" and "let's have a second round" categories.

The Hot Bubba ($9) sounded good, but I was wishing I had ordered the Mood Swing. Too much coffee in this one.

Then there are places where the bartender is of no use. We asked the guy at Zephyr Cove Lodge what fun hot drinks he could make. He paused, then said he could make an Irish coffee. We passed.

Five of us at Brook's Sports Bar at Edgewood were ready to do research one afternoon this month. The waitress had no fun hot drinks to offer us. (We stuck with beer.)

While the two hot drinks on the menu at Pacific Crest in Truckee were passable, the ambiance at the bar is what would get us to go back. It's fun.

I would recommend the Bourbon Furnace ($8) – Buffalo Trace Bourbon and hot cider. Sue took one sip and passed it to me. So much for sharing.

She liked the Almond Joy ($8) – saying it was like drinking a chocolate bar. The sweetness is what had me passing it back to her. The hot cocoa drink has two kinds of rum and Amaretto.

One place we won't be ordering hot drinks from again is Stateline Brewery. The names are cute, the concoctions are unique and the price ($6-$8) reasonable. The execution, though, put this experience at the bottom of the list for me,

Sue, Brenda and Roni.

As Brenda put it, “It seems like they are unprepared for people who order hot drinks.”

The bartender didn’t know how to make all the drinks and all came to the table without whipped cream. The server added the topping after the fact – which didn’t work. Presentation is a big deal – especially with hot drinks.

It’s mid-February and we are taking in the Unbuckle Apres Ski Party at the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly. Half-price drinks are touted. We paid $23 for two hot cocoas with Frangelico and Grand Marnier. *Ouch.* Another for the “not going to do that again” category.

However, later in the month we are back at Heavenly, this time at the Umbrella Bar that is now at Snow Beach. This time, two cocktails $17.92 – plus, they are bigger and tastier. And Angela the bartender is much better at customer service.

She even warned us the drinks were hot. Which they were.

Sue had the Hot Sailor Cider, which has Sailor Jerry spiced rum and hot apple cider. My Hot Apple Pie (with whipped cream) was the same, except it has tuaca, too. We both liked mine a little bit better.

It was hard to decide which hot cocktail to order at Riva Grill. Original choices, flavor and value for the price would have us going back to this restaurant at the Ski Run Marina.

I had the Hot White Russian. It’s very much like the cold version. It has Kahlua, Absolute vodka, steamy cream and a Mexican chocolate shake. The steamed milk is certainly something I had not had in a hot spiked drink before.

Sue had the Stabbin’ Cabin – rum, Irish cream and amaretto. Something on the menu mentioned it would be hard to find the door after two. Sue agreed just after one.

Riva definitely serves its drinks in the best looking glasses. The handles make it so you don’t burn yourself holding the drinks – which are served hot. Each drink was $9.95.

Over at the West Bowl at Sierra-at-Tahoe I let Jason tell me what I should drink. It’s his version of an Irish coffee, only hot chocolate is the main ingredient. The Jameson whiskey, Bailey’s and whipped cream were delightful. With tax, the bill came to $8.39.

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Note: On March 15 read about hot places for having a winter drink in Lake Tahoe.

Truckee Rotary crab feed benefits Sierra Expeditionary Learning School

Get your tickets for a fun-filled night of all-you-can-eat Dungeness crab, live auction action and Truckee camaraderie. The 2012 Rotary Crab & Pasta Feed will be at the new Truckee Community Recreation Center on March 24.

All proceeds benefit Sierra Expeditionary Learning School, a public charter school in the Tahoe Truckee Unified School

District. SELS board member Erica Stein said the school plans to use the money raised from the auction to start a capital campaign fund to pay for needed additional classroom space.

For the past 18 years, the Rotary Club of Truckee has organized the Crab & Pasta Feed to benefit one worthy local nonprofit. While Rotary provides the venue, the auctioneer and the bidding audience, the selected organization must organize and run the event's live auction in order to receive its proceeds. In previous years, groups have earned up to $14,000 for their causes.

The bar opens at 5pm, dinner is served at 7pm and the auction will begin at 8pm. Tickets are $40 for adults and $20 for children 16 and under. Tickets can be purchased through any Truckee Rotarian or by calling Steve Randall at (530) 582.7720.

K's Kitchen: Not your run of the mill taco

By Kathryn Reed

It wasn't until I started typing the recipe that I figured out why I had so many limes when Pam and Darla went home. I forgot to cut them into wedges and put them on the plate. Oops.



Luckily, that was on of those cooking oops that don't really matter. But I could see how an extra squeeze of lime would have been great on these tacos.

Another thing I learned in writing this is there is a lot of confusion about poblano and pasilla peppers on the Internet. I kept reading U.S. grocers confuse the two; when the truth is they are different chiles or peppers.

I'm completely confused and hope a reader can clarify the difference between a poblano and pasilla, as well as a chile and pepper.

Neither Grocery Outlet nor Safeway in South Lake Tahoe had poblano. Safeway had a pasilla. I knew it looked like a poblano, but the produce gal clearly didn't know the difference.

Darla thought the dish was too spicy and kept swigging her beer to cool off her mouth. The rest of us were fine. My barometer is how Sue does with a dish – and she was fine. This meant Pam and I could have used a hair more kick. There are enough opportunities based on the ingredients to adjust the heat index.

The recipe comes from the November 2011 *Cooking Light* magazine.

Besides being so flavorful, it's easy to make. This was good, because after a day of skiing at Sierra, the last thing I wanted to do was come home and work up a sweat in the kitchen.

Mushroom, Corn, and Poblano Tacos

2 T olive oil, divided

1 (8 ounce) package mushrooms, sliced

1 C onion, chopped

1 tsp dried oregano

1 tsp garlic, minced

¾ tsp chili powder

¾ tsp ground cumin

1 poblano chile, chopped (abut ½ C)

1½ C frozen whole-kernel corn

1 (14.5 ounce) can no-salt added black beans, rinsed and drained

¼ C salsa verde

1 T fresh lime juice

1 tsp hot sauce

½ tsp salt

8 (6-inch) corn tortillas

¾ C (3 ounces) crumbles queso fresco

¼ C chopped fresh cilantro

¼ C light sour cream

8 lime wedges

Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon oil to pan; swirl to coat. Add mushrooms to pan; cook 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil to mushrooms. Stir in onion and next 5 ingredients (through poblano); cook 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add corn and beans to pan; cook 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove pan from heat; stir in salsa and

next 3 ingredients.

Heat tortillas according to package directions. Divide vegetable mixture evenly among tortillas. Top each tortilla with 1½ tablespoons cheese, 1½ teaspoons cilantro, and 1½ teaspoons sour cream. Serve with lime wedges.

K’s Kitchen: Frozen foods have history that dates to 1000 BC

By Kathryn Reed

When I first heard this is national Frozen Food month I didn’t think much about it. I didn’t think I ate many frozen foods.



Then I looked in the freezer. For the most part it’s leftovers that are in there. There’s also coffee, tater tots, butter, chocolate chips and fake hamburgers. From last summer’s farmers’ market I made pesto and have that frozen to use all winter, as well as tomatoes that I had bought at the market, stewed and now have in the freezer.

Then it made me think about the old icebox I have in my office that instead of having cold food stores my cold weather clothing. It’s hard to imagine living when there weren’t freezers like we know them.

Either there was a lot of wasted food in years gone by or people cooked more efficiently than I do. But I absolutely love leftovers.

It was Clarence Birdseye who in 1924 began freezing foods as we think of frozen foods today. He used a quick freezing method that eliminated the slower freezing technique that caused ice crystals to form on food.

The National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association says, “The first to harness the power of freezing foods beyond the winter months were the Chinese, who used ice cellars as early as 1000 B.C. The Greeks and Romans stored compressed snow in insulated cellars, and the Egyptians and Indians discovered that rapid evaporation through the porous walls of clay vessels produced ice crystals in the water inside the vessels.”

According to the USDA, food stored at zero degrees is safe because it inactivates any microbes – bacteria, yeasts and molds. Nutrients are not lost.

The Department of Agriculture folks also say, “Freezer burn does not make food unsafe, merely dry in spots. It appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and is caused by air coming in contact with the surface of the food. Cut freezer-burned portions away either before or after cooking the food. Heavily freezer-burned foods may have to be discarded for quality reasons.”

Next time I shop in the frozen food section or pull something out of the freezer, I won’t take it for granted.

K’s Kitchen: A cocktail with a seasonal super fruit

By Kathryn Reed

Drinking iced cocktails in winter is not my normal routine. But sometimes it’s necessary when the fruit in the drink is ripe this time of year.

That’s why kiwi mojitos were being concocted in our kitchen last weekend. Plus, I know my sister likes mojitos and has experience making them. And they are also one of Sue’s favorite cocktails.



I’m really not good with mixed drinks because I don’t get the portions of alcohol right even when I follow directions. I’ve ruined plenty of mixed drinks. That’s why Pam was there to pour in the rum.

The recipe comes from the March issue of *Rachael Ray* magazine. (The publication just started arriving, and this is the only recipe I’ve tried so far.)

What I didn’t know until reading the magazine is how good kiwis are nutritionally.

According to the magazine, two kiwis provide 230 percent of the vitamin C you need each day – which means they are good for flu prevention.

I really wish I had known they help prevent cataracts considering I had surgery on both eyes in 2010.

Kiwis help lower cholesterol and keep skin clear.

According to kiwi-fruit.info, kiwis are native to China, where they are the country's national fruit. There they are called *yang tao* (sunny peach) or *mihou tao* (macaque peach). They were imported to New Zealand in the early 20th century. The first crop in California was harvested in 1970.

We did things a little differently than what the magazine called for, so below is our adaptation. While I write about using a shaker, we don't own one – so don't let that direction stop you.

Kiwi Mojitos (makes 3)

1 C peeled kiwis, from 4-5 kiwis

4 tsp honey

8 mint leaves, or more

Ice

Club soda or tonic water

Rum, about a shot per glass

Puree kiwis and honey in food processor or blender. In cocktail shaker, muddle mint leaves. Fill shaker with ice, then add rum and kiwi puree. Shake vigorously and strain into ice-filled glasses. Fill remainder of glass with soda or tonic water.

Famous chef talks about her 2 cookbook collections

By Paula Forbes, Eater

Beard Award winning chef Traci Des Jardins has four restaurants — Jardinière, Mijita Cocina Mexicana, and Public House in San Francisco, and Manzanita at the Ritz-Carlton at Northstar — and two cookbook collections: one antique, one modern. (She is also working on a cookbook of her own to be released in fall 2013.)

Below, Des Jardins talks about what draws her to both old and new books, the need for encyclopedic cookbooks, and the one book she thinks is worth "all of the accolades that it got."

So tell me about your cookbooks.

I have a whole range. I do a lot of the modern books, the books that are just being published. And then I have a collection of antique books. Celia Sacks, the owner of San Francisco's Omnivore Bookstore, is an old friend of mine, and she was an antiquarian book cataloguer in her former life. So she started collecting books for me a long time ago, and looking at these different collections of books across the board, culinary books. So she would call me and say, "Hey, I got this really cool book! Do you want to come see it?" So that's how I started collecting antique books. I have two collections: I have a modern collection, and then I have a pretty significant library of antique books.

Read the whole story