Private grocery labels promoted for deal hunters

By Matthew Boyle, Bloomberg Businessweek

Like many U.S. grocery chains, Safeway wanted to improve its private-label offerings during the economic slump, when consumers were eager for brands that offered better value. So three years ago it poached veteran marketer Diane Dietz from Procter & Gamble and named her chief marketing officer.

Since joining Safeway, Dietz has been digging into P&G's bag of branding tricks. In June, to promote the introduction of Safeway's Open Nature line of antibiotic-free meat, she had a 305-foot-long picnic table (a Guinness World Record) constructed in San Francisco's Marina District, where celebrity chef Tyler Florence of Food Network fame helped prepare a meal for several hundred people. The resulting buzz was a publicity bonanza for the house line.

Store brands have come a long way from their copycat days, when they confined themselves mostly to yellow boxes of faux Cheerios and black-and-white cans labeled "beans." Back then, grocers were loath to anger the Kraft Foods and PepsiCos of the world by pushing their own labels too hard.

Now, with deal-hunting shoppers increasingly brand-disloyal, Safeway, Kroger, and Supervalu — which together account for 40 percent of U.S. retail food sales, according to Citibank analyst Deborah Weinswig — are increasingly willing to devote more shelf space to their own merchandise.

As of mid-November, store brands accounted for 31.4 percent of the 14,400 new food and beverage items introduced in the United States this year, according to market researcher Packaged Facts, based on data from Datamonitor's Product Launch Analytics. That's double the share logged in 2010 and

up from just 8.7 percent in 2009.

To fuel sales of their in-house lines, retailers are recruiting veteran marketers to help out-innovate traditional packaged goods companies.

Read the whole story

California farmers a bright spot in state's economy

By Diana Marcum, Los Angeles Times

FRESNO – As Californians savor their Thanksgiving feasts, the states' farmers are especially thankful. California's agriculture sector is on track for a record year, a rare bright spot in the state's economy.

Prices for cotton, grapes and other crops are near all-time highs. Foreign buyers are gobbling California almonds, grapes, citrus and dairy products. Agricultural exports through September are up 16% over the same period last year. Net farm income is projected to post strong gains in 2011 after nearly doubling over the previous decade.

At a time when other Golden State industries are struggling, times are good down on the farm. Just ask Steve Moore.

The Fresno County pistachio farmer recently completed the harvest on his 480-acre spread near Huron, part of what's estimated to be California's second-largest pistachio crop ever. Prices are strong, at around $2.10 a pound, driven by

growing demand in places including China and Israel.

Moore started with 160 acres in 1982, planting trees that take seven years to produce. “Looking at those bare sticks in the ground, I thought I must be nuts,” he said. But the crop is so lucrative he’s looking to expand again.

Indeed, prices for all manner of farm products are so high that Vernon Crowder, an agricultural economist with Rabobank, a major agricultural lender, has been seeing some unfamiliar faces at industry events.

“When you go to ag conferences you now have venture capitalists hanging around,” he said. “But they find it very difficult to beat out another farmer for land, and that shows you how strong the market is. There’s been a fundamental shift as the global market demands more food and more expensive food.”

That’s good news for California, the nation’s leading agricultural state and the fifth-largest producer worldwide. In contrast with the grain-and-livestock focused Midwest, California farmers cultivate more than 400 commodities, including more than half of the nation’s fruits and vegetables.

Looking for artichokes? Dates? Kiwi? Pomegranates? California accounts for more than 99 percent of the U.S. production of each of those crops, according to the California Food and Agriculture Department.

Read the whole story

Spices, herbs help with healthy lifestyle

By Kerri-Ann Jennings, EatingWell

As a registered dietitian and associate nutrition editor at *EatingWell* magazine, I know that herbs and spices do more than simply add flavor to food. They let you cut down on some less-healthy ingredients, such as salt, added sugars and saturated fat, and some have inherent health benefits, many of which Joyce Hendley reported on for *EatingWell* magazine.

Modern science is beginning to uncover the ultimate power of spices and herbs, as weapons against illnesses from cancer to Alzheimer's disease. "We're now starting to see a scientific basis for why people have been using spices medicinally for thousands of years," says Bharat Aggarwal, professor at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and author of Healing Spices (Sterling, 2011).

Aggarwal notes that in his native India, where spices tend to be used by the handful, incidence of diet-related diseases like heart disease and cancer have long been low. But when Indians move away and adopt more Westernized eating patterns, their rates of those diseases rise. While researchers usually blame the meatier, fattier nature of Western diets, Aggarwal and other experts believe that herbs and spices—or more precisely, the lack of them—are also an important piece of the dietary puzzle. "When Indians eat more Westernized foods, they're getting much fewer spices than their traditional diet contains," he explains. "They lose the protection those spices are conveying."

While science has yet to show that any spice cures disease, there's compelling evidence that several may help manage some chronic conditions (though it's always smart to talk with your

doctor). What's not to love? Here we've gathered eight of the healthiest spices and herbs enjoyed around the world.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Apple crisp makes guests think you worked hard

By Kathryn Reed

What to do with the three remaining pippin apples? You can't just eat these like any ordinary apple. That would be wasteful – plus they are pretty bitter. These are practically gold in the world of baking.



Needing to use them before they went bad (these aren't quite as hearty as real bullion) I consulted with mom. She suggested a crisp.

She just said do this, do that and you will be fine. While I'm sure I would have been fine, I figured it would be better to consult with a cookbook so I would have something to share with all of you that came with real measurements.

Crisps really are one of those basic desserts that tastes like you've gone to a whole lot more trouble than you did. And if you have fresh fruit in the house like peaches or blueberries or strawberries or cherries or pears – they can all become a

crisp.

For people who don’t want to deal with a full pie, this is the best solution.

The recipe said to let it cool. I put vanilla ice cream on my first serving – cooled it right down.

I got the recipe from Sunset’s “Easy Basics for Good Cooking” cookbook. This was one of the first two cookbooks I was given. They were Christmas gifts from my parents when I was a sophomore in college.

The cookbook says the crisp is best eaten the day it’s made. I have to agree.

Apple Crisp

1 C firmly packed brown sugar

1 C all purpose flour or whole wheat flour

2 tsp ground cinnamon

½ C butter or margarine

7-8 baking apples (2-2½ pounds)

2 tsp lemon juice

1 tsp grated lemon peel

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-inch square baking pan; set aside.

In a small bowl, stir together sugar, flour and 1 teaspoon of the cinnamon. With a pastry blender or your fingers, cut in butter until mixture is crumbly; set aside.

Peel apples; slice thinly into prepared baking pan. Sprinkle with the remaining teaspoon of cinnamon, lemon juice, and lemon peel; to coat apples, then spread them out in pan.

Sprinkle crumb mixture evenly over apples.

Bake, uncovered, for 50-60 minutes or until apples are fork-tender and top crust is browned and crisp. Let cool for at least 30 minutes before serving, or let cool completely and serve at room temperature. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Jelly Belly tour is more than a sugar rush

By Kathryn Reed

FAIRFIELD – Free tour, free candy. Count us in.

I don’t know how many times I’ve driven past the Jelly Belly factory in Fairfield off Interstate 80, but it was finally time to stop. I had been there once before, but this was Sue’s first venture into this world that is more than just Jelly Bellys.

The only downside to visiting on a Sunday was the workers were all at home, so the real operation can’t be seen. Nevertheless, the 40-minute walking tour is still fun and informative.



The Jelly Belly factory has free tours in Fairfield. Photo/LTN

While President Ronald Reagan made Jelly Belly a household world, the candymakers' roots go back to Germany. Brothers Gustav and Albert Goelitz immigrated to the United States in 1867, starting their businesses here two years later.

It was 1976 that the Jelly Belly was born, so to speak. The initial flavors were Very Cherry, Lemon, Cream Soda, Tangerine, Green Apple, Root Beer, Grape and Licorice.

In addition to the 50 official flavors, there are sugar-free, sours and chocolate dipped beans.

We bought Belly Flops at the store. These are rejects – sort of. They taste great; just look a little funky in shape and color. The flavors can be original and not likely to be created again.

Then there are the ones that make you scratch your head as to who developed the bean and another scratch for who would buy them. Flavors like Pencil Shavings, Skunk Spray and Booger.

What I think is fun is using the recipes to come up with a new flavor. It takes two Blueberry beans and one Buttered Popcorn to come up with what tastes like a Blueberry Muffin.

According to Jelly Belly, the difference between their product and regular jelly bean is "their authentic and intense

flavors, the number of flavors, the smaller size, the brilliant colors and, of course, the Jelly Belly name on every bean. … most Jelly Belly flavors use fine natural ingredients, whenever possible, to flavor the beans, i.e., chocolate, coconut, fruit juice concentrates and fruit purees like strawberry, pear and banana. These 'true-to-life' flavors are mixed into the center and the shell."

More information about tours all things Jelly Belly is online.

Inmate claims soy diet is cruel and unusual punishment

By Lizette Alvarez, New York Times

MIAMI – One too many bouts of flatulence and cramping has led a Florida inmate to sue the Department of Corrections, arguing that the prison's soy-based turkey dogs and sloppy Joes amount to cruel and unusual punishment.

Eric D. Harris, 34, who is serving a life sentence for sexual battery on a child, said the soy in his prison chow is threatening his health by endangering his thyroid and immune system. Florida prisons serve meals with 50 percent soy and 50 percent poultry three times a day, a mixture that costs half as much as using beef and pork, the Department of Corrections says. The cost per meal: $1.70 a day for each inmate. Florida prisons first began serving soy-based meals in 2009.

As an inmate at the Lake Correctional Institution, near Orlando, Mr. Harris, a former paralegal, has few culinary choices. He can eat 100 grams of soy protein a day, use his own money to buy food at the commissary or eat a vegan diet,

he said in the lawsuit, which was filed in state court in Tallahassee and which The Orlando Sentinel reported on this week.

Gretl Plessinger, a spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Corrections, said inmates can choose an alternative vegan meal if they do not want soy. “We have a constitutional obligation to feed them healthy, nutritious food, but we don’t have an obligation to feed them beef,” she said.

Read the whole story

Farmers can learn how to better connect with consumers

Subscription services are not limited to magazines and newspapers. Farmers have discovered the popularity of offering weekly subscriptions to consumers for local, seasonal produce.

Area growers can learn more about this trend at a Western Nevada College Specialty Crop Institute workshop. “Subscription Farming for the Small Farm” meets Dec. 17 from 9am-3:30pm at WNC Fallon campus, 160 Campus Way. Cost is $35 for registrations by Dec. 9 and $45 afterward. Lunch is included.

The workshop is directed to small-acreage farmers to teach them how to make a profit in this alternative direct marketing enterprise. Participants will learn about recruiting and retaining customers, planting schedules, recordkeeping, benefits and challenges of working with other farms, and more. The workshop will include a roundtable discussion on farm successes and challenges.

Subscription farming, also known as Community Supported Agriculture or CSA, employs a system of weekly delivery or pick-up of farm-fresh, seasonal produce, and sometimes includes dairy products and meat. Customers pre-pay during planting season for a set number of weekly shares of produce to be delivered during harvest season. Customers enjoy the benefits of fresh produce delivered directly from the farm and often receive varieties that cannot be found in retail outlets or farmers markets.

For information/registration, contact Ann Louhela at (775) 351.2551 or louhelaa@wnc.edu.

K's Kitchen: A warm drink on a cold day

By Kathryn Reed

When Sue was in Oregon early this month visiting her sister they got to talking about hot cider. Out came the Betty Crocker cookbook to see if it suggested anything special be done to the beverage.



Last weekend Sue made her version of the wintry drink – spiked. She said it's very similar to Betty's recipe.

Something about the smell of hot cider is wonderful. The aroma fills the house. It makes me think of my childhood.

I did a little research on the Internet trying to find out the difference between cider and juice. My conclusion is there is no difference.

“Martinelli’s apple juice and cider are the same; the only difference is the label. Both are 100 percent pure juice from U.S. grown fresh apples. We continue to offer the cider label since some consumers simply prefer the traditional name for apple juice.” That from Martinell’s website.

What I would do is make sure you buy a good juice or cider. The cloudy, not from concentrate, unpasteurized stuff is my favorite.

Sue’s Spiked Apple Juice

1 gallon apple juice

Orange juice

1 T whole cloves

½ dozen cinnamon sticks

1 whole orange, cut into slices

Dash brown sugar

Brandy

Put all of the ingredients into a crock pot and let simmer for half a day. Pour a quarter shot of brandy (or whatever you like) into a small mug, then fill with hot juice.

Americans eat 13 pounds of turkey a year

In fall 1621, early settlers of Plymouth Colony had a three-day feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest, an event many regard as the nation's first Thanksgiving. Historians have also recorded ceremonies of thanks among other groups of European settlers in North America, including British colonists in Virginia in 1619.

The legacy of thanks and the feast have survived the centuries, as the event became a national holiday in 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a national day of thanksgiving. Later, President Franklin Roosevelt clarified that Thanksgiving should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month.

The number of turkeys expected to be raised in the United States in 2011 is 248 million. That's up 2 percent from the number raised during 2010. The turkeys produced in 2010 together weighed 7.11 billion pounds and were valued at $4.37 billion, according to the USDA.

Minnesota raises the largest number of turkeys – 46.5 million expect this year. Other high-volume turkey production states are North Carolina (30 million), Arkansas (30 million), Missouri (18 million), Virginia (17.5 million) and Indiana (16 million). These six states together account for about two-thirds of U.S. turkeys produced in 2011.

In 2009, Americans on average consumed 13.3 pounds of turkey plus 5.3 pounds of sweet potatoes – that's per person.

ZCES Sharing Feast embodies true meaning of Thanksgiving

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Sampling the pie before the main course was barely touched, a pair of third-graders gave the sweets thumbs up.

Rachelle Hernandez is used to eating pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving, so for this meal she chose cherry. Her friend Alyssa Siewell was not going to break with tradition, so she was diving into the pumpkin.



Rachelle Hernandez and Alyssa Siewell are fans of the pie at ZCES' Sharing Feast. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Both said the pie at Wednesday's Sharing Feast at Zephyr Cove Elementary School was the best part of the meal.

"This is coming in second place right here," Alyssa said of the roll she had covered with mashed potatoes. While that isn't usually how she eats bread or potatoes, it was working

for her the day before Thanksgiving.

Now in its third year, the Sharing Feast is the brainchild of parent Kelly Krolicki. The idea to ensure everyone – students, teachers, administrators, parents – have at least one hot Thanksgiving meal.

The sharing part is that it's a group effort to feed 210 students plus all the adults. They share in the preparation and the eating. Per health codes regulations it is store bought food the parents must bring, while under the guidance of the school nutrition manager the hot food is freshly prepared.

Lakeside Inn donated the turkey. Filling out the plate were green beans, mashed potatoes, gravy, and fresh fruit. Rolls and cranberries were on each table, with pie and juice also available.



Teachers and parents share a meal with students Nov. 23.

No worries about twin kindergartners Henry and Andrew Craig fighting over who gets more gravy. Andrew doesn't want a drop to hit his plate. Henry is more than glad to have another ladle.

"I love gravy on my mashed potatoes," Henry said.

While Andrew is a huge fan of potatoes – it practically looked like he licked his plate – he likes them au natural.



Kelly Krolicki dishes turkey to students at ZCES.

Principal Nancy Cauley walked among the tables with a plate of food – making sure everyone was having a good time. She is proud her school is the only one in Douglas County School District to have such a feast.

Mixed in with the students are parents and extended family members.

“The food is so good,” kindergartner Hana Muller said as she cut another piece of turkey.

No one seemed to care they might be having a very similar meal today.