

Whole Foods says it'll lower prices, but at a cost

By Julie R. Thomson, Huffington Post

Whole Foods Market, also known as the place where you can spend your entire life savings on a couple of bags of groceries, is working on cutting its prices – but that could affect the number of products it stocks on its shelves. This is a big shift for the company, which just a couple of years ago admitted to overcharging its customers.

The change is inspired by a continued drop in sales growth. One of the reasons sales are hurting is because other grocery chains are upping their organic options, cutting into Whole Foods' market. Another reason is because of the way the chain operates.

Whole Foods Market, unlike some other national grocers, operates regionally. Rather than centralize its products for purchase and distribution in one location, it works out of 11 U.S. regions.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Maple syrup stars in cheesecake

By Kathryn Reed

Decadence awaits with this dessert. It's rich, creamy and wonderful.

In case you are one of those who doesn't read all the directions until you are cooking, know that the cheesecake needs to be refrigerated for a few hours, so it might need to be a two-day process, but definitely not a last-minute thing.

While it was difficult to truly taste the maple syrup, it was obvious there was something different about the cake itself – but in a good way. The whipped cream is where the syrup came across much more. Be sure to use a good quality syrup.

Invite people over – there's so much to share.



Vermont's Cheesecake

Crust:

$\frac{3}{4}$ C flour
3 T brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ C butter
 $\frac{1}{4}$ C walnuts, chopped

Cheesecake:

24 ounces low fat cream cheese, room temperature
8 ounces mascarpone cheese, room temperature
 $\frac{3}{4}$ C brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C pure maple syrup
 $\frac{1}{4}$ C half-and-half
2 T flour
1 tsp vanilla
3 eggs, room temperature

Whipped cream:

2 C heavy whipping cream
½ C pure maple syrup
1 tsp vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine the flour, brown sugar and butter. Then add walnuts. Press the mixture into the bottom of a 10-inch spring form pan. Bake for 10 minutes or until lightly browned.

Beat cream cheese and mascarpone cheese in mixer until smooth. Add brown sugar, maple syrup, half-and-half, flour and vanilla. Mix well, then add the eggs.

Pour cheese mixture over cooled crust.

Bake for 35 minutes or until the cheesecake is set and the middle jiggles just a little. Cool for 15 minutes. Use knife to loosen edge before removing ring. Let cool, then chill in refrigerator for at least four hours.

Whip the heavy cream until soft peaks form; then add the maple syrup and vanilla. Spread frosting on cake.

Sierra Salsa Showdown hot enough to melt snow

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Bottle it. It was that good.

Jerry Lee Marsh took home top honors April 22 at Sierra-at-Tahoe's Salsa Showdown. For his winning efforts he earned a 2017-18 season pass to the ski resort.

Jerry's Verde, as he called it, was one of 11 traditional salsas. Two fruit salsas were judged separately.

The six judges – all with a connection to Sierra except for this reporter – agreed Jerry's Verde was outstanding. It was thicker than a lot of green salsas. The heat was perfect – starts out mild, then has a strong finish, but not overpowering.

One judge suggested chopped avocado would enhance it, but not all were in agreement.

Now in its 10th year, this contest brings out locals and people throughout Northern California.



Tomatillos beat out tomatoes April 22 at the Sierra Salsa Showdown. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Jerry's Verde had close competition from Salsa Romo. It had great flavor without having to be hot. Some judges thought it might have had pickled veggies in it.

Doug Abbott of South Lake Tahoe came up with Smoky Bacon Salsa. He said the creation was an accident that he liked. It

was the only one with meat in it. Abbott is a veteran of this contest, having won it a few years ago.

Allen Evangelista of San Francisco has been entering his salsas every year, even winning it a couple years back.

"It's an awesome tradition," Evangelista told *Lake Tahoe News* of the event. "This year I put honey in it." His Rainbow and Sunshine was near the top of the pack.

Teresa Elena Petersen of Meadow Vista was a first-time entrant with her Neña's Pico de Gallo.

"The secret to a good salsa my aunt Mercy told me is to chop everything finely, use salt and don't make it the last day," Petersen told *Lake Tahoe News*. "You need to let the juices of fresh tomatoes sit."

Winning the fruit salsa contest was Arica Davis, who now lives in South Lake Tahoe, after moving out from Louisiana.

Both fruit salsas were mango dominated, but Davis' edged out her competitor's because her flavors were more balanced and overall it tasted more like a true salsa. She also won a season pass.

It was all things Mexican-themed Sunday afternoon at the Golden Bear Terrace – with taco eating contests, a piñata for kids, and plenty of margaritas being mixed for the adults.

This is closing weekend for Sierra, with Monday being Customer Appreciation Day. Proceeds from the \$35 lift tickets will benefit youth recreation and education in South Lake Tahoe. All guests are invited to join General Manager John Rice and the rest of Sierra's team for the official "last run of the season" from the top of Grandview Express beginning at 2pm. Last call at the Sierra Pub will be 2:45pm, in time for the ending of all winter operations at 3pm.

Farmers getting more water won't lower produce prices

By Ben Bergman, KQED

Thanks to a historically wet winter, Central Valley farmers south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta got some long-awaited good news this week from federal water managers. For the first time in more than a decade, they will receive their full allotment of groundwater from the Central Valley Project.

It's a remarkable turnaround from last year, when farmers got only a 5 percent allotment, or even earlier this year, when they got 65 percent.

But don't expect more water to trickle down to lower prices in your local produce aisle.

Read the whole story

Rhone varietals star in two-day wine event

Pleasant Valley is known as El Dorado County's Rhone Zone, and as such there is a wine event focusing on Rhone varietals.

During Rocks & Rhones weekend, May 20-21, visitors will meet local winemakers, sample gourmet food, and sip wine pairings at five Pleasant Valley wineries.

Rhone wines include Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre and Viognier.

The wineries are in a four-mile drive of each other: Auriga, Holly's Hill, Miraflores, Narrow Gate and Sierra Vista.

Tickets are \$35 in April, \$40 in May; \$45 at the door; \$20 designated driver. Price includes logo glass. They are available **online**.

'Grocerants' competing with traditional restaurants

By Zlati Meyer , USA Today

Whether it's pizza from a wood-fired oven or a glass of wine while shoppers stroll the aisles, some grocers are turning portions of their stores into a nosher's delight – and creating tough new competition for fast-food chains and traditional restaurants.

The phenomenon is growing fast enough both in prevalence and sophistication that the food industry has coined a name for these combination grocery stores and eateries – the "grocerant." Customers get the convenience of being able to order a meal, then fill their shopping carts with home essentials while they wait. Stores pick up extra sales.

Grocerants generated 2.4 billion visits and \$10 billion in sales in 2016 by promoting restaurant-quality freshly prepared foods, which are on trend with the contemporary palate, reports The NPD Group, a research outfit. Grocerant visits have increased close to 30 percent since 2008.

Read the whole story

New food items on the menu at Aces ballpark

By Jim Krajewski, Reno Gazette-Journal

Baseball season is upon us and with it are some changes in food at the ballpark.

The Reno Aces have several new food items, as well as a new executive chef entrusted with making those meals.

Paul Valenzuela is in charge of the kitchen now at Greater Nevada Field. He moved to Reno from Phoenix in January and has more than 30 years of experience in stadium kitchens, 15 of those as executive chef.

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Truckee woman making her mark with family wine



Lori Barra of Truckee is bringing her family's Mendocino County wine – Mia Bea – to the greater Lake Tahoe area.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Family traditions mean the world to Lori Barra, a Truckee woman who's pouring her heart into her family's wine business.

When she's not helping travelers fly the friendly skies at the United Airlines ticket counter at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, Barra, 61, is marketing her family's Mia Bea varietals.

Created from a small vineyard on 60 acres, Mia Bea gets its name as a tribute from Barra's father, Pete, to her mother, Beatriz, who died in 2012. Pete Barra is the 89-year-old son of an Italian farmer-grape grower who turned his love for his wife and decadeslong work growing premium wine grapes at the headwaters of the Russian River in Mendocino County into a lasting legacy for his children and their children.



Mia Bea Chardonnay
is crisp and a bit
fruity.

Photo/Kathryn Reed



Mia Bea's Petit
Syrah is winning
awards.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

An image of a red rose dominates the Mia Bea label, signifying the romantic flower Pete often gave to Beatriz.

"He always had a thing for roses," Barra said of her sentimental father. Now when she visits the farm in Calpella near Ukiah, her father puts a rose in her room as an extended gesture of her Dutch mother's presence.

The tender loving care of the actual winemaking is paying off with accolades. The 2014 Chardonnay has raked in six awards in six competitions, including a silver medal at the Grand Harvest Challenge Wine Competition in Sonoma County in 2016. Last year, it won bronze under the unoaked category at the 2017 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.

A recommendation of Barra's winemaker, the unoaked nature of the Chardonnay rolls off the tongue with more of an earthy, slightly fruity richness not found in traditional, buttery, oak-barreled Chardonnays.

"I'm over it," Barra said of the trendy buttery Chards.

She likes her Chardonnay with spicy food, especially Asian dishes. (This reporter discovered it pairs well with Mahi Mahi tacos.)



Pete and Beatriz Barra's love continues to shine through Mia Bea wines. Photo/Provided

Barra said friends who don't usually like Chardonnay have been transformed by trying Mia Bea. For Barra, that's the satisfaction of her work. She enjoys the pleasure of introducing the wine to people she knows and meets.

Nonetheless, she also realizes the wine business needs to grow and extend its reach from the small operation run by her father, the winemaker and her two sisters. Mia Bea has averaged between 200 and 250 cases in each of its two years in existence, with plans to somewhat expand without losing its small vineyard appeal.

While the family has been in the grape growing business for decades, the actual wine making side is a new endeavor. No tasting room exists – yet, but Mia Bea wines are available through a couple of wine clubs.



Pete Barra is happiest when he is working in the vineyard. Photo/Provided

Beyond its white wine, Mia Bea's Petit Syrah is also gaining its own acclaim, winning the same awards in the same competitions under the estate grown certified organic fruit designation. Barra admitted that her father – who doesn't use chemicals – was eco-friendly in his vineyards before it was cliché.

Forging ahead, the family and its winemaker are experimenting with a Pinot Noir, which often thrives in the moist coastal ranges.

The family patriarch has shown little sign of wanting to slow down, content that his children are chipping into a business that essentially got its roots in Italy over multiple generations.

"My sisters and I are committed to keeping the business going," Barra said, realizing that her father is aging.

The U.S. Barra clan went back to Europe to research and trace the extended family history. The elder Barra found his relatives and shortly thereafter returned for a large family reunion in Italy. It was pure joy for him to receive that type of validation to 60 years of his life's work in the United States.

"He would rather be in the vineyard than anywhere else," Barra said.

The life of the grapes and the process involved is something Barra grew up with and never tires from.

"I like seeing how wine complements food and how we always had big family gatherings to celebrate that. As an adult, I enjoy seeing other people enjoying the wine," she said of the most amazing thing about running a wine business.



The morning light shines on the Barras' vineyards.
Photo/Provided

How Barra ended up in Truckee is a familiar tale. After leaving the farm and attending college, she came to Tahoe "to ski for a winter and fell in love with the area," she explained. That was 30 years ago.

The settling down in a mountain town represented quite a departure from Mendocino County, where she grew up knowing the Fetzer family "just down the road," she said.

In charge of sales, Barra would like to do expand its market in the Lake Tahoe area.

"We're feeling confident about the wine. But the challenge we face right now is since it's not familiar, how can we get people to pick it off the menu?" Barra said since the wine received award titles.

Currently, the Barra family has nine accounts carrying Mia Bea wine – three markets and two restaurants. In the Tahoe basin, Spindleshanks at the Brockway Golf Course in Kings Beach where her son lives and the River Ranch in Tahoe City have the Chardonnay. With the marketing help of her daughter in San Diego, she hopes to find new locations. Both restaurants have expressed interest in selling the Syrah.

So far, Spindleshanks manager Steve Marks who buys the wine for the restaurant likes what he sees from the Chardonnay.

“It’s a crowd pleaser – fruity and easy drinking. It stands on its own,” Marks said. He added the appeal is with a certain patron that likes an unoaked variety.

K’s Kitchen: Vegetable-dominated frittata

By Kathryn Reed

One of the best things about a frittata over a quiche is not having to make a crust. That also makes it healthier.

I’m a believer eggs are a good dish for dinner – or lunch. This recipe proves that sentiment to be true.

Many frittata recipes call for cheese and milk. I’ve left both out. The main reason is that I didn’t have either in the house. Secondly, it made this dish healthier. I whipped the eggs until they were frothy; this ensured the eggs would stand up a bit and not be so dense. It worked wonderfully.

Any combo of vegetables will work. Just make sure they are cooked before baking the concoction.

Serving this with a little salsa would be tasty. And, honestly, I thought it was better the next day.



Asparagus-Pepper-Mushroom Frittata

2 T butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ medium red onion, diced

5 cloves garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$ red pepper, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound asparagus, chopped

4 ounces baby bella mushrooms, chopped

1 T fresh thyme

$1\frac{1}{2}$ T fresh rosemary

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp kosher salt

Dash hot sauce

8 eggs

Cooking spray

Salsa, optional

Melt butter in sauté pan over medium heat. Add onion and garlic, then pepper and asparagus. Then add mushrooms, herbs,

salt and hot sauce. Cook until asparagus is tender. This will not take long.

Coat pie dish with cooking spray. Heat oven to 400 degrees.

Whip eggs until slightly frothy.

Place vegetable mixture in pie plate. Pour whipped eggs over vegetables. As the eggs start to set, with a spatula pull back lightly from sides to allow runny eggs to fill that space. Cook until there is no evidence eggs are runny; at least 10 minutes. Keep an eye on it so it's not overcooked.

Craft beer makers ride double-digit gains

By Bill Chappell, NPR

The number of American breweries topped 5,000 for the first time last year, with craft beer makers accounting for 5,234 of 5,301 U.S. breweries, according to new figures from the Brewers Association.

Just five years ago, there were only about 2,000 U.S. craft brewers, which the Brewers Association defines as small or independent beer makers. Last year alone, more than 800 opened for business.

Compared to those increases, changes in the overall American beer market were less dramatic, the industry group says. While craft brewers managed to capture \$23.5 billion of the money spent on beer last year – a 10 percent gain over 2015 – their volume share remained essentially flat, at 12.3 percent of the amount of beer sold in the U.S.

Read the whole story