Study: Schools provide healthier lunches than parents

By Roberto A. Ferdman, Washington Post

It might be time to reconsider the lunchbox.

A study carried out by researchers at Virginia Tech concluded that preschoolers and kindergartners tend to eat healthier lunches when the food is chosen by their school, not their parents. The study, which surveyed more than 1,300 lunches at three schools in Virginia, found that parents frequently pack things like chips, sweets, and sugary drinks—all of which are not allowed under the National School Lunch Program.

Parents, it turns out, appear to do just the opposite. More than 60 percent of meals packed at home had one dessert (nearly 20 percent had two or more); just under 60 percent had savory snacks, like chips; and roughly 40 percent had a soda or sugar-added juice. School meals, meanwhile, were more likely to contain fruits, vegetables, naturally sweetened juices, and milk.

Read the whole story

Milk may not do a body good

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

Got milk? If you’re drinking it to prevent bone fractures or to boost your overall health, you might want to go back to the

fridge and opt for a yogurt or a slice of cheese instead.

A study in the journal BMJ casts doubt on the widely held view that milk can help adults ward off hip fractures and broken bones. After tracking more than 100,000 Swedish men and women for up to 23 years, the study authors saw no link between milk consumption and fracture risk. However, they did find that avid milk drinkers were more likely to die at younger ages than their counterparts who drank little to no milk.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans advise everyone over the age of 8 to consume three cups of milk per day or the corresponding amount of yogurt, cheese or other dairy products. Many European countries offer similar suggestions. After all, milk is a convenient source of calcium, vitamin D and phosphorus, three nutrients that are important for bone growth.

However, the researchers – from the Uppsala University, the Karolinska Institute and the Swedish National Food Agency – wondered whether this advice was scientifically valid. No randomized clinical trials have shown that drinking milk causes the risk of fractures or premature death to fall, and observational studies that might reveal an association between milk and better health have had mixed results.

The research team cited another reason for their skepticism: D-galactose. This is produced by the body as it breaks down lactose, the sugar in milk. Studies in animals have shown that chronic exposure to the nutrient causes “oxidative stress damage, chronic inflammation, neurodegeneration, decreased immune response, and gene transcriptional changes,” they wrote. In fact, when scientists want to mimic the effects of aging, they give animals shots or food containing D-galactose.

Read the whole story

Cheese industry not happy with FDA

By AC Shilton, Outside

As Americans, we're used to certain infringements on our liberty, like having the NSA creep on our phone records and the TSA examine our shoes. But there's a limit to our patience. When the government comes for our cheese, people get pissed.

Earlier this summer, FDA inspectors in New York cited a cheese manufacturer for using wooden boards during the aging process – a common practice among artisanal cheesemakers. Because the New York Department of Agriculture allows cheese to be aged on wood, it contacted the FDA for clarification. In response, it got a terse statement from Monica Metz, the branch chief for the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Dairy and Egg Branch:

> *The use of wooden shelves, rough or otherwise, for cheese ripening does not conform to GMP [good management practice] requirements, which require that "all plant equipment and utensils shall be so designed and of such material and workmanship as to be adequately cleanable, and shall be properly maintained." 21 CFR 110.40(a). Wooden shelves or boards cannot be adequately cleaned and sanitized.*

Wooden shelves have been used for hundreds of years – pretty much every shard of Parmigiano-Reggiano (not including that from-a-tube stuff) was aged on a wooden board. To enforce this rule would change the way most U.S. artisanal cheese is made—and it would stop the import of many European varieties.

When the news broke, people got angry.

A mob of cheesemakers and cheese enthusiasts took to social media to lambaste the federal agency. Vermont congressman Peter Welch (Dem.) led the fight on Twitter, posting, “We will not back down □#SaveOurCheese□□□.”

Surprisingly, it worked.

Read the whole story

Rethinking the logic of kids’ menus

By Maura Judkis, Washington Post

All that was left of Julia Washington’s seared-scallop entree were the baby artichokes. The 10-year-old speared one with a fork, eyeing it with curiosity and contempt.

“I don’t know about new things. I don’t know how they taste,” the fifth-grader from Upper Marlboro said at the restaurant Equinox. “It looks like a mushroom. I don’t like mushrooms.”

Julia is a typical child. She loves mac and cheese, fried shrimp, ice cream. But she couldn’t order from the kids’ menu that night, because Equinox has no kids’ menu. The restaurant’s chef, Todd Gray, does not believe in kid food.

“With the right encouragement, kids will eat anything,” Gray said.

Most restaurants don’t give children many choices: chicken fingers. Tater tots. Or bland, cheese-laden pizza, accompanied

by a cup of limp fruit salad. And some parents are getting tired of it.

“The idea that there is different food for children drives me nuts,” said Lynn Fredericks, founder of Family Cook Productions, an organization that teaches healthful family eating. She recently launched the Kids Food Reboot, a campaign to get restaurants to adapt their kids’ menus to rely less on frozen french fries and other beige fried foods and more on healthful, fresh and – most important – interesting choices for young diners. Given the chance to eat, say, spaghetti squash or broccoli rabe, children will rise to the occasion, Fredericks says.

“Children will eat other foods. They will,” she said. “It’s just about how you present it.”

Read the whole story

Record tomato crop in California

By Michael B. Marois, Bloomberg

California farmers who grow a third of the world’s processing tomatoes, the kind used for pasta sauce and soups, nurtured a record crop this year even as the state’s drought damped production of other vegetables.

An estimated 14 million tons of processing tomatoes were harvested in California this year, the most ever and up 16 percent from last year, according to the California Tomato Growers Association, a trade group for the $1 billion-a-year

industry. Canneries such as Campbell Soup Co. paid $83 a ton, also the most ever.

“The price was at a point where guys felt they could take the water risk and put their limited water supplies on tomatoes instead of other crops,” said farmer Aaron Barcellos, whose family grows tomatoes and other crops on 7,000 acres about 110 miles south of Sacramento. “Processors needed to pay a price that would get the acreage in the ground.”

With 82 percent of California suffering from extreme drought after three years with record low rain and snow, the water distribution system is rationing supplies to the nation’s most productive agricultural region. Growers have been forced to drill wells, sapping already depleted groundwater. The dry spell is likely to boost food prices nationwide as farmers leave some land unplanted because they can’t irrigate, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

Read the whole story

Ordering food online is making you fat

By Harry Bradford, Huffington Post

Whether it’s newcomers like Seamless and grubHub or veterans like Apple and Starbucks, companies of all sorts are making it easier than ever to order and pay with as little human interaction as possible.

That might be convenient and faster, but it’s not great for our health.

Ordering food online from restaurants causes people to do two unhealthy things: order more food and choose items that are higher in calories. In fact, a 2012 study centered around a North Carolina pizza restaurant found that total calories in online orders were about 6 percent higher than phone orders. That came out to about 100 calories more per order, according to Ryan McDevitt, an assistant professor at Duke University Fuqua School Of Business and the author of the study.

So why do we order with more reckless abandon when we're using our smartphones and laptops? McDevitt said these barriers to human interaction essentially also act as barriers to shame. If there's no waiter, there's no other person to make them feel guilty for making less-sensible choices.

Read the whole story

Opportunity to bottle wine

Charles B. Mitchell Vineyards is hosting a bottle-your-own wine experience Nov. 8-11.

The free event will take place from 11am-5pm.

Participants will have a chance to learn the process of winemaking in a hands-on experience from winemaker
Charles B. Mitchell, including filling, sealing and labeling the finished product.

Varietals to be bottled are the 2013 Delfino Vineyards Malbec, 2011 Fair Play Merlot and 2013 El Dorado
Primitivo.

Guests may bring a clean and empty wine bottle to use or purchase new bottles from the winery for 75 cents each.

Complimentary corks and labels will be provided. Single bottles of bottle-your-own wine may be purchased for $9.99 per bottle or $6.99 if bought in case quantities.

For more information, call 530.620.3467.

Charles B. Mitchell Vineyards is located at 8221 Stoney Creek Road, Fair Play.

Cash for Halloween candy programs growing

By Allison Aubrey, NPR

If your little ghosts and goblins dump their candy on the living room floor tonight, go ahead: Let them at it. They can sort, then trade, and gorge on their favorites.

But if you're like many parents, by tomorrow morning you may want to get rid of some of this candy glut.

One possible solution? Check out the Halloween Candy Buy Back program, which was founded by dentist Chris Kammer in Wisconsin. Kammer's office offers $1 a pound to buy back candy collected by the young trick-or-treaters in his practice.

Think of it as cash for candy. And the idea is catching on.

This year, more than 2,500 dentists and orthodontists have signed up to participate. By comparison, about 300 dentists participated in 2007, the first year the program expanded nationally.

Read the whole story

’14 Calif. wine harvest 3rd largest

By Western Farm Press

California vintners and growers across the state are grateful for another excellent vintage, despite an ongoing drought and earthquake that rocked south Napa in late August as crush was getting underway.

A mild winter and spring caused early bud break, although the overall length of the growing season was similar to past years.

A compacted harvest began in July for sparkling wines and started winding down by mid-October for later ripening varieties. Moderate temperatures, with only minimal rain in September, allowed for even ripening.

According to the USDA Pacific Regional Crop Production Report from August 2014, California’s wine grape production this year is forecast at 3.9 million tons, down 8 percent from 2013’s record high crop. The 2014 harvest is the third largest on record.

Read the whole story

Gluten-free flours raising Kickstarter dough

By Rene Lynch, Los Angeles Times

Shauna Ahern, better known in the online world as Gluten-Free Girl, will tell you upfront: You can make gluten-free and grain-free flour blends yourself.

She has this DIY starter guide on her website. But, um, unless you're an experienced baker with plenty of time for trial-and-error-type experimentation, it looks intimidating. And not a week goes by without readers reaching out to Ahern to ask whether they could just buy Ahern's blend because they just don't have the time, or energy, to take the DIY route.

"People kept asking us if we'd sell it, and finally we thought, 'Well, maybe we should,'" Ahern said.

Ahern and her chef husband, Danny, have launched a Kickstarter campaign to see if there's enough interest to launch their own line of gluten-free and grain-free flour blends.

With one week to go, the couple are roughly $10,000 shy of their $79,000 goal.

Read the whole story