Study: Coffee industry not great for environment

By Joe Satran, Huffington Post

Every day, coffee fans in cities from San Diego to Stockholm get a dose of self-satisfaction along with their morning caffeine jolt when they order fancy coffee that tastes great and that they assume is helping the environment.

But the recent uptick in coffee connoisseurship hasn't yet translated into a more environmentally friendly coffee industry. Quite the opposite. According to a study published in the latest issue of BioScience, the world's coffee farms are now more harmful to the environment than ever.

Specifically, the study's authors, led by Shalene Jha of the University of Texas, found that a far larger share of the world's coffee than ever before is now being grown in direct sunlight, rather than under the shade of a canopy of trees. These full-sun coffee farms are scarcely any different from the large plots of monoculture corn and soybeans that have been vilified by environmentalists over the past several decades.

By contrast, large trees provide a habitat for native wildlife, support soil health, fight erosion and confer side benefits, like fruit and firewood, to farmers. "Our scientists say a certified coffee farm is the next best thing to rainforest," Chris Wille, the head of sustainable agriculture at Rainforest Alliance, said of shaded farms.

Read the whole story

Restaurants skip required nutrition labels

By David Lazarus, Los Angeles Times

Only five years ago, California enacted a pioneering law that required restaurants to put nutritional information on menus. For the first time, consumers were empowered to make informed decisions about what they ate.

So it seems crazy that it’s even a question: Does the law still exist?

If you ask state Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Pacoima, the author of the menu-labeling law, the answer is yes.

But that’s not how the California Restaurant Association sees it. It believes Padilla’s law has been repealed.

So does the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, whose members are responsible for enforcing menu labeling at the local level.

Or, in the words of Angelo Bellomo, environmental health director at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: “There is a law that requires it, but both the federal government and the state government have decided not to enforce it.”

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Winning Kahlua brownies

By Kathryn Reed

Eating well and eating healthfully are two completely different things.

My tennis team eats well. We bring an array of edibles to each home match to share with our opponents.

On Sunday I chose to bring the sweet treat. I had made the brownies the night before, but had not sampled them until the morning of the match. A brownie is probably not the usual breakfast of champions, but it worked on this particular day. I’m thinking I might have to make this a ritual since I won and this was the team’s first win of the season.

And these are no ordinary brownies. They don’t come from a box and they involve liquor. I tend to put more Kahlua in than what is called for.

They take longer to bake at higher elevations.



Kahlua Brownies

8 ounces semi-sweet chocolate

½ C, plus 2 T butter

1 pound cream cheese, softened

½ C sifted powdered sugar

6 eggs

1 C, plus 2 T all-purpose flour

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 C granulated sugar

½ C brown sugar

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

3 T Kahlua (give or take, mostly give)

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease a 9 x 13 baking pan.

Melt chocolate and 6 T butter over low heat, stirring constantly. Set aside.

Cream remaining butter and cream cheese in a medium bow. Gradually add powdered sugar and mix until light and fluffy. Stir in 2 eggs, 2 T flour and vanilla. Set aside.

Beat 4 eggs until light. Gradually add sugars, beating until well combined and thickened. Combine 1 C flour, baking powder and salt. Add to egg mixture, beating well. Stir in cooled chocolate mixture and Kahlua.

In prepared pan, spread two-thirds of the chocolate batter. Spoon cream cheese over chocolate, then top with remaining chocolate batter.

Swirl batter with a knife to marble.

Bake 30 minutes or until tester comes out clean.

Study: Chardonnay comes with a serving of health benefits

By Lenny Bernstein, Washington Post

Red wine gets all the good press for the cardiovascular benefits of the flavonoids it contains, but U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers are reporting that one white wine grape has the reds beat when it comes to slowing weight gain and lowering cholesterol, at least in laboratory animals.

The researchers put hamsters on a high-fat diet supplemented by flour made from the seeds of grapes used for Chardonnay, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon wines. They found that the white grapes easily beat the reds in slowing the hamsters' weight gain and limiting production of cholesterol.

They believe the higher levels of flavonoids in the Chardonnay grape seeds altered the work of genes related to fat metabolism.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Hearty comfort food on a cold day

By Kathryn Reed

Winter weather, no matter the month, calls for comfort food.

Lasagnas and casseroles fall into that category.

And because I have a thing for mushrooms, the recipe below had my taste buds and stomach calling for more – and a little too often. I kept finding myself heating up more in the microwave. We are rifling through this so fast I don't know if it would freeze well.

There are several moving parts at once, so it's not a recipe to make if you are going to be distracted by the phone or kids or the television.

Fusilli or bow tie pasta would work great. You want a type that is chunky. And take note the measurement is for cooked pasta, not raw.



Wild Mushroom Pasta

1 T olive oil

1 C onion, chopped

5 garlic cloves, minced

2 (8-ounce) packages exotic mushroom blend, chopped

2 T fresh oregano, chopped

½ tsp kosher salt

¼ tsp black pepper

1/8 tsp ground nutmeg

1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

5 T fresh parsley, chopped

1 T unsalted butter

1½ T all-purpose flour

2 C nonfat milk

2 C shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese, divided

4 C hot cooked pasta

Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic; sauté for 3 minutes or until tender. Add mushrooms. Cook for 8 minutes or until liquid almost evaporates. Stir in oregano, salt, black pepper, nutmeg and tomato sauce. Cook 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat.

Combine eggs and parsley in a large bowl. Heat the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Sprinkle flour evenly into pan; cook 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Gradually add milk to flour mixture, stirring with a whisk until smooth. Bring to a boil; cook 2 minutes or until thickened, stirring frequently. Remove from heat; let stand a few minutes. Stir in 1 cup cheese. Gradually add hot milk mixture to egg mixture, stirring constantly with a whisk. Add pasta to milk mixture; toss to combine.

Spread half of pasta mixture in an 11 x 7 baking dish coated with cooking spray. Top with mushroom mixture. Top with remaining pasta mixture. Cover with foil. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil; sprinkle with remaining cheese.

Broil 5 minutes or until cheese melts. Let stand 15 minutes.

K’s Kitchen: Fresh strawberries in a green salad

By Kathryn Reed

This was the first time Sue was disappointed the salad was gone. Clearly, I’ll be making more.

My only disappointment is that I had not made it sooner.

With strawberries being so sweet right now, I’m guessing we’ll be having this salad regularly. I only made a small bowl the first time because I didn’t know how much we would like it, and a dressed salad doesn’t last long. We will each eat a slightly soggy salad the next day, but beyond that – no thanks. And it’s something I would never serve to others.

I like buying the big tub of mixed spring greens and then feasting on them for a while. Spinach would work just as well for this salad.

Prepared strawberry vinegar would suffice, too. But making it is pretty darn easy. I’m sure there are other uses for the vinegar, but I’m too busy making the salad to discover them.



Mixed Greens and Strawberry Salad

½ small shallot, finely chopped

2 T strawberry vinegar*

2 T olive oil

½ pound greens

1 C strawberries, thinly sliced

1/3 C sliced almonds

2 ounces crumbled feta cheese

Mix shallots and vinegar in bowl. Drizzle in oil. Whisk together. In separate bowl mix greens, strawberries, almonds and cheese. Add vinegar concoction. Toss thoroughly.

***Strawberry Vinegar**

¼ pound strawberries, hulled and quartered

½ C white wine vinegar

¼ C rice wine vinegar

1/8 C sugar

Combine strawberries, white wine vinegar, rice wine vinegar, and sugar. Refrigerate in glass jar up to 24 hours. Discard strawberries and strain vinegar through cheesecloth or a coffee filter into a glass jar or container. Vinegar will keep up to 1 month refrigerated.

K’s Kitchen: Fresh squeezed

lemonade

By Kathryn Reed

For much of my life I had a lemon tree out back. But as a kid you don’t realize what that means.

In fact, I didn’t realize the significance of the tree until my parents moved. And by this time I was in my 40s. For decades I took those yellow orbs for granted.

I didn’t realize how expensive lemons could be at a grocery store. I didn’t realize how little juice they might have. I really didn’t realize how spoiled I had become.

I used to get bags of lemons from my parents’ tree when I would visit them in the Bay Area. That ended a few years ago when they moved to an area of the state where lemon trees don’t grow.

Lemons can be squeezed into so many dishes. But one thing I really love is making lemonade. While there are now some good store bought varieties on the market, there is nothing like homemade lemonade. And the recipe can always be changed up accommodate those who like a more bitter or more sweet beverage.

A friend from the Bay Area gave me lemons recently. With the rather warm weather Tahoe has been having, lemonade sounded so good.

**Fresh Lemonade**

3 C water

1C lemon juice

½ C sugar

Mix all together. Serve chilled.

Take time to find the ripe strawberry

By Russ Parsons, Los Angeles Times

Strawberries used to be a springtime treat, available for only a few months and treasured. But because we love strawberries so much, growers have turned them into a year-round staple, the parsley of the breakfast plate. Still, at this time of year there is a calling, and if you know what you're doing, you can find strawberries that will remind you of the old days, when they were special.

The trick is to follow the farmer. Growing great strawberries is a tricky business, dependent not only on all of the normal agricultural attentions, but also on the specific variety (most commercial berries are bland and firm), and weather (strawberries are tremendously sensitive to climate).

But even when those factors all line up, the berries can be less than ideal as strawberry plants cycle between putting their energy into growing fruit and growing foliage. If you get them when they're pushing leaves, the flavor will not be what you're hoping for.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Spicy cauliflower satisfies

By Kathryn Reed

Cauliflower used to be one of my least favorite vegetables. But like so many veggies, it's all about how it is cooked and seasoned.

Much like broccoli, cauliflower is usually cut into florets and then cooked. The recipe below cooks the entire head of cauliflower before cutting it into pieces to serve. For one, this makes for a different type of presentation. It would also allow people to take as much as they like. The problem could be that those who like this concoction may take more than their fair share.

It is so incredibly easy to make that this would be a good dish for kids to start with or have that novice cook help

with. The only tricky part for kids would be cutting off the stem, so that would be better for an adult to handle.

You are bound to have leftovers of the marinade. It can be used on other veggies or meats or fish. Or go get more cauliflower.

The nice is this is healthy because yogurt is used instead of sour cream. Guilt free, good eating is always something to savor.



Spicy Cauliflower

1 T olive or vegetable oil

1 head cauliflower

1½ C plain Greek yogurt

1 lime, zest and juice

2 T chile powder

1 T cumin

1 T garlic powder

1 tsp curry powder

2 tsp kosher salt

1 tsp black pepper

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Lightly grease a small baking

sheet with oil.

Trim stem and leaves from cauliflower.

In a medium bowl, combine all of the other ingredients.

Put cauliflower in the bowl to cover it with mixture. Use hands or spatula to cover thoroughly. Excess marinade can be stored in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to three days.

Place the cauliflower on the prepared baking sheet and roast until the surface is browned with a crust on top. It will take 30 to 40 minutes.

Picky eaters overhauling restaurant industry

By Jillian Berman, Huffington Post

In Panera Bread CEO Ron Shaich's vision of the future, every restaurant could have "a different menu for every person."

Shaich's chain and others are bringing his vision closer to reality, making it easier for diners to order exactly to their preferences instead of picking from a rigid set of menu items like they did in the Dark Ages. That could either be a food utopia or a diner's nightmare. It just all depends on what kind of eater you are.

A growing number of diners are walking into restaurants knowing exactly what they want, thanks to an "explosion" of specific diets like vegan and gluten-free, according to David Just, a Cornell University behavioral economist who focuses on

food. And for those consumers, many of whom are already flocking to build-a-meal chains like Chipotle, Panera’s foray into customization could take some of the stress out of ordering a salad-dressing-on-the-side-no croutons.

Read the whole story