U.S. soda sales continue downward spiral

By Phil Wahba, Reuters

Americans cut back on drinking carbonated soft drinks again last year with soda sales reaching their lowest levels in nearly two decades, according to a leading beverage industry newsletter.

Total sales volume fell 3 percent in 2013 to 8.9 billion cases, the ninth straight year of decline and the lowest since 1995, according to Beverage Digest. Soda sales fell 1.2 percent in 2012 and 1 percent in 2011. Each case is equal to 192 liquid ounces.

Soda sales in the United States grew throughout most of the 1990s, before beginning to slow in 1999. Sales have been in decline since 2005.

Read the whole story

Virginia City to get hot with chili contest

Virginia City's 31st annual Chili on the Comstock returns to the historic town on May 10-11.

The two-day event has about 30 chili cookers who are competing for a spot in the International Chili Society World Finals later this year. Competitors start from scratch on Saturday morning and a winner is picked each day.

A people’s choice award is up to the tasters with winners receiving cash and “Virginia City-style” prizes.

Tasting kits are on sale now. New this year is the “VIP Tester,” where for $50 guests receive catered chili including all the toppings, drinks and shaded seats in an exclusive area. Regular tasting packages start at $5 for the “Cautious Tester.”

The event is from 10am-5pm along C Street.

For more information, call 775.847.7500.

Cream cheese trying to be a bit more healthy

By Alexander C. Kaufman, Huffington Post

Philadelphia Cream Cheese Spread is trying to move its schmear a smidgen closer to the green slot on the food pyramid.

Kraft Foods Group Inc. has retooled the packaging on the iconic cheese product, swapping the round, gray containers for oblong tubs designed to promote newly added natural ingredients.

This marks the third revamp in four years of the brand’s marketing strategy, after previous efforts touted cream cheese’s use as a cooking ingredient and an old-timey food tradition. But, for the first since Philadelphia’s whipped cream cheese spread hit the market in 1982, Kraft has made major changes to the recipe in an attempt to woo health-conscious shoppers, the Wall Street Journal reported last week.

Now, existing fruit and vegetable flavors are seeing a significant increase in ingredients like berries, carrots and peppers.

Americans have shied away from fat, cholesterol and sugar in recent years, and breakfast foods are seeing some of the biggest changes. Consumption of eggs has sunk nearly 70 percent since its peak in 1945 as dieters feared cholesterol in yolks. Even orange juice, once a staple praised for its rich vitamin C content, is losing its place at the breakfast table as Americans cut out sugar – and sometimes breakfast altogether.

Read the whole story

Milk isn’t just about what comes from cows

By Dana Sullivan Kilroy, Los Angeles Times

Not milk? Choosing milk for your morning cereal or coffee used to be pretty simple: skim, low-fat or whole. These days, though, market shelves and refrigerators are crowded with an array of alternatives: soy, almond, rice, hemp and more.

While some people opt for these beverages because they’re vegan, they have allergies or because they’re lactose intolerant, the beverages are increasingly popular for another reason too. “We’re all being encouraged to eat a more plant-based diet, and some of these products fit that category,” says Andrea Giancoli, a spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and a policy analyst at the Beach Cities Health District Blue Zones Project in Hermosa Beach, an

initiative to develop healthier communities.

They're all slightly different in terms of nutrients – some are low in carbs and fat and others not so much – but Giancoli recommends choosing the unsweetened versions and those that also are fortified with calcium, vitamin D and, ideally, B12.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Transforming asparagus into soup

By Kathryn Reed

Asparagus has a tremendous amount of health benefits and it can be cooked in so many different ways.

And now is the time to be eating it, although it has a long growing season in California. The first harvest – January-April – is in the southern desert valleys. Then February-May is when the San Joaquin Valley and Delta regions are picking the spears. The Central Coast harvest is from March to mid-June.

It is rich in vitamins B and C, as well as calcium and iron.

"As a result of its very strong anti-inflammatory and antioxidant nutrient composition, we would definitely expect to see a food like asparagus showing up as a risk reducer for certain cancers. Chronic, excessive inflammation and chronic oxidative stress are risk factors for a variety of cancer types, and both unwanted phenomena are related to deficient dietary intake of anti-inflammatory and antioxidant nutrients – exactly the kind of nutrients that are especially plentiful

in asparagus," according to the World's Healthiest Foods website.

Despite it being so healthy, I turned it into a rich, somewhat unhealthy soup. While it tasted OK without the sour cream, it did seem like it was missing something. I would start with less sour cream and keep adding until you get the flavor you like.

If I were to serve this for guests I would put a garnish on top – maybe chopped chives. Even a few grinds of pepper will spruce it up a bit.



Creamy Asparagus Soup

1 T butter

1 leek, chopped

2 small-medium red potatoes, chopped

1 pound (bunch) asparagus, chopped

4 C vegetable broth

½ tsp lavender salt

8 ounces low fat sour cream

Pepper, to taste

Melt butter in soup pot. Add leek, cook about 5 minutes. Add potato, cook about 5 minutes. Add asparagus and stir all

veggies together. Add broth and bring to boil.

Let mixture cool a bit. Then puree batches in a blender. Return to pot. Add sour cream. Stir. Season with salt and pepper to your liking. Serve hot.

Proposal reignites genetically modified foods debate

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — The high-stakes battle over labeling foods with genetically engineered ingredients is back.

Less than two years after California voters narrowly turned down a labeling ballot measure, the state Senate is grappling with the issue. The 2012 campaign cost the food industry $46 million to fight, five times more than the amount spent by the measure's proponents.

By a 5-2 vote last week, the Health Committee approved Senate Bill 1381, by Sen. Noreen Evans, D-Santa Rosa, which would require labeling of genetically engineered bulk and packaged foods beginning in 2016. The legislation goes to the Rules Committee and perhaps the Agriculture Committee, where it could face trouble.

The proposal defines genetic engineering as the manipulation of genes in a laboratory to make them resistant to certain pesticides or diseases.

Read the whole story

Cocktail prices continue to climb

By Catey Hill, MarketWatch

You’re not seeing double: Your bar tab really is that big.

Margaritas, screwdrivers and Bloody Mary’s are among the cocktails that could become more expensive in coming months. And drinkers can’t blame the actual alcohol for that. Thanks to a convergence of factors ranging from weather to bacteria, the price of many of the ingredients in cocktail mixers has jumped. In general, the prices for fresh fruits – including many used as cocktail mixers – climbed 2.5 percent from January to February this year, compared with just 0.4 percent for food overall. And Vernon Crowder, the senior vice president and senior analyst at Food & Agribusiness Research and Advisory, says that fruit prices could continue to climb through the summer.

Take limes and lemons, used in everything from a Long Island iced tea to margaritas (not to mention sour mix). The retail price of limes has jumped 152 percent to $0.53 apiece since last year, according to USDA data. Lemons too have seen a price jump with the cost climbing nearly 41 percent to $0.62 apiece.

Read the whole story

Blame your parents if fried foods make you fat

By Michaeleen Doucleff, NPR

When it comes to fried foods, sometimes I feel cursed.

My husband can eat as many spicy, crispy chicken sandwiches as he wants and never gain a pound. But for me, just smelling the chicken fryer seems to expand my waistline.

Now doctors at Harvard Medical School show what we've all suspected: Some people do indeed pay a higher price for indulging in French fries and Tater Tots. And we have mom and dad to blame for it.

French fries: There are probably other reasons besides acrylamide to avoid these tasty snacks.

People with higher genetic risk for obesity gain more weight when they eat fried foods than people with lower risk, a team from Harvard Medical School reported Tuesday in the British Medical Journal.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Sweet drink on a hot day

By Kathryn Reed

With the weather being so warm in Tahoe, it is time for summer drinks.

Often after a hike or snowshoe a beer sounds good. On Sunday, Sue surprised me with something she calls Rejuvenation. I'm not sure that it rejuvenated me, but I was feeling better by the time I was done with it.

Sue has been on this rum kick where she is trying new concoctions. She definitely is the one who likes sweeter drinks. The version of this for herself calls for more pineapple juice.

Like most sweet drinks it should be sipped instead of gulped so it doesn't go to your head too fast. And if you are imbibing in a hot tub, drink slowly and get out slowly.

The nice thing about a drink like this is that the proportions can be changed to cater to individual tastes.

I can see this becoming a regular drink as the days keep getting warmer.



Rejuvenation

2 shots rum

½ C club soda

1½ shots pineapple juice

2 shots sweet and sour

Splash Grenadine

Pour all the ingredients over ice in a tumbler glass. Stir.

Straw and umbrella are optional.

Millions of U.S. seafood meals regularly dumped in sea

By Alastair Bland, NPR

Seafood often travels huge distances over many days to reach the people who eat it. And it’s often impossible to know where a fillet of fish or a few frozen shrimp came from – and, perhaps more important, just how they were caught.

Fortunately, activists are doing the homework for us, and what they’re telling us could make your next fish dinner a little less tasty.

According to a report released Thursday by the environmental group Oceana, commercial fishermen in the U.S. annually throw overboard as much as 2 billion pounds of so-called bycatch, much of which is edible fish equivalent at least half a billion seafood meals. Incredibly, much of this waste includes some of the most valuable – and delectable – seafood species in the world, like bluefin tuna, swordfish and Pacific halibut.

Read the whole story