Social media pressuring changes in food industry

By Stephanie Strom, New York Times

Renee Shutters has long worried that food dyes – used in candy like blue M&M's – were hurting her son, Trenton.

She testified before the Food and Drug Administration, but nothing happened. It wasn't until she went online, using a petition with the help of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, that her pleas to remove artificial dyes from food seemed to be heard.

Mars, the candy's maker, is now hinting that it may soon replace at least one of the dyes with an alternative derived from seaweed.

While the FDA continues to allow certain dyes to be used in foods, deeming them safe, parents and advocacy groups have been using websites and social media as powerful megaphones to force titans of the food industry to reconsider the ingredients in their foods and the labeling and processing of their products. In several instances in the last year or so, major food companies and fast-food chains have shifted to coloring derived from spices or other plant-based sources, or changed or omitted certain labels from packaging.

Read the whole story

Malbec’s status rising in Argentina

By Florence Fabricant, New York Times

In Argentina, where the malbec grape is king, winemakers have put a different and intriguing spin on what is usually known as a Bordeaux blend. Instead of the typical mix of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, they are relying primarily on Cabernet and Malbec.

Malbec because it dominates the vineyards of Mendoza, the country’s largest wine region. And Cabernet because making a top-of-the-line Malbec blend seems to beg for its cachet, especially if you have French partners.

“Cabernet Sauvignon has always been considered classier than Malbec,” said Alejandro Vigil, the head winemaker at Bodegas Catena Zapata, a top Argentine producer based in a stunning Aztec-style winery in Mendoza with the high Andes in the background. “It’s more noble, has more prestige and is more expensive.”

Read the whole story

Too much cinnamon may violate the law

By Sidsel Overgaard, NPR

Who doesn’t love a Danish pastry?

And in Denmark, they like their pastries sprinkled with plenty of cinnamon.

But now, Denmark's bakers are being told that their time-honored recipe for the beloved kanelsnegle –or cinnamon swirl – may be unhealthy and against the law. Recent testing by the Danish government found that a large number of Denmark's beloved rolls had too much cinnamon – more than the recommended limits set by the European Union.

Too much cinnamon? Yes, there is such a thing. Actually, the concern here is coumarin, a naturally occurring ingredient found in Cassia cinnamon – the most common variety of the spice sold in Europe and the U.S. In high-enough doses, coumarin can cause liver damage in a small group of sensitive individuals.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Substantive vegetarian cuisine

By Kathryn Reed

There are so many things to love about San Francisco. Food is one one them.

It would be so easy to eat at a different restaurant each day for every meal. But there is one that I always like to return to – Greens.

My mom first took me there years ago. It's at Fort Mason. The views of the Golden Gate Bridge are outstanding, especially on an evening when the fog is rolling in.



It’s a restaurant I have since introduced Sue to. She liked it so much that when we had a belated birthday celebration for her in August she opted to go to Greens. This is a true testament to the restaurant – a meat eater chose a vegetarian restaurant.

The food at Greens is off the charts outstanding. The dishes are creative, the flavors incredible.

Fortunately, Executive Chef Annie Somerville has written a few cookbooks so people can feel like they are at Greens – at least with the cooking. It’s impossible to duplicate that view.

Below is one of my all-time favorite recipes from her “Fields of Greens” cookbooks. Depending on what you are serving with it and for how many, you may want to increase the ingredients. It’s a good hearty meal for fall or winter.

The comments in the recipe are all from Somerville in the cookbook.

Spinach Fettuccine with Shiitake Mushrooms, Spinach, and Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Spinach fettuccine is a good pasta choice for this boldly flavored dish. The deep, earthy taste of the shiitake mushrooms is heightened by the sun-dried tomatoes; the toasted pine nuts add nutty sweetness, and the quickly wilted spinach lightens all the flavors.

½ pound fresh shiitake mushrooms

3 T extra virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

3 garlic cloves, finely chopped

¼ C dry white wine

½ pound spinach fettuccine

1 small bunch of spinach, stems removed and leaves washed, 4 cups packed

3 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and thinly sliced

1 T pine nuts, toasted

2 T chopped fresh herbs: marjoram, chives, and thyme

Grated Parmesan cheese

Set a large pot on the stove to boil. Remove the mushroom stems and cut the caps into ½-inch slices.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large sauté pan; add the mushrooms; ½ teaspoon salt, and a few pinches of pepper. Sauté over medium heat for 3 to 4 minutes, then add the garlic and wine. Cook for a minute or two to reduce the wine, but not completely; leave a little liquid in the pan to keep the mushrooms from sticking.

When the water boils, add 1 teaspoon salt. Add the pasta to the boiling water, and while it’s cooking add the spinach to the mushrooms along with ¼ teaspoon salt and a few pinches of pepper. Sauté over medium heat for 1 minute, until the spinach is just wilted, then reduce the heat and add the sun-dried tomatoes, then remaining tablespoon of olive oil, and ¼ cup of the pasta cooking water to loosen the pan juices.

The pasta should be just tender at this point; drain it in a colander and add it to the sauté pan along with the pine nuts and herbs. Toss everything together and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan.

Serves two to four.

Food traditions dominate during holidays

By Eliza Barclay and Jessica Pupovac, NPR

Around Thanksgiving, the Race Card Project brought us the story of a woman who grew up in a Filipino family but desperately wanted to be anything but Filipino. When Melanie Vanderlipe Ramil was a child, she shied away from her family's traditional meals, including the rice that's a staple in Filipino cooking.

But recently, she's become committed to keeping those food traditions alive.

Ramil's story got us thinking about people who cherish special dishes — specifically, holiday dishes — that have been passed down through generations as a tribute to their heritage and ancestors.

One person who wrote in was Mary Young in Bowling Green, Ky. She had just decided to start making her Norwegian grandmother's Christmas cookies again. They're called krumkake (pronounced krim-caca), and they look like small waffle cones.

Read the whole story

Study: Tomatoes may protect against breast cancer

By Huffington Post

Tomatoes could help boost levels of a hormone that plays an important role in sugar and fat metabolism, a small study suggests, potentially lowering the risk of breast cancer among women already at risk for the condition.

Research published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism shows that women who were randomly assigned to eat 10 weeks of tomato products (that contained 25 milligrams of lycopene each day) also experienced higher levels of this metabolism-regulating hormone, adiponectin.

The researchers noted that the increase in adiponectin could help to protect against breast cancer, since obesity is a known risk factor for breast cancer.

Read the whole story

Tap into holiday beers

By John Verive, Los Angeles Times

There is no one single style of Christmas beer, but brewers have long loved creating special brews for the yule season. Spices are common, dark malts are often used, and many Christmas beers have enough alcoholic punch to help settle your brain for a long winter’s nap.

Here’s a look at a few varieties of festive holiday beers.

Read the whole story

It’s possible to survive eating airline food

By Maria Godoy, NPR

When you think about a scrumptious meal, airline food does not come to mind.

There are plenty of challenges to tasty airline meals, like the fact that many airlines now charge you for anything more than a tiny bag of chips and a plastic cup of non-alcoholic drink, at least on domestic flights. Plus, you can’t cook on an airplane, so anything you’re served has probably been chilled, then reheated. And flight delays certainly don’t help with the freshness factor.

But the bigger obstacles to palatable fare in the air are biological: Our senses are scrambled at high altitudes.

Read the whole story

Regional wines earn recognition

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

The wine mags of the world continue to release their best of

2013 lists, and once again, the foothills area has landed some recognition. The latest instances come via *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, which published three year-end lists, and all include some local flavor.

Bogle Winery of Clarksburg nabbed spot No. 47 in Wine Enthusiast's "Top 100 best buys" for the Bogle 2010 Old Vine Zinfandel.

As for "The Enthusiast 100," which lists the magazine's top wine picks of the year, Easton Wines of Amador County landed at No. 42 for its 2010 Estate Bottled Zinfandel ($32).

Though based in Berkeley, Donkey & Goat received two mentions for wines which used grapes from El Dorado County.

Read the whole story

Reports: Food inspections lacking in U.S.

By Kimberly Kindy and Brady Dennis, Washington Post

Recent salmonella outbreaks that sickened at least 523 people and sent dozens to the hospital underscore "serious weaknesses" in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's oversight of poultry plants, according to a study released Thursday by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which also criticized the government's failure to push more aggressively for recalls of contaminated meat.

A separate investigation by Consumer Reports, also published Thursday, suggested that those lapses have contributed to the prevalence of potentially harmful bacteria that lurk in store-

bought chicken. The magazine independently tested more than 300 raw chicken breasts purchased from stores across the country and found that every major brand contained “worrisome amounts” of pathogens such as salmonella and E.coli, including some strains resistant to treatment with antibiotics.

The USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service said in a statement that the reports “confirm the need for measures already underway at FSIS to prevent food-borne illness,” including proposals to change how meat is inspected and another to help drive down salmonella rates.

Read the whole story