

Organic food – high prices, uncertain benefits

By Leslie Patton, Bloomberg

Organic food sales have gone through the roof. It's no wonder. It's widely believed that organic foods are more nutritious and safer than non-organic – they're even said to fight cancer – even though the evidence is far from clear. Consumers have been paying a lot to eat organic; food certified as organic sometimes costs twice as much as conventional products. T

he premium prices may not be buying everything that's promised.

About three-quarters of grocers in the U.S. sell organic food, including specialty markets, like Sprouts, and mass-market retailers, like Wal-Mart and Target. While that's only 4 percent of total food sales, demand in the U.S. and Europe is growing. The trend is driven both by rising interest in locally grown food – more than 80 percent of farmers markets sell organic food – and fears about food safety.

Roughly 48 million Americans every year become sick and 3,000 die from foodborne diseases.

To be labeled organic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture says food must be grown without synthetic fertilizers and must be free of genetically modified organisms; meat must be raised without antibiotics and growth hormones and the animals must have access to the outdoors. There are similar standards in the European Union and Japan. In China, demand for organic food is skyrocketing after a series of scandals over tainted food has consumers willing to pay double for organic kale and other items.

Until the invention of pesticides, all agriculture was

organic.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Tom's at center of MTBE issue – again

By Kathryn Reed

Years after MTBE was used in South Lake Tahoe it continues to turn up in well water.

The latest incident involves Tahoe Tom's gas station near the state line. The former owners – Mohammad Ahmad and the Thomas E. Erickson Trust – have never fully cleaned up the contaminated groundwater even though multiple complaints have been filed against them dating to 1991.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board said samples taken from a well used by the Mark Twain Hotel on Park Avenue “revealed the presence of the contaminant MTBE (methyl tertiary butyl ether) at concentrations above the drinking water standard for taste and odor.”

Lahontan officials were not available for comment.

Cindy Black, manager of the hotel, told *Lake Tahoe News* their water is fine to drink or to shower with. She said the water is tested all the time.

“In the summertime there is more usage so the water level goes down so it looks like (MTBE) is higher,” Black said.

Several properties on the California side near the state line

have individual wells. Others use Lakeside Park Association water. That water comes directly from Lake Tahoe.

MTBE is a volatile organic chemical that was added to gasoline starting in the 1980s. In the 1990s it was found to be contaminating groundwater. It has since been banned – from California in 2004 and Nevada in 2007.

It was such a problem locally that 13 of South Tahoe Public Utility District's wells were put out of service because of the contamination. The district sued the oil companies, winning a \$69 million judgment in 2002.

"MTBE in aquifers has reduced over time, however the drought appears to be increasing groundwater concentrations of residual petroleum left in soil," Lahontan said in a press release.

Lahontan, again, is going after the former owners. In 2009, those parties were ordered to pay a civil penalty of \$412,900. They never did.

It is not known why Lahontan thinks any enforcement action now will make any difference or get a different result from the prior owners.

"The current owner has gone out of his way to help try to clean that up even though it is not his responsibility," Mehrdad Javaherian, consultant for the owner Lake Tahoe Investments, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Historically the other operators released gasoline. That gasoline had MTBE. That is in the ground. The rate of migration of that gasoline depends on the direction and hydrologic gradient of the water. That can be impacted by drought."

Lahontan has added Lake Tahoe Investments as a responsible party to the cleanup.

Ice bucket challenge may change nonprofit world



Brandi Ledbetter Brown takes the ice bucket challenge in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Provided

By Alicia Rancilio, AP

NEW YORK – The ice bucket challenge’s phenomenal success is making other charitable organizations rethink how they connect with a younger generation of potential donors.

Since the ALS Association began tracking the campaign’s progress on July 29, it has raised more than \$53.3 million from 1.1 million new donors in what is one of the most viral philanthropic social media campaigns in history.

Thousands of people, including celebrities like Taylor Swift

and Oprah Winfrey, have posted videos of themselves getting buckets of ice water dumped over their heads and challenging others to do the same – or donate money to the ALS Association, which raises money for Lou Gehrig's disease research and assistance.

The ice bucket challenge has shown it's OK to be silly for a good cause, says Brian Mittendorf, a professor at the Ohio State University Fisher College of Business, who teaches courses in nonprofit finance.

"Normally the model is to find people who are passionate about a cause and then ask for donations or to educate people and then seek out donations. (The ice bucket challenge is) something that's fun that people can do ... people are taking part in it and then taking the info and donating."

The viral nature of the effort surprised even the ALS Association.

"This level of unprecedented giving is (something) I don't think this country has seen before outside of a disaster or emergency," said ALS Association spokesperson Carrie Munk. "We had no idea it would get to this point."

Who should get credit for making this a viral sensation depends on whom you ask. Some say it began earlier this month when friends of a 29-year-old Boston man with ALS, a neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, did a group challenge.

It's also demonstrated that the average Joe or Jane can make waves.

"One of the big take-aways is the power of individuals who are so tightly connected to a cause can really make a difference," Munk said. "I'm pretty sure that if any company or any nonprofit had all of the public relations dollars in the world to come up with a campaign, we never would've seen this kind

of success.”

Lucretia Gilbert, executive director of The Pink Agenda, which raises money for breast cancer research and awareness, believes it will encourage other nonprofits to get creative on social media.

“It’s a very simple thing and that’s kind of the beauty of it. Everyone can do this challenge,” she said.

The effort comes at a time when private groups are searching for new ways to raise dollars in the wake of tighter federal government spending on basic medical research, including on diseases like ALS.

The National Institutes of Health is spending about \$30 billion this year, money that is divided in a highly competitive process to scientists around the country, and the world, to pursue what are deemed the most promising leads to understand various diseases and to find new targets to fight them.

Congress cut government spending last year; in 2012, the NIH’s budget was \$30.8 billion. And even before those cuts, the agency’s budget hadn’t kept pace with inflation for about a decade. As a result, the NIH is funding about one in six grant applications – down from about one in three a decade ago, director Francis Collins said earlier this year.

For Lou Gehrig’s disease, the NIH’s estimated budget this year is \$40 million, down from \$44 million in 2012.

Employing technology for fundraising campaigns, of course, isn’t a new idea: Perhaps one of the most enduring began in 1966 when the Muscular Dystrophy Association had its first annual Labor Day weekend telethon. Last year, it raised \$59.6 million in contributions. Fundraisers have also embraced donating by text message in recent years.

But some fundraisers contend that one of their greatest challenges is asking the same people for money year after year – a challenge successful social media campaigns could solve.

Mindy Bailey, corporate and community development specialist for JDRF, a foundation that raises money to fight Type 1 diabetes, said volunteers want to come up with a similar idea to fuel donations.

“We have had a lot of people reach out to us and say, ‘Hey, we’re going to do the ice bucket challenge,’” Bailey said. “Recently we had a woman say, ‘I’m thinking of doing a pie-in-your-face idea.’ The wheels have been turning.”

However, not everyone is a fan of the public approach of the ice bucket challenge.

#NoIceBucketChallenge is a hashtag on Twitter that’s being used for a variety of reasons.

“I just think it seems hokey and far too gimmicky and a hot trend and part of the whole ‘me’ culture of ‘Oh look at me. Pay attention to me,’” said Cameron Mitchell of New York. “The charity part seems like an afterthought.”

Some even argue that it’s wasteful to dump water, even for a cause, especially in places like California, where there’s a drought.

The California Water Board offered a measured response.

“It doesn’t violate any of our regulations. People should always use good judgment whenever they use water while we’re in a drought. On the other hand, we understand that this is a charitable event,” said George N. Kostyenko, director of the California State Water Resources Control Board’s office of public affairs, in an email.

Annoyed, impressed or otherwise, the ice bucket challenge has people talking – and ALS’s Munk asserts that even if they

don't donate, the campaign has raised public awareness, a major focus of the organization that last year spent 32 percent of its annual budget on public and professional education and 27 percent on research.

Just a few years ago, she said, only about 50 percent of Americans knew what ALS is.

"We're really looking forward to see how the needle moves," she said.

Plastic bag ban opponents up the ante

By Jessica Calefati, San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO – Lobbyists have launched a frenzied eleventh-hour effort to kill a bill that would make California the first state to outlaw flimsy plastic grocery bags, delaying a key vote and setting up one of the fiercest legislative battles of the year.

Last week, the bill seemed in the bag after it cleared a tough committee vote. But in recent days, industry lobbyists who have squashed more than a dozen other proposed bag bans over the past few years have renewed their effort by targeting moderate Democrats.

"We're going to do everything in our power to educate legislators on the facts," said Mark Daniels, a senior vice president at Hilex Poly, an East Coast company that is the largest producer of single-use plastic grocery bags in North America.

Opponents led by the company have spent more than half a million dollars in lobbying fees and campaign donations, painting the proposal as a job killer.

But environmentalists are also expressing confidence as they dig in for an epic battle similar to their ultimately successful fight to pass California's "bottle bill" in the 1980s. The stakes are even higher this year because the clout of environmental groups is on the line after a series of embarrassing legislative defeats last year.

Supporters say a statewide bag ban is needed to wipe out a particularly noxious form of litter that kills marine life in the Pacific Ocean and costs Californians \$25 million a year to collect and bury.

Read the whole story

River Ranch Lodge embraces laid-back



The River Ranch Lodge's patio is along the Truckee River. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

ALPINE MEADOWS – There's something about running water when it's time to chill and go with the flow of life.

And that flow may involve a cold drink on a warm summer day with picturesque surroundings.

That's a key reward involved in a stay at the River Ranch Lodge on Highway 89 about 3 miles north of Tahoe City. The small, 19-room cozy lodge is situated right on the Truckee River. It's hard to imagine getting any closer.

And now is the time to go if one enjoys the experience of leaning over the short stone wall from a riverside table as if diving into the water. It's not crowded now, which is unusual.



The bar and restaurant are inviting.

The Truckee River rafting companies have ceased operations because of the drought's effects on the region's iconic, windy river. The water level is low and getting lower to accommodate Lake Tahoe in the ebb and flow of the climate and environment.

So on a sunny, summer Sierra weekend afternoon, it's actually easy to get a table on their famed bar deck.

"We've definitely felt the effect (of less guest traffic). Normally, you couldn't come walking up to this bar and get served right away," bartender Jake Clinton said.

Others have also witnessed the change.

"That's the first thing we noticed when we got back to Tahoe. There were no rafts," said Kristine Schug, as she was pouring her Sonoma County Winery's Sauvignon Blanc for Homewood's Farm-to-Peak dinner earlier this month.

On any given Tahoe summer weekend, hundreds of people end their Tahoe City raft floats on the River Ranch deck, cramming the outside bar and food stand known for its River Rum Punch and mountain of gooey nachos.

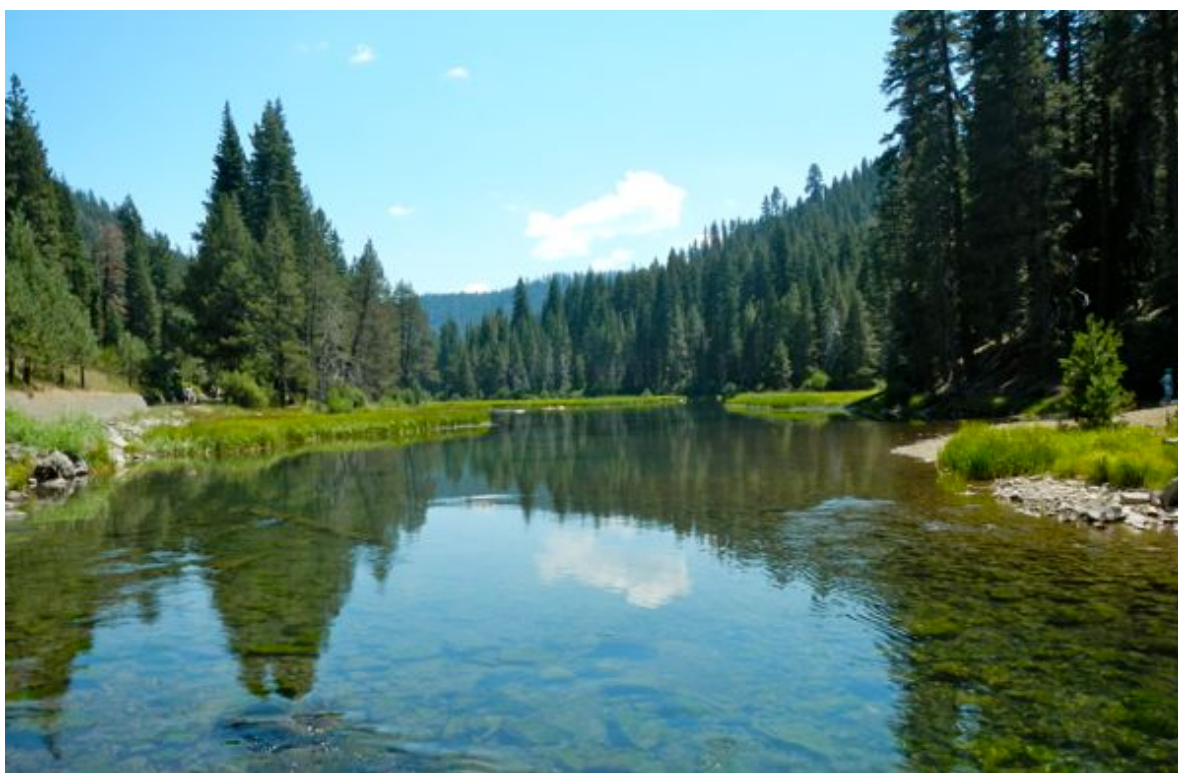
On the Sunday morning during our stay, a morning hike starting a few miles up the road near the Alpine Meadows Ski Resort brought us much bang-for-the-buck scenery. It whet our appetite for a few mojitos, a beer and French fries on the deck with friends Roni and Brenda. The drinks were refreshing

and the fries hit the spot after having hiking snack food. (Of course, some would say French fries are a snack. To the four of us, they are a mandatory food group that's become an after-exercise ritual.)

I noticed the mound of not-your-average cheesy nachos order whiz by and briefly schemed about ruining my upcoming dinner scheduled in the formal dining room.

The smell of Tahoe pines blended with the different scents coming from the kitchen. Glasses were clinking at the bar. And the sun glistened on the rapids rolling over the rocks on the river next to our table and in the calm swimming hole. The night before, the patio provided a beautiful super-moonlight evening when we had the place and the adjacent low docks to ourselves – AJ included.

Life is good at the River Ranch Lodge. It's a perfect launching pad to many activities for those who want to do more than sit on the deck or docks, even though that's an attractive option.



The Truckee River is calm and shallow just before the

lodge.

Location, location, location

Beyond the nearby hiking trails west in the rugged Granite Chief Wilderness that gives Squaw Valley one of its famed backdrops, the River Ranch is plopped right between the meandering bike trail that follows a historic railway and the river where many people take their own inner tubes or small rafts.

The recent closure of the commercial rafting operations has given the Truckee River Taxi Co. a boost in business because floaters need a ride back to their vehicles.

“We can even fit dogs in here,” shuttle driver Derek Watson pointed out, looking back in the van where he’s crammed up to 10 inner tubes. The cost is \$15 a person. The service is filling a gap in a creative way, much the same way the River Ranch has planned events like pool parties to pique the interest of Tahoe summer enthusiasts.

“If anything, I think a lot of people are looking for a place to go swimming,” River Ranch Lodge General Manager Rob Curtis said of guests who stay or drop in to eat, drink and dunk in the adjacent watering hole.



Rooms have a Tahoe-feel to them.

The inn, built in 1888, was once a stopping off point for railway traffic. A landmark sign is embedded on a rock next to the bike trail near the lodge to remind guests of its historic past. Once called the Deer Park Inn, the structure was demolished following its demise during the Great Depression and rebuilt in the 1950s to accommodate dignitaries during the 1960 Olympic Games at Squaw Valley about a mile away.

Through the years, some hints of its history remain intact. Ten tennis courts from more than a half-century ago are still situated behind a few monstrous summer homes across the river from the lodge.

Nowadays, rooms in the quaint lodge are not swank or polished – but that's part of their charm. The evolving renovations and upgrades made by private owners since the 1970s have provided what is needed to truly relax and enjoy the surroundings. Each room is comfortable, spacious and comes with basic amenities, but be mindful the Internet is slow for those needing that service. The mountain motif such as the bedspread and chair upholstery, light pine wood paneling, old cross country skis on the wall, log-cabiny bed frame and coat hanger along with tasteful wood-framed pictures reminds guests where they are staying. (Note: collected pine cones and fake wreaths are a little over the top in being imitation cute.)

The bathroom is small, but serves its purpose. I especially enjoyed using the wall heater and imagined how comfortable this would be for a winter stay. (Another note of improvement for housekeeping: the towels are rough and smell chlorinated.)

That aside, the place has its own unique qualities. We laughed at the notion of opening our window at the cushy easy chair in the room to order drinks in Room 11. It butts up behind the bar. Modest guests may want a different room or run the risk of flashing people bellied up to the bar facing the windows. One of the busy bartenders smiled and pointed out the window screen as inhibiting that ordering idea.

But that was all in good, laid-back fun.

The staff at the River Ranch Lodge is extremely accommodating. One front desk clerk even printed out the hiking map I emailed to her when I failed to find mine.

The good service spans from the front to the back, where a friendly wait staff scurries around the elegant dining room. A giant stone fireplace behind the indoor bar was a reminder winter is not far away. The menu has been updated to include Skuna Bay salmon and Cervena elk, but vegetarians may want to partake in a mix of appetizers and sides. (I probably could have been satisfied with that plate of nachos earlier if not for enjoying the ambiance of the dining room with a river view.)



The couscous is quite good.

The tomato-bisque soup was not the best part of the meal, as it tasted like someone just poured a can of tomato sauce in a bowl. The couscous entrée with what seemed to be a hint of saffron was good, despite the squash blossoms being nothing special. Nonetheless, the beets were perfectly cooked. Plus, the wilted greens were a tasty accompaniment.

The heirloom tomato salad plate presentation was beautiful. The burrata cheese represented a nice creamy alternative to the usual mozzarella cheese. However, the tomatoes themselves

didn't seem as fresh or sweet as they could be in the height of their season. The friendly waitress returned to tell us the tomatoes came from Sacramento Valley, and not a farmers' market. From that, it wasn't surprising that the bread Kae and I really liked originated from "random food distributors".

The wine list was vast, with some Sierra Nevada foothill varietals mixed with Napa and Sonoma favorites. We were pleased with a really good Zinfandel from Amador, the land of Zin.

It stands out when a hotel guest is able to stroll to a nice restaurant instead of a chain eatery or driving somewhere.

And here at the River Ranch as in many places in Tahoe, a diner may see a variety of people of different ages and attire. One man donned a tank top, while a family came in dressed for the occasion.

Dinner entrée prices range from \$19 to \$34. Room rates on the weekend start at \$132 per night, with some accommodating dogs.

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If you go:

River Ranch Lodge

2285 River Road (corner of Alpine Meadows Road and Highway 89)
530.583.4264.

Drought forces early grape harvest

By Jennifer Chaussee, Reuters

DAVIS – At the University of California’s prized winemaking institute near Sacramento, a sleek metal wine crusher on Thursday morning let out a deep rumble and began to shake, jostling grapes made sweeter by the state’s ongoing drought into sticky juice.

Dry conditions have made this year’s crop ripen early, and winemakers across the state are picking and crushing their grapes weeks ahead of the usual harvest time as the lack of water has caused them to ripen faster than usual.

The early harvest has stoked winemakers’ concerns that ongoing drought conditions could pose a serious threat to wine quality next year, since grapes that ripen too fast can become too sweet for winemaking.

The grape crop has mostly been protected, as many growers have managed to spend extra cash on underground well water to protect the quality of their vines. But well water is an expensive and limited resource, and underground wells throughout the state are becoming drier.

Already, this year’s grapes have reached their peak sweetness faster than last year’s. If the trend continues, it could be difficult to make good wine with the 2015 crop.

California is the fourth-largest wine producer in the world and brings in more than \$60 billion in state revenues each year.

Read the whole story

Placer sheriff's office served with federal subpoena

By Mike TeSelle, KCRA-TV

The Placer County Sheriff's Department was served with a federal subpoena during the first week of August, according to a sheriff's spokesperson.

However, the department declined to comment on exactly what the warrant is seeking.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Sacramento also declined comment and did not even confirm if an investigation involving the sheriff's department existed.

"It is uncommon, very uncommon for a prosecutor to issue a subpoena on a law enforcement agency," said Johnny Griffin, a former federal prosecutor.

Griffin, a current defense attorney, did not want to speculate, but he did offer general perspective of why a local law enforcement agency would be served with a federal subpoena.

"If you serve a subpoena on an entity, say a sheriff's department, that doesn't necessarily mean the sheriff's department is under some type of investigation or target, but it does not exclude them," said Griffin. "Perhaps a member or someone connected to the department may be under some type of investigation. It could be a vendor, an employee or an inmate."

Read the whole story

Goldman: Climate change hurting Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

If treated wastewater weren't pumped out of the Lake Tahoe Basin, the clarity of the lake would be much different than it is today.

That was one of the messages delivered Aug. 21 by Charles Goldman during the South Lake Tahoe Public Utility District board meeting. The 83-year-old renowned limnologist has been studying Lake Tahoe for more than 50 years. While he has retired from teaching at UC Davis, he is still actively involved in what is going on with and at Lake Tahoe.

"This organization probably has had more to do with keeping Lake Tahoe blue than any other organization," Goldman said of the utility district.



Charles Goldman talks about climate change on Aug. 21 in South Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

He said helping to get sewage out of the basin may be his most important achievement.

Treated wastewater from STPUD is pumped over Luther Pass where it is then used as irrigation water for Carson Valley ranchers.

He is against any reclaimed water being used in the basin because of the energy it takes to make it useable, the air pollutants associated with the process and that phosphorous would reach the lake.

Goldman said if the wastewater stayed here the lake would likely be green by now.

This has a lot to do with climate change. The warming surface water of the lake and the increase in phosphorous are already altering how the lake looks and functions.

The fact that it doesn't get as cold at night as it used to in Tahoe contributes to a warmer lake, which in turn means the lake water is not mixing as often. Warm water is harder to mix than cold. All of this then can affect oxygen levels at the bottom of the lake. A warmer lake is contributing to more algae growing near the shoreline.

Algal growth increases at a rate of about $5\frac{1}{2}$ percent each year at Lake Tahoe, according to Goldman.

He said if the amount of nutrients reaching Lake Tahoe is not reduced, things will worsen. Nutrients can produce neurotoxins, which are known to kill people and cows.

"That is one reason to keep nutrients out of Tahoe," Goldman said.

A picture of the United States proved how much of the country has already sustained unprecedented increases in warming.

The carbon dioxide level acceleration is rising at a level

that he called “dire.”

“It’s strictly the result of burning fossil fuels of all kinds,” Goldman said.

His idea of bringing a monorail to the basin has fallen on deaf years for 52 years. It would get people out of their cars and reduce air pollution – a significant contributor to problems with Lake Tahoe.

Predictions are that by mid-century 65 percent of China’s more than 46,000 glaciers will have disappeared, with all of them being gone at the next turn of the century.

The North Pole has already melted at times to where there is water standing on top of the ice. This in turn melts the ice faster because the water is warmer than ice, plus it doesn’t reflect back to the atmosphere.

Climate change, Goldman said, is the largest threat to humanity since the Black Plague.

Nev., N.J. casinos link progressive slots

By Wayne Parry, AP

ATLANTIC CITY – A long-planned initiative to create bigger jackpots by linking casino slot machines in New Jersey and Nevada is up and running.

The New Jersey Gaming Enforcement Division says the

progressive slots system links 100 machines in Atlantic City with 600 in Nevada. The progressive jackpots grow in size as more gamblers play them.

“The division is pleased to have been at the forefront of passing regulations and reaching out to other jurisdictions to enable this expanded gaming opportunity for Atlantic City,” said director David Rebuck. “Much like multi-state lotteries, this new technology and cooperative regulatory agreements will allow combined progressive jackpots to grow, which should be very appealing to players looking for the opportunity to play for huge jackpots.”

The system quietly went live Wednesday afternoon, and was announced by regulators Thursday morning.

Slot machines account for about two-thirds of the revenue won by Atlantic City’s casinos.

It is the second multi-state system linking New Jersey slot machines with those in other states. Earlier this year, the state approved a compact with South Dakota. The two interstate slot systems are not connected with each other, though.

New Jersey casino regulators have been working on the plan for at least two years, and they are still looking for other states to participate in an expanded multi-state slots system.

It is one of many things the state is trying as it tries to reverse Atlantic City’s eight-year casino revenue decline, brought on by increased competition in neighboring states. New Jersey also legalized Internet gambling and tried unsuccessfully to overturn a federal ban on sports betting, among other initiatives.

The interstate concept is also a key to New Jersey’s plans for Internet gambling. The state plans currently limits Internet gambling to people physically present in New Jersey, but the law allows it to enter into compacts with other states or

countries where Internet gambling is legal.

Division spokeswoman Kerry Langan says all 11 Atlantic City casinos are participating, including the three that are shutting down within the next few weeks: Revel, Showboat and Trump Plaza.

174 applications for 76 medical pot dispensaries

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY — A total of 174 applications were submitted by Monday's deadline to operate 76 medical marijuana dispensaries in Nevada, the state Division of Public and Behavioral Health reported.

Of those, 140 came from Clark County, where the law allows 40 dispensaries. Those submitting applications for licenses had to pay a \$5,000 non-refundable fee.

The division said it received another 263 applications for licenses for marijuana cultivation facilities, production facilities and testing labs.

Read the whole story