

California chefs attempt to repeal foie gras ban

By Jesse McKinley, New York Times

PEBBLE BEACH – The countdown to foie-mageddon has begun.

With less than a month until California's first-in-the nation ban on foie gras takes effect, fans of the fattened duck and goose liver are buying out stocks of the delicacy, searching for legal loopholes and sating themselves at a series of foie-heavy goodbyes.

"We want to get our fill before it's gone," said Terrance L. Stinnett, a lawyer from Alamo, who attended a farewell lunch here recently. "This is a wake."

July 1 is the start date of the hotly debated and divisive ban, which prohibits the sale of any product derived from the force-feeding of birds to enlarge their livers – the only way to mass-produce foie gras. (The law was passed in 2004, but included a seven-and-a-half-year grace period.)

As the deadline approaches, some of the best-known chefs in California – including Thomas Keller, Gary Danko and Michael Mina – have been mounting a repeal effort and promising new ethical standards. But they are also making practical preparations for the likelihood that they won't be able to overturn the law before it takes effect. Even opponents of the ban say going to bat for high-priced foie gras, after all, isn't exactly an easy political stance in an age of animal rights and fiscal austerity.

So how will chefs replace foie gras, with its butter-soft texture and rich, subtle taste? The short answer, they say, is that they can't, and the sense of loss is palpable.

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