Giants’ stolen base in Game 2 means free tacos for everyone

By Huffington Post

Angel Pagan has become a fan favorite in San Francisco. But with one clean swipe of second base, he may have won over America. At the very least, those in the country who love Taco Bell are now among his fans.

In eighth inning of the Giants’ 2-0 win in Game 2 of the World Series, Pagan got a great jump on Detroit reliever Drew Smyly’s first pitch to Pablo Sandoval. Catcher Gerald Laird fired a strike to second baseman Omar Infante but Pagan slid in ahead of the tag. By stealing second, he not only got himself into scoring postion but he triggered a World Series promotion by the fast food chain.

The “Steal A Base, Steal A Taco” promotion promised that we’d all be treated to something called a Doritos Loco Taco if any player stole a base in the World Series. According to MLB.com, you just need to turn up at participating Taco Bell on Oct. 30 between 2-6pm to get your free taco.

“Actually, bring it over here. I’m hungry right now. I just found out about it. I’m pretty happy, but I was just trying to play the game hard,” Pagan said after the game, via Big League Stew. “Trying to create a situation for us to score and then, after the game, they told me about it.”

First a three-homer game. Then free tacos for everyone. What’s going to happen in Game 3?

Burger King creates pumpkin burger for Japanese eateries

By Huffington Post

In *New York* magazine, Felix Salmon posted last week that pumpkin was the new bacon. We disagreed – bacon is a year-round obsession whereas pumpkin just gets popular in the autumnal months. But maybe Salmon is right about one thing – the pumpkin obsession seems like it is reaching new heights this year. More proof comes in the form of Burger King Japan's awesome new creation of a pumpkin burger.

Brand Eating reports that the burger contains two slices of kabocha (commonly known as Japanese pumpkin but yes we understand that it is technically squash), bacon, lettuce, a beef patty and a creamy nut sauce with sesame seeds, peanuts, almonds, cashews and hazelnuts. Also, the bun is meant to be shaped like a pumpkin!

The burger will be available for a limited time starting October 26 and will cost about $3.90. There's also a "pumpkin bomb" option which offers 10 slices of pumpkin for only about $1.25 more. Or, you can just order pumpkin slices as an optional topping for any burger for about 75 cents.

While we admit that some of Burger King Japan's offerings may not be so successful in America (we're looking at you, black bun burger), a pumpkin burger seems downright genius. Could there be a better way to capitalize on pumpkin mania than to combine it with both bacon and ground meat? Burger King Japan, we tip our hats to you.

K’s Kitchen: Kale stars in tasty soup

By Kathryn Reed

With overnight temperatures last week in the 20s and the house feeling much colder than it was outside, soup suddenly started to sound good. Plus, I had to do something with all the kale that was showing up in my CSA box.

Kim suggested I put the kale in soup. So I started snooping around the Internet for recipes. The one below comes from AllRecipes.com.

It is super yummy. Added bonuses are that it’s easy and fast to make.

I changed a few things that are not reflected in the recipe. I used 8 cups of vegetable broth – not the water-bouillon combo. Instead of white potatoes, I used the purple ones from the CSA box. I also didn’t peel them because I didn’t feel like taking the time.

The kale needs to be chopped into bite size pieces or slightly larger. I’m not sure what I was thinking when I essentially left them in strips. That doesn’t work well for eating with a spoon.

I neglected to use parsley and it didn’t seem to matter.

I also thought the flavor was great without adding salt or pepper.

Kale Soup (8 servings)

2 T olive oil

1 yellow onion, chopped

2 T chopped garlic

1 bunch kale, stems removed and leaves chopped

8 cups water

6 cubes vegetable bouillon

1 (15 ounce) can diced tomatoes

6 white potatoes, peeled and cubed

2 (15 ounce) cans cannellini beans (drained if desired)

1 T Italian seasoning

2 T dried parsley

Salt and pepper to taste

Heat the olive oil in a large soup pot; cook the onion and garlic until soft. Stir in the kale and cook until wilted, about 2 minutes. Stir in the water, vegetable bouillon, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, Italian seasoning, and parsley. Simmer soup on medium heat for 25 minutes, or until potatoes are cooked through. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

K’s Kitchen: Discovering my Danish roots over a hot stove

By Kathryn Reed

Sometimes it’s better no one is in the kitchen when I’m cooking – especially when it’s the first time I’ve made a particular dish.

This was true Sunday morning. Aebelskivers were about to be made.

It was messy. (It doesn’t have to be.) It was smoky. (Doesn’t have to be.) It wasn’t pretty. (Doesn’t have to be.) But finally, it was tasty and they even looked good. It’s a good thing the batter made a few dozen so my mistakes didn’t have to reach the table.

Aebelskivers are a Danish doughnut – sort of. While they look like the size of a doughnut hole, they taste more like a pancake.

I remember my mom making them when I was growing up. (I have Danish in me from both sides of the family.)

When I was in Solvang last month I introduced them to Sue. She had never heard of them, let alone had one, or two, or three. It seemed like every restaurant in this Danish-town in the middle of California served them with powdered sugar and raspberry jelly.

Mom remembers eating them with butter and powdered sugar.

And what I remembered about mom’s were they were much lighter (and tastier) than the ones we had in Solvang.

Until I talked to mom about aebelskivers I didn’t realize it

takes a special pan to make them. She had one to loan me, though it’s not the one her mom used. But the recipe she shared is from my grandma.

I used canola oil. And you need to keep filling up the portals. It’s a delicate balance between making sure the pan is hot enough and not too hot. I’m not sure I found the balance, but somewhere in the process I made several that were just right.

Living with a New Englander meant we skipped the jam topping and went right to pure Vermont maple syrup.

Grandma Frances’ Aebelskivers

3 eggs, separated

2 T sugar

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

2 C flour

2 C buttermilk

Beat egg yolks, add sugar, salt and buttermilk. Combine flour, soda, baking powder and add to liquid. Beat egg whites until stiff and fold into batter. Heat pan. Place small amount oil in each well and fill two-thirds full. Cook until bubbly. Turn with fork and cook until done.

Can be served dusted with powder sugar, jam, syrup or eat straight from the skillet.

Study: Vegetarians live longer

By Annie Hauser, Huffington Post

Some vegetarians can be awfully superior about the health benefits of their plant-based diet. What they might not know is they have the Adventist Health Study to thank.

In the ’70s and ’80s, a series of studies from Loma Linda University in California, which has tracked tens of thousands of Seventh-day Adventists since 1958, were the first to show that vegetarians live longer than meat eaters.

Not only that, the studies also indicated that the kinds of foods frequently consumed in vegetarian diets – fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes – can reduce a person’s risk for diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes, control body mass index and waist size, and boost brain health.

In 2002, the National Institutes of Health gave Loma Linda a grant to continue the research on Seventh-day Adventists, branding this round of research Adventist Health Study 2.

The study, which is midway to completion and includes 96,000 people from the United States and Canada, presents findings just as dramatic, principal investigator Gary E. Fraser, MD, PhD, said at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’ 2012 Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo. Vegetarian Adventist men live to an average of 83.3 years and vegetarian women 85.7 years – 9.5 and 6.1 years, respectively, longer than other Californians, Fraser explained.

Here are more findings from the Adventist Health Study 2:

– Vegans are, on average, 30 pounds lighter than meat eaters.

– Vegans are also five units lighter on the BMI scale than meat-eaters.

– Vegetarians and vegans are also less insulin resistant than meat-eaters.

– Lean people are also more likely to exercise regularly, eat plants, and avoid cigarettes than overweight people, suggesting that numerous factors are boosting the overall health of these participants.

– Pesco-vegetarians and semi-vegetarians who limit animal products, but still eat meat once a week or so, have "intermediate protection" against lifestyle diseases.

Perhaps the most staggering finding? Obesity cuts an African American's life span by 6.2 percent, and across races, the protective qualities of fat in seniors was not seen. (Previous studies have found past about age 85, people who are obese have a lower risk of dying than normal-weight peers.)

The study population is 25 percent African American and half vegetarian. The reason why researchers have such an interest in the Seventh-day Adventist population, they say, is that the religion promotes vegetarianism and discourages drinking, smoking, and drug use. For example, health pioneer and breakfast cereal inventor John Harvey Kellogg is one of the church's most famous founding members.

A road trip through California's produce empire

By Mark Bittman, New York Times

I left Los Angeles at 4 in the morning, long before first light, and made it to Bakersfield – the land of oil derricks, lowriders and truck stops with Punjabi food – by 6. Ten minutes later, I was in the land of carrots.

You know that huge pile of cello-wrapped carrots in your supermarket? Now imagine that the pile filled the entire supermarket. That's how many carrots I saw upon my arrival at Bolthouse Farms. Something like 50 industrial trucks were filled to the top with carrots, all ready for processing. Bolthouse, along with another large producer, supplies an estimated 85 percent of the carrots eaten by Americans. There are many ways to put this in perspective, and they're all pretty mind-blowing: Bolthouse processes six million pounds of carrots a day. If you took its yield from one week and stacked each carrot from end to end, you could circle the earth. If you took all the carrots the company grows in a year, they would double the weight of the Empire State Building.

At Bolthouse's complex, carrots whirl around on conveyor belts at up to 50 miles an hour en route to their future as juliennes, coins and stubs, or baby carrots, which the company popularized and which aren't babies. Other carrots become freezer fare, concentrate, salad dressings and beverages. Fiber is separated for tomato sauce and hot dogs. Whatever's left becomes cattle feed.

Bolthouse is just one of the many massive operations of California's expansive Central Valley, which is really two valleys: the San Joaquin to the south and Sacramento to the north. All told, the Central Valley is about 450 miles long,

from Bakersfield up to Redding, and is 60 miles at its widest, between the Sierra Nevada to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west. It’s larger than nine different states, but size is only one of its defining characteristics: the valley is the world’s largest patch of Class 1 soil, the best there is. The 25-degree (or so) temperature swing from day to night is an ideal growing range for plants. The sun shines nearly 300 days a year. The eastern half of the valley (and the western, to some extent) uses ice melt from the Sierra as its water source, which means it doesn’t have the same drought and flood problems as the Midwest. The winters are cool, which offers a whole different growing season for plants that cannot take the summer heat. There’s no snow.

The valley became widely known in the 1920s and 1930s, when farmers arrived from Virginia or Armenia or Italy or (like Tom Joad) Oklahoma and wrote home about the clean air, plentiful water and cheap land. Now the valley yields a third of all the produce grown in the United States. Unlike the Midwest, which concentrates (devastatingly) on corn and soybeans, more than 230 crops are grown in the valley, including those indigenous to South Asia, Southeast Asia and Mexico, some of which have no names in English. At another large farm, I saw melons, lettuce, asparagus, cabbage, broccoli, chard, collards, prickly pears, almonds, pistachios, grapes and more tomatoes than anyone could conceive of in one place. (The valley is the largest supplier of canned tomatoes in the world too.) Whether you’re in Modesto or Montpelier, there’s a good chance that the produce you’re eating came from the valley.

I came to the valley both by choice and by mandate. In preparation for the magazine’s Food and Drink Issue, I asked readers to suggest my assignment. They could send me anywhere they wanted, within limitations of climate and jet lag. After reviewing the suggestions, it became clear that readers wanted an article that incorporated big farming, small farming, sustainability, politics, poverty and, of course, truly

delicious food – and in the United States, if possible. So I decided to head to the Central Valley, where all of this was already happening. This also happened to satisfy a curiosity of mine. From a desk in New York, it's impossible to fathom 50 mph carrots, hills of almonds, acres of basil and millions of tomatoes all ripening at once. How can all of this possibly work?

But I was also inclined to head to the valley because I know that, for the last century or so, we've been exploiting – almost without limitation – its water, mineral resources, land, air, people and animals. Mark Arax, a writer who lives in Fresno and has chronicled the region's past and present, offered his opinion while serving me and a dozen others marinated lamb, a terrific recipe from his Armenian family: "This land and its water have gone mostly to the proposition of making a few men very wealthy and consigning generations of others, especially farmworkers, to lives in the dust." I'd already seen an example of how wealth has been concentrated and captured in the valley: this summer, Campbell's bought Bolthouse Farms for $1.55 billion. Meanwhile, there are thousands of valley farmworkers who are often victims of wage-theft and (illegally) required to supply their own tools.

So for five days I drove through the southern half of the valley. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the agriculture in America's produce factory; where thoughtful farmers were leading it; and how – if at all – it might become sustainable.

I have driven through the valley numerous times, almost always on Interstate 5, where, like everyone else, I have had the experience of getting out of the car and being hit by what felt like a giant hairdryer blowing 120-degree, manure-scented air. Like many others, I've also pulled over to the side of the road and taken pictures of the Harris Ranch in Coalinga, which, if it isn't the largest feedlot in the country (capacity: 100,000 cows), is certainly the one with the most

drive-bys.

The best way to enter the valley, though, is from the south, through the Tehachapi Pass, west of the Mojave and Edwards Air Force Base. Although the land is scarred by roads and electric lines, it's still easy to imagine what it looked liked 150 years ago. Not so Fresno, the center of the valley's agriculture industry about 110 miles to the north of Bakersfield. There the valley's problems are readily evident. Since 1970, the population has more than doubled to 6.8 million, virtually all of whom, it seems, drive (more often than not a Ford F-150). The air, trapped between mountain ranges, stinks, and the pollution is consistently ranked among the most severe in the country. Worse, there are so many cows nearby in megadairies and feedlots that the air contains microscopic particles of dried dung, enough so that you can taste it. I smelled it on my clothes when I unpacked each night and even brought it home with me. I have never carried Visine in my life, but there I was using it every half-hour.

Then there's the water and soil. On the west side of the valley, water is scarcer, and hundreds of thousands of acres can't be farmed because of salt buildups (the land is naturally salty) and selenium from irrigation drainwater. Tulare Lake, which was once the biggest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, was drained long ago; now there's barely a trace of it. The San Joaquin River, the second longest within California and once among the best salmon-fishing rivers in the country, was dammed in the '40s and essentially drained for irrigation, 60 miles of a once-beautiful river run dry. (The Natural Resources Defense Council won a lawsuit that is re-establishing the flow of the San Joaquin.)

Then there's the toxic waste, meth labs and rampant unemployment, which is above 30 percent in some towns. One, Corcoran, bills itself as the "farm capital of the world," but it's actually the "famous-prisoner capital of the world." Charles Manson and Juan Corona – a schizophrenic who was

convicted of murdering at least 25 farmworkers in 1971 — are both there. (Until recently, so was Sirhan Sirhan.) Low wages are compounded by wage theft and correspondingly high poverty levels. Fresno, Modesto and Bakersfield are three of the five poorest cities in the United States. The valley suffers from this, but it can be blamed for it in part, too.

This, and not the verdant hills of a Green Giant commercial, is where our food comes from. Part of the reason is the size and scope of production. Bolthouse farms and manages 60,000 acres, or more than four Manhattans, annually. Though nearly 15 percent of its production is organic, there is no way an operation of that size can avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides. But the industrial farms don't have a monopoly on doing damage to the land. One day I visited the most unindustrial operation imaginable, a four-acre farm run by May Vu, a Hmong immigrant and former nurse. The valley is home to countless individual farmers like her who work a few acres in marginal land in and around Fresno, much of which was slated for development before the crash. Now it can be rented for around $400 an acre a year.

Vu grows what she believes she can sell locally. (The Hmong population is about 6 percent of that of Fresno, and a visit to a Hmong supermarket is breathtaking.) This includes squash (a kind that lasts for years on the shelf), several varieties of basil, tomatoes, herbs that I can't possibly recognize, okra, a few different eggplants, green beans, daikon, cabbages, cilantro, onion, long beans, chard, zinnia, sunflower, squash and more. This is post-green-revolution farming as it happens in much of the Third World, and there is something to be said for the independence it affords. But on farms like these, almost no one gives much thought to sustainability. It's too time-consuming; the primary goal is not sustaining the land but sustaining themselves. (Vu works seven 10-hour days a week.) It's also historically true that renters — especially those who move from plot to plot every

half-dozen years as the Hmong do there – are bound to the land in general but have no ownership of any particular piece. Their mind-set is often to get as much as you can out of the land this year and don't worry about the next decade.

There must be, I thought (or fantasized) as I traveled through the valley, some movement toward pushing farmers, big and small, to produce decent food sustainably. Because if there's not, the valley's problems will only worsen, and we'd be complicit in destroying one of the country's greatest resources, one that has served us amazingly well until now. Indeed, I found a number of large farmers experimenting with sustainability and scale. John Diener's 4,500-acre Red Rock Ranch, in the west valley town of Five Points, uses mostly so-called conventional methods, but does so in creative and intelligent ways. Over all, his vision of big farming – minimizing chemical application, for example, and reducing tillage (turning over or otherwise disturbing the soil) – may point a way toward a future in which big-time farming can become more sustainable. Diener has also already instituted a system of mining (and even selling) minerals that he extracts – via a series of tiles under his farmland – after irrigation. This keeps local businesses from having to purchase minerals mined in more destructive ways.

Likewise, Keith Gardiner, the principal owner of Pacific Ag Management, farms about 10,000 acres of almond groves using plenty of conventional techniques. But the company is experimenting with solar energy to pump water and trying to reduce chemicals through an integrated pest management system. It was almond-harvest time when I visited Pacific Ag. In one field, Gardiner and Holly King, whose family land is farmed by the company, showed me a shaker, a squat four-wheel vehicle with a robotic arm that grabs the trunk of a tree and shakes it until the nuts fall to the ground. There they sit, drying for a week or so (the chances of rain are almost nil), until a sweeper comes along and gathers them. This is followed by a

harvester, which scoops them into trucks that bring them to be hulled and shelled. The result is dozens of towering hills of almonds waiting to be processed and a small but growing mountain of shells.

It’s not labor-free, but it’s pretty easy compared with growing tomatoes or broccoli. And along with the fact that almond trees go for 25 years, it explains why so many valley farmers are turning to nuts. A decade ago, many analysts thought that the crop had reached its peak of one billion pounds. This year the harvest is something like two billion pounds, and farmers are still ripping out other crops and planting almonds. They’re selling, too, if not here, then in China. The same is also true of grapes, which are feeding China’s growing and extraordinary thirst for wine.

All of this made me wonder what, if anything, big farmers owe a society — not only in terms of what they do to their land but in terms of what they actually grow. The food that’s grown in the valley may be copious, but it’s not necessarily all that good. The fruits and vegetables at my breakfast buffet in Glendale were pretty much the same as the stuff I bought two weeks ago at a supermarket on Broadway. And though I ate well on my trip, I tasted plenty of produce that was grown to withstand a couple of weeks in transit and on the shelf.

Do we have a right to expect tomatoes that taste like tomatoes and to have them grown in sustainably? It might sound like a ridiculous question. These are for-profit enterprises operating on private land and dealing with the difficulties of distribution and the vagaries of the market. But it’s not so outlandish to think we should have some collective say in what is farmed and how. After all, between 1862 and 1934, the Homestead Act transferred 10 percent of all land in the United States from federal to private control, and it’s federal money that pays for much of the roads and irrigation systems that make farming in the valley so profitable.

I badly wanted to visit Tom and Denesse Willey in Madera, 25 miles northwest of Fresno. I'd met them over dinner at Mark Arax's house at the outset of my trip. (Denesse's plum cake was the best I've ever had.) The Willeys represent another part of valley culture that usually gets little credit: making a sizable organic farm work, with few compromises. It's true that 75 acres is small by Central Valley standards, but their model is important and their impact large: they have 800 families in their C.S.A., or community-supported agriculture, program, some of whom live 60 miles away. They have a largely year-round, full-time staff of 60, all of whom can qualify for vacations and a bonus pool. The Willeys farm 40 crops on their land, with a four-season rotation and customers from the Pacific to the Mississippi.

There are people who will tell you that the valley is all food production and no food culture, but that's not true at the Willeys' farm, where varieties are chosen for flavor and color — the overall look of the place is dazzling, almost psychedelic — as well as hardiness and productivity. When I arrived, Tom was struggling with a basil problem that showed me just how seriously he takes his produce. Basil is a huge crop for the farm — at four acres, it might be the biggest basil patch in the country — and downy mildew had attacked the crop. There were two 25-gallon garbage barrels of basil ready to be recycled. The bright green leaves looked gorgeous to me, but Willey deemed them unfit for sale.

We took a golf-cart ride in the afternoon heat, during which I admired Willey's tomatoes (6 acres), potatoes (25, in two crops), peppers (2), eggplant (4) and cool-weather crops like lettuce and artichokes. T & D Willey Farms is different from the valley's largest operations in four important ways. First, the farm averages nearly one worker per acre, a remarkable rate by industrial standards. Second, unlike other farms, their rotation allows them to offer year-round work. Third, the farm's land is replenished at or near the rate that it's

being exploited. Perhaps most important are his superior crops. Though I arrived late in the season, I tasted Willey's tomatoes and eggplant, and they did for me what all the best California produce does: they made me want to farm. Or at least garden — but definitely in California.

The Willeys are pioneers in the organic (and fair) farm movement, and Tom is as articulate and committed a representative of it as I've found. He's unshakable in his belief in organic farming, though "we're all pioneers," he reminded me. "For 95 percent of history, we were hunter-gatherers. There's no reason to assume that agriculture of any kind will be successful in the long run."

Willey argues frequently with his friend Paul Buxman, who lives about 50 miles southeast, in Dinuba, and who has become gradually disillusioned with organics. After stints as a painter and a teacher, Buxman bought a majority of his 58-acre family farm from his father 30 years ago and went broke almost immediately. He survived, incredibly, by selling art, and now he is one of the best tree-fruit growers in the state. Part of the land he purchased had been contaminated by a once-popular soil-treatment chemical known as DBCP that was believed to double grape yields. That is, until it was shown to cause sterility and maybe worse. Health officials told Buxman that not only should he not use his groundwater on his crops but also that his family shouldn't wash in it, cook with it or breathe near it. Buxman's 32-year-old son, Wyeth, came down with leukemia when he was 3. Buxman became an organic farmer immediately.

But after a few years, Buxman came to believe that nonorganic chemicals can target problems more precisely and more accurately than organic ones and that it was time to leave "organic" behind. "An organic pesticide is still poisonous," he told me, over his fabulous biscuits, served with his (ditto) apricot jam.

There is, it's true, a spirit and letter of what's organic. What Tom and Denesse Willey do is organic in every sense of the word, but they're the exception. When consumers buy organic, they are guaranteed little more than food that is (in theory at least) produced without synthetic chemicals or G.M.O.'s (genetically modified organisms), and with some attention (again, in theory) to the health of the soil. They're not guaranteed fair treatment of laborers. They are not guaranteed a minimized carbon footprint or anything approaching local. (Organic vegetables, as you probably know, may come from China.) Nor, for that matter, are they guaranteed anything that tastes good.

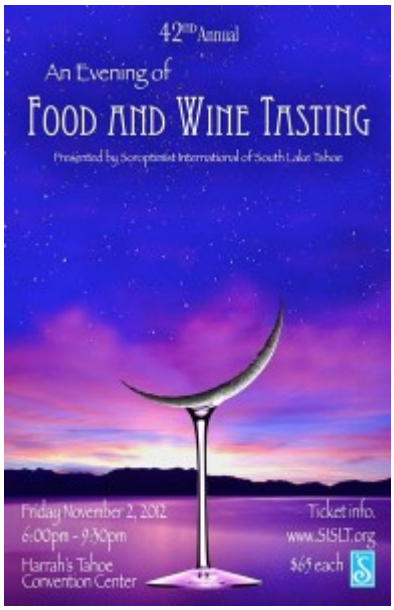
"The public is tired of corporate food," Buxman said. "But the word 'organic' has been misused and usurped." Instead, Buxman devised a rating system called California Clean, which would allow for chemical fertilizers but exclude farms of more than 100 acres and require the farmer and his or her family to be the primary laborers. It would also require that produce be of high quality, with high nutrition, and would require that the farms had an active biology, including healthy soil, birds, worms and so on.

It hasn't caught on, and it may be imperfect, but Buxman's idea of splitting the difference between "organic" and "conventional" seems to me to point the way forward to a place beyond a simplistic label like "organic." Big farmers can be encouraged and taught — and perhaps incentivized — to use fewer and more precise pesticides, to reduce tillage and water use, to evaluate soil not only based on output but on health. The biggest beneficiary, of course, is the land, but the health of workers, animals, the environment and consumers are all important considerations as well. And in the valley right now, not much attention has been paid to them.

No matter what, though, it seems as if the valley is eventually going to become less productive. In fact, that's already happening. Development and contamination have taken

land out of production. And disproportionate swaths are being devoted to grape and almond farming solely because those crops can be reliably processed and profitably shipped to China. There are pioneers in the valley, people working to figure out ways to make their style of farming – whether big or small – work over the long term. But beyond the profit motive, there is little public support or encouragement for them or their ideas and no way for consumers or even officials to know whom to support. As a result, our land use and, to a considerable extent, our diet are dependent on the hunches and whims of landowners. If we want a system of farming that's sustainable on all levels, we have to think about a national food and farming policy. And as I was looking out at Buxman's amazing land, it occurred to me just how amazing it is that we don't have one.

LTN has 2 Soroptimist wine tasting tickets to give away



Lake Tahoe News in cooperation with Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe is giving away two tickets to the annual wine tasting.

The event is Nov. 2, 6-9:30pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. It will showcase more than 18 area restaurants and 30 vintners.

To be in the running for the pair of tickets you must be part of *Lake Tahoe News'* NEWS Team. To be part of the team, just fill out the paid subscriber form. Then, write a comment below describing your best experience with wine – but keep it G rated.

Winners will be announced the week of the event.

If you don't win the freebies, tickets are $65 each and may be purchased from any SISLT member or online.

Shrinking apple trees don't hurt the harvest

By Dan Charles, NPR

When Zarrina Mulloboeva got invited to go apple picking the other day, she thought it would be a taste of home. She's an

exchange student from Tajikistan, in central Asia – a country close to the ancestral homeland of apples. Her uncle has a small orchard. In fact, when Mulloboeva came to the United States six weeks ago, she brought with her a large bottle of homemade dried apple slices.

But when Mulloboeva arrived at the orchard, she was startled to find that in America, this land of skyscrapers and super-sized portions, the apple trees are midgets. Back in Tajikistan, apples hang on trees that are big as houses, and it takes real work to get at them. Here, she didn't even need a ladder.

Actually, American apple trees used to be big, too. So what made them shrink? Very simple: Dwarfing rootstocks.

"It all began a hundred years ago," says Gennaro Fazio, a geneticist with the USDA's Plant Genetic Resources Unit in Geneva, New York. In 1913, Fazio says, a scientist named Ronald Hatton went to work at a new agricultural research center in the small town of East Malling, in England. There, he started to catalog the "rootstocks" being used by apple growers across Europe.

Apple growers have known for centuries that they can graft together the roots of one tree variety with the fruit-bearing branches of another. That way, they can create a tree that combines the best of both: strong, disease-resistant roots with branches that yield delicious apples.

Hatton was intrigued by "a group of rootstocks that will dwarf the tree and make it more productive," says Fazio. Essentially, those roots channel the tree's energy away from making wood and toward growing fruit. He published information about them and distributed several of the most promising ones to apple growers.

But it took a long time for the industry to come around to more petite trees, Fazio says. Most growers couldn't believe

that small trees could be more productive than big ones. With time, though, growers realized that if they used dwarfing rootstocks and planted their trees closer together, they could increase their harvest of apples per acre by 200 to 300 percent.

And they also discovered it’s a lot easier to pick the fruit from dwarf trees and spray them, too (if you are inclined to spray your trees).

By now, smaller trees are the rule in the United States and Europe. In many other places, though – including the central Asian homeland of apples – you’ll still need a tall ladder to get your hands on the fruit.

Cocktails evolving into more than just a mixed drink

By Kathryn Reed

Drinking isn’t just about quenching one’s thirst. These days it can be a meal unto itself based on some of the ingredients.

Mixologists have come into their own. They are much more than a bartender. They are chefs behind the bar – creating cocktails that are anything but ordinary. While using locally grown ingredients, much like chefs are doing these days, they are also creating drinks that are seasonal in nature.

“We are bringing the kitchen to the cocktail,” is how Camber Lay, with Parallel 37 at the Ritz in San Francisco, described how mixologists approach drink making.

Glasses are ready to be filled with A Wild Rose from the West Shore Cafe, one of the winning drinks at the Mix It Up event at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Two events in September tested regional drink creators' ability to invent an original drink for the public, while competing against their peers. Wild Turkey was the spirit those at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe had to use, while vodka was the liquor in the drinks at the Barton Foundation gathering.

Both events collected money for charities. The one at the Ritz at Northstar raised funds for Project MANA, which is a hunger relief organization serving the North and West shores of Lake Tahoe and Truckee. This event was part of the larger annual Autumn Food & Wine Festival. Barton's Signature Cocktail event at Riva Grill in South Lake Tahoe was a fundraiser for the Barton Foundation.

The South Shore event grossed $5,900. Each bartender donated his or her tips, which raised more than $500 of that amount.

Gail Oversteg from Manzanita restaurant at the Ritz picked some lemon verbena from the property for her Mela Melange, which she described as a deconstructed Manhattan.

Nicole Barker of Cin Cin at the Eldorado casino in Reno has a pear tree at her house. She boiled some down for six hours to use as the base for her drink.

Camber Lay likes using local, seasonal items in her cocktails at Parallel 37 in San Francisco.

“We do everything fresh, from scratch. There are no low end liquors,” Barker said of her bar.

Kelley Luchs from the West Shore Café in Homewood came up with A Wild Rose. He said he wanted to play with something not often used – so rose water was his special ingredient.

The public picked the winning drinks at the Ritz, with Luchs and Barker tying.

Muddled jalapenos were an ingredient in two drinks at the Barton event.

On the South Shore, with the winning drink eventually winding up on the menu at the Barton Gala in December as part of the Festival of Trees and Lights, winter was a central theme for the creators.

Two cocktails at this event used fresh jalapenos. Jimmy Kelso from the Edgewood came up with the Caliente Christmas Martini. Vodka, pomegranate and muddled jalapeno were the major ingredients. It was served with a candied jalapeno.

James Kent Meiers of the Cantina devised the Cukacabra. Vodka, orange agave liqueur, with muddled cucumber and jalapeno were the winning combination. That drink will be served at the gala in two months.

“I was mixing flavors to complement Cantina’s food,” Meiers said of how he came up with the drink.

Sense of adventure needed to eat this Nordic cuisine

By Katie Baker, Newsweek

When foodies hear the word “Fäviken,” it conjures up dark spruce forests, deep Scandinavian cold, and a hunting, foraging chef whose 14-seat restaurant in the remote Swedish

hinterlands has become a pilgrimage site for global gastronomes.

Now, Magnus Nilsson is bringing his robust brand of New Nordic cuisine—famous dishes include wild trout roe in a crust of dried pig's blood, and scallops cooked over burning juniper branches—to his first cookbook, Fäviken, out Oct. 1 from Phaidon Press.

Not yet 30, with wild blond hair and babyish cheeks, Nilsson is a local Jämtland kid who worked in two of Paris's greatest kitchens before returning home to run an eatery whose intense commitment to locavorism is perhaps rivaled only by René Redzepi's Noma in Copenhagen.

Like Redzepi, Nilsson crafts his menus out of rare ingredients specific to his corner of the world—reindeer lichen, lingonberries, black grouse—and his familiarity with the Swedish landscape is deep and reverent. He knows how to stuff a hare's cavity with pine branches to keep it from spoiling; where to find tufted vetch and edible lupin; how to drain the blood from a wild bird to keep its flesh fresh and flavorful.

Nilsson's reliance on the bounty of his surroundings is, of course, what makes Fäviken so famous—and also what makes the cookbook less of a practical how-to for the home chef and more of an ode to a fantastical place and a type of cooking that has mostly disappeared from the Western world. Few but the most monkish of readers will have the time, equipment, or dedication that Nilsson counsels for his dishes.

Recipes call for fresh cow hearts, rib-eyes "dry-aged for 20 weeks," and burning marrow bones sawed apart at the table. Pantry staples include birch syrup, moose-meat powder, and mead. Dishes can take a year or two to prepare due to the drying time for marigold petals or the fermenting process for grey peas.

One of the most enchanting things about the book is its

powerful sense of place: its pages shimmer with the mountains and glens of Jämtland, a region supposedly created by the Norse god Thor “during a drunken accident” and whose woods and streams team with fish and fowl. Nilsson’s recipes are paeans to this wilderness: capercaillie and “coniferous forest”; pine-bark cake with wood sorrel; pork broth filtered through moss. Nilsson tracks his menus as they change with the seasons: here, in spring, are fresh mussels, wild onions, and thrush. By summer, the kitchen bursts with ripe berries and herbs. Fall brings chanterelles, fat geese, and decaying leaves. Winter is austere, all about survival, with cured meats and jams and all manner of vegetables pickled and dried.

This is the type of food that Nilsson’s grandparents ate—rektun mat, or “real food”—and the emphasis is on the earthy and the super-fresh. The techniques are from another time, too—such as knowing how to butcher a cow to use all its parts. It’s cooking from a pre-industrial – or maybe post-apocalyptic—age. (Globalism does creep in: the staff’s favorite family meal is Hawaiian pizza, with ham and pineapple.)

As a teenager, Nilsson says he sketched out a 20-year business plan that “ended in me running the best restaurant in the world.” But when he first started at Fäviken, the restaurant was so isolated and unknown that he could barely recruit extra staff members. Yet he never gave up his belief that his food would be of a “high-enough quality to make it worth travelling for.”

He’s clearly passed that mark: the restaurant is often booked up months in advance. For the rest of us who can’t make the trip, there’s this cookbook, and its little slice of his “magic culinary wonderland out there in the wilderness.”