

Technology may allow veggies to be grown in space

By Mike Wall, Space.com

Astronauts flying to Mars or beyond may be able to grow their own veggies during the long trip using new technology tested in the Arizona desert.

During a two-week trial, NASA put a compact vegetable-growing unit through its paces as part of the agency's annual Research and Technology Studies demonstration, also known as Desert RATS. The unit, developed by the Wisconsin-based company Orbitec, grows salad-type crops using a minimum of space and energy.

"We're very excited about it," said Paul Zamprelli, business director for Orbitec. "It's another piece of the puzzle for long-duration missions, and for habitat missions on the moon and Mars."

Read the whole story

Fallon farmers may expand business into distillery

By Johnathan L. Wright, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Frey family, Nevada farmers for five generations, don't simply want to remain on their land in Fallon.

They want to work it, see it breathe and thrive – even as

water rights have dramatically diminished and surrounding farms have been abandoned to the wind.

In 2001, the Freys began planting fine wine grapes, a low-water, high-value alternative to traditional hay and grain crops. Today, Churchill Vineyards occupies part of their 738-acre Frey Ranch and releases about 1,500 cases annually, all of them made and bottled on the ranch.

But having successfully taken up the grape, the Freys now are taking a new look at their grain. Or, more accurately, a new look at both grape and grain.

Read the whole story

Veggies trying to be something more than healthy food

By Kim Severson, New York Times

It's been a busy week for vegetables.

The baby-carrot industry tried to reposition its product as junk food, starting a \$25 million advertising campaign whose defining characteristics include heavy metal music, a phone app and a young man in a grocery cart dodging baby-carrot bullets fired by a woman in tight jeans.



Despite the popularity of farmers markets, people are not eating enough veggies.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

On the East Side of Manhattan, crates of heirloom vegetables with names like Lady Godiva squash were auctioned for \$1,000 each at Sotheby's, where the wealthy are more accustomed to bidding on Warhols and Picassos than turnips and tomatoes.

Both efforts, high and low, are aimed at the same thing: getting America to eat its vegetables.

Good luck. Despite two decades of public health initiatives, stricter government dietary guidelines, record growth of farmers' markets and the ease of products like salad in a bag, Americans still aren't eating enough vegetables.

Read the whole story

The new food hero – the farmer

By Julia Read, Newsweek

In 1934, when Gertrude Stein was invited to return to America from Paris to deliver a series of lectures, the thing that troubled her most, according to her companion, Alice B. Toklas, was “the question of the food she would be eating there.” A French friend who’d made a trip to the United States had returned with tales of “very strange” fare, including “tinned vegetable cocktails and tinned fruit salads.” The ladies went anyway and managed to suss out wild rice and “unrivalled T-steaks and soft-shell crabs,” but they were right to be afraid.

The America of 1934 was a place where such “culinary improvements” as processed meats and canned goods were all the rage; chain grocery stores had been introduced 10 years earlier. After World War II, when women poured into the workforce, taste was further sacrificed in the name of “convenience products.” By 1959, things were so bad that A. J. Liebling wrote a piece in *The New Yorker* railing against processed cheese that wasn’t “cheesy,” lobster tails “frozen as long as the Siberian mammoth,” and synthetic vanilla that wasn’t “vanillary.” I was born a year later, and until my neighbor put in an asparagus bed I had no idea that the gray-green, brine-soaked mush that came from the Green Giant can bore little resemblance to the real thing. It would be many more years before I found out that grocery-store carrots had been bred to have blunt ends so they wouldn’t puncture the plastic bags in which they were shipped.

Read the whole story

Wild game chef to explain how to cook the meat perfectly

By Kristi Buffo

PLACERVILLE – How long should you dry-age your elk meat? What size pieces of meat should you use? How much time for deer versus elk versus other game?

Chef John McGannon has made it his life's work to answer questions like these.

“Good hunters are usually people who want to know the whys behind what they see and hear in the field. It's the same with good cooks,” says McGannon, who will be sharing his 35 years of knowledge about wild game cuisine during a presentation at the fairgrounds in Placerville this weekend. He's one a couple dozen top outdoor guides and experts participating in the first annual Gateway to the Sierra's Sportsman's & Outdoor Expo, Oct. 1–3.

“If you've ever wondered why your prize meat is gamey or tough, why your meat appears burned and haggard after a few months in the deep freeze or why specific cuts of meat are best suited for different cooking techniques, you're not alone,” says McGannon. “As someone who craves the autumn ritual of heading into the hills in search of nature's bounty—and has an equal passion for the culinary result of all that great hard work – I've made it my business to learn the answers to those whys.”

An author and television host on the Outdoor Life Network, McGannon is widely recognized as one of the leading authorities on fine wild game cuisine and has achieved an

almost cult-like status among the fishing and hunting community. In 1996, he founded Wildeats Enterprises, a food company providing wild game spices, rubs, tips and recipes. He's a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and worked his way through some of New York's finest restaurant, such as Le Perigord on Manhattan's East Side and the historic Doros in San Francisco. McGannon went on to open 13 restaurants of his own in New York, Florida, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and San Francisco. He has an impressive list of personal clients and has served eleven times as executive chef for Valley of the Moon at the Russian River's exclusive Bohemian Grove.

McGannon will be hosting a booth at the expo today through Sunday, and will present a demonstration entitled "Getting the Most of Your Wild Game Harvests" on today at 2pm and Oct. 2at 3pm. Guests will be treated to an assortment of wild game tastings.

Fall farm festival involves produce, maze, scarecrows

Lattin Farms Fall Festival is every Saturday in October. It is a jubilee of family activities.

Visitors can take a hayride to the pumpkin patch to find the perfect pumpkin, build a life-size scarecrow at the Scarecrow Factory, or treat the little ones to a cow train ride or a trip through Critterville. Pick-your-own raspberries and tomatoes are available for a short while.

Highlighting the festival is the Know Your Farmer Corn Maze. This year's maze is carved out of 3 acres of corn, with a

design that features produce, dairy and other farm products. The theme was inspired by the USDA Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative to better connect consumers with local producers.



Scarecrow-making is part of the fun in Fallon.

Photo/Provided

“It’s important for people to know where their food comes from,” Rick Lattin, co-owner of Lattin Farms, a five-generation family farm, said in a statement. “And that’s why we picked this theme. Visitors can come out and have fun and see firsthand all the things we can grow in Nevada.”

The fall festival will be open every weekend in October, 5-8pm on Fridays, and 10am-8pm on Saturdays, beginning Oct. 1.

Lattin Farms is located at 1955 McLean Road in Fallon. For more information, call 866.638.6293 or visit www.lattinfarms.com.

Mother Nature messing with El Dorado County grape harvest

By John Smith

The weather for growing grapes in Fair Play is generally favorable, but there have been exceptions. 1995, 1998, 2005 and now 2010 stand out over the past 21 years here as less than ideal.

In both this year and 1998, the culprit has been El Niño, the Pacific Ocean weather pattern that brings us more rain and cooler summer temperatures. In 1998, it rained through the first week in June, and shoots that should have been 3-feet long by then were barely 3 inches. This year, in addition to the rainy spring, we had lots of sunshine, and the growth of the vines was near normal.

The grapes, however, are not so easily fooled. The time for harvest can generally be predicted by adding up the “degree days” for the growing year (technically from April 1 through Oct. 1, but by the time August is over, we pretty much know what’s in store for harvest).

A professor at UC Davis developed a system of “regions” for California, based on the calculation: take the average temperature for each day in the date range, subtract 50, and add them up. The regions are:

- 2,500 degree days or less: Region I
- 2,501-3,000 degree days: Region II
- 3,001-3,500 degree days: Region III
- 3,501-4,000 degree days: Region IV
- Greater than 4,000 degree days: Region V

Most of Fair Play is considered to be Region II (the same at Rutherford or Oakville in Napa), but this year would have been an almost ideal Region I, and if anyone had planted Riesling or Pinot Noir, it would have been a perfect year.

For Zinfandel, Cabernet and even Syrah, though, it has been much cooler than we'd like.

Many growers had the foresight when the cool weather was evident to reduce the crop load and spread the available sugar over a small number of clusters; others will simply have to wait much longer for the crop to ripen. Will it be late September, October, or even later? The answer depends on the temperatures we see from here on out.

In 1998, the harvest at Oakstone Winery for Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot was delayed until late October, after an "Indian summer" brought two weeks of warm weather and finally produced grapes of very good quality.

Not to worry, though, each El Niño is usually followed by La Niña, and 1999 was one of the finest years for growing grapes here in Fair Play that anyone can remember.

We all appreciate your good thoughts and prayers for relief this year; and if not, we can all hope for a truly fabulous vintage in 2011.

John Smith works for Oakstone Winery in Fair Play.

Creative answers to packing

Lunches kids will eat

By Amber Wilson

Packing a school lunch is one of the best ways for your kids to get the nutrients needed for a productive school day. Studies show that well-nourished children perform better in the classroom, so fill their brown bags with a mixture of whole grains, lean protein, fruit and vegetables. The following tips will help you to pack a tasty school lunch that your kids won't want to trade.

1. **Involve your kids** – Studies show children are more likely to try a food they had a hand in creating. Sit down with your kids and brainstorm ideas for healthy lunch items. Encourage your kids to try new foods by taking them to the grocery store or the farmers market and letting them pick a new fruit or vegetable to try. The cafeteria is a bartering community and your kids will trade foods from their lunch box that they don't want to eat.



Amber
Wilson

2. **Give your sandwich a makeover** – Who said a sandwich needs to include two slices of bread? For a new twist on an old favorite, make a wrap instead. Grocery stores carry whole grain tortillas and flat breads that can be filled with a variety of sandwich ingredients. Try turkey, avocado and cheese, hummus and veggies or peanut butter and banana slices.

3. **Create your own lunchable** – Make your own healthy version

of a lunchable with your kids' favorite snacks. Pack a large Tupperware full of whole wheat crackers, string cheese, veggies (such as baby carrots, strips of bell pepper, pieces of broccoli and cherry tomatoes) and 2 tablespoons of low-fat ranch dressing or hummus. Add a low-fat yogurt for a sweet ending to the meal.

4. Substitute your chips – Crunchy snacks are a favorite lunch box item, but try swapping out the usual fried chips for a healthier, crunchy option. Baked chips, air-popped popcorn, flavored rice cakes, pretzels, trail mix and veggies with dip all provide crunch without the unhealthy fat.

5. Slip in a sweet treat – Cookies and baked goods are a fun treat once in a while, but sugar usually leads to an energy crash later in the afternoon. Instead, satisfy your child's sweet tooth with snacks that also provide some nutrition, such as fruit, granola bars, trail mix, low-fat yogurt or low-fat chocolate milk.

Amber Wilson, MS, RD, is a nutrition counselor and the owner of NewLife Nutrition in South Lake Tahoe. Contact her at a.wilson@new-life-nutrition.com for more information about personalized nutrition counseling, supermarket tours and healthy cooking classes for you and your family. For additional healthy recipe ideas, visit her website.

Truckee Wine, Walk & Shop event expands

This year the Oct. 2 Downtown Truckee Wine, Walk & Shop is expanding the event with two activities that bookend the main event.

Kick off the weekend at the Sierra Senior Services' Stomp Out Hunger grape stomp on Oct. 1 from 5–7pm at the Truckee River Winery Tasting Room, 11467 Brockway Road in Truckee. Each four-member team will vie to produce the most juice in two minutes. Teams are comprised of a stomper, a strainer, a container holder and a grape re-filler.

A fundraiser for Sierra Senior Services, the cost is \$150 for each four-member team and there are 12 team slots available.

The participation fee includes light appetizers, wine tastings and friendly competition. Spectator tickets, which also include wine tastings and appetizers will be available for an additional \$20 per person. For more information, call Sierra Senior Services at (530) 550.7600 or visit www.sierraseniors.org.

The next day, as the Downtown Truckee Wine, Walk & Shop event winds down, folks are encouraged to parlay their fun with a stop at the Dragonfly After Party. The \$15 ticket includes passed appetizers, a no-host bar and live funk-style music.

Tickets for the seventh annual Downtown Truckee Wine, Walk and Shop are \$30 in advance (\$40 day of) and are available online at www.TruckeeWineWalk.com. A \$3 service fee applies for online sales. The Oct. 2 event is from noon-4pm.

Each ticket includes wine tastings with more than 30 wineries, five food tickets, commemorative glass, program/passport and goodie bag. The passport program proved to be a popular addition to last year's festivities. Attendees are encouraged to get their program maps stamped at each venue they visit and they must visit shops in different areas of town as designated on the map to be eligible to be entered in the Wine, Walk & Shop raffle.

For more information, call (530) 550.2252 or visit www.TruckeeWineWalk.com.

Grant for group aiming to change views on pesticides

By Susanne Rust, California Watch

The state's food and agriculture department announced the winners of a \$17.2 million federal grant designed to promote specialty crops, including vegetables, fruits and nuts, in the state.

Among the 63 winners were Sunsweet Growers Inc., which received \$450,000 to develop a high-fiber breakfast prune bread, and scientists at UC Davis who received more than \$80,000 to keep light brown apple moths from having sex.

But there was one grant winner that received the attention and ire of the Environmental Working Group, an environmental advocacy group based in Washington, D.C.

That group, the Alliance for Food and Farming, received \$180,000 to "correct the public's misconceptions about pesticide residues."

Read the whole story