

805

LIVING

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ISSUE



FOOD & WINE



805

FOOD NATION

SOME *of* THE PEOPLE
AND PRODUCTS THAT
MAKE EATING LOCALLY
A WORLD-CLASS
EXPERIENCE.

PHOTOGRAPHS *by* GARY MOSS



EATING TO LIVE OR *living* TO EAT.

Whichever epicurean philosophy you adhere to, it's a good thing that there's an 805 Food Nation to satisfy your hunger and enthrall your sense of culinary adventure. It's a place of heritage and innovation. A place of sustenance, bounty, and beauty. It's a place of food.

Don't bother looking for an exit off the 101 for this place; its borders aren't so clearly defined. But you'll know when you're there because the 805 Food Nation is filled with vineyards hanging with pinot noir and zinfandel, fields of greens stretching to the horizon, and orchards running up and down the gentle hillsides. There are cattle ranches and chicken coops. There are farmers' markets by the dozens and restaurants by the hundreds.

Chefs, vintners, farmers, and foragers keep the 805 Food Nation thriving because they bring passion to their work. They care about quality because they know their customers by name. And their food is delicious, whether it's a mushroom just picked from the forest that ends up on a dinner plate a few hundred yards away, or beef from grass-fed cattle that gets shipped halfway around the globe.

If they don't already grow it or make it, you can bet they'll find a way soon—and they'll do it the best they can—because the 805 Food Nation feeds California, it feeds the USA, and it feeds the world.

QUEEN OF THE FOREST

Hikers taking to our local backcountry after the first big rains of the season may be lucky enough to stumble upon a delectable treasure: the coveted chanterelle mushroom. Known as the “queen of the forest,” the easily identified chanterelle is a golden trumpet-shaped fungus found on the moist roots of oak trees, usually buried under the leaves.

Local forager Vito Pascua of Lompoc has been picking chanterelles, porcinis, morels, and matsutake wild mushrooms for 18 years. “You name it, I pick ’em,” says Pascua, who sometimes supplements his income by selling his harvests to local restaurants.

Prized for superb flavor—mild with a hint of pepper spice—this tasty fungus is fleshy, firm, and features an earthy-fruity aroma. Chef Didier Poirier of Ventura’s 71 Palm (www.71palm.com) likes to prepare them as a fricassee with sautéed garlic and shallots plus fresh chervil and chives, and then serves them over a frisée salad with garlic croutons and crispy pork belly. And Brandon Hughes of Bouchon (www.bouchonsantabarbara.com) in Santa Barbara entices his patrons by roasting Pascua’s finds with parsley, thyme, and Roma tomatoes. *Note: Never eat wild mushrooms unless they have been identified by an expert and properly cooked.*

—Lisa Snider

ICE CREAM by COMMITTEE

Ever wished you could invent your own type of ice cream? Add in all the flavors and ingredients you really like? Even give it a cool name? Well, you can at Doc Burnstein’s Ice Cream Lab in Arroyo Grande. Every Wednesday, the store stages a fun show, during which the audience helps create a totally new variety of ice cream. They get to taste their handiwork and vote on a name, too. Two days later the wicked concoction goes on sale. For example, in July, Pismo Bear Tracks was created using fudge brownie and cookie-dough ice cream loaded with peanut butter cups, chocolate chunks, and gummy bears. *For more information go to www.docburnsteins.com.* —Frank Nelson

ADORABLE ORBS

Pixie tangerines are small citrus wonders that hail from the Ojai Valley, where about 36 growers harvest them in late February or March. These California originals are known for their dependable sweetness, and can be purchased at farmers’ markets in Ojai, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Thousand Oaks from March until May or June. The first person to commercially plant Pixies in Ojai was Jim Churchill—the “Tangerine Man.” To get *his* Pixies, go to www.tangerineman.com and sign up for the “Ojai Pixie Alert” e-mail list. You’ll be messaged when the fruit are in and can even have them shipped to your door.

—Angela Pettera

ATASCADERO ARTISANS

Donnie Monroe’s decision to attend the San Francisco Baking Institute has paid off big time: People just can’t get enough of the artisan breads he learned to bake there.

Today those breads (and the sandwiches made from them) have become a magnet for customers at the Hush-Harbor Artisan Bakery and Café that Donnie and his wife, Penni, opened six years ago. But that’s not all that draws people to this Atascadero eatery. The bakery and café, which has inside-outside seating for about 50, also offers quiches, scones, muffins, cinnamon rolls, almond-apple pastries, peanut brittle, biscotti, and much more.

“And it’s all made from scratch right here on the premises,” says Penni who, like her husband, left a career in Southern California’s aerospace industry to embark on this new venture. Today the couple employs half-a-dozen staff, including their daughter, Morgan. Penni says she and her husband are very community-minded and committed to literacy and the arts, especially jazz. For example, they have catered fundraising dinners at the café, occasionally mixing a little cool music in with the baked goods. *For more information call 805-460-0541.*

—Frank Nelson



RISING SUCCESS

Stone Ground Bakery in Agoura Hills is more than a name—it describes the flour found in the kosher, European-style bakery’s products. The flour is ground daily in the approximately 40-year-old, on-site stone mill, says owner Abby Franke.

“I think we are so popular because we do old-fashioned recipes, we spend a little more on ingredients, and everything we do is mainly by hand. Other than the mixing, everything is done by hand,” says Franke.

Bakers make all the products from scratch, using only natural ingredients and no trans fats or preservatives. Although braided challah is their most popular bread, a wide selection of items—from nine-grain and honey-whole-wheat to sourdough, jalapeño, and baguettes—fills the bustling bakery’s shelves. Plate-size chocolate chip cookies, Oreo tarts filled with Bavarian cream and dipped in chocolate, éclairs, and fruit tarts also tempt from the bakery case.

The five-year-old bakery distributes products to about 300 venues, including upscale grocers, temples, and restaurants. Trader Joe’s has long distributed Stone Ground’s goods in four states, and the bakery’s almond macaroons and raspberry rugelach are now available nationally, too. *For more information go to www.stonegroundbreads.com.*

—Sarene Wallace



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Rolled dough at Stone Ground Bakery in Agoura Hills awaits its destiny as a delicacy; hearty sliced bread at Hush-Harbor Artisan Bakery and Café in Atascadero; handmade raspberry rugelach and almond macaroons tempt customers at Stone Ground Bakery.





The Burger Bus' hormone-free beef concoctions are served on toasted ciabatta (left). Below, yards and yards of hydroponically grown lettuce thrive in temperature-controlled greenhouses at Hollandia Produce's Live Gourmet Lettuce. Bottom, The Burger Bus owners Cheryl and Michael Gardner in front of the mobile food stand. OPPOSITE PAGE: Happy Angus make for tasty meat at the Rancho San Julian Beef Company.



MEALS ON WHEELS

A short yellow school bus tricked out to serve food and labeled **THE BURGER BUS** tools around Santa Barbara grilling up high-end hamburgers. Owners Michael and Cheryl Gardner start with grass-fed, hormone-free beef patties, top them with cheddar or Jack from Spring Hill Cheese, and wrap them in a toasted ciabatta roll made by Our Daily Bread. The burgers (cash only, around \$7.50 each) can be dressed with lettuce, tomato, grilled onions, and jelly (yes, jelly) made by Mama's Preserves. Sides include yam fries, beer-battered onion rings, and fried pickle chips (\$2.50 to \$3.50). The Bus isn't a delivery service, nor is it a typical street vendor. You have to know where they're parked, so visit the website (www.theburgerbus.com) or follow them on Twitter (www.twitter.com/theburgerbus). You might want to bring your own chair if you aren't ferrying your burger back to the office.

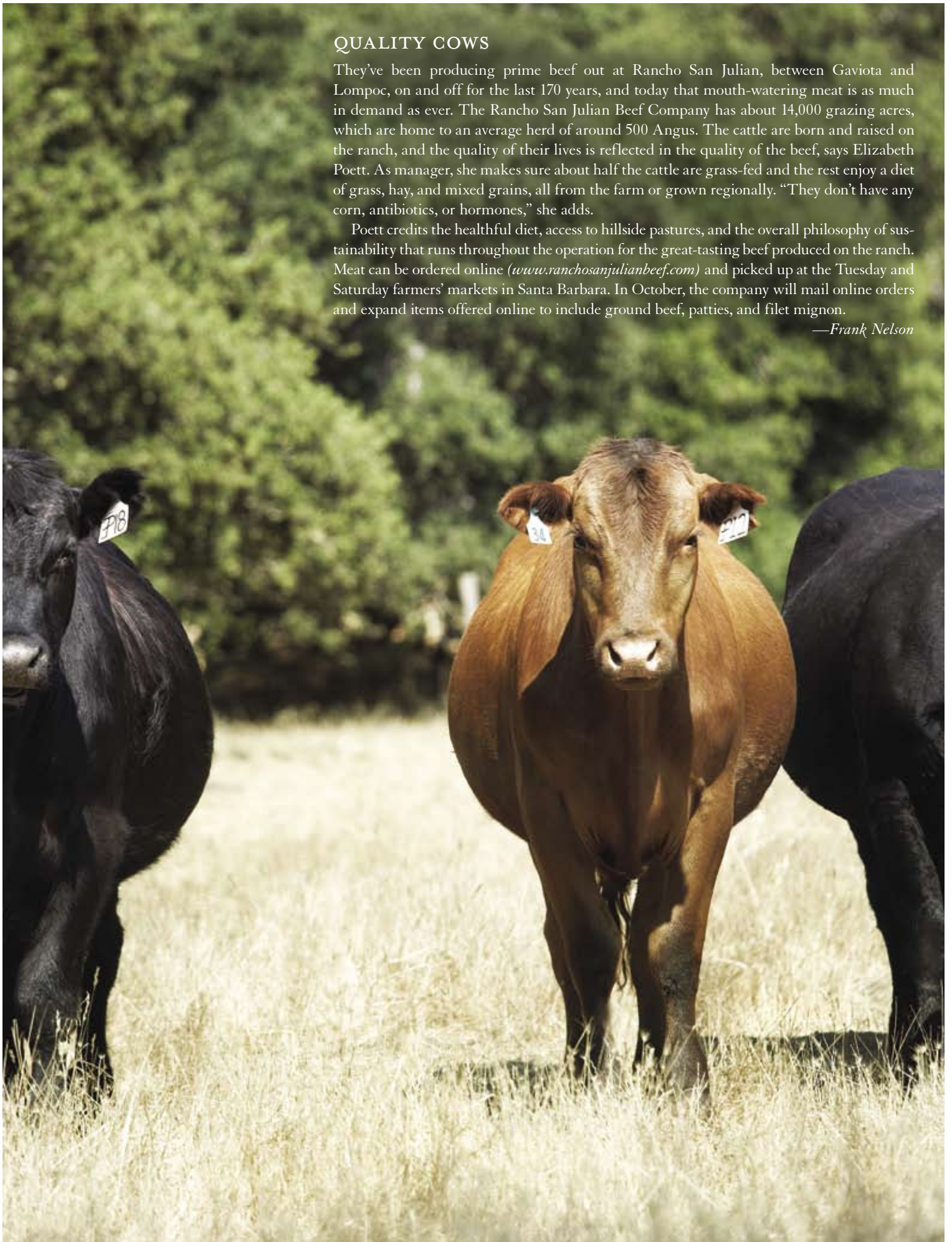
—Angela Pettera

QUALITY COWS

They've been producing prime beef out at Rancho San Julian, between Gaviota and Lompoc, on and off for the last 170 years, and today that mouth-watering meat is as much in demand as ever. The Rancho San Julian Beef Company has about 14,000 grazing acres, which are home to an average herd of around 500 Angus. The cattle are born and raised on the ranch, and the quality of their lives is reflected in the quality of the beef, says Elizabeth Poett. As manager, she makes sure about half the cattle are grass-fed and the rest enjoy a diet of grass, hay, and mixed grains, all from the farm or grown regionally. "They don't have any corn, antibiotics, or hormones," she adds.

Poett credits the healthful diet, access to hillside pastures, and the overall philosophy of sustainability that runs throughout the operation for the great-tasting beef produced on the ranch. Meat can be ordered online (www.ranchosanjulianbeef.com) and picked up at the Tuesday and Saturday farmers' markets in Santa Barbara. In October, the company will mail online orders and expand items offered online to include ground beef, patties, and filet mignon.

—Frank Nelson



LIVING GREENS

Traditionally, farmers are always ready to complain about the weather: It's too cold or too hot, too wet or too dry; frost ruined one crop, wind another, hail yet another. So it would seem that if a grower can make his own weather, his produce will turn out near-perfect every time and he'll have a thriving business. Case in point: Hollandia Produce, the Carpinteria company synonymous with Live Gourmet Lettuce, packaged in a 100-percent recyclable plastic clamshell for easy storage.

The business, founded by Art Overgaag almost 40 years ago and now run by his children Pete, Ellen, and Karin, grows different types of lettuce, cress, and arugula, all sold with the roots still attached to enhance the taste and prolong shelf life.

Inside about 15 acres of massive greenhouses, nothing is left to chance. "Everything is controlled," says Vince Choate, Hollandia's longtime director of marketing. "From the seed to the finished product, the plants are nurtured at every step." This attention to detail includes the filtered and reused water supply that carries nutrients to the hydroponically grown plants; pest control using predator insects or organic treatments; and closely monitored temperature, sunlight, and humidity. Daylight is artificially extended in winter to maintain an ideal 13-hour growing day, and even the air content is regulated, with extra carbon dioxide pumped in for the slumbering plants at night.

Choate says the pampering pays off, with plants maturing about a week faster than those grown in the fields. The gourmet butter lettuce, a three-in-one lettuce mix, Upland cress, and arugula are sold in major grocery stores across the southwest and have a shelf life of up to 15 days. *For more information go to www.livegourmet.com.* —Frank Nelson

ROBBINS FAMILY FARM OLIVE OIL

True to its name, Robbins Family Farm's production of olive oil is a family affair: Robbie and Patti Robbins planted their orchards in the Edna Valley of San Luis Obispo in 1998, and began producing oil about four years later. These days, their children, Eve and Jesse, also help out. Robbie enjoys the farming side, while Patti, an artist, has created paintings for each of the labels.

"Our farm started as a hobby with all the intensity and perfection that hobbies involve," says Robbie. "In 2003 and 2004, we spent time in Tuscany and Umbria for harvest, doing all the work involved with oil making. We realized that our oil was really nice and that we should give the retail side a shot."

Several awards later, Robbins Family Farm now offers four distinct olive oils, including a mandarin orange blend, plus balsamic vinegar; look for their products at Edna Valley wineries and at We Olive locations (www.weolive.com), where Robbie says he's proud to be represented. "California olive oil makers are among the best in the world and some of the nicest people I have ever met," says Robbie. "Just being on the shelf with them is humbling." *For more information go to www.robbsfamilyfarm.com.* —Laura Samuel Meyn

A LIFE of LEMONS

We all know the old saying about turning lemons into lemonade, but a Ventura couple has taken that one tasty step further, turning the area's signature citrus fruit into limoncello, an after-dinner liqueur. James Carling and his Italian-born wife, Manuela Zaretti-Carling, launched the business in 2007, pinning their hopes on a family recipe handed down from Manuela's grandmother.

Today this traditional Italian tippie has taken root in Southern California with liqueurs from the Ventura Limoncello Company, now available in more than 150 stores, markets, and restaurants from Solvang to Costa Mesa. Sourcing quality, tree-ripened lemons locally from Petty Ranch and Limoneira Company, James and Manuela handcraft two varieties of their sweet lemon liqueur: Originale and Crema.

Using just the lemon peel (or zest), pure grain alcohol, sugar, and water (or whole milk for the Crema), the drink sounds simple to make. However, the journey from orchard to bottle takes about six weeks, and timing the critical infusion process remains a closely guarded secret.

James says limoncello is best sipped frosty cold from the freezer in a chilled glass. However, chefs, bartenders, and other fans have begun using the 58-proof liqueur in cocktails, desserts, and even vinaigrettes and sauces.

The company brands its aromatic liqueur as "La Dolce Vita-California style." That's right, says James: "We're combining Old-World techniques with fruit from the New World." *For more information go to www.venturalimoncello.com.* —Frank Nelson

CAVING IN to WINE

Nick Fisher's dream of creating an affordable and unpretentious food-and-wine-tasting experience came true when he opened The Cave. As proprietor of Ventura Wine Company since 2001, Fisher delighted in finally being able to offer his customers a unique way to fully appreciate the grape when he moved and expanded his business last year. "I believe wine and food is life!" says Fisher, who feels that anyone can be a wine expert when given a comfortable, relaxed setting.

The Cave's self-serve Enomatic machines offer 16 red wines and eight chilled white wines, poured as 1- to 5-ounce tastes (starting from 65 cents). With the swipe of a prepaid card and the push of a button, this is the candy store for oenophiles.

To complete the experience, chef Gary Daniel prepares wine-friendly, small-plate food pairings, such as lamb paillard with grilled potato and tomato-red wine sauce (\$8) and chicken tarragon with Blue Lake beans and polenta cake (\$7). *For more information go to www.venturawineco.com.*

—Lisa Snider



Sisters Christa Hozie (left) and Traci Nickson found a simple shortbread cookie was the key to their success. Now customers flock to the Brown Butter Cookie Company in Cayucos for a taste of the salty-sweet treat.





BUILDING A BETTER COOKIE

It was a single recipe for their Brown Butter Sea Salt Cookies that pushed sisters Christa Hozie and Traci Nickson (then owners of The Little Market, a small specialty food store) to completely change their business plan and become a devoted cookie company. While the sisters' Cayucos store offered a large variety of foods, customers kept coming back for the cookies—and began ordering them by the dozens to take home, too. “We didn’t dream of having a cookie factory and shop,” says Hozie. “We feel like the cookie told us—and we listened!”

Customers who stop by the Brown Butter Cookie Company are rewarded with a sample (the sisters love to watch people try their cookies for the first time). While Hozie and Nickson rolled up their sleeves and made more than 10,000 cookies to get their holiday orders filled last year, they now have a staff of about 10 to keep the cookies coming—for parties, showers, wedding favors, and cookie jars. “We make everything from scratch right here in our little shop,” says Hozie. “The larger we get, the more people we can hire; we don’t want to add a big machine to make our cookies.”

The cookie that has inspired such a following is pretty simple, really—Hozie calls it their take on a shortbread cookie. They brown the butter, hand-roll each cookie, and top it with a pinch of sea salt for an addictively sweet-salty balance. In addition to the original cookie, the sisters have added a new Brown Butter Sea Salt Cocoa Cookie. “The original cookie is great with coffee or tea or a crisp dessert wine,” says Hozie. “We also love the cocoa cookie with a bold red wine.” *For more information go to www.brownbuttercookies.com.*

—Laura Samuel Meyn

SLOWING DOWN

Residents of the 805 have enthusiastically embraced Slow Food, a global grassroots movement that seeks to maintain and nurture traditions of pleasurable eating along with a commitment to community and respect for the environment. Ojai and Ventura, for instance, have shown positive responses in the recent past to Slow Food programs, though right now both are languishing a little while waiting for new leadership.

No such problems in Santa Barbara, where there’s a flourishing chapter of almost 80 active members under the dynamic leadership of Laurence Hauben—a 10-year veteran of the Slow Food movement—who has been running things since 2001. Coming from a French background, where everyone cooked and mealtimes were social events, Hauben found Slow Food a very compatible philosophy. “When I start to cook, I look at every ingredient as a gift. Cooking is an appreciation for gifts shared,” she says. “And it does not have to be elaborate. It can be as simple as bread, cheese, and a tomato.”

Slow Food began in Italy in 1986 as a reaction against not only fast food but the wider industrialization and standardization of food and food production, which meant thousands of traditional varieties and flavors were being lost. Since then the movement has taken root in more than 100 countries and attracted upwards of 100,000 members. The US currently has around 230 branches.

The movement seeks to promote a slower and more harmonious lifestyle, the enjoyment of wholesome foods and culinary traditions, and the return of the kitchen and the table as centers of pleasure, culture, and community.

For Hauben, this is not so much an attack on fast food as an attempt to introduce these alternative elements into daily life and “make that relevant for average American families.” She thinks many people have forgotten how to cook or been persuaded by advertisers to rely on convenience foods.

At the same time, Slow Food has a strong ethical and ecological core, fostering respect for the land and production process, and trying to instill strong environmental values through education.

Certainly that’s been happening in Santa Barbara, Ojai, and Ventura, where chapter initiatives have included programs in local schools; cooking, canning, and cheese-making classes; promotion of local growers; and efforts to preserve endangered varieties of fruits, vegetables, and other foods.

Santa Barbara has also been active in trying to encourage nutritious snacks and meals in schools. “What you learn to eat as a child is crucial to what you end up eating as an adult,” says Hauben.

Sims Brannon started the Ojai Slow Food chapter in 2001, and says they ran similar programs promoting healthful salad bars in schools and raising money for school gardens. Ojai had 30 to 40 active members before merging with Ventura about four years ago. Brannon says support for the movement remained strong after that, with more than 100 people attending a Slow Food event in Ventura in August 2007. He helped run successful Ojai events, including a wine tasting and an “ultimate BLT”—using about 30 varieties of heirloom tomatoes—before stepping down as leader last year. He’s sure the Ojai and Ventura chapters will flourish again once they find replacement organizers.

Meanwhile, Santa Barbara is still going strong, thanks in part, says Hauben, to the area’s well-educated and well-traveled population. “We also have great local fresh foods available here,” she says, adding, “It’s not rocket science. It’s not flying a plane. It’s cooking dinner.” *For more information on the Slow Food chapter in Santa Barbara, go to www.slowfoodsantabarbara.org; for a chapter near you, visit www.slowfoodusa.org.* —Frank Nelson

TAKE ANOTHER LITTLE PIZZA MY HEART

Pizza & Wine: Authentic Italian Recipes and Wine Pairings (\$19.99; Gibbs Smith, 2009) by Santa Ynez duo Leonardo Curti and James O. Fraioli arrives in bookstores piping hot this month. The 176-page book pairs 65 pizza recipes with their wine soul mates, so you don't have to. Wonder what to serve with a freshly baked *schacciata* with burrata, arugula, and speck? It's Carhartt Vineyard Sangiovese from Faith Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley. Of the 40-plus wineries featured, nearly all are boutique and hail from the 805.

"Santa Ynez Valley produces wonderful fruity yet full-body zinfandels and fruit-forward, well-balanced sangiovese, which pair well with cheese and sausage," says Fraioli. "White sauce pizzas, those without a red sauce, pair exceptionally well with a crisp chardonnay or fruity pinot noir, and we're in the mecca of pinot country."

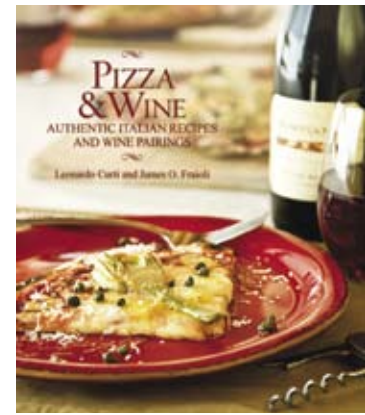
Curti is the executive chef and co-proprietor of Trattoria Grappolo in Santa Ynez. He shares his recipes for regional and traditional Italian dishes such as vegetarian, meat, and seafood pizzas; focaccias; and calzones. *Panzerotti* (small, deep-fried calzones from Naples) and *schacciatas* (baked, flattened calzones with unsealed edges) are included, too. For a sweet finish, the dessert chapter dishes up delicious treats like limoncello cake. *Delizioso!*

—Sarene Wallace

FRESH FOWL

Because a chicken isn't just a chicken, Katherine Anderson raises her poultry organically and lets them roam through her pastured acres on Blue Oak Ranch in Goleta. She tends to them daily, insisting that quality chickens don't just grow themselves, and processes each one by hand on the day it's purchased. In November and December, she sells heritage turkeys with the same commitment to quality; call to see about availability and pricing. On the day your bird is ready, bring a cooler and drive up to the ranch in Goleta to pick it up. *For more information go to www.blueoakranchsb.com.*

—Angela Pettera



FOOD NATION EVENTS CALENDAR

Through September 27: SARDI'S TO ORANGE JULIUS: LOS ANGELES RESTAURANTS FROM THE ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN COLLECTION
University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara. Restaurant architecture through the years is on display through drawings and vintage photographs. Iconic eateries include Sardi's, Lindy's, and the HiHat restaurant. *For more information call 805-893-2951 or go to www.uam.ucsb.edu.*

September 11–13: LA GREEK FEST
Saint Sophia Cathedral, Los Angeles. It's everything Greek at this celebration of the Greek Islands. Food and wine—and ouzo—will be in abundance. Don't miss out on dancing, music and entertainment, cooking demonstrations, and much more on the beautiful grounds of a historic Greek Orthodox cathedral. *For more information call 323-737-2424 or go to www.lagreekfest.com.*

September 13: TASTE OF THE TOWN
Riviera Park Gardens, Santa Barbara. This epicurean adventure features samples from more than 80 Santa Barbara restaurants and wineries. Proceeds benefit the Arthritis Foundation. *For more information call 805-563-4685 or go to www.tasteofthetownsantabarbara.com.*

October 1–31: EPICURE SB
Citywide, Santa Barbara. This monthlong foodie festival incorporates several popular events, including the Harbor & Seafood Festival, California Lemon Festival, California Avocado Festival, and Celebration of Harvest. Showcasing regional cuisine and culture, this event also features special midweek menus, educational seminars, mixology demonstrations, farmers' market tours, cooking classes, microbrew tastings, winemaker dinners, and more. *For more information call 805-966-9222 or go to www.epicuresb.com.*

October 3–4: MORRO BAY HARBOR FESTIVAL
Morro Bay Embarcadero. The 28th annual nautical celebration includes fresh seafood and other dishes, wine and beer tasting, arts and crafts, a commercial exposition, a home show, kids' activities, and live music. *For more information call 800-366-6043 or go to www.mbhf.com.*

October 10: CELEBRATION OF HARVEST
Rancho Sisquoc Winery, Santa Maria Valley. Wineries from this celebrated region showcase their latest vintages during the grape harvest. Local restaurants and caterers will be on hand with a variety of food selections, and live bands will play during the event. The Vintner's Visa is a four-day pass to 12 participating wineries (from October 9 to 12) that offers pass-holders special treats not offered to the public. *For more information call 805-688-0881 or go to www.sbcountywines.com.*

October 10: SANTA BARBARA HARBOR & SEAFOOD FESTIVAL
Santa Barbara Harbor. Coinciding with the area's commercial lobster season, this festival celebrates the region's huge variety of seafood. Along with all types of delicacies for sampling, there will be live music throughout the day, as well as cooking demonstrations, interactive maritime and children's activities, harbor tours, and more. *For more information call 805-897-1962 or go to www.santabarbaraca.gov.*

October 16–18: HARVEST WINE WEEKEND
Paso Robles. The Paso Robles community of wineries—some 130 in all—opens its doors during this fall harvest occasion. There are special dinners, wine tastings, entertainment, crush demonstrations, and more. *For more information call 800-549-9463 or go to www.pasowine.com.*

October 17–18: CALIFORNIA LEMON FESTIVAL
Girsh Park, Goleta. Lemon treats of all kinds are available, as well as pie-eating contests and lemon dish cooking contests. There will be live bluegrass, country, folk, and pop music, and arts and crafts booths. *For more information call 800-646-5382 or go to www.lemonfestival.com.*

October 23: CRAVE
Veterans Hall, San Luis Obispo. It's kind of like speed dating—only with food and wine. Nine varietal bars feature dozens of local wines that are paired with specially chosen dishes from area restaurants. *For more information call 805-227-4812 or go to www.cravepaso.com.* ■

—Mark Langton