# Fresh News

For Growers, Retailers, and Consumers in Canyon Country

## HELL'S BACKBONE GRILL EXEMPLIFIES CANYON COUNTRY FRESH:

A Menu That Tastes of the Land Upon Which It Is Served

Hell's Backbone Grill is a restaurant in the canyon country of southern Utah which serves food tasting as fantastic as the landscape in which it is grown. Lauded in the New York Times and the CSE book, A New Plateau, the restaurant is nestled in the valley between Boulder Mountain and Capitol Reef National Park to the east, and Escalante-Grand Staircase National Monument to the west.

The flavors of this landscape include locally grazed Navajo-Churro sheep, wild perennial bushmint, Capitol Reef heirloom apples and apricots, and heirloom vegetables cultivated within one hundred yards of the kitchen, on the grounds of Boulder Mountain lodge. Because chefs Jen Castile and Blake Spalding are so deeply committed to sourcing what they can from the region's farmers, gardeners, micro-brewers, and foragers, we are especially proud to have them as part of the Canyon Country Network.

I was able to taste Jen and



Blake's distinctive local flavors-from Churro lamb chops to a spinach, goat cheese, and piñon nut quiche-while on a recent trip assessing the status of heirloom fruits and restored historic orchards in the national found in Canyon Country. I learned that the restaurant staff and their friends are engaged in restoring historic orchards and documenting heirloom fruits within their own valley, hoping to eventually use more in the restaurant.

What became clear is that when such a fine restaurant makes a commitment to supporting local food production and wild foraging, benefits spread throughout the community. Things begin to happen on their own—edible plant walks, harvest parties, buying co-ops—that offer further resiliency to the local food system. Such

Continued inside.

## GET YOUR PRODUCTS FEATURED IN RESTAURANTS IN NATIONAL PARKS

Do you want your farm or ranch product featured in a national park? Call Canyon Country Fresh today and team up with Xanterra to feature your food on a menu in the Colorado Plateau's great national parks.

Xanterra Corporation is joining with Canyon Country Fresh to test Colorado Plateau region-specific foods in their concessions at four National Parks. Chefs and purchasers from the South Rim and North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, Zion, and Bryce National Parks are looking for reliable, locally produced foods with cul-

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## STATE POLL SHOWS ARIZONANS WILLING TO PAY MORE FOR TRADITIONAL FOODS

Canyon Country Fresh producers looking for novel ways to market traditional foods of the Southwest may be heartened by the results of a recent survey of Arizonanas. NAU's Social Research Laboratory, commissioned by CSE, recently conducted a survey inquiring about interest, support, and willingness to pay for heritage foods.

The majority of Arizonans, over 3 million (54%), would support the cultural heritage of traditionally processed foods such as Navajo lamb, saguaro cactus syrup and blue corn with their purchases. Over 1.8 million Arizonans would pay 10% more than grocery store prices to support these cultural heritage foods. And over half a million would pay 25% more than grocery store prices for heritage foods. These Arizonans know the value of eating meals rich in flavors and fragrances developed over centuries.

Canyon Country Fresh's buy-local program in northern Arizona and the Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT) national campaign to preserve endangered foods teamed up to determine how Arizonans felt about traditional foods. While most (90%) would pay the same prices as conventionally produced food items, 57% of those surveyed would pay at least 10% more at the checkout to support our native traditions.

Two years ago, Arizonans were asked what they look for when selecting food. 38% stated that quality/freshness was paramount, and while cultural traditions were important, they ranked below such categories as health, price, locally grown

and natural. At the same time, 72% of Arizonans (over 1 million) who would buy more locally raised beef would pay more for range-fed Arizona beef.

Over the past two years, the need to support traditional foods has grown intensely. The effects of the drought can be seen in rural and tribal communities throughout Arizona, particularly in northern Arizona. From reductions in grazing land that are forcing many to sell off herds, to loss of mainstay crops, the drought's recent hardships have made traditionally processed foods even more rare.

The benefits of preserving cultural traditions through food connections in northern Arizona are great. Many of these traditionally processed foods are grown and prepared within 150 miles of Flagstaff. From Navajo-Churro sheep to Corriente cattle, saguaro cactus syrup to blue corn, income generated from these foods stays in the local economy, through farmers market sales, specialty retailers, wages to local residents, and multiplier effects.

In the past two years alone, Flagstaff has seen a 54% increase in sales of local foods, including traditional and native foods, from just three sales sites.

This study is the third in a series of questions commissioned by the Center for Sustainable Environments in the annual Grand Canyon State Poll. The survey was conducted with 423 randomly selected Arizonans and calling took place in March, 2005.

#### BACKBONE GRILL, cont.

things are now happening in Boulder and in nearby Escalante and Fruita, perhaps buoyed by the success of Hell's Backbone Grill, but engaging additional talent, skills and traditional know-how.

As Blake explained to me, Hell's Backbone Grill has developed a distinctive cuisine, national reputation and devoted following not only because of what food it serves, but also what it chooses not to serve. Jen and Blake have been praised by the likes of Deborah Madison for "drawing a line in the desert sand" and declining to source seafood from thousands of miles away, instead featuring smoked rainbow trout, free range chicken, range fed beef and lamb—all from nearby sources. While coastal restaurants can source fresh seafood and build on local culinary traditions, the Grill's chefs have decided not to imitate them but instead discover and celebrate the distinctive foods grown at their own back doors. Rather than resting on their laurels by constantly featuring the best recipes from their recent book, their menus are frequently changing, exploring new possibilities.

Even if other grills and cafés in Canyon Country eventually embrace this same philosophy, I doubt whether it will create much redundancy since each place will discover its own seasonal flavors. We are honored that Jen and Blake—both of them former Flagstaff residents—have taken the time to share their success stories with us through CSE events and publications, as well as at the Grill itself.

by Gary Nabhan

## NATIONAL PARKS TO FEATURE LOCAL FOODS

tural significance to feature on their menus and in their retail shops.

The chefs intend to spend the next six to twelve months testing products in their kitchens and on their menus in the hopes of finding the right long-term dishes for their menus. Products may be featured as seasonal specials or on regular menus. They area also interested in prepared and value-added products for their retail and gift shops.

If you have a product, such as cholla cactus flower buds, Churro lamb, Corriente cattle, prickly pear fruit, mesquite flour, piki bread, or any other region-specific foods, contact Catherine Freeman at 928-523-0664 to connect directly with concessionaires at your closest National Park.

## CANYON COUNTRY FRESH FOUNDING MEMBERS, RESTAURANTS AND MARKETS

AzMex, Flagstaff Crossroads Café, Prescott Garland's, Oak Creek Canyon and Sedona Hell's Backbone Grill, Boulder, UT Lon's at the Hermosa, Paradise Vallev Morning Glory Café, Flagstaff Mountain Harvest Market, Flagstaff New Jersey Pizza, Flagstaff Parks Garden Market, Parks Pesto Brothers Piazza, Flagstaff Pinon Bistro, Cottonwood Simply Delicious Catering, Flagstaff The Turquoise Room at La Posada, Winslow

Winter Sun, Flagstaff Young's Farm and Market, Dewey

We also hope you continue to support our partners in local foods:

Flagstaff Community Farmer's
Market
Prescott Farmer's Market
Cottonwood Farmer's Market
Hopi Farmer's Market (open now!)
Flagstaff Community Supported
Agriculture Project (CSA)
Flagstaff Foodlink
Flagstaff Wild Foraging Project
Hopi Cultural Center, Second
Mesa
The Café at Arcosanti

#### NEWS AND TIDBITS FROM OUR CANYON COUNTRY FRESH MEMBERS



Chef John Sharpe gives a regional foods cooking demonstration at a CSE Four Corners Event

Chef John Sharpe of La Posada at the Turquoise Room has started an online newsletter. His first email was about his Mother's Day Brunch featuring traditional and local foods, entrées from roast prime rib to salmon to Churro Lamb with red corn Posolé.

La Posada, in Winslow, Arizona, is now open every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

New Jersey Pizza is at it again. Their new Della Fattoria news (from the farm) describes their food menu sources. Included are McClendon Farm greens, tangelos, blood oranges, broccoli, basil, and honey; free range Young's Farm; chicken from Whipstone Farm jalapeños; Summer Place Farm pecans; Emma farm eggs; Blue Sky Farm spinach; and Hatch green chiles. Chef Marco Agostini is working hard to gather the best local foods for his menu. If you have a

product you'd like to propose for his menu, call him at (928) 774-5000.

AzMex, Southwest food at the Flagstaff Mall, and Catering to You have joined Canyon Country Fresh network, pledging to source from local farmers and ranchers at least three times in the year. Owners Amy and Steve Schlanger have jumped right into the mix, volunteering to prepare piñon brownies for the May 24 Wild Foraged Feast. AzMex is located across from Movies at the Mall, at the Flagstaff Mall. Catering to You is available for small and large events at (928) 853-7364.

### Canyon Country Fresh News

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www.environment.nau.edu/ccf

#### UPCOMING LOCAL FOOD EVENTS

## Flagstaff Wild Foraged Feast, Riordan Mansion May 24 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Join Patty West and the Flagstaff Community Wild Foraging Project as we feast on wild delicacies prepared by local chefs from the Southwest mountains and desert. Live music, local chefs and wild wild food. \$10. Purchase tickets in advance from Patty West at (928) 523-2942 or Stacie Flajnik at (928) 523-0637.

## Canyon County Fresh presents "Farm to Menu Forum" May 25, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

La Quinta Inn, Flagstaff.

Join us as we kick off the season with farm to restaurant connections, an introduction to value-added marketing, discussion of using heritage foods in Northern Arizona and much more. RSVP to Catherine Freeman by May 19 at (928) 523-0664 or catherine.freeman@nau.edu. \$10 donation requested. Lunch is included.

## Flagstaff/West Navajo/Hopi Food and Agriculture Council May 25, 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

#### LaQuinta Inn, Flagstaff

Continuing our work from February. Updates on local farm-to-school, state and local food policy, and local food efforts. Free and open to individuals and organizations working on local foods in Greater Northern Arizona. RSVP to Catherine Freeman by May 19 at (928) 523-0664 or catherine.freeman@nau.edu.

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