

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

FOOD BANK LAUNCHES FARMER EQUITY PROGRAM

By Tara Fatemi Walker

In today's culture, people unfortunately — and unrealistically — expect instant gratification and quick results. But cultivating long-term change, including improving inequities in our society, requires patience and hard work. Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, no stranger to creating programs and services to nourish the local community, recently launched the Farmer Equity Program (FEP). This pioneering project is part of The Food Bank's newly created sustainability initiative, Land & Sea, which also includes local nonprofit Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust (more on that later).

"We are very excited about FEP," says Food Bank CEO Erica Padilla-Chavez. "We have always been committed to feeding people in need. Now we are accomplishing this while simultaneously fostering equity and social justice for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) farmers."

Last summer, The Food Bank decided it would help build equity by prioritizing the sourcing of BIPOC-owned produce from farms in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties. Emily Freed, supply chain director at Second Harvest, was tasked with finding local growers of color who were interested in selling to The Food Bank. They needed to be small-scale farms, but not so small that they couldn't meet Second Harvest's volume needs — especially as the food insecure population in the county has increased.



CONTRIBUTED

FOOD BANK » PAGE 2 Food Bank distribution with fish from the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust at Freedom Elementary School.

Quick Bites

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Penny ice cream for breakfast, Valentine's news

The Penny Ice Creamery (thepennyicecreamery.com) is holding its annual Eat Ice Cream for Breakfast event from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at all locations. It will serve items such as Goldilocks five-grain porridge with brown sugar walnuts and optional ice cream, fresh pastries, bacon, and breakfast sundaes: homemade lemon morning cake with ice cream (Verve Coffee with Chocolate Almond Praline flavor), chocolate sauce, whipped cream, and toasted almonds.

Also, the ice cream shop has \$12 Valentine's heart-shaped ice cream pies, featuring dark chocolate ice cream, sea salt, caramel, and a chocolate crumb crust, available at stores and online. You can preorder (pick up Feb. 10-14) or buy at the shop on Valentine's Day while supplies last.

APTOS

Bittersweet Bistro adds winter specials

Bittersweet Bistro (787 Rio Del Mar Blvd., 831-662-9799, bittersweetbistroaptos.com) recently launched several \$24 winter specials. Available every day, they will run until April. Entrees are Steak & Frites, Mom's Meatloaf (with garlic mashed potatoes and veggies), Meatballs & Pasta (with housemade meatballs and Bolognese sauce), spicy Blackened Cod with garlic spinach and au gratin potatoes, Cheese Ravioli topped with sundried tomato-vodka sauce, and Truffle Fettuccini (includes shallot, crème fraîche, and black truffle). Hours are 2 p.m. to closing Wednesday through Sunday.

CAPITOLA

La Marea Café & Pizzeria open for First Friday

La Marea Café & Pizzeria (311 Capitola Ave.), which is usually only open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, has extended hours this Friday. After closing at 2 p.m., it will reopen from 5-8 p.m. with pizza, drinks from Syllable Coffee, mocktails, and live music. Follow the business on Instagram @lamareacafe.

SANTA CRUZ

Talk with Dr. Michael Greger, vegan appetizers on deck

Eat for the Earth (eatfortheearth.org) is hosting Dr. Michael Greger for an appearance at Rio Theatre (1205 Soquel Ave.) Saturday. A best-selling author, physician, and internationally recognized speaker, Greger is touring the U.S. for his new book, "How Not to Age: The Scientific Approach to Getting Healthier as You Get Older." The event starts at 6:15 p.m. with whole food, plant-based appetizers including Savory Mushroom Poppers and Artisan Cultured Nut Cheese Mini-Sandwiches on Onion-Flax Bread. Learn more and buy \$25 advance tickets at bit.ly/GregerSantaCruz. If it doesn't sell out, \$35 tickets will be sold at the door. Proceeds benefit nonprofits Eat for the Earth, Santa Cruz VegFest, Vegan Outreach, and NutritionFacts.org (the latter, operated by Greger's science-based nonprofit, is a free online portal with more than 2,000 videos and articles).

SANTA CRUZ

Mardi Gras, Valentine's, Super Bowl offerings at Manresa Bread

Manresa Bread, which has a Santa Cruz bakery (330 Ingalls

BITES » PAGE 2

RECIPE

Braised chicken with fennel and saffron recalls flavors of Provence

By Christopher Kimball
Milk Street

Other than a glass of rosé and blooming fields of lavender, nothing calls to mind Provence more than bouillabaisse. The brothy soup, originally from the port city of Marseille, combines whatever shellfish and white fish were caught fresh with iconic flavors such as saffron, fennel, tomato and garlic.

Absent a serious trip to the fishmonger, though, it's not easy to pull off on a weeknight. Still craving the flavors, we instead nodded to that tradition by applying the flavors to meaty braised chicken thighs.

In this recipe from our book "Tuesday Nights Mediterranean," which features weeknight-friendly meals from the region, we deeply brown tomato paste to lay the foundation of flavor for the braising liquid. Deglazing the pan with dry white wine adds acidity, while scraping up the flavorful browned bits ensures that no flavor goes wasted.

Fresh fennel, garlic, orange zest and saffron give the braise a rich, heady perfume and an unmistakably Mediterranean flavor. Any uncooked dry white wine works well here, but ideally look for one produced in southern France, such as white



MILK STREET

A recipe for braised chicken with fennel and saffron.

Côtes du Rhône or marsanne.

We use strips of orange zest instead of grated zest to lend citrusy notes to the braise. A sharp Y-style vegetable peeler is the best tool for peeling away zest strips, but try to remove only the colored peel, not the bitter white pith just underneath.

Serve the chicken with toasted crusty bread drizzled with olive oil.

Provençal Braised Chicken

Start to finish: 45 minutes

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

1½ pounds boneless, skinless

chicken thighs, trimmed, patted dry and cut crosswise into 1-inch pieces

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium red onion, halved and thinly sliced

1 medium fennel bulb, trimmed, cored and thinly sliced

2 tablespoons tomato paste

3 medium garlic cloves, minced

¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

2 wide strips orange zest (each about 2 inches long), plus 2 tablespoons orange juice

½ cup dry white wine

¼ teaspoon saffron threads

1 cup lightly packed fresh basil, torn

DIRECTIONS

In a medium bowl, toss the chicken with ½ teaspoon each salt and black pepper; set aside. In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the onion, fennel and ½ teaspoon salt, then cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

Add the tomato paste, garlic, pepper flakes and orange zest. Cook, stirring often, until the tomato paste begins to darken and stick to the pot, about 4 minutes. Reduce to medium and add the wine. Bring to a simmer and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until the liquid is almost evaporated, about 3 minutes.

Add the chicken, 3 cups water and the saffron, then stir to combine. Bring to a simmer, then reduce to medium-low and cook, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until a skewer inserted into the chicken meets no resistance, about 15 minutes.

Off heat, remove and discard the zest strips. Stir in the orange juice and about half the basil, then taste and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer to a serving dish and sprinkle with the remaining basil.

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ON NUTRITION

More on probiotics

A column on probiotics brought this response from Don S. in Arizona:



Barbara Intermill

“One of my docs thinks supplements are important, the other thinks they are worthless. A continuing mystery until I read your quiz. My question: How do I know my (probiotic) supplements are alive? The capsules are kept at room temp for up to four weeks and the predelivery environment is an unknown.”

Not an easy answer to this one, Don. As you stated, it is very important that the probiotics you consume are “live and active.” In fact, the International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics defines probiotics as “live microorganisms that, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host.”

How to determine if the good bugs in your particular supplement are alive is tricky.

According to the Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS), which is part of National Institutes of Health, manufacturers of these products are only required to list the total weight of the beneficial bacteria on the product’s label. This doesn’t tell you whether these organisms are dead or alive.

But there’s another way to determine if your capsules contain live microorganisms, says the ODS. Look for the amount of colony forming units (CFUs), which some probiotic manufacturers voluntarily list on their labels. This will tell you the number of good bugs that are actually living. But here’s the kicker, as you mentioned in your question. These live probiotics can die over time, which renders them useless healthwise. That’s why a good manufacturer will list the amount of CFUs in a product at the end of its shelf life or

expiration date, not at the time it was manufactured.

Remember also to follow the label instructions for how to store your probiotics. Some need to be refrigerated and others can be stored at room temperature.

Here’s another thing. When you’re looking at the amount of probiotics in a product, one with 50 billion CFUs is not always better than one with 10 billion. That’s because the healthfulness of a probiotic supplement depends on what particular strains (types) of helpful bacteria it contains and what specific health benefits have been attributed to those strains, according to the World Gastroenterology Organization.

How to determine if the good bugs in your particular supplement are alive is tricky.

Perhaps that is why your docs have differing opinions on probiotics. Because they are not regulated by the same strict standards as drugs, it’s not easy to determine which products have scientific evidence to back them up. Hence, many professional health organizations have yet to make specific recommendations for or against probiotic use by healthy people.

Lastly, don’t forget that probiotics also live in fermented foods such as yogurt. Experts say these good bugs typically survive through a product’s shelf life.

Barbara Intermill is a registered dietitian nutritionist and syndicated columnist. She is the author of “Quinn-Essential Nutrition: The Uncomplicated Science of Eating.” Email her at barbara@quinnessentialnutrition.com.

Food Bank

FROM PAGE 1

“I was able to succeed (in finding applicants to the Farmer Equity Program) using my pre-existing relationships with growers as well as my professional networks,” says Freed, whose experience includes working at Jacobs Farm/del Cabo for many years and earning a certificate in Ecological Horticulture from UC Santa Cruz. It is clear that the roots of farming and community run deep, and can grow connections that lead to people being both physically and spiritually fed.

The three farms participating in the initial Farmer Equity Program — all meeting the required qualifications including residing in an appropriate county — are Oya Organics, Luna’s Farm and Rancho Las Palmas. So how does the program work, exactly? From October 2023 through June 2024, Second Harvest is purchasing produce from these local farms and distributing the produce to people in need through two methods: through its partner agencies, and through direct Second Harvest-run distributions at sites like local schools. Luna’s Farm was the first farm to deliver in late October with pallets of organic butternut, kabocha, spaghetti and delicata squashes. Oya Organics was the next farm — with produce boxes — followed by Rancho Las Palmas with organic Brussels sprouts. Due to its work season, Oya Organics will be supplying produce only through early February. Luna’s and Rancho Las Palmas are participating through June.

Second Harvest is purchasing 400 weekly produce boxes (similar to CSA boxes) from Oya Organics, each featuring a variety of local, fresh organic fruit and vegetables. “Partnering with Second Harvest Food Bank to grow crops during the fall and winter months has been a great benefit to our farm,” says Marsha Sayuri Habib, owner/founder of Oya Organics. Because of the Farmer Equity Program, Oya was able to keep many staff members employed during the winter — which is normally a slow time. “We are grateful for this opportunity and are



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Food Bank distribution featuring Oya Organic Farm produce at Freedom Elementary School.



Food Bank distribution featuring Oya Organic Farm produce at Freedom Elementary School.

“We grow high-quality produce, so we feel great doing this. Plus, it helps us continue running the farm this coming year.”

— Anthony Luna, owner of Luna’s Farm

thrilled to grow local, organic and delicious produce for our neighbors, Santa Cruz County community members,” adds Habib.

Luna’s Farm is currently providing The Food Bank with organic produce including radishes, cilantro and peas. In the near future, there will be organic items like spring onions, green garlic and winter squash. “We are so glad to have this opportunity to share our food with different people,” says Antonio Luna, who owns Luna’s Farm and runs it with his family. “We grow high-quality produce, so we feel great doing this. Plus, it helps us continue running the farm this coming year.” Last year was a challenging one. Luna’s Farm got quite behind in its harvest, mostly due to a lot of cold weather that negatively affected the crops. “This Food Bank program came at a perfect time and we’re very grateful,” says Luna.

Second Harvest is currently utilizing organic Brussels sprouts and artichokes from Rancho Las Palmas. “We’re very happy that this opportunity came knocking on our door,” says Teresita Diaz, who operates Rancho Las Palmas with Maria Diaz and Juvenal

and Rigoberto Cruz. “We really appreciate the work The Food Bank does,” she adds. “We share some of the same values; we always try to make healthy food available for our community.” Rancho Las Palmas regularly donates to a local elementary school and a community center. The farm members are grateful that Second Harvest launched the Farmer Equity Program. “They came up with ways to help smaller farmers, using a fair program that benefits us,” says Diaz.

The team at Second Harvest is happy with the Farmer Equity Program’s success so far and excited for its future. “I think this program has been financially impactful for the three farms,” says Freed. “All of them have repeatedly thanked The Food Bank for this opportunity. One of FEP’s goals was to infuse the local ag economy with local dollars, and that’s exactly what we’ve done.”

As previously mentioned, the Farmer Equity Program is part of Second Harvest’s Land & Sea initiative, which has goals like increasing locally sourced and sustainable produce and meat proteins that clients receive — which in turn, improves people’s health — and strengthening collaborations between The Food Bank and local partners.

Two of these partners, the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust and Lusamerica Foods, recently joined Second Harvest to create unprecedented opportunities for local individuals and families in need. Last week, community members felt the impact of this partnership for the first time. At two distributions held

at regular Food Bank sites — one at a North County school and one at a South County school — clients received local seafood (specifically frozen grenadier) in addition to produce — including some from the Farmer Equity Program.

Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust’s programs include a Community Seafood Program, launched in 2020. It purchases seafood from local fishermen and donates this to local food relief programs. The number of relief programs was formerly five; with this new Second Harvest partnership, there are six food relief organizations Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust works with. For last week’s distributions, Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust was the donor, and Lusamerica was the seafood supplier. Since its inception, the Community Seafood Program has provided over 34,000 nutritious seafood meals in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties.

“We are so excited to partner with Second Harvest Food Bank as part of our Community Seafood Program, and collaborate to bring fresh, nutritious seafood to those in our community who need it most, while also supporting our local fishing community,” says Melissa Mahoney, Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust’s executive director.

“We welcome (Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust) as a perfect partner for the sea aspect of our new initiative,” says Second Harvest’s Paddilla-Chavez. “At The Food Bank, we are committed to improving the health of our community. I look forward to continuing to expand our collaborations with other strong local organizations to increase access to nutritious food. Everyone deserves to be well nourished.”

Bites

FROM PAGE 1

St., 831-431-6738) plus several other South Bay locations, has announced special selections. A “re-invented King Cake” features Manresa Bread’s signature laminated babka dough with cinnamon and butter topped with a crème fraîche cream cheese glaze and purple, green, and gold-colored sugar crystals. Customers can buy a whole cake or slice through Mardi Gras day (Feb. 13) in-store at all locations. Plus, the cake will be on the menu at Los Gatos restaurant The Bywater (which honors chef David Kinch’s New Orleans roots).

For the Super Bowl (Feb. 11), Manresa has a four-pack of soft pretzels plus

beer cheese. It will be available in-store (while supplies last) Friday-Sunday leading up to the Super Bowl, and pre-orders start soon at exploretock.com/manresa-bread-santa-cruz for pickup Feb. 11.

Valentine’s offerings at Manresa Bread include Babka Cake (small or large, raspberry or chocolate), chocolate cream pie, passion fruit tart, heart cakes for two, and packaged cookies in flavors including salted butter and coffee. Preorders start soon at exploretock.com/manresa-bread-santa-cruz, and pickup is Feb. 13-14.

SOQUEL

Valentine’s wine with cheese, chocolate at Bargetto Winery

For Valentine’s Day,

Bargetto Winery (3535 N. Main St., 831-475-2258, bargetto.com) is offering a flight of wines featuring its 90th Anniversary Blanc de Blancs “bubbles,” Rose of Syrah, Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir, Cabernet and Port. This \$20 tasting flight will have an optional \$10 pairing with choice of cheese or chocolate. The winery will be open extended hours Feb. 14, until 6:30 p.m.

SCOTTS VALLEY

Popups at Steel Bonnet Brewing Co.

A few food trucks are appearing at Steel Bonnet Brewing Co. (20 Victor Square, 831-454-8429, steelbonnet.net) in the near future. Cali Caracas (Venezuelan) pops up

from 5:30-8 p.m. Thursday, The Griddler (burgers & sandwiches) appears from 5:30-8 p.m. Friday, S.C. Eatery is there from 5-8 p.m. Saturday. Other appearances include Scrumptious Fish & Chips from 4-8 p.m. Feb. 9, 16, and 23, and Areperia831 from 5-8 p.m. Feb. 17.

SANTA CRUZ

Bad Animal Books hosts renowned chef’s culinary book sale

“In partnership with Bad Animal I will be selling my personal culinary library,” announced local renowned chef/restaurant David Kinch (Mentone, etc.) on Instagram. From noon to 3 p.m. Feb. 3-4, there will be hundreds of books that the chef collected over 45 years — some signed, some out of print, and many French and Japanese titles. The bar at Bad Animal (1011 Cedar St., 831-900-5031, badanimalbooks.com) will be selling wine and beer.

SANTA CRUZ

Belly Goat Craft Burgers adds menu item

Belly Goat Craft Burgers (Abbott Square Market at 725 Front St., 831-225-0355, bellygoatburgers.com) recently launched a new menu item: the Ahi Tuna Burger. It features wild ahi, pickled ginger slaw, crispy onion haystack, Gochujang aioli, and a Brioche bun. Other menu selections include Viva La Verde Burger (cheddar, bacon, pickled jalapeno slaw, Poblano relish) and French fries (traditional or loaded with toppings like pork belly bites, tomatoes, and melted ched-

dar). Winter hours are 11:15 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Sunday-Monday, 11:15 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, 11:15 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, and 11:15 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

SANTA CRUZ

Bantam starts fried chicken lunch

Bantam (1010 Fair Ave., 831-420-0101, bantam1010.com), usually only open from 5-10 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, has offered a fried chicken sandwich lunch popup the past two Fridays and is planning to continue this for the foreseeable future. It starts at 1 p.m. and goes till sell-out. Stay in the loop on Instagram @bantam1010.

SANTA CRUZ

Valentine’s reservations, other news at Crow’s Nest

For Valentine’s Day, Crow’s Nest (2218 East Cliff Dr., 831-476-4560, crownsnest-santacruz.com) is accepting reservations starting at 9:30 a.m. Jan. 31. The menu will be posted in the near future on the website.

Also, the restaurant’s weekday specials continue. These include a Wednesday pasta special (\$19.95) and a rotating Thursday three-course prix fixe Thursday menu (\$29.95), which currently includes options like French Onion Tart and Salmon Enchiladas with Oaxacan Mole.

SCOTTS VALLEY

Temporary closure at Melmore Café

Melmore Café (behind Love Apple Farm, 5311 Scotts Valley Drive),

where chef Elizabeth Albertucci offers a small rotating menu of fresh Italian pasta and salads with some ingredients from Love Apple Farm, is temporarily closed for renovations. Normally, hours are noon to 4 p.m. Friday through Monday. Stay in the loop about reopening date via Instagram @melmorecafe.

SANTA CRUZ

Downtown sweets promotion launches Thursday

Starting Thursday, several businesses are collaborating with the Downtown Association of Santa Cruz for “Sweets Bingo” through Feb. 29. Pick up a bingo card at the Info Kiosk in front of New Leaf Community Market or at Pacific Cookie Company. Buy any type of sweets from the businesses on the front of the card. Complete a single row to win a Pacific Cookie Company cookie. Complete the whole card for a chance to win the grand prize: \$100 in Downtown Dollars. Participating businesses include Mission Hill Coffee & Creamery, Mariposa Coffee, Barceloneta, It’s Sugar, Zachary’s, Café Delmarette, and Trader Joe’s. Visit downtownsantacruz.com/do/sweets-bingo for details and full participant list.

Quick Bites, compiled by Tara Fatemi Walker, is your weekly helping of Santa Cruz County restaurant, food, and drink news. Send items to sentinelfood@gmail.com (Sunday 7 p.m. deadline for that week’s column). Want local food & drink news as it happens? Follow the Sentinel’s food crew on Twitter @santacruzfood.

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