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# SCOFF!

The free email newsletter on good food and drink

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Issue one, August 2004

## August offer: tasty tea

Wendy Brandon has a reputation for making serious jam: in 1997 she was voted Best jam and preserve maker in the Food Lovers' Guide to Britain, and she supplies several hotels and restaurants including one at Harrods.

All her chutneys, mustards, flavoured oils, fruit vinegars, pickles, jellies, jams and marmalades are home-made in her kitchen at Felin Wen in Pembrokeshire and if you happen to be passing you can pop into her shop and tasting area in the former 18th century corn mill. Our offer is for a new product Wendy has added to her range: tea, "for tea drinkers like me who prefer proper loose tea to teabags full of dust". The teas are from Sri Lanka, one a small-leaf breakfast tea from the Mattekelle estate, and the other a lighter, large leaf tea that is ideal for anyone who prefers their tea without milk.

*Scoff!* readers can try both teas — 125g of each — for £4.50 including P&P. To order telephone Wendy or her son Ian on 01239 841568 and mention *Scoff!* or fax 01239 841746. This exclusive offer is not available online though there is plenty else at [www.wendybrandon.co.uk](http://www.wendybrandon.co.uk)

an **A** to **Z** of *Scoff*

### 'A' is for 'Assured'

On a recent trip to the touchy-feely sandwich chain Pret a Manger, *Scoff!* noticed their chicken sandwiches were labelled 'Farm assured in the EU'.

Having no idea what this meant, we emailed Pret to ask them the difference between this formulation and the better known 'free range'. The response was: "Our chicken comes from Spain. The chickens live in open-sided pens and they are allowed great freedom of movement out in the sunnier climes, however as they are from Spain we cannot classify them in the UK as free range."

This is odd, since European Commission Regulation No 1274/91 sets out a definition for free range across the whole of the EU.

The response also does not state unequivocally that the chickens are reared in conditions that would be considered free range on the UK, either, but repeated requests for clarification have drawn no further response.

Even where terms are used in a clearer manner, such as the famous British Farm Standard, alias the Little Red Tractor ([www.littleredtractor.org.uk](http://www.littleredtractor.org.uk)), the precise definitions or conditions for use are not always that clear. For example, as Felicity Lawrence notes in her book *Not on the Label* (see *this issue's book review, below on this page*), a product does not even have to be British to sport the 'British Standard' logo, it merely means it reaches certain standards set by British producers.

It also has more to do with food chain traceability than rearing conditions. For an alternative view, see 'Don't be fooled by the little red tractor', from *Compassion in World Farming*: [www.redtractortruth.com/Truth\\_Behind\\_Little\\_Red\\_Tractor.htm](http://www.redtractortruth.com/Truth_Behind_Little_Red_Tractor.htm)

## Review: the hidden horrors on your plate

by Jack Bancroft

Over the past 20 years, Felicity Lawrence has travelled the world investigating how everything from coffee to prawns are produced for western tables. Her resulting book, 'Not on the label - what really goes into the food on your plate' (Penguin paperback, £7.99) is a fascinating and alarming trawl through the steamy depths of the global food industry.

Often, it is the more innocuous items in your fridge that turn out to be the most damaging to the environment and the world economy. It is not surprising to find out that the conditions in which chickens are kept and slaughtered are extremely distasteful, for example, but who would have suspected that bagged salad is the product of such a disturbing mix of chemical additives and exploitative labour that I am no longer able to buy one even on those days when I am feeling ultra-lazy?

In its own words, the book "investigates the global forces that now control our food. It



exposes how retailers' and manufacturers' profits have grown, while farmers around the world struggle to survive despite vast

subsidies". The book broadens the current debate about food production from narrow matters of taste and animal rearing conditions to global economics. It reveals that around 50 per cent of the workforce in the food industry is made up of migrant labour, much of it employed illegally and brutally exploited by a mafia-style network of gangmasters. The recent deaths of people gathering cockles in Morecombe Bay suddenly begin to fit into a dark pattern that our blithe supermarket choices are doing everything to sustain. Lawrence is not out to destroy the supermarket sector, even if she could: but this book is recommended reading for everyone who aspires to be a responsible consumer.

● *Scoff!* has five copies of *Not on the Label* to give away to readers who write in with the best anecdotes about ethical consumption, which will be published later this year. Please send entries to Dan Jellinek on [dan@gastronomail.com](mailto:dan@gastronomail.com) by 30 September.

## Simple Summer Soup

### Ingredients (serves six)

1 pint plain yogurt  
1 pint tomato juice  
2 oranges  
8 - 10 mint leaves, plus mint sprigs to garnish  
Salt and pepper

Squeeze the juice from the oranges, and blend all the ingredients together. Season to taste. If the oranges are very sweet, add a little lemon juice. Chill well before serving in small bowls with a sprig of mint (or parsley) to garnish. Cold soups should be served COLD, and one of the advantages of this soup is that all the ingredients can be kept in the fridge until blended so there need be no further cooling time.

Recipe by Elizabeth Ray

## Titbits and crumbs

### ● Isle of Wight Garlic Festival, 21-22 August

Now in its 20th year, the Garlic Festival at 'Fighting Cocks Crossroad' in Newchurch, Isle of Wight features over 250 stallholders selling such delights as garlic beer and garlic ice cream, alongside more traditional garlic and other local products:

<http://www.garlicfestival.co.uk>

### ● Mail-order books on food

An indispensable list of specialist US, UK and French-based cook-book suppliers, including for rare and out-of-print books, from food site 'Sally's Place':

[http://www.sallys-place.com/food/chefs-corner/mailorder\\_books.htm](http://www.sallys-place.com/food/chefs-corner/mailorder_books.htm)

### ● eBay Keyword: Kitchen

Use this link to jump straight to the section of the online auction phenomenon eBay where people in the UK are selling kitchen items:

<http://search.ebay.co.uk/kitchen>

### ● Free books for links!

*Scoff!* is giving away books on food and wine to readers who send in their favourite web link, if we publish it in a future issue. You have nothing to lose and a brand new book to gain! Email them in to: [dan@gastronomail.com](mailto:dan@gastronomail.com)

## American wine's best-kept secret: deep-fried catfish country

By Jonathan Ray

I always knew that California makes wine, as do Washington State, Texas, Oregon and New York; but I never knew about Missouri.

I discovered this state's wine-growing pedigree quite by accident. After a few days pottering about Missouri, I was in Hannibal, home to Mark Twain and setting for the adventures of both Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Hungry after a day's sightseeing, I opted for 'Bubba's', an establishment whose sign invited customers to "walk in and waddle out".

The Mid-West is not the place to go if you like your food. I could have recited the menu unseen: the deep-fried nuggets, the deep-fried onion rings, the deep-fried chicken, the deep-fried catfish. The shortest, fattest, most heavily tattooed and most scantily-clad waitress I had ever seen took my order, asking whether I would like to drink beer or Chablis. I thought I had misheard: Chablis? Bubba himself brought it over with great ceremony, declaring it to be the best wine in the world. Well, it wasn't the best and it wasn't the worst, and it certainly wasn't Chablis, but Bubba beamed as I asked to see the bottle, and informed me that a century ago Missouri exported more wine than any other state. "If y'all don't believe me, go see Hermann," he said.

Hermann turned out to be a place, not a person – a town on the Missouri River in a region known as Little Germany. The town was founded by the German Settlement Society of Philadelphia, whose members used their European winemaking skills to produce wine from the area's abundant wild grapes, and within two decades were producing 100,000 gallons a year.

So successful were they, that by the end of the nineteenth century, the entire nation's wine manufacturing industry was centred on nearby St. Louis. Prohibition knocked the industry flat, but in the 1960s it picked up again, and today there are about 30 flourishing wineries in Missouri in four officially-recognised viticultural areas: Hermann, Augusta, Ozark Mountains and Ozark Highlands.

On the day of my visit Hermann was celebrating its annual Oktoberfest with oompah bands, chaps in lederhosen and giggling girls in T-shirts emblazoned with "Kiss me, I'm German." I made my way to the Stone Hill Winery, the largest in Missouri and the third most awarded winery in the US. Stone Hill makes 17 different wines from grape varieties unfamiliar to most Europeans, largely comprising French/American hybrids such as Norton,



Stone Hill Vineyards, Hermann: the secret is out?

Seyval, Vidal and Concord, all of which survive Missouri's weather and pests better than classic varieties.

Unfazed by my impromptu visit, Stone Hill's owner Patty Held-Uthlaut laid on a fascinating tasting. We started with Missouri Champagne (which, because it isn't exported, can be so named) made by the champagne method from 100% Vidal: crisp, dry and delicious. We then compared a cold-fermented 2002 Seyval with a barrel-fermented 2001 Seyval, which had been kept on its lees for seven months in small French oak barrels. The former was light and crisply dry, with hints of spice on the nose but instantly forgettable, while the latter was a delight; fruity but dry, with an oaky softness and intriguing depth of flavour.

The next wine, Steinberg, a blend of four varieties, was a liquid bubble-gum identical to mass-produced Liebfraumilch, and was, I was sad to learn, the winery's best seller. The two wines of real quality, however, were a 1999 Norton, a robust, oak-aged dry red with buckets of spicy, peppery flavour, which would give any decent Zinfandel, Syrah or Cabernet a run for its money, and an astonishing 2000 late-picked, botrytis-affected Vignoles, a rich, complex dessert wine bursting with luscious fruit.

At present, the winemakers of Missouri manage to sell locally every bottle that they produce, but they hope one day to break into the European market. I fear their unfamiliar grape varieties might make it difficult, but buying their wines is the least we can do: the dreaded phylloxera was overcome thanks to two Missouri viticulturalists who first grafted French varieties onto phylloxera-resistant American rootstock. This is a debt so far acknowledged only in Montpelier in France, where grateful winemakers have erected a memorial to their Missourian counterparts.

# How to scour the planet from your kitchen chair

By Dan Jellinek

Most cooks are compulsive recipe hoarders, whether they clip cuttings out from magazines, write them in a notebook or are modern about it and use a home computer to organise their information.

The internet is a fantastic source of recipes. There are recipe web sites covering all kinds of cooking and from all over the world. Some are run by restaurants, food producers or publishers that invest money in developing extensive resources to attract the attention of potential customers; but most are simply produced by amateur cooks who want to share the secret of their green bean salad with the planet.

The problem is finding what you want, or more accurately, not finding what you don't want.

This is not a problem unique to recipe hunting online: any internet research needs to be carefully filtered, and the most effective technique for doing this is simply to use the advanced searching tools available on all the main web search engines to refine your search in various powerful and sophisticated ways.

For example, you might find yourself with a load of uneaten ripe fruit in your fruit bowl, which is in danger of rotting away and being wasted. If you have an ice-cream maker (and everyone should, they are cheap and repay their purchase price quickly) you might want to find a sorbet or ice-cream recipe for whatever fruit it is you don't want to waste.

All you need to do is visit [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) and type in 'plum sorbet', and you will find a thousand recipes. Better still to type in "plum



Plum job: how to narrow down your search

sorbet" – encasing the two words in double quotes so the search engine looks for them as a phrase – and add the word 'recipe' as well, and your search will be faster and more accurate. If you are in the UK, you could also add the search time 'site:uk' and only UK-based web sites will be returned: even better, as otherwise most recipe sites you find will be American, and while the recipes will be fine you will have to convert all the measurements they contain to UK weights and measures.

And so on – search engines are flexible tools, and it is worth doing a little homework on the web site of your favourite search engine to learn about the tools and settings that it offers.

However well you search, however, the results can still be a little erratic. One of the first recipes I used the internet to locate was for biscotti, the slender Italian biscuits with almonds often served for dipping in Vin Santo wine. Countless recipes appeared, setting out wildly differing cooking methods: the dough was made up with very different proportions of egg and flour; in some, the biscuits were double-cooked with a final toasting, but not in others; and the cooking

times and temperatures varied from medium heat to low and slow.

Becoming ever more confused, I eventually came across an American web site whose creator was a master of mouth-watering prose. 'Are you looking for the perfect biscotti recipe?' began the blurb – I had to admit it. 'Are you fed up with trying to work out which is the best method?' – he was reading my mind. 'Then fear not – I spent literally months testing out every recipe I could find, several times, in batches of all sizes, until I arrived at the best, most foolproof recipe which turns out perfect biscuits time after time, beautifully subtle and sweet and with that glassy texture that shatters in your mouth...'

I was sold. Printing off the recipe, I gathered the ingredients together and made an enormous batch of what turned out to be the gloopest, stickiest dough I had ever seen. It stuck my fingers together and my hand to the mixing board so I thought I would never be able to move again. Oh well, I thought, this person has done all that kitchen science, so this must be what it is supposed to be like. I need only to bake it, and glassy biscotti will be shattering against the taste-buds of my friends and family for weeks to come.

It was a disaster. I don't know if it was a mistake with American cooking measures; or whether the person had wildly exaggerated his credentials – I suspect both. Whatever, I learned a valuable lesson that day about cooking from the internet: be careful; don't believe what people say about their own recipes; and never use an internet recipe for the first time when you are holding a dinner party for anyone you care about.

## Top tips: Cooking with kids

by Rochelle Shalet

There is so much children can learn from being involved in cooking: using their senses, following directions, maths, reading, vocabulary, social interaction, science, innovation and creativity, co-operation and more. And the more that they become involved, the more they can do and the more they will love it. Don't just involve the kids in kiddy cuisine; get them involved with the everyday meals. They even like doing the washing up.

My top tips are:

**1** Ask your child to help you assemble the ingredients and equipment that you will need before you start. You don't want to leave your child unsupervised around a half-finished batter while you look for new ingredients and utensils.

**2** Show your child the recipe. If this is your first time cooking with your child, introduce them to the concept of a cookbook. It is a good idea to buy a cookbook especially for children. I recommend ones with large pictures which show each stage of the recipe.

**3** Let your child name, taste, feel and smell the various ingredients. If there are items that look and feel similar such as salt and sugar, let them taste both. But never let your child taste raw eggs, fish, poultry or meat: when you work with a recipe containing these ingredients, have your child taste it before any of these items are added.

**4** Let your child put in as many ingredients as

possible, and mix them together. Most items need a bit more mixing than a child can manage, but you can have your child start and then you can finish the process. If you are using a mixer, show them how you use it, but never leave an electric mixer plugged in around a young child and do not turn your back, even for a second.

**5** While you're eating, discuss what you did. What ingredients did you use? See if they remember what you did at each stage. Talk about how much fun it was and discuss any problems they might have had.

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