

# The Eye



Beach, Village + Urban Living in Oaxaca

August/September 2020

Issue 100

FREE

# Issue 100!





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# Editor's Letter

**“There are people in the world so hungry,  
that God cannot appear to them except  
in the form of bread.”**

**— Mahatma Gandhi**

**T**his month at The Eye we have much to celebrate! When we put out the first issue in early 2011, I could not have predicted that almost ten years later we would still be going strong and putting out our 100th issue.

This is also our annual Food Issue and, as a restaurateur, it is one of my favorites to put together. However, this year feels a little bit different for me.

The unprecedented worldwide COVID situation is affecting how we relate to one another. We are reevaluating social norms; shaking hands is verboten, let alone the hugging and kissing which is so common in Latin culture. Standing too close to someone is no longer just rude but is seen as a form of aggression.

The restaurant experience as we have come to know it is changing quickly, with disposable menus, plastic-wrapped cutlery, having your body misted down with disinfectant, hand sanitizer, and of course there are the masks. Suddenly staying home seems a lot more fun.

With this in mind, we return to comfort foods. This is not a time for molecular gastronomy or expensive cuts of meat. It's a time for eating close to home with seasonal ingredients. Make extra and send it to your neighbor – in sterilized Tupperware, of course!

And we need to evaluate these changes through a wider lens. Yesterday 4,158 people died from COVID while over 21,000 died from hunger. I do not say this to diminish those affected by this virus, but to encourage us to remain focused on the fact that many humans do not have the basics for survival. This 'new normal' makes providing those basics even more difficult. There are currently 70 million displaced people across the globe and half of those are women and children. Many are living in one of the various immigration detention centers or refugee camps around the globe. As the world came to a stop, they have not had the luxury of self-isolating. In addition, caseworkers, courts and immigration services came to a standstill, making the already long process they face, even longer.

The world has come to a halt to protect human lives. But why have we not stopped the world for the hungry when their numbers are so great and their power so little?

Thank you to our readers for being on this journey with us!

See you in October,

**Jane**



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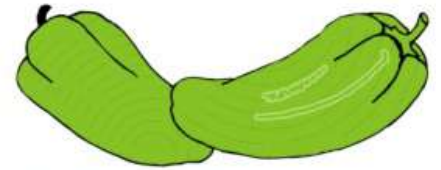




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##### FRIDAY- Street Food

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- 2 types of Taco Fillings
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#### Evening Activities

##### TUESDAY- Frida's Favorites- dishes inspired by Frida Kahlo

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# Al Pastor and the Lebanese Influence on Mexican food

By Julie Etra

**Y**um! One of my favorite Mexican dishes is Tacos al



Pastor, layers of marinated meat, slow-cooked on a spit with a vertical flame, slivered up and served on a warm corn tortilla with all the side fixings. The spit, called a *trompo* ("spinning top") in Spanish, slowly rotates as it cooks the al pastor, which in Mexico is usually pork. Marinades vary, but can mostly be classified as "adobo," which includes achiote and ground red guajillo chilies, resulting in the reddish colored meat. The *pastor* part, which means "shepherd," is derived from the verb *pastorear* ("to herd"), as this fixture in Mexican street food is actually Lebanese in origin and the corresponding meat was lamb (pigs are not herded). In the Middle East, the dish is called "shawarma," and originally consisted of spiced lamb roasting on the slow-turning spit and served on pita bread; when it arrived in Mexico, the pita eventually became a wheat flour tortilla (as in *tacos árabe*). This method of cooking on a rotating spit is also customary in Greek food, e.g., the gyro (think gyroscope), a meat sandwich of beef, veal (oh no, not a fatted calf), lamb, pork, or chicken.

## Lebanese Food Comes to Mexico

Records show that the first Lebanese arrived Mexico in 1892, initially concentrating around Puebla and to a lesser extent Mexico City and the Baja. At the time, Lebanon was not a distinct country but part of the immense Ottoman empire. The immigrants were largely Christians fleeing political persecution, and they rapidly assimilated in Mexico.

The first Middle Eastern restaurant in Mexico was opened in Puebla by Yerbagues Tabe Mena y Galeana in Puebla in 1933. Called "La Oriental," it was located at Avenida 16 de septiembre, #303. Since lamb apparently was difficult to find and expensive, and since the Mexicans preferred pork, the family quickly adapted. Traditional Lebanese spices, such as caraway, cardamom, nutmeg, and ginger were gradually replaced with Mexican spices but *tacos árabes* are in part defined by the wheat flour tortilla, not corn.

The restaurant moved to its current location near the *zocalo* in 1942; it's at Portal Iturbide, #5. The sign reads "La Oriental: la cuna del taco Árabe" ("The Eastern: the birthplace of the Arab taco).

Speaking of spices, there are numerous spices not originally Mexican but over the centuries and decades have found their way into Mexican cuisine, e.g., cumin (*comino* in Spanish) and cilantro.

Cumin, which seems indispensable in so many Mexican dishes, is in fact from the Mediterranean, introduced to Mexico by the Spanish conquistadores. Cilantro (called coriander when you are referring to the seeds) is related to cumin, as they are both in the carrot/parsley/celery family. Although its origin remains uncertain, it is also most likely from the Mediterranean and it has been in use as a spice and as a medicinal plant for about 5,000 years. There are references to the use of coriander in the Old Testament (in Exodus) and *The Arabian Nights*. Coriander, too, arrived in Mexico with the Spaniards, along with cinnamon (*canela*) and cloves (*clavos*).

## Lebanese Culture in Mexico

Who are some famous Mexicans of Lebanese origin?

Number Uno has to be Carlos Slim Helu, better known as Carlos Slim. I have to assume, dear readers, that most of you know he is the 5<sup>th</sup>-richest person in the world, the wealthiest Latin American and worth about \$68.9 billion US dollars, but did you know he is of Lebanese descent? Slim is the son of Julián Slim Haddad (born Khalil Salim Haddad Aglamaz) and Linda Helú Atta, both Maronite Christians from Lebanon. Slim's father emigrated to Mexico from Lebanon at age 14, apparently to avoid conscription in the Ottoman army, making Slim first generation on his father's side. His mother was from Chihuahua, but both her parents were also Lebanese immigrants. The Soumaya Museum in Mexico City – and most of its contents – are the gift of Carlos Slim.



The actress Salma Hayek Jiménez, aka Salma Hayek, is also of Lebanese descent. She was born in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. Her father, Sami Hayek Domínguez, is Lebanese, having emigrated from the city of Baabdat, Lebanon. Her mother, Diana Jiménez Medina, is Mexican/Spanish (her maternal grandmother and great-grandparents were from Spain).



The supermarket Chedraui, aka Super Che, is one of the two big box stores in Huatulco and is part of a chain of super stores founded by the Lebanese immigrants Lázaro Chedraui Chaya and his wife Ana Caram in 1927 in Xalapa, Veracruz. First known as Port of Beirut, this highly successful chain now includes stores in the United States in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas, under the names El Super and Fiesta Mart.







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# Calming Your *Nervios*

By Kary Vannice

“*Nervios*” is a classification of medical disorders used here in Mexico that, for us, would loosely be translated as the “jitters.” In reality, though, the symptoms go well beyond that.

The late professor Carlos Zolla Luque, an expert in Mexican traditional medicine at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), described *nervios* as characterized by a “state of unrest” in which it is customary to experience “insomnia, loss of appetite or compulsive eating, anxiety, rapid pulse, occasional despair and other disorders such as hair loss, dermatitis and weakness. Any circumstances that alter the emotional state or mood are interpreted as possible triggering agents.”

Now, let's be honest, we are all staring down the barrel of another six months of civil unrest, economic uncertainty, and social isolation – as if the past six months were not enough to make anyone reach for the Prozac.

Unlike the other North American countries, Mexicans have long recognized what modern science now calls “stress-related disorders.” Ancient folk remedies throughout Mexico always included several different plants and trees as cures to calm the nerves. In 2014, a team of UNAM scientists itemized 92 “medicinal plants for the treatment of ‘nervios’, anxiety, and depression in Mexican traditional medicine” – a great resource for getting high-strung, stressed out, insomniacs to chill out and take a nap.

In the midst of a global pandemic, regional economic crisis and racial tensions boiling over (for good reason, I might add), it's safe to say we're all experiencing more than a little stress in our daily lives. The good news is, here in Mexico, they haven't lost touch with their ancient ways and some of these old folk remedies are still very much available to us today. Anyone who's been to a traditional “tianguis” market knows there's always at least one vendor there selling dried herbs to cure what ails ya'.

Two of the 92 Oaxacan antidotes for *los nervios* you'd more commonly associate with a flower shop than a pharmacy. They are a local **chrysanthemum** and ***Ipomoea stans***, a variety of those lovely blue/purple morning glories you see on your morning walks. However, in their case, it's not the flower that's used, it's the roots.

In other plants, it's the bark or the leaves, or the berries that hold the power to relax one with a tense and uneasy disposition. **Calderona Amarilla** (*Galphimia Glauca*, or thryallis), for example, by far the most wildly studied of the folk remedies, uses the seeds and branches to make a soothing tonic.

Another recognizable Mexican flower, the ***cempasúchil***, the Mexican marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) traditionally used Day of the Dead displays, while not reviewed in the study, has long been used to cure headaches, “fright,” insomnia, excessive crying and nervousness.



There are many other at-home treatments readily available in your local fruit and veg store. While not necessarily native to Mexico, these are well-known “medicines” for nervous Nellies.

**Passionflower** – There are over 500 varieties of passionflower and only some of them produce a curative effect, but you'll often find dried *Passiflora* in local natural *farmacias*, which you can use to make a calming tea.

**Ruda (common rue)** – Originally from the Mediterranean, this herb has a long-standing place in Mexican households for its calming and relaxing effects. A tea can be made from its delicate leaves to reduce anxiety and nervousness.



**Sage** – What we think of as a nice addition to a savory dish is actually an antidote for anxiety here in Mexico. If you're lucky, you can find it fresh in the produce section. But if you strike out there, move on to the dried herb section of the store and look for *salvia*.

**Lavender** – Oil of lavender can be put into a diffuser to create a peaceful and comforting atmosphere. The leaves can be made into a tea and flowers can be added to a hot bath.

**Chamomile** – You'll often find this fresh in the herb section of most *fruterías*. And it is always available in the bagged tea section of the local supermarket.

**Hibiscus tea** – Yes, the ubiquitous *agua de Jamaica* served in cafés and street corners across Mexico is a great tonic for anxiety. So, if you're feeling edgy, double down on this *aguita* the next time you have *comida corrida*.



**Red rose** – Even this iconic symbol of love and romance has calming effects. Four flowers left standing in a liter of freshly boiled water for one hour can be consumed a half-cup at a time to soothe the stomach and the nerves.

There are better days ahead, but until then, to keep from popping Prozac from a PEZ dispenser, why not take a more natural approach to calming your nervous system? It's worked here in Mexico for thousands of years.



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# A Brief History of Cooking

By Randy Jackson

Today, perhaps more than any other time in human history, food has been elevated on a cultural pedestal of reverence. The depth of knowledge and appreciation for a wide variety of cuisines among so many people seems to be a cultural characteristic of our times. Celebrity chefs, food shows and food networks, never mind food pictures posted on Instagram, are only a few of the many indicators of this interest. The term "foodie" was first coined in the 1980s and is now in common use. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a foodie as "a person who has an ardent or refined interest in food and who eats food not only out of hunger but due to their interest or hobby." Travel, immigration, and the abundance of food and ingredients from all over the world have all had a hand in this current cultural obsession with food and cooking. However, today's modern hipsters of cuisine are only the most recent green sprig of growth in the long history of cooking.

Our evolutionary record shows the harnessing of fire coincided with the growth of the human brain relative to body size. This development took place roughly 1.9 million years ago. Harnessing fire had multiple benefits to humans, but chief among them was that it allowed the cooking of food. Cooking food increases the caloric value and reduces the energy required to digest it. Cooking food also enabled early humans to eat certain tubers and roots that were otherwise inedible.

I think it safe to assume that grilling was the first cooking method. Studies of primitive tribes, even today, show how an animal is cooked (it's estimated that there are more than a hundred "uncontacted peoples" worldwide, half of them in the Amazonian jungle). The entire carcass is thrown onto the open fire. The fire, along with some scraping, removes the fur. Then as bits of the animal are deemed cooked, they are cut or torn from the carcass and consumed. It's easy to see the direct lineage of this form of cooking to the tossing of a piece of meat onto the barbeque today.



The earliest dishes beyond grilling were probably soups and stews. There is some evidence from Japan dating back 10,000 years of a type of stew made by putting flesh and water into an animal's paunch and boiling it over a fire. No doubt soups and stews were being made much earlier than this. Once mankind had figured out how to cook in a container of some sort, it only made sense they began boiling up bits of almost anything they could find.

There is an ancient tradition in Oaxaca – still practiced – of making "stone soup." National Geographic has a documentary showing this ([https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/intelligent-travel/2010/10/04/mexicos\\_stone\\_soup/](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/intelligent-travel/2010/10/04/mexicos_stone_soup/)). The cooking method consists of putting water, vegetables, and fish into a smooth rounded depression in the rocky ground. Then a stone is heated on a fire before dropping it into this natural cauldron, and the soup is cooked. It's easy to imagine how different flavors were discovered by experimentation or by chance when something new was added to the soup or stew.

Let's not forget about bread. Archaeologists in Jordan have found the remains of flatbread made with wild barley and plant roots – about 14,000 years old, it predates agricultural practices by thousands of years. Societies all over the world have independently found ways to make bread. Mash up grains, add water to make a paste, fry on a hot rock – and presto! For example, the original inhabitants of what is now California developed a complex procedure to make flour for flatbread out of acorns. Source material for bread was everywhere once man learned to harness fire.

Harnessing fire and cooking required greater social organization and division of duties – there had to be fire tenders, wood gatherers, hunters, etc. A central fire also brought people together for longer periods, especially at night, which increased social complexity and likely helped in the evolution of language.



Racing the cooking timeline ahead by a few thousand years, we know that, for millennia, there have been places where people went for a cooked meal outside their homes. In Greek and Roman times, there were cook shops known as *thermopolia*. A thermopolium had L-shaped stone tables with storage urns from which a soup/stew was ladled out at certain times of the day. Thermopolia were not restaurants as we know them today, rather a type of cook-shop frequented by travellers and people without kitchens.

The word “restaurant” came from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century French term for a type of soup purported to have medicinal benefits, in turn based on the French word *restaurer*, to “restore.” A French businessman by the name of A. Boulanger, in 1760, is credited with having the first restaurant as we understand them today. He offered a variety of soups.



A single eating place that offered a choice to customers was new. Later, others joined in. Some tried to offer other types of food beyond soups. This practice, however, was fiercely contested by the cooking guilds of the time. These guilds were first established in the Medieval Era. Such guilds as meat cookers (charcutiers), pie makers, sauce makers, poultry cookers, etc., were protected by law; each had their own single offer to customers. Then came the French Revolution. Societal structures were upended, including the guilds. Aristocrats were sent to the guillotine and their private cooks became unemployed. Many of these cooks started their own cooking businesses to survive, and the path to the modern restaurant was born.

Restaurants are an integral part of society and are constantly adapting to changing technology and cultural practices. For example, the prevalence of cars in America has made the majority of cooking businesses fast food restaurants. In 1921, White Castle became the first fast food chain restaurant, serving its distinctive little square hamburgers that became known as “sliders.” McDonald’s started in 1940 and KFC in 1952.

“The Importance of Eating Together,” a July 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, reported that Americans eat one in five meals in their car, that one person in four eats one fast food meal a day, and the average American family spends almost as much on fast food as on groceries.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, apps like SkipTheDishes and Uber Eats have made take-out an important revenue segment for many restaurants. The pandemic also seems to have shifted more meals from restaurants into the household kitchen. This is likely feeding the foodie craze further. More people have time to cook at home and have the desire to have safer, family-centered meals. The history of cooking continues.

# Upcoming Events

## Huatulco Recurring Events:

English AA, Huatulco

Saturdays, meeting, 7:00 pm

Plaza Oaxaca, Calle Flamboyant 310

2nd floor, La Crucecita,

Info: Becky Wiles, [b\\_wiles@yahoo.com](mailto:b_wiles@yahoo.com)

## Weekly Markets

Pochutla Market- Every Monday

## Huatulco’s Organic Market

Santa Cruz 8 am - 2 pm

First and third Saturdays of the month

Encuentro de Cocineros - Local cooks gather with sample dishes to raise money for local charities.

Santa Cruz Park, 150 pesos

Last Sunday of the month at 2 pm

## Oaxaca City Recurring Events:

Open AA Meetings (English)

Members of all 12-step programs welcome

Mondays and Thursdays, 7 pm

Saturdays, 9 am

303B Rayon near corner of Fiallo

Al-Anon (English)

Tuesdays, 10:30 am

303B Rayon near corner of Fiallo

## Religious Services

Holy Trinity Anglican Episcopal Church

Sundays 10:30 am

Crespo 211 (between Morelos and Matamoros)

Liturgy followed by coffee hour. Information 951-514-3799

## Oaxaca Quaker Friends

Saturdays, 10 am, Free. All are welcome.

For more information and location, contact

[janynelyons@hotmail.com](mailto:janynelyons@hotmail.com).

## Weekly Markets

Zaachila Market, Every Thursday

Ocotlán Market, Every Friday

Etla Market, Every Wednesday

Tlacolula Market, Every Sunday

**Due to Coronavirus safety measures we assume most of these events are suspended until further notice.**



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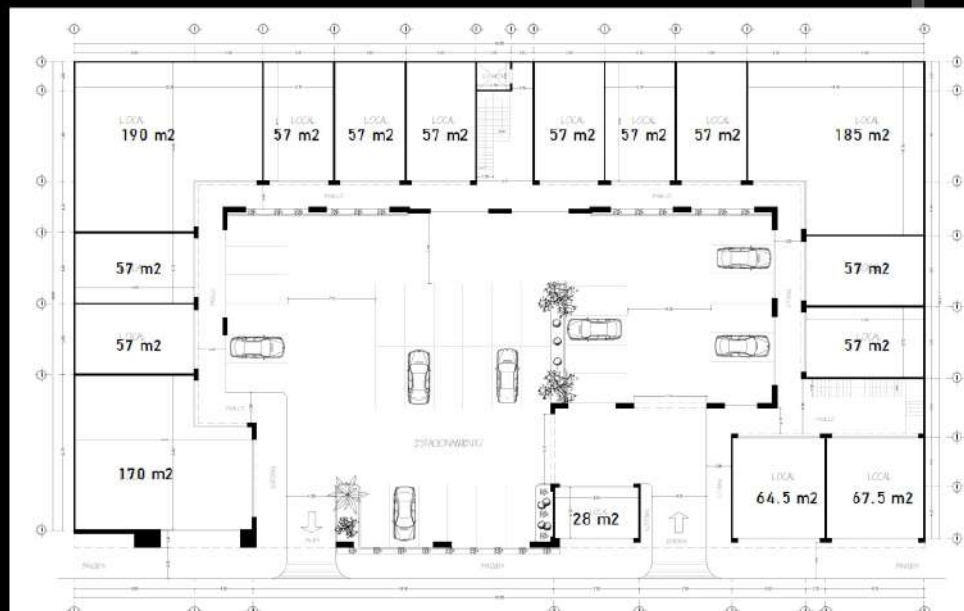


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# Where Foodies Can Still Get Their Kicks: A Quarantined Summer in San Miguel de Allende

By Carole Reedy

The virus is on our minds, and frustration fills our hearts with dread. Most of the readers of *The Eye* are travelers, wanderers, and adventurers, so staying inside is anathema to us. Yours truly, who lives in Mexico City, struggled with the same, especially after the cancellation of a months-long Italian trip scheduled for the fall.

As a result, I opted to take refuge in San Miguel de Allende, my second home.

The tranquil pueblo of San Miguel de Allende (SMA) is just a three-and-a-half-hour drive from the hustle and bustle of the megapolis of Ciudad de Mexico, with its population of over 20 million. SMA was recently listed as the second-best city in the world by the magazine *Travel + Leisure*. (Oaxaca City grabbed first-place accolades, and the country of Mexico had four out of 25 mentions on the coveted list, more than any other country.)

Fearful of a bus ride filled with 30 potential virus-carrying passengers, I opted for a private car and driver from the reliable BajioGo company. It's also possible to order a shared-car ride, but that, too, seemed a bigger risk than I wanted to take.

The deluxe bus ride is very reasonably priced at approximately US \$30 a person (half that for seniors who have Mexican residency), whereas my private car was US \$250. The price of a shared car/van ride depends on the number of passengers, of course. *Vale la pena* was my thought!

## Eating in quarantine

The quarantine situation in SMA was much the same as Mexico City: stay home and wear a mask when out. No restaurants, stores other than grocery or food businesses, or hotels are open. This is scheduled to change on July 15, when the next phase takes over. Hotels are set to open at 40% capacity, as will some restaurants.

One of the attractions of San Miguel is the breadth of its international and local eateries. Like most major cities, the scrumptious food of the region can be delivered to your door or picked up. And the La Europea and Cava Sautto wine stores fortunately are open daily for your imbibing needs.

The local tortillerías are also working daily, so you can have freshly made tortillas for your tacos. The small and large fruit, vegetable, and flower markets are open too for purchasing (at drop-dead low prices) the freshest regional produce, with avocado, papaya, melón, mango, jícama, cilantro, and broccoli topping the list of the vast range of fruits and vegetables available year-round in Mexico.



For those with a kitchen in which to cook at home, in San Miguel we are fortunate to have a grocery store right in centro.

**Bonanza** has graced the street of Mesones for many years. It's a favorite of the gringos due to its range of imported items, including sweet relish, horseradish, and New Zealand butter. They also carry delicious homemade yogurt and ice cream. There's a deli section and a back room with a variety of spices and nuts. The prices are higher than

the La Comer just outside of town, but the convenience is incomparable. My favorite purchase is the pickled herring in a jar, an item I have trouble finding even in Mexico City. I would shy away from buying wine here though. The prices are often double that of La Europea or Cava Sautto.

If you'd rather not cook, let me recommend some take-out/delivery options. I'm finding comfort foods more satisfying these days than the fancy "tasting" options many restaurants are offering.

Let's start with a brimming bowl of pozole. On the Ancha San Antonio, at # 35, you will find **Victoria's**, a tiny restaurant hidden among the larger venues that sell Mexican *artesanías* (handcrafts). There are just a few tables inside and you'll wait just a few minutes for your take-out order of green or red pozole, chicken or pork. Accompanying your large or small portion are fried tortillas and the fixings to top your pozole: lettuce, radish, and red onion.



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**Hecho in Mexico**, at Ancha San Antonio, # 8, is a favorite among both the gringo crowd and Mexicans due to the highly consistent quality of each item on the menu. The variety of selections is staggering: everything from enchiladas and tacos to hamburgers, salads, soups, and (my personal favorite) the Reuben sandwich. This is a large, mostly outdoor venue, which makes it ideal for social distancing.



**Il Castello Ristorante Pizzeria**, at Animas 20, serves the real thing when it comes to Italian food at reasonable prices. There is fabulous pizza, stromboli, calzones, and the best eggplant and chicken parmesan around (a personal favorite). Small seating area only, but like all other restaurants, they are prepared to give you take-out. The portions are ample and the location is easy, just up from the market at the Plaza Cívica on the charming street of Animas.



**Garambullo**, at Animas 46, just down the street from Il Castello, serves breakfast and lunch only in a beautiful courtyard. It's been described as a small jewel in the midst of the hustle-bustle of the nearby market. Garambullo, by the way, is a Mexican fruit that has many healthy properties, and the restaurant reflects its name in the quality of their food. There are salads, eggs dishes, beans, sandwiches, and enchiladas, all made from the freshest ingredients.



**La Parada**, at Recreo 94. During normal times you need a reservation for seating at this popular spot featuring Peruvian food. Of course, you must start by sipping a tart Pisco Sour. Follow it with a meal choice from the variety of seafood and wonderful pork dishes, including a yummy pork sandwich, a favorite of many friends. Portions are ample and all very fresh. The waitstaff is exceptional, which makes every visit a special occasion.



**Buenos Aires Bistro**, at Mesones 62, serves some of the best steaks, arrachera, and lamb chops in town. My personal favorite is the polenta with vegetables or pork; another friend always orders the octopus salad. It is a charming restaurant just steps from the Jardín.



**Zenteno**, at Hernandez Macías 136, has by far the best coffee in town. That and their breakfast pastries are served daily in this miniscule space with just four tables. You might find yourself alone in here during these pandemic days, but during normal times you'd see many happy patrons on their iPads sipping coffees. One day I even spotted Robert Reich, the American economist, in a quiet corner. I buy my freshly ground coffee here by the kilo.



**Tostévere**, at Codo 4, is known for their tostadas. Forget your image of a Mexican tostada because here they create their own version of the popular Mexican dish. The chef and staff present a small menu, but it's filled with unique variations on the traditional tostada. Think octopus, soft-shelled crab, corn, a variety of vegetables, and carpaccio, all served in a manner you've not experienced before. There's a full bar with a variety of popular cocktails and a friendly, knowledgeable staff.



Whether dining out or in, you're sure to find variety, quality, atmosphere, and charm in this small yet grande colonial city of Mexico. Come visit when you feel comfortable traveling.

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# The Important Role that Grassroots Organizations Play in Oaxaca, Mexico

By Pete Noll

As I was thumbing through previous editions of *The Eye* during the start of our quarantine in amazing Huatulco, I was pleased to see a number of social organizations highlighted. After college, I took the path most followed by many of my peers and began a job in finance and sales outside of Los Angeles. Fortunately, that journey ended when I got the news that I had been accepted to join the Peace Corps and would be going to Guatemala.



For the past 11 years, I have collaborated with *Puente a la Salud Comunitaria* ([www.puentemexico.org](http://www.puentemexico.org)); in August I started a position at TASH, Inc. ([www.tashinc.org](http://www.tashinc.org)), an organization that helped initiate and grow a nonprofit hospital, *La Clinica del Pueblo, A.C.*, located in San Martín Mexicapam. Since 2000, TASH has been able to support a total of 15 organizations in Oaxaca in addition to La Clinica. During the pandemic, we have also given a grant to a civil

society coalition, AMOax (<https://amoax.org.mx/>), or *Apoyo Mutuo Oaxaca* (Mutual Help of Oaxaca), which is giving meals and supplies to low-income families affected by the situation.

Since then, I have transformed my vocational pursuit, or life strategy as I now refer to it, to working in social justice, primarily in the nonprofit sector. In addition, I went back to graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) to add to my academic portfolio of the theory and practice of public policy and management, with a focus on structural change. I believe that, while far from perfect, the nonprofit sector can provide a space and balance to address many issues that are underserved, intentionally or unintentionally, by the private and public sectors. I would include independent media as a fourth element, although we are regrettably seeing most of the content absorbed by a handful of corporate media outlets.

Since 1997, I have had the opportunity to work in both rural and urban centers in Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. I have had the opportunity to un-learn a lot of my beliefs about top-down management and miracle market forces and, ultimately, have discovered the empowerment gained from participatory social processes.

I often refer to two sayings that I believe exemplify grassroots work. The first one uses the image of a person atop a donkey, with the caption “Only the donkey knows how hot the ground is.” You can draw your own reflection. For me, I have been humbled time and time again when I have left my preconceived ideas in the background and observed and learned from the local people and customs. In Oaxaca, the people have deep traditions in community action, like *guezza*, *guelaguetza*, and *tequio*, indigenous words (Zapotec and Nahuatl) for slightly different forms of reciprocity. I have been inspired by those forms of collectivism and solidarity. And thus, to my second adage: “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, we go together.” I hold a strong belief that humankind is best served when we can focus on the common good.

One might ask how the Mexican government or private sector supports these organizations. The unfortunate response is their responses are limited, with only about 150 foundations compared to over 86,000 in the United States. However, charity or generosity is complicated and nuanced, as the society and culture practice social contributions in their own ways, such as the solidarity after natural disasters or community support to those who need help. Moreover, differences in tax codes – i.e., whether or not they incentivize charitable contributions – affects giving around the world. Mexico itself has an anti-money-laundering law that makes reporting on incoming funding more of a burden.

In conclusion, if any readers are interested in engaging with any specific areas of health, education, environment, or a whole range of other possibilities, I am a promoter of collaborative efforts and you can reach me at [pete.noll@tashinc.org](mailto:pete.noll@tashinc.org). I live in Oaxaca City, while TASH currently supports projects in the Central Valleys, Sierra Juárez, and the Mixteca.



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# Mexican Mangos

By Brooke Gazer

Originating in South Asia, the first mango trees arrived in Mexico via the Philippines, in 1779. At one time, China dominated world mango exports, but Mexico now holds that distinction. In 2015, Mexico exported 277,000 metric tons (±305,340 US tons) to the USA, and 368,000 metric (±405,651 US tons) in 2019 – that was 18% of Mexico's production. While Mexico currently produces many mango varieties, the two most commonly exported are the Tommy Atkins and the Ataúlfo.



Weighing up to two pounds, Tommy Atkins is a large mango covered with a green, yellow, and red mottled skin. Inside this mildly sweet fruit, the orange flesh is juicy but highly fibrous. Originally cultivated by a Florida grower bearing its name, Tommy Atkins may not be the tastiest of all mangos, but it is the favorite among importers throughout Canada, the USA, and most of Europe. This is due to its long shelf life and its ability to be transported with minimal bruising. The Tommy Atkins is grown extensively throughout the Americas and represents up to 49% of all Mexico's mango production.

The tastier Ataúlfo mango is about half the size, with golden skin and flesh of a similar tone. Unlike the fibrous Tommy Atkins, this fruit has a rich creamy texture, the sweetness of honey, and a relatively small flat pit. It was named after Ataúlfo Morales Gordillo, a grower from Chiapas who developed this particularly delicious variety. In Mexico, Ataúlfos are grown commercially in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Michoacán.

With its smooth buttery texture and sweet rich flavor, this could be considered the champagne of mangos. And just as the bubbly wine from France is protected for authenticity, the Ataúlfo mango is protected by Mexican Institute of Industrial Property. When other countries began producing and exporting the Ataúlfo, they called it a "Champagne Mango." In some places, these sold better than the original Ataúlfo, since gringos had difficulty pronouncing and remembering the Spanish name. To make it more marketable, in 2017, the National Mango Board of the U.S. Department of Agriculture renamed it "Honey Mango." Whatever they call it, this is the same sweet fruit with a soft creamy texture.

Mangos are an important part of Mexican cuisine, and this country is proud of their contribution to the mango species. Mexico has not adopted the English names – here it is still referred to as Ataúlfo. Those of us living in Hualulco will have no difficulty remembering the name, which is pronounced A-TOOL-fo, and rhymes with Wha – TOOL- co.



Environmentalists suggest we favor eating locally grown food to cut down on shipping foods over long distances, thus reducing agriculture's carbon footprint. Mango transportation might be an exception. Like all trees, mangos absorb carbon dioxide from the environment and release oxygen back into the atmosphere in a process called carbon sequestration. While trucking the mangos to their final destination inevitably produces greenhouse gases, researchers in Nayarit and Sinaloa determined that the average mango tree sequesters two to two-and-a-half times the carbon emitted while transporting fruit to the U.S. In Chiapas, mango trees absorb seven times the carbon that is emitted. So, wherever you are, go ahead and indulge yourself.

Some people are wary of consuming mangos because they are high in sugar. They are, but they are also low in fat, high in soluble fiber, and rich in vitamin C, vitamin A, iron, copper, and potassium. One cup of cubed mango equals about 100 calories, the same as a slice of bread or a four-ounce glass of dry white wine.

When I serve mangos at breakfast, guests frequently ask how I am able to cut the fruit in half, maintaining a smooth clean surface in the center? The answer is simple - I can't, the mango is actually cut into three pieces. The center part is reserved for a different use, possibly a smoothie or chopped up and added to salsa. There are so many ways to use mangos, and one of my favorites is mango fish. In this simple recipe I prefer the juicier, less sweet Tommy Atkins.

# Mango Fish



This will serve 4 people. I use dorado (which may be called dolphin fish or mahi-mahi up north), but any firm white fish will do.

3-4 Tommy Atkins mangos  
oil for frying  
4 pieces fish 1" thick, about 6-8 oz each (in Huatulco, ask for *dorado en lonja*)  
2 cloves of garlic, chopped fine  
1 cup white wine  
a few shakes of Valentina sauce  
salt and pepper  
chopped cilantro

1. Peel and slice the mangos, then cut about 1½ cups into ½-1" cubes.
2. Put the remaining mango into the blender, squeezing all the juice from the skin and pit into the blender. Blend until the mango is a smooth purée. This should give you about 1½ cups of purée.
3. Cover the bottom of a frying pan with the oil and heat it; add the garlic and then the fish. Sear the fish for about 1 minute on each side. Remove it and keep on a plate. Do not wash the pan.
4. Pour the mango purée into the frying pan and use the wine to rinse out the blender. Add that to the pan and use a spatula to stir in any bits of fish and garlic remaining on the bottom of the pan. Add Valentina sauce, salt and pepper to taste.
5. When it comes to a boil, return the fish along with any liquid it may have sweated, and reduce the heat.
6. Turn the fish to coat it with sauce, and continue to simmer until the fish is cooked.
7. Add the mango cubes just long enough to warm them.
8. Place the fish and mango cubes over rice or quinoa and drizzle the sauce over top. Garnish with cilantro.

**Brooke Gazer operates Agua Azul la Villa, an ocean-view Bed and Breakfast in Huatulco**  
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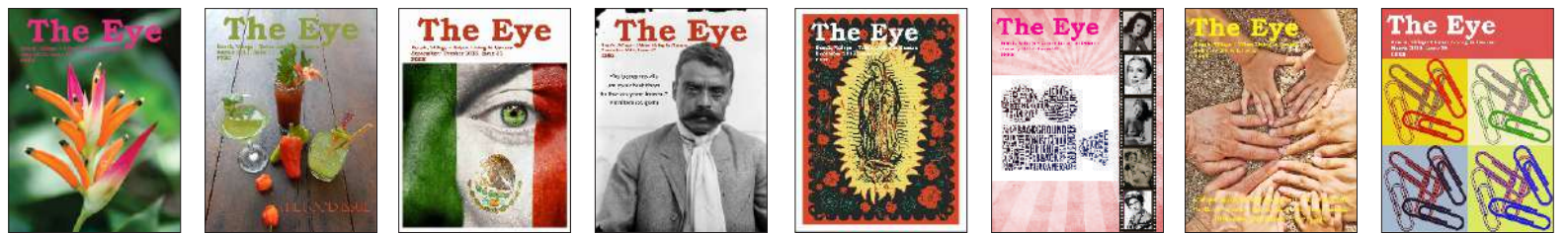
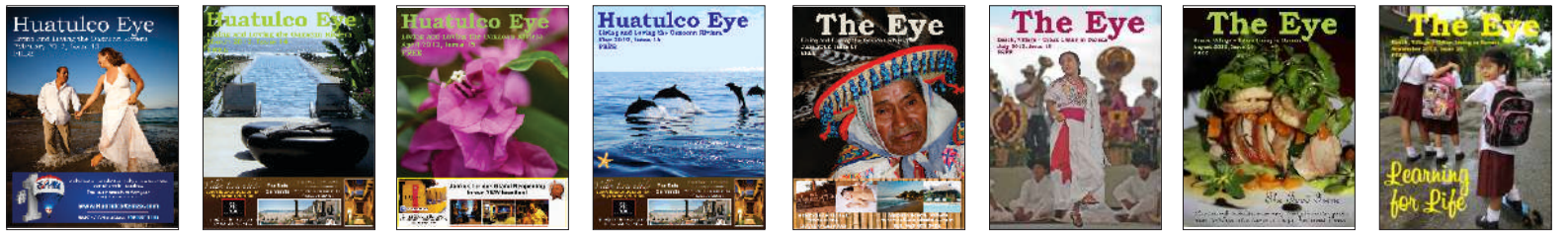
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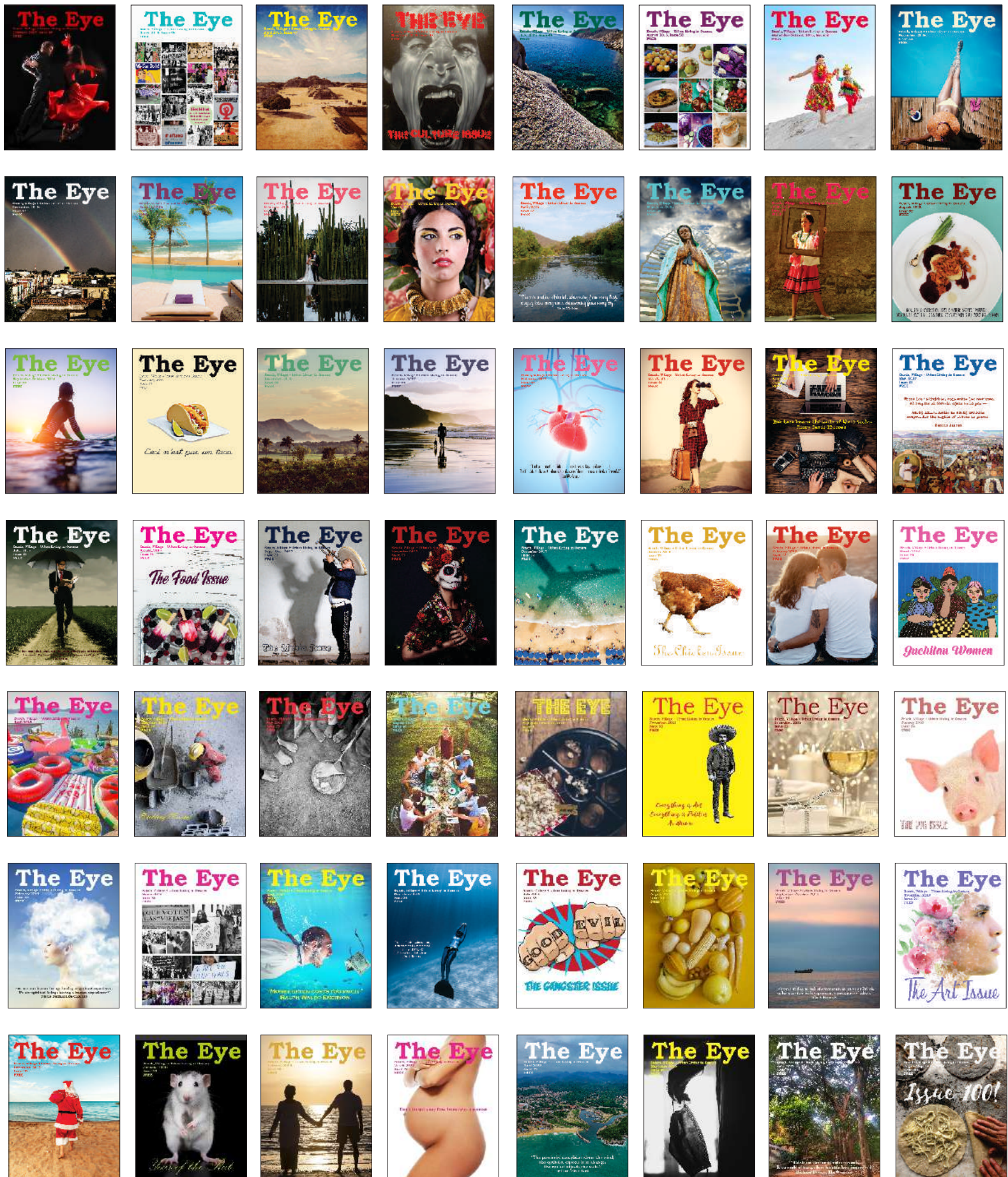




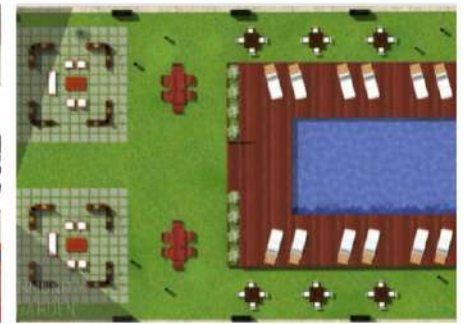
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# A New Relationship with FOOD in the New Normal of 2020

By Susan Birkenshaw

**M**y connections to food have never truly been what would be considered logical, happy, or even healthy. At times I ate because I had to, at others because I absolutely adored what was presented to me on a beautifully created plate, and then others ... was I having an “emotional” set back?

This less than normal or consistent relationship with food has led me to be one of the laziest cooks that I know. My grandmother would be horrified! BUT – that finally changed in later years when timing and urgency were no longer factors in how or what I cooked and ate. Add to this, I led myself to believe that I do not like to shop. The truth is, since I do not really know what to do with food beyond the basics and the fact that I absolutely detest waste, cooking has not been a creative outlet for me.

Now we are in the middle of 2020 and our world has changed. Since leaving our home in Huatulco, we have been isolating as much as possible in lake country in northern Ontario, Canada, and this has given me ample time to think about many things that I have ignored until now.

I am blessed to live basically two snowless seasons, and this means fresh seasonal fruit, veggies and all the good local things year-round. And surprise, surprise, I am taking the time to learn how to cook!

Three months into this process, this is what I have learned: creating delicious is a combination of **Chemistry, Creativity and Courage** - all of these mixed with a big dose of patience and willingness to stick to the process and do-over if necessary!

**Let's consider chemistry.** I know now that it was a mistake for me to have dropped chemistry class in high school as early as I could, but I remember the only thing I found useful about Baking Soda happened in my geography project.



My dad helped me mold a mess of flour, salt, water, and food colouring into an active volcano! Baking soda and vinegar created the inner boom to move the “lava” up – what a mess! And now after my first baking experiment, I absolutely know I must have baking soda in my pantry.

And as I moved on, I learned there are many common substitutions in the kitchen. Use 1 tsp of lemon juice for ½ tsp of vinegar, ½ a banana for 1 egg, 1 cup corn syrup = 1¼ cup sugar + 1/3 cup water, and 1 cup self-rising flour = ¾ cup all-purpose flour + 1½ tsp baking powder + ½ tsp salt – see, it's Chemistry!

**Now, on to my Creativity!** Creativity is accepting differences and stepping outside the boundaries of whatever you are doing. Author Elizabeth Gilbert believes that creativity is in part “a life that is driven more strongly by curiosity than by fear.”

So, taking these definitions to heart, I decided that I wanted to put my own spin on this thing called “cooking.” Obviously, this goes beyond simple taste and temperature. I realized the first thing I need to learn was the way each of these ingredients tastes and the way each cooks. This requires experimentation – and failure.

**And failure takes Courage.** But failure breeds its own kind of courage. Over time, the creativity involved in experimentation becomes a fearless activity. The act of creating a new flavour, new textures and combinations, leads to fascinating taste tests and carefully considered do-overs. Once I threw out the preconceived notions I had absorbed from my grade school Home Ec teacher, I was free to brave the mysteries of cooking!



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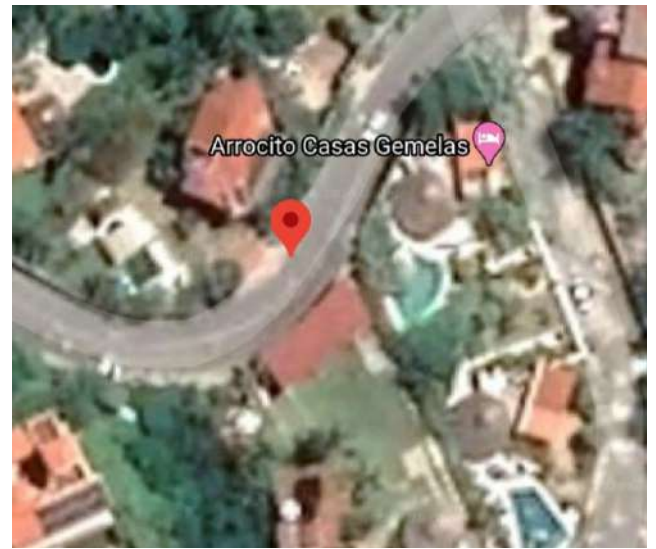


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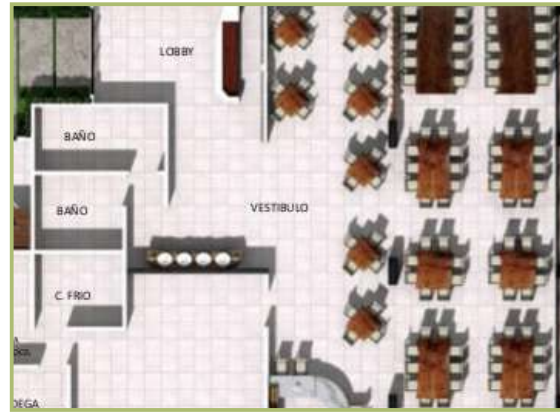


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# Berry, Berry Good!

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

If you've ever driven across the high plains of central Mexico, you've seen the signs. *FRESAS con CREMA*, *FRESAS con CREMA*, until you come to a weather-beaten shack that shades baskets of strawberries and coolers with crema on ice. Those strawberries used to make their way down the mountains to Huatulco, to be sold in the streets from impeccably arranged pyramids on wheelbarrows. Thinking "I'm too old for this," I once chased one up Carrizal, against the traffic, to get a kilo weighed out on the scale that magically appeared from beneath the wheelbarrow. Well worth it.

Now we go to the Carrizal produce markets to buy Driscoll's strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries – the "everyday" brand in American groceries. The berries come in vented, hinged, "tamper-evident" plastic containers called "clamshells," stored in the commercial coolers on the back wall at Fruver or Hermanos Lucas.



The growing fields of Jalisco are located above 4,000 feet, as they are in neighboring Colima and Michoacán, thus avoiding the severe heat at sea level; since they border the Pacific Ocean, these three states also have ready access to the "cold chain" (refrigerated storage and transportation) necessary to export fragile berries. The volcanic soil in the "fruit-belt" produces sweeter strawberries from the same varieties grown in California. It wasn't long before acreage used for lower-profit crops, e.g., sugar cane, was being converted for strawberries, then for blackberries and raspberries, and most recently, blueberries.

Berries are also grown in Baja California, with climatic differences allowing for year-round fruit production, although growers in the two regions tend to use different cultivars. Strawberries are still grown all across the high plains, but production has begun concentrating in the fruit-belt states and Baja.

## The Berry Biz

### What Happened to the Wheelbarrows?

They went big-time. Global big-time.

Mexico is now the world's fifth-largest producer and the third-largest exporter of *frutas rojas* – "red fruits," the category for straw-, rasp-, blue-, and blackberries; sometimes cranberries, sweet cherries, and grapes are included in the group (Mexico has begun to produce and export all three of these, especially and surprisingly cranberries, which boast a 50% return on investment.)

In 2019, the "true" berry exports were valued at US \$800 million, employed about 100,000 people in – for the most part – stable, well-paid jobs, many of them year-round. Direct employment and another 100,000 "spillover" jobs (jobs indirectly related to the berry industry) were valued at US \$900 million, for a total industry impact of US \$1.7 billion. In 2016, more than half (53%) of the fruit in America's markets was imported, and Mexico supplied 100% of those imported strawberries, 98% of the imported raspberries, 95% of the imported blackberries, and 9% of the imported blueberries.

The berry trade basically did not exist 25 years ago. One winter in 1995, J. Miles Reiter, now CEO/Board Chair of Driscoll's, came to Mexico to attend the wedding of one of the company's migrant pickers in California. Reiter looked around and thought strawberries would grow well in that environment. He did some testing and trials; when tensions over labor, immigration, and water supply soon started rising in California, Reiter realized that Jalisco could be the solution.

Driscoll's is a good example of how the U.S. berry industry became Mexico's most profitable agricultural sector – exports of tomatoes, avocados, and hot peppers may be bigger, in terms of money and quantity, but profit-wise, berries are the winners.

Starting with strawberries in the 1880s, J.E. (Ed) Reiter and his brother-in-law R.F. (Dick) Driscoll are credited with starting the "Strawberry Gold Rush" in Shasta County in northern California. Ed and Dick got together with a marketing guy, Thomas (no doubt "Tom") Loftus and developed a sales strategy that included a paper banner wrapping every last crate they sent to market. Voilà, Banner Berry Farm's Brand incorporated in 1904.

The California strawberry business imploded in the 1940s when Japanese residents, the primary growers, were forced into internment camps during World War II. Next-generation Ned Driscoll and Joe Reiter kept planting strawberries when no one else did, so when the war was over, they were in a position to hire the released Japanese as sharecroppers. They started calling themselves Driscoll Strawberry Associates; the sharecropping model, along with hiring breeders from the University of California's about-to-be-dropped strawberry program, represent key pillars of Driscoll's current business model: contract growing and state-of-the-art research and development.



When they had to fend off takeover assaults in the late 1980s, Driscoll's decided to go bigger, getting out of production and into organizing the industry. They worked on building their brand, developing the clamshell package largely so they could slap a big label on it. They did the R&D to create new varieties of blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries that suited the Mexican climate. They adopted the eminently suitable name of Driscoll's, Inc.

Still a private, family-owned business, Driscoll's has over 400 growers in 21 countries on every continent except Antarctica (their berries are probably served on polar cruise ships); they market their wares in 48 countries. Their major competition is half a dozen or so major berry-producing companies (e.g., NatuRipe, WellPict, Dole, SunnyRidge, Sunbelle), which also practice contract growing.

### How It Works in Mexico

The Mexican berry business has been profoundly shaped by Driscoll's (and their competition) – it is a world removed from what Miles Reuters saw when he went to that wedding in Jalisco. Growers are licensed by Driscoll's, provided with plants developed by Driscoll's, and required to return all berries from those plants back to Driscoll's. Growers must meet federal, state, and local food safety regulations for their country, as well as additional U.S. requirements; performance is monitored.

Berries are handpicked, "decanted" into the clamshells, moved into coolers and chilled to 33°F, palletized, and moved on to the "cold chain" serving that location. According to a case study for the executive agribusiness seminar at the University of California at Davis, payment to the grower is based on a quality evaluation of 4 clamshells from every pallet. Under Driscoll's Pay for Quality program, growers get paid by the tray (8 one-pound clamshells), according to their average quality score over a week's worth of evaluation. Let's say the tray sells for \$12, Driscoll's knocks off \$2 for the clamshells and takes 18% as its share – that leaves \$8.20 for the grower. But it's not that easy – in order to make growers in a local area compete for quality, the \$8.20 goes into a pool for all the area growers, and growers are then paid based on their evaluation score: \$8.20 is for average quality, top quality gets a premium price of \$8.50, low quality gets \$7.90.

Very American business school, pairing pay with worker-generated quality improvement. And very American ag-tech university, all the innovations in "controlled environment agriculture" (CEA).

Using drip irrigation with filtered water and white plastic protective tunnels, strawberry growers in Zamora, Michoacán, have achieved a remarkable increase in production per acre – going from 60,000 pounds per acre to 160-200,000 pounds per acre, as opposed to 54,000 pounds per acre in California. The tunnels protect from the weather – too hot, too cold, heavy downpours, heavy winds – and most pests. A double layer of plastic mulch around the plants prevents soil-borne pests from damaging the roots.



In the San Quintin Valley of Baja California, growers use raised white plastic troughs lined with coco/coir fiber (the "substrate") to grow their strawberries hydroponically, under screen houses for insect protection. The substrate reduces water use – always in scant supply in Baja – and lets growers reuse and regenerate the hydroponic solution, and of course eliminates soil-borne pests and pesticides to kill them.

Trough production is often called "table-top," since it puts the plants at a height that eliminates "stoop work" for pickers. (If Baja berry production is to continue, it needs even more technology – current efforts to support wide-spread desalinization will have to come to "fruition"!).

### Small is Still Beautiful

But it's not all Driscoll's (or Naturipe or Sunbelle) all the time. Alejandro Olvera manages Productores Qzar, a cooperative that grows certified organic blackberries (*zarzamoras*) in San Juan del Río in the state of Querétaro. There are four members – families or groups of friends – in the cooperative. Qzar's website (<http://qzar.mx/>) emphasizes its outreach to the community through eco-agritourism (including U-pick visits), tours by school groups, and support for entrepreneurs. Olvera, in a 2016 interview with the online trade magazine *Fresh Plaza*, points out that as long as "more and more people want to eat healthy," they will want to eat berries, and blackberries are a more economical source of antioxidants than blueberries.

Although Productores Qzar is a very small company, with perhaps more interest in social benefits than commercial success, Olvera is well versed in the industry, noting that Mexico's status as a major exporter of berries requires "dependency on many foreign companies investing in Mexico." For smaller producers, however, exporting doesn't really work as their reason for being.

"The exporting culture is not widely spread throughout the Mexican population ... it is difficult for Mexicans to see themselves as exporters."

Nonetheless, Productores Qzar does export its berries, on its own scale. "We are growing for companies that are our size, regardless of which country they are in. We love working with family businesses that don't need a container, but a pallet." The Querétaro location puts Qzar close to three airports, so it provides its own cold chain for exports.

When Qzar started growing blackberries, the crop was unknown locally. Their success has started other blackberry operations; their focus on community outreach had already brought 6,000 U-pick visits to the fields, and Olvera was predicting 10,000 visits within two years.

Future plans include setting up a hundred acres for new families to join the cooperative. "Just like we did when we started," he said. "We don't want to do it through large companies or for large supermarkets. What we want is for families here to work for families in other countries, ... knowing other countries and getting other countries to know us."



# How GMO Crops Help Mexico

By Larry Gompf

**M**any people want to know exactly what GMO, or "genetically modified organism," crops are, and how they benefit Mexico. GMO, or transgenic, crops have an altered gene in their seed that expresses a certain trait that makes them desirable for production by farmers.



The most common (and of course the most notorious) GMO crops are those grown from seed that carries the trait that protects the crop from the herbicide glyphosate, a key ingredient in the product Roundup (among others). When sprayed, glyphosate kills all plants that are green except the ones carrying this trait. Why is that good? Because it enables farmers to spray a lesser amount of chemicals than they normally would to grow a given crop, and of course a weed-free crop produces a higher yield.

The status of GMO crops in Mexico, however, is somewhat complicated. The organization that regulates the import and release of genetically modified organisms, as well as their consumption, is the Inter-secretarial Commission on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms in Mexico (CIBIOGEM). This regulatory body issues permits for three levels of production. The first permit allows for experimental trials, the second is for pilot projects of field trials and the third is for commercial production. The first applications for experimental trial permits were made in 1995 for a number of crops; cotton was authorized for commercial production in 2010, with soybeans following two years later in 2012.

Development and production of GMO crops in Mexico is regulated by a Biosafety law, enacted in 2005 and updated in 2009. Permits for production cover 14 states, 10 in the north and 4 in the Yucatan. Mexico is ranked as the 17<sup>th</sup> country in the world in production of GMO crops.

Since 2013 production of genetically modified maize (corn) has been banned in Mexico because of public pressure arising from a fear that GMO maize might result in cross contamination with local varieties. Subsequently, the permit for commercial production of GMO soybeans was revoked in 2017. That stemmed from pressure from a coalition of Mayan farmers and honey producers who claimed that GMO soybean permits were granted without their approval, that the crop was grown in areas that weren't

authorized and that pollen from transgenic soybeans could contaminate their honey, causing them to lose their ability to export to Europe.

The loss of the ability to grow GMO maize is an interesting one. In 2017, Mexico ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the world for maize production but 43rd in yield/hectare; indeed, Mexico's annual production falls 37.4% below domestic consumption. Under the recently renegotiated NAFTA agreement, Mexico imports corn to meet the shortfall, mainly from the U.S. and mainly as GMO corn.

Mexico's population thus consumes more than a third of their *maiz* in the form of GMO corn. However, if Mexican farmers were allowed to grow GMO corn, they could increase yields, the country would import less from the U.S. and both producers and consumers would benefit. Transgenic plants have been used in commercial agriculture since the mid 1990s, after being released for the first time in the United States, China, Argentina, Australia and Canada. There is no evidence of ill effects to consumers from the consumption of GMO crops and cross-pollination of GMO crops with local crops is minimal. Mayan farmers are concerned about GMO crops because if their European customers perceive that there is cross-pollination from GMO crops, they will refuse to buy Mexico's honey. It's purely a marketing issue not an issue of safety.

***This article uses information from a 2018 article by Ruiz, Knapp and Garcia-Ruiz, "Profile of genetically modified plants authorized in Mexico." Larry Gompf is a former Professional Agrologist (PAg) and Certified Crop Protection Consultant from Winnipeg, Manitoba.***





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# The Cheeses of Mexico

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

The United States in the mid-20th century was not a place where children developed a palate for cheese. Our families' forays into cheese-tasting extended not much further than Philadelphia cream cheese, which was liberally smeared on bagels, and some soft substance called American cheese that was grilled between two slices of white bread. When well-travelled cousins introduced us to exotic cheeses imported from France, or even just purchased in Wisconsin, we quickly created the name "stinky cheese" for them.



The manchego that was available in La Cremeria Costa del Pacifico came from Guadalajara after being aged two or three months. Originally made in Spain from sheep milk, it is perhaps the most versatile of cheeses. Whether from specialty stores or supermarkets, we grate manchego for a variety of dishes, melt it for others including queso fundido which sometimes is served with tortillas or vegetables for dipping, or sometimes we simply cut up the manchego into cubes for a snack. The best cheddar (yes Mexican not Wisconsin cheddar) is aged 12 months and comes from the mountains of Jalisco where, according to Senora Barboza,

"milk is cheaper than water."

Although in the following decades small US dairies began experimenting with and producing some wonderful cheeses, by savoring them, or visiting France and Italy, we still weren't fully prepared for the varieties and differences of the cheeses we learned to love while living in Mexico. Even the mass-produced cheeses that one finds in the supermercados are wonderful for snacking or cooking. Our weekly supermarket shopping in Mexico is never complete until we toss into our basket a block of manchego, a ball of Oaxaca cheese, and a round package of panela. And, in the enormous Chedraui near our favorite condo in the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City, the huge cheese department tempts us with varieties from virtually every state in Mexico and beyond.

But in our opinion the very best cheeses are found in small specialty stores or from sellers in outdoor markets. One such store was in La Crucecita in Huatulco, Oaxaca, and offered a wide selection of cheeses: La Cremeria Costa del Pacifico. Unfortunately, the shop recently closed due, in part, to the economic effects of the pandemic. Last March, the owner, Rebeca Barboza, was gracious enough to discuss their cheeses with us.

Most of the cheeses available at such specialty cheese stores are made from cow's milk, but each type has a distinctive taste and properties. Fresh, crumbly Ranchero, made in the State of Mexico, is a great addition to salads. Panela, also fresh from the State of Mexico, is the delight of nutritionists since it contains no fat or salt. We sometimes grill panela, and since it has no fat, it softens into a spreadable consistency but doesn't melt.

Quesillo, the pride of Oaxaca, is also a fresh cheese made without salt. But because of its fat content quesillo can melt. If we don't immediately snarf it down, we use it in omelets or other dishes calling for a taste of melted cheese. An alternative to quesillo for cooking is Mexican mozzarella made using the same process as mozzarella in Italy – but the Italian process uses buffalo milk while mozzarella in Mexico is made from cow's milk. While mozzarella is traditional on pizza, quesillo is everyone's favorite on the Oaxacan alternative to pizza, the delicious tlayuda.

Both specialty stores and supermarkets also carry goat cheeses. One of the best is the crumbly feta that is made in Guanajuato. And our favorite queso de cabra is spreadable and is sold in many stores in small logs, often covered with black ash which gives the cheese a delicious smoky flavor.

For the very freshest of cheeses we head to the organic market which is held outdoors on selected Saturdays in Santa Cruz Huatulco. According to the cheese seller, Isabel Ramos, all their cheeses are made from cow's milk the day before the market on a ranch located twenty minutes north of Puerto Escondido. The organic designation requires that no chemicals be used in the cheese preparation, just milk from free-range cows.

We can heartfully recommend all their cheeses. The queso de prensa is firm enough to slice. Chiles and epazote are integral to the queso botanero and different batches range from mildly tasty to moderately picante. The queso ranchero and quesillo are on a par with the same types of cheeses found in specialty cheese shops – but we like buying local and knowing that the cows producing the milk were free to wander around pastures. The requesón is sold under the name of ricotta since foreign frequenters of the organic market are more familiar with that term. But whether one calls the cheese ricotta or requesón, it is great heaped on toasted bagels with tomato slices – much better than cream cheese.

While at the organic market, it is worthwhile searching for the vendor who sells Gouda cheese from Queseria La Pradera in Tlaxapotala, Morelos. The cheese maker is originally from Holland. More information about the production of this Gouda can be found at

<https://www.facebook.com/queseria.la.pradera/>.

During these weeks of sheltering in place to avoid COVID19, we miss our friends and our wonderful view of the ocean in Huatulco. We also miss the cheeses. We will miss La Cremeria and hope that the owners and staff of the other little shops and market tables that sell our favorites are safely weathering the earthquakes and the virus. Provecho!



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Taco Oriental  
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Pizza Árabe Arabic pizza

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