

FLASH IN THE PAN!

Trying to milk an oat

It's like milk, but made for humans. Wow, wow, no cow.
— Toni Petersson

In what was perhaps the most unusual and divisive Super Bowl ad of the year, the CEO of Oatly, which makes oat-based foods and heavily promotes the oat-based lifestyle, sang two verses in a field of oats. Over and over again. His voice — well, he shouldn't quit his day job, but like the commercial, it wasn't quite off-key.

The next day, as people sparred over whether the jingle was any good, or what it was even about, the catchy lyric wormed deeper into everyone's head, even the milk-fed haters. It probably encouraged people to give Oatly a shot, for any number of reasons, while keeping expectations low. By any standard, the commercial was a success.

There is a lot of inside baseball for the food and agriculture nerds to geek out on in that catchy lyric. It references, of course, the dairy industry's decades-long campaign to push the FDA to enforce its very delicious-sounding definition of milk: "The lacteal secretion, practically free from colostrum, obtained by the complete milking of one or more healthy cows."

FDA also recognizes goat's milk and sheep's milk, and the dairy industry is fine with that, but not with the use of milk for beverages made with nuts and grains.

There are signs the dairy industry might be winning, as FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb recently telegraphed in a 2018 interview, "An almond doesn't lactate, I will confess." Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's recent rulings suggest a First Amendment approach could benefit the grain and nut milkers. The situation is fluid. And milky.

Please see LEVAUX, Page D2



ARI LEVAUX

LET'S COOK!



GREG PATENT

Classic Georgian Borscht is a vegetable powerhouse. Loaded with beets, leeks, onions, carrots, potatoes and a couple more veggies, the soup gets a classic sweet-sour kick from lemon juice and sour cream or yogurt added at the end.

BORSCHT

Beet soup warms the body, soul

I spent my early childhood in Shanghai, where my food tastes and preferences got an early jump start, thanks to my grandmothers — mom's mother Granny, from Iraq; and Baba, my father's Russian mother. Both were exceptionally fine cooks who knew how to bring out the best in vegetables.

Thanks to them, I grew up eating lots of vegetables from different parts of the world. Granny cooked with Middle Eastern and Indian ones, and Baba with those that grew in Russian Georgia and Siberia.



GREG PATENT

bright red beet soup, and a specialty of my Baba's.

I say Georgian, but borscht's long history includes many Eastern European cultures, each claiming the

soup as its own creation. Borscht is basically a sweet-sour soup. Purists may want to slice and ferment raw beets to make kvass, the sour liquid added to borscht just before serving. Lemon juice does the job very nicely too, and that's what I do.

Borscht can also have a life in the summer, served chilled. But hot is the way I like it best. I can't claim this to be Baba's recipe, but my Aunt Luba, Baba's daughter, helped me reconstruct it from her memories.

Please see PATENT, Page D2

LAST BEST PLATES

Feeding Billings with healthy food and love

Sarah Moyer of Project Lunch makes lunches better than Mom's. Although I have fond memories of my Felix the Cat lunch box holding Mom's omelette sandwiches, Moyer's stainless-steel box with a colorful band and a love note carries a louder expression of affection. On the back of a business-sized card with the

front message: "thank you for supporting my small business," she writes, "Stella ~ Enjoy your Greek Falafel Salad! — Sarah." Moyer founded Project Lunch

in 2017 with the goal of delivering the freshest salads and wraps directly to your desk or meeting in reusable stainless-steel containers. Three years later, with her catering business gaining momentum, the COVID pandemic struck her business hard with cancellations from several large clients. As a result, she had to take a loan out to pay employees.

After working for Starbucks for 10 years, Moyer learned the value of honoring employees. "It is important to respect their dignity and to treat them with kindness." At 16, she appreciated the benefits of a retirement plan and a health care package.

When Gov. Steve Bullock announced the closing of public

schools, Moyer took a step back and thought of the impact on underprivileged kids. "When you live in poverty, you don't have the ability to do DoorDash or Uber Eats," she said. Moyer was spurred to action, hoping that "delivering a meal a day might reduce the stress and abuse."

On March 16, 2020, she started #projectlovebillings, bringing the Billings community together to offer bag lunches to kids in need. On social media, she recruited volunteers and funds, and as of Aug. 21, she had delivered 21,842 sack lunches to hungry kids, right to their doorstep.



STELLA FONG

On this cold and busy day, an order of lunch from Project Lunch brings memories of mom.

Please see PLATES, Page D2

Explore
125 YEARS
of history



Want to check out your uncle's unbelievable tale? Explore Missoula's history. Relive special moments!

missoulian.com/archives

missoulian.com
Missoulian
Every minute. Every day.

Patent

From D1

My mother, who knew Baba's cooking well, contributed to Luba's recollections.

This soup is really packed with vegetables that you add sequentially so that each cooks to its best texture. I begin by cooking the beets. My favorite method is wrapping them in foil and baking them in the oven. While the beets bake, I prep the other vegetables so they'll be all ready to add to the soup when their time comes.

Some cooks include meat by making a stock first and cutting the cooked meat into pieces to add to the soup close to serving time. If you want to do that, brown about 2 pounds of oxtail or beef shank in a large saucepan with a little oil, add water to cover by an inch or two, and cook at a simmer for a couple of hours (or more) until the meat is completely tender. Use the unseasoned stock in your borscht.

This recipe makes a big batch. Trust me, you'll be glad to have it around for second helpings. Happy cooking!

Georgian Borscht

Makes 10 to 12 servings

- 6 medium size beets (2 1/2 to 3 pounds total)
- 2 large leeks (about 1 pound total)
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 medium yellow onions (about 1 pound total), peeled and chopped
- 2 large carrots (8 ounces), peeled, cut in half lengthwise, and thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped garlic
- 4 medium Yukon Gold potatoes (1 1/2 pounds total), peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 2 large green bell peppers (about 1 pound total), cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 3 quarts beef, chicken, or vegetable broth
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 6 cups shredded green cabbage (about 1 pound)
- 4 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice, plus more if needed
- Sour cream or unflavored yogurt, for garnish
- Fresh parsley or dill sprigs, for garnish

1. Wash the beets and wrap them tightly in heavy-duty aluminum foil. Set them on a baking sheet and bake in the center of a preheated 400 degree oven for about 1 1/2 hours, or until tender when pierced with a sharp knife. Cool the beets in the foil. When cool enough to handle them, peel the beets and cut them into 1/2-inch cubes.

2. Split the leeks lengthwise and rinse under cool running tap water to wash away the dirt. Shake off excess water and pat the leeks dry. Thinly slice the white part and about 1 inch of the tender green portion. Save the dark green portion to use in stock.

3. Heat the oil in a large, heavy, 6- to 8-quart stockpot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the beets and cook them for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they begin to brown a bit. Add the leeks and onions and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the carrots and garlic and cook about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

4. Toss in the potatoes, stir well and cook for 2 minutes. Add the bell peppers and cook another 2 minutes. Add the broth and salt and pepper to taste. If your broth is unsalted, about 2 teaspoons salt should be enough. Bring the soup to the boil, uncovered, over medium-high heat. Stir in the cabbage and bring borscht back to the boil.

5. Reduce the heat and simmer the borscht, uncovered, until the cabbage and potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice. Adjust the seasoning carefully with salt, pepper and lemon juice. You can make the soup ahead and reheat it slowly until piping hot before serving.

6. To serve, ladle the soup – it will be thick with vegetables – into warmed bowls and place a dollop of sour cream or yogurt in the center. Garnish with the parsley or dill. Before eating, swirl the sour cream or yogurt into the soup. Accompany with crusty bread.

Greg Patent is a James Beard Award-winning cookbook author for "Baking in America," a food journalist, blogger, and radio co-host for "The Food Guys" on Montana Public Radio. Please visit his blog, www.thebakingwizard.com, and follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.



STELLA FONG PHOTOS

Whipped lavender yogurt was the perfect end to a healthy lunch, with granola and diced fruit and a note of love handwritten by Sarah Moyer.



Project Lunch's Greek salad is served with house made falafels, Swanky Roots lettuce, feta cheese, tomato, red onion, kalamata olives and vinaigrette dressing.

Plates

From D1

As the youngest of three children, she said, "My mom always had me make the salad for dinner." Though her mother cooked "by the book. I tasted everything for flavor." With a grandfather who had a pasta business, and her family taking in Vietnamese refugees, Moyer developed an international palate.

With three children of her own – Naomi, age 12, Charles, 8, and Joseph, 4 – Moyer is concerned about nutrition and cooking healthy, and wants to extend her passion for healthy eating to the community: "I want to share the importance of eating food made from scratch, and sourced locally."

Whenever possible, Moyer supports local producers, such as Kate's Garden and Trevino's Tortillas. "I package with the intention of recycling," Moyer said, expressing her belief in sustainability on many levels. The recycling of her containers encourages repeat customers. When they place orders for food, they can exchange the empty

containers for ones with food. She protects the environment by not using plastics and Styrofoam.

On this day, with a full schedule and my friend Anna Brewer coming over for lunch, I went online to the Project Lunch website to order the Greek and BLT salads. For dessert, we shared the whipped lavender yogurt with granola, kiwi, mango and pineapple. Half an hour before my delivery time of 12:30 p.m., Holli Klein showed up at my door. With an enthusiastic smile, she handed me a red cloth bag filled with two metal containers and a jar. With Moyer's mission statement of, "My goal is to have you satisfied and rejuvenated to finish your day at work in a happier state of mind," I knew I had made the right decision.

Anna's BLT salad came with beef today, as chicken was unavailable. The salad included Swanky Roots greens, grilled sliced beef, bacon, cucumber and tomatoes with yogurt dill ranch. "The salad dressing is marvelous. It has the right burst of flavors," she said. "The quality of the greens is really fresh."

In my Greek salad, the gener-

LeVaux

From D1

Petersson's little croon uses this legal and semantic scuffle to promote his milky stuff as superior to bovine lacteal secretions because it's been engineered specifically for humans, while "milk" is created by mother cows for baby cows. Since the Super Bowl, Oatly's Oat-Milk has been renamed Oat Drink. Why not "oat juice," I wonder?

Whatever we call it, the milky beverage made from oats has a leg up on most other nut- and grain-based milky drinks, because it has this amazing viscosity, thanks partly to those beta-glucans. And vegan coffee drinkers are coming around to it as the latte milk of choice.

The raising of cows and consumption of milk and meat, of course, are problematic for a host of environmental and ethical reasons, and the impact of cattle includes all of the acres of corn and soy that's grown to fatten it. This, of course, is part of the excitement conveyed by Petersson's song's climax: "wow, wow, no cow." By making oat juice directly from grains, we can cut the cows, and their green-

house gases, out of the loop.

Washington Post food and agriculture columnist Tamar Haspel has gone deeply into the weeds on the advantages of mixing other crops like oats into the rotation, in terms of crop yields, soil health and pest management. She particularly likes oats because a bowl of oatmeal will set you back about a dime, which makes it an earth-friendly way to feed a lot of people.

That bowl of oats contains an impressive amount of protein, minerals and, most famously, fiber. The daily bowl of oats, so known to keep the bowels regular, owes its effectiveness to beta-glucan, a type of soluble fiber. Beta-glucan has also been shown to improve cholesterol levels of both "bad" and "good" types, reduce blood sugar levels, improve gut microbial health and make you feel full.

All of that, and more, packed into a little bitty song. And by creating a debate about its weird commercial, Oatly got those in the know to explain it to those late to the oat party.

Meanwhile, the company has been at it for 30 years, giving it a significant head start on its competitors, which of course put a target on its back.



Anna Brewer holds a beef BLT salad made with grilled beef, bacon, cucumber and tomato over Swanky Roots lettuce with yogurt dill ranch dressing.

ously sized falafels, made with ground garbanzos from Marias River Farms, sat atop greens that seemed to expand as I dug into the container to retrieve olives, feta, onions and tomatoes.

The yogurt with whipped cream ended our meal with light richness.

Moyer will be expanding out of the kitchen she shares with Miss Gigi's Sweets in the old Log Cabin Bakery building as she partners with Billings Community Foundation. The organization recently purchased the Commons building downtown where Moyer will be creating a community restaurant, where she can continue to share her passion about food sweetened

with a love note.

Stella Fong, author of 'Historic Restaurants of Billings and Billings Food' hosts 'Flavors Under the Big Sky: Celebrating the Bounty of the Region' for Yellowstone Public Radio.

THE last best PLATES

TheLastBestPlates.com is a digital destination that serves up Montana's tasty food, travel and culture stories ... one bite at a time.

Oatly's rivals even forced the company to list added sugars in its oat milk, even though no sugar is added. As part of its oatmilk process, Oatly uses enzymes to snip the long starch molecules found in oats into sweet little sugar molecules. By adding those enzymes, Oatly is essentially adding sugar, its accusers claim – sugar that was locked up in those oats. Wow, indeed.

Since I learned about Oatly's enzymes, I've been obsessed with making my own oat drink. Oatly's website offers a cheerful view of the planet if farms grew oats for people rather than corn and soy for cows, and lots of information on fiber. I figured they would want to help me in my quest to tell the people how to make oat drink at home, and reached out to the company. I promptly heard back from a bubbly "Sara," who was grateful for my inquiry. She cheerfully and apologetically declined to discuss the enzymes.

I began ordering enzymes, like amylase, the main enzyme in saliva, and several more digestive enzymes, and mixing them with water and oats that I'd pulverized in the Vitamix. My counter is littered with jars of milky fluids like the chemistry lab of a mad scien-

tist. I was trying to imitate Oatly's sweetness and creaminess, and my amylase did improve the sweetness. But it was watery, not creamy, with a thick sediment at the bottom that I believed held the key to my missing creaminess.

That sludge makes oat drink nearly impossible to filter. Even a colander will clog. I once brought a jar of homemade oat drink on a car camping trip, and discovered that if you let it settle, you can just pour off the non-gunky part. I also found that you can use the gunk at the bottom to patch a punctured water jug, if necessary. The fibers are that strong. Especially, I presumed, those beta-glucans.

The quest for oat milk will continue, and I am making progress, trust me. My wife thinks I'm crazy, but that just means I'm onto something. Just wait until my new enzyme arrives. My beta-glucanase will be the game-changer.

Ari LeVaux writes Flash in the Pan, a syndicated weekly food column carried in more than 60 newspapers nationwide. Though his audience is national, he says he "always writes about Montana. Usually."