

Truffles: Ice cream and cheese are also popular Valentine’s foods

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In the mooood for love
“Cow milk’s role in Valentine’s Day is absolutely huge,” said Monica LaBelle, spokesperson for the National Dairy Council.
In 2018, according to a dairy economist, about 3.1 billion pounds of milk went into making confections, enough to fill 562 Olympic-sized swimming pools.
“Candy, confections and baked goods for holiday celebrations like Valentine’s Day,” said Matt Herrick, vice president of the International Dairy Foods Association, are “part of the fabric of America.”
When Milton Hershey invented the Hershey’s Milk Chocolate Bar in 1900, he built his operation in the heart of Pennsylvania dairy country.
Ice cream and cheese are also popular Valentine’s foods. LaBelle of the National Dairy Council said heart-shaped pizzas trend in February, and demand is growing for artisan cheeses.
“Folks in the artisanal cheese industry have been predicting 2020 might be a record year for sales,” said LaBelle.

Nuts about you
Oregon’s Willamette Valley produces 99% of the nation’s hazelnuts, many of which go into candy and other treats, according to Oregon State University. Even bigger are the peanut and almond industries.
“Peanuts and chocolate are a match made in heaven,” said Lauren Williams, spokesperson for the National Peanut Board.
Snickers, Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups and M&Ms are the most popular peanut candies, said Williams. Every day, 99 tons of peanuts go into 15 million Snickers bars. The bar was named after its founding family’s favorite horse.
“I was raised on a farm,” drawled Andy Bell, a Georgia peanut farmer. “We’ve always grown peanuts. I plant a seed, watch it sprout, irrigate; I love the process.”
Almonds also earn their time in the limelight Feb. 14.
In 1976, Don Cameron, a biology graduate with no farming background, applied for his dream job at a wild-life refuge. He didn’t get an interview.
“I thought, ‘I’ll get into ag,’” Cameron recalls. And he did.
Forty-four years later, Cameron is the vice president of Terranova Ranch in California’s San Joaquin Valley.
One of Cameron’s major crops is almonds, hard-shelled stone fruits related to plums; the ranch produced 2.7 million pounds in 2019.
“The demand for almonds has been phenomenal,” said Cameron.
California’s 1.24 million acres of almond trees churn out 80% of the world’s almonds.
Almond growers have close ties with chocolatiers, said Darren Rigg, sales manager at Minturn Nut Company in Le Grande, Calif.
“It’s cool how global this is,” said Rigg. “Every country has a different relationship with almonds. They’re popular in every country’s holiday season, and Valentine’s is huge. To think we supply it here in California is remarkable.”
Bee my honey
The almond industry is braided with another strand of



A peanut farmer with a peanut plant in Camilla, Ga.



Don Cameron, vice president of California-based Terranova Ranch, holds almonds.

agriculture—honeybees.
On Feb. 5, John Jacob, a beekeeper at Old Sol Apiaries, was on the road toting crates of bees from Rogue River, Ore., to California almond country.
“I love working the seasons,” said Jacob. “It’s appealing to my biology background and my nature-loving side. I get to call the outdoors my office, and the scene changes every three months.”
In February, pollination season for almond orchards, more than 50% of U.S. beehives are transported to California. Without bees, Jacob said, trees produce 90% less almonds, so producers are willing to pay beekeepers \$200 per hive for pollination.
And honey itself is a Valentine’s Day treat.

White gold
America is Candyland.
High fructose corn syrup, made from milled corn, is a major sweetener. As consumers have become more health-conscious, USDA data show the industry has shrunk 40% since the 2000s.
But the same data show refined sugar deliveries have increased 5%. Ranking sixth in global production—after sugar behemoths like Brazil, India and China—the U.S. makes about 9 million tons of “white gold” annually, according to the USDA, or 55 pounds per American.
Sugar doesn’t just come from cane fields in the South. According to the USDA, the sugar beet, a root vegetable related to chard, produces 55% of the domestic supply.
Most sugar beets are grown in Idaho, North Dakota and Minnesota, but Oregon State University says the Willamette Valley is the nation’s only significant production source of sugar beet seed.
Vegans often prefer sweetener from sugar beets because it is processed without using bone char—charred animal bones, a practice common in producing cane sugar.
Other consumers, according to Oregon State, prefer



A tree with ripe cocoa pods in the Ivory Coast.

cane sugar, citing their concern that most sugar beets are genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, that allow farmers to control weeds using less labor.
Berry sweet
Floods, cold snaps, plundering hail storms—growing winter strawberries isn’t easy, farmers say. But buyers must have their berries.
“Chocolate-covered berries, strawberry shortcake, just stem strawberries like candy on a stick. Valentine’s Day is a hugely important day for us,” said third-generation farmer A.G. Kawamura, founding member of Gem-Pack Berries and former secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. His farms are in California and Mexico.
For the holiday, Kawamura estimates, he sells hundreds of thousands of trays, each containing 4 to 8 pounds of strawberries.
During Valentine’s Day 2017, according to the Nielsen Company, a market research firm, fresh strawberry sales generated more than \$52 million.
“The weather sometimes doesn’t cooperate, and it’s not a hardy fruit,” said Kawamura. “Sometimes one hail storm makes me lose everything I could’ve harvested for 20-something days. Farming is not easy.”
Valentine’s fruit is often



Stephanie Rodas, who works at Euphoria Chocolate Company in Eugene, Ore., hand dips truffles.

paired with wine.
Say you’ll be wine
“There’s always an uptake in wine sales during the holidays,” said Gladys Horiuchi, spokesperson for the Wine Institute.
Valentine’s Day is a top-selling moment for U.S. winemakers, according to the Nielsen Company, a market research firm. Feb. 14 is the sixth biggest individual sale day for wine in the year. In 2017, the industry generated \$630 million during the holiday.
Red wine remains a favorite, followed by rosé, sparkling rosé and white.
Restaurant dining also impacts farmers’ profits and creates ripples in the Valentine’s economy.
According to the online reservation site OpenTable, more than 30% of consumers celebrate Feb. 14 by dining out with loved ones, increasing sales of food and wine.

Landing on a chocolate bar
“I have loved chocolate for as long as I have memory as a human being,” said Kristy Leissle, a Ph.D. who follows the cocoa and chocolate industries. “I reached a point when I realized it was bizarre that I knew almost nothing about this food. It sparked my curiosity; I wanted to understand where it comes from.”
It was evening in Ghana, Leissle’s home, in one of the world’s largest cocoa-producing regions.
Most consumers eat chocolate without thinking about the farmers behind it, said Leissle.
“It’s an industrial product. Those beans pass through many, many machines,” she said. “There’s nothing about a chocolate bar that suggests farming. I think the fact that cocoa grows on a tree as a fruit is often a revelation to people.”
Some cocoa farmers are wealthy, but the majority, Leissle said, “struggle to live on tiny margins.” Many West African farms, said Leissle,

often have no running water, no electricity, no paved roads.
Cocoa has a dubious labor history.
According to the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, 2 million children do hazardous cocoa work. The worst forms involve slavery, trafficking and debt bondage.
But most child laborers, Leissle said, are working on their family’s land. Seventy percent also attend school.
In fact, she said, cocoa earnings have made school, even college or trade school, possible for many who otherwise could not afford it.
Leissle said cocoa has advanced growers’ profits and the economy.
“Farmers are not fools,” said Leissle. “They think, ‘There’s huge demand, so I’m going to plant this crop.’ And it’s improved many of their lives.”
But Feb. 14 isn’t just about food. National Retail Federation records show in 2019, flowers constituted 53% of purchases.
A rose from any other place
At 5 a.m. the week of Valentine’s Day, workers at the Portland Flower Market, an Oregon wholesaler, were unloading shipments. The room flowed with rivers of color.
February is peak season for the flower industry.
At the market, Scott Isensee, a manager at Frank Adams Wholesale Florist, said during Valentine’s week he sells 3 million flowers.
Isensee mainly works with local growers, but most roses come from South America.
“We wish we could have Valentine’s Day in July,” said Isensee.
Americans give each other about 200 million roses every Valentine’s Day. Most grow in the savanna outside Bogota, Colombia, a plateau fanning out from the Andean foothills.
Here, roses are summoned from the soil by a great hot sun hugging the Equator.

Harvested flowers are chilled to sleep in an attempt to outwit death, then shipped in cargo jets—10,000 boxes per plane, say airport officials—to be sold in the U.S.
The story begins in 1967, when an American horticulture student, David Cheever, wrote a paper that identified Colombia as an ideal place to grow flowers. In 1970, Cheever turned his dissertation into a business, planting an operation in Bogota. Others followed.
Before the rose trade, government reports show Colombia was wracked by poverty, guerrilla warfare and cocaine cartels.
To disrupt cocaine trafficking, the U.S. government suspended import duties on Colombian flowers in 1991. It was a boon for Colombia, but sales of U.S. roses dropped 95%.
Hillsboro, Ore., grower Sandra Laubenthal of Peterkort Roses said she remembers the change. Her farm continued growing roses year-round until the cost of heating greenhouses was too high to compete. Now, her biggest Valentine’s sellers are lilies and tulips.
Colombians don’t even celebrate Valentine’s Day, but the foreign holiday makes up 20% of flower growers’ annual revenue.
In the month prior to Feb. 14, according to Abel Serrano, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Assistant Port Director at the Miami Airport, 60 to 70 cargo jets per day, each carrying more than a million flowers, land at Miami’s airport.
There, Serrano said, 24 hours a day, agricultural experts process 720 million stems, checking for exotic pests or diseases that could harm American agriculture and the environment.
The flowers are X-rayed for contraband. Then, specialists wielding magnifying glasses shake flowers upside-down over white paper. The flowers must be kept cold and unbruised.
“It’s very demanding,” said Serrano. “Very physical.”
Miami’s port intercepts 16,000 pests per year.
“We’re trying to protect agriculture and free trade,” said Serrano. “There’s a lot of stress because many people rely on us.”
In 2019, when the government shut down for 35 days, Miami’s agents continued working.
“Last winter was tough,” said Serrano. “Our people were not getting paid but still showing up for work. I think a lot of them take pride in what they do.”
From Miami’s airport, the flowers are loaded in refrigerated trucks and shipped across the U.S.
After passing through many miles and hands, the roses are given as symbols of love, often alongside chocolates.
A world in a bite
Valentine’s Day had nearly arrived. In a Euphoria Chocolate Company retail store, owner Bonnie Glass was preparing to open the shop.
Glass flicked on the lights. The walls were stacked with red gift boxes. Inside display cases, rows of truffles waited for eager buyers who might never know how far their truffles had traveled, how many had labored to make them.
But Glass knew: there’s a world inside a bite of each chocolate.

Water: Under Oregon water law, water rights must be developed or owner risks losing them

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However, instances when OWRD does grant such permits also spur legal conflicts when other people oppose the development of additional water rights.
“These are more and more challenging as we have limitations on new water being available,” Byler said.
Extensions that allow permit holders more time to develop their water rights — for example, by installing irrigation systems — were the second-most frequent cause of conflicts, with 34 cases. Under Oregon water law, water rights must be developed or the owner risks losing them.

The goal is to prevent people from obtaining water rights for speculative purposes without actually using the water and OWRD has scrutinized extension requests more closely in recent years. Disputes most often arise when the agency denies such extensions.
Water distribution and regulation comprised the third largest category of disputes, with 22 cases. These conflicts involved such issues as junior water users being “regulated off” by senior water rights holders.
Other categories of disputes include water rights transfers, cancellations of water rights, well construction problems and

miscellaneous issues.
The Klamath basin is particularly prone to water conflicts for several inter-related reasons, said Byler.
Irrigators have objected to orders to stop using wells that have been found by OWRD to interfere with surface water rights, for example.
Also, the agency completed its adjudication of Klamath water rights in 2013, which determined the seniority of water rights and established that tribes held the oldest “time immemorial” rights. The determination allowed for tribes to request that junior users be “regulated off,” but the entire adjudication must

still be approved by a state court.
“Part of the reason (for conflicts) is folks are not used to being regulated,” Byler said. “Part of the reason is the adjudication is not completed and folks will fight until the adjudication is done.”
However, Byler pointed out that OWRD took roughly 20,000 to 30,000 enforcement actions in the time period examined in the report, which should put the 165 disputed cases in context.
“I will tell you that compliance with our regulations is the norm around the state,” he said. “It’s less than 1 percent of our actions that leads to these disputes.”



A recent report to Oregon lawmakers outlines litigation over water regulation.