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California Food Expo Links State's Innovative Food & Beverage Companies with Top Buyers, Coveted Awards, Celebrated Chefs & Eager Public

*Over 650 Pre-Qualified Buyers, 130 California Food & Beverage Companies, Industry Sessions, Awards and Over 1,200 Public Attendees Delivered
Value and Growth Opportunities to California's Innovative Food Industry*

Fresno, California – September 10, 2019... The California Food Expo (Expo) connected 130 California-based food and beverage companies with over 650 pre-qualified local, national and international food buyers at its inaugural food industry trade event. Educational sessions were well-attended as diverse industry topics were tackled and the Expo's expanded award platform touted products that reaffirm California's role as a food leader and innovator. The first-ever ["Taste of California" Chefs' Competition](#) held during Expolicious, the public event, featured delectable treats created by well-known chefs from San Francisco to Los Angeles using Expo food and beverage products.

"Our show offers buyers an opportunity to discover some of California's most authentic and innovative brands that aren't often found at other food industry trade shows," said Amy Fuentes, Manager of the California Food Expo. "Our Golden State expansion has enabled us to showcase California's booming food industry, while strengthening relationships with a wider-range of buyers to help pave the way for future growth."

The Expo highlighted California's long-held position as America's number-one agricultural producing state, with over 400 commodities accounting for more than \$50 billion in output. Additionally, over 5,500 food manufacturing facilities operate in California, double the number of any other state. Statistics like these give the Expo a solid platform for expanding the state's relationships with national and international food buyers, ensuring continued industry growth.

"We are always looking for new ways to reach potential customers. The exposure at the California Food Expo is good; it brings out a different clientele of buyers," said Kyle Beth, Foodservice Regional Sales Manager for Foster Farms. "It is important to be present at a show like this to meet new customers and our peers throughout California."

Among the top buyers attending this year's Expo were: Albertsons Vons Pavilions, Bristol Farms, Whole Foods Market; Grocery Outlet; Smart & Final; Rancho San Miguel Markets; Walmart among others. Complementing the local and national domestic buyers were qualified international buyers from Latin America and Southeast Asia, in addition to export trading firms.



The Expo's educational sessions featured the industry's hottest topics, including: Consumer Trends, Sustainability, eCommerce and Influential Food Brands. Speakers and panelists were made up of food industry experts and innovators behind a variety of California's leading food companies.

"It's an honor to exhibit at the California Food Expo and to also share our expertise as a featured panelist," said Martin Kruger, COO of Follow Your Heart. "Our journey in the Vegenaise, dairy-free and plant-based food industry has been transformative, but honestly we get back just as much as we give from our colleagues whose valuable insights and connections prove that we are stronger together as an industry – a sentiment we found at this year's Expo."

The California Food Expo's [expanded suite of awards](#) provides brand exposure before, during and after the event generating an elevated platform for exhibitors to tout their products. The New Product Awards featured two distinct categories: the Buyer's Choice Award and Consumer's Choice Awards.

The Buyer's Choice Awards were judged by the Expo's Retail Advisory Council - a diverse group of retail buyers representing a range of categories and store formats. The Retail Advisory Council includes: Tony Antoci, CEO of Erewhon Markets; Daniel Bell, Produce Buyer, California & Nevada at Grocery Outlet; Marty Colridge, Director of Center Store at Food4Less/Rancho San Miguel Markets; Randy Ducummon, Vice President, Northern California & Reno Region at Whole Foods Market; Roland Harmon, Senior Director, Global Produce Sourcing California at Walmart US; Steve Howard, Vice President, Perishables at Bristol Farms; Brandon Leong, VP of Marketing at Range Me; Mil Mijanovic, Produce Sales Manager at Albertsons/Safeway; Miriam Welch, Grocery Sales Manager at Albertsons & Vons, Southern California Division.

The 2019 Buyer's Choice Award first place winner was Setton Farms Garlic Onion seasoned kernels; second place went to HMC Farms SpongeBob and PAW Patrol grape packs; and third place was True Gold Honey Discovery Flight.

"We're extremely excited and honored to be awarded first place for the Buyers Choice New Product Award for our premium crafted Garlic Onion seasoned pistachio kernels, which follow our family company's tradition of innovation and high quality," said Anna Abbatiello, Marketing Director at Setton Farms. "All five of our seasoned kernel varieties provide retailers and consumers a delicious new snack choice that meets all their expectations and more."

The Consumer's Choice Award was judged by the Expo's Consumer Panel, which mirrors California's demographics for gender, ethnicity, age, income and education. The 2019 Consumer's Choice Award first place winner was Pappy's Foods Buffalo Sweet and Spicy Sauce; second place went to Gillum Family Farms Smoked Jalapeno Cheddar Sausage; and third place was Busseto Foods California Snackin' 3 oz. Personal Serving.

The Golden State Award gave all exhibitors the opportunity to submit a product for the chance to be voted the "most liked" California Food Expo product. Followers of the Expo's Instagram and Facebook pages were able to vote by liking the product of their choice; entries ranged from Smoked Jalapeno Cheddar Sausage to Banuelos Flavored Tortilla Chips to Probiotic Chickpea Granola, and generated social interaction that led to some distinct favorites. The winner with the highest reactions was Fermenting Fairy for their Elderberry-Ginger Lemonade.



The Fred Ruiz Award, named in honor of the founder of Ruiz Food Products Inc., the largest frozen Mexican food manufacturer in the U.S., honored one California food or beverage company recognized by its peers as a pioneer in innovation and a steward in its community. The Fred Ruiz Award recipient for 2019 was Busseto Foods.

“When you think of Fred Ruiz and what he means to the food industry, his vision, his story – he is truly an inspiration,” said Mike Grazier, President of Busseto Foods. “To be awarded the Fred Ruiz Award created in his honor means so much to someone like me who has worked very hard in building Busseto Foods. To receive this honor at the Expo, which I’ve been a part of since the beginning, is the icing on top.”

During Expolicious, the Expo’s public event, over 1,200 attendees were able to sample new creations from six premier California chefs utilizing featured products on the show floor. Food writer, cook and Food Network TV personality, Simon Majumdar, was back for the fourth year to host the first annual, “Taste of California” Chefs’ Competition, where each of the featured California-inspired bites competed for three awards. Participating chefs in “Taste of California” prepared inspired dishes using Expo products paired with a Tioga Sequoia Brewing Co. beer and a CRU Winery wine. Contestants included: McKinze Bridges from Max’s Bistro & Bar in Fresno; Karlo Earisto and Jared Ventura from Adia Pop-Up in San Juan Capistrano; George Meza from Onsen Restaurant in San Francisco; Vatche Moukhtarian from The Cracked Pepper in Fresno; Charles Olalia, Ma’am Sir in Los Angeles; and Jimmy Pardini, The Annex Kitchen in Fresno.

Majumdar not only hosted the competition, but judged it as well. He selected winners in three categories which were: *Taste Test* winner – Adia Pop-Up for their Hamachi Crudo with Peach Gazpacho; *California on a Plate* winner – Max’s for their Almond Panna Cotta with a Peach Coulis and Vanilla Almond Granola; *Best Combination of Food and Beverage* winner was Onsen Restaurant with their Scallion Chicken Wonton with Smoked Soy Chili Sauce, Stone Fruit and Salted Almonds paired Tioga Sequoia Brewing Co.’s Half Dome.

“It stands to reason that this showcase for the scope and innovation of California foods would be held in Fresno – in the very heart of the nation’s richest agricultural regions,” said Simon Majumdar. “Fresno represents not only a convergence of California’s finest foods, but a melting pot of cultures, flavors and creativity – it’s like the city and the Expo are made for one another.”

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About the California Food Expo:

The California Food Expo is an exclusive industry trade show for California food and beverage companies to connect with pre-qualified retail and foodservice buyers, network with industry peers and showcase California’s thriving food industry.

The 2020 California Food Expo will be held on September 14-15, 2020. Exhibitor reservations are now open at the discounted rate of \$900 until January 1. To register, and for more information on the California Food Expo, visit www.CaliforniaFoodExpo.com.