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CHEF BILL CRAWFORD WINS GRAND PRIZE FOR INNOVATIVE USE OF REAL CALIFORNIA CHEESES IN 5TH ANNUAL REAL CALIFORNIA PIZZA CONTEST

El Pollo Borracho Brings Home \$5,000 Cal-Mex Prize; \$10,000 Grand Prize in Real California Milk's Pizza Bake-off Event

Napa, Calif. (August 2, 2023) – Following a live bake-off competition where 12 professional chefs crafted innovative pizzas highlighting California cow's milk cheeses, the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) today crowned three new pizza champions in the 2023 Real California Pizza Contest, the premiere national search for the best pizza recipes that feature Real California Cheeses.

The Grand Prize winner, Bill Crawford, is the owner of Righteous Slice in Rexburg, Idaho. Crawford grabbed the contest's top prize for his *El Pollo Borracho* recipe in the Cal-Mex pizza category. Crawford received \$5,000 as category winner, plus \$10,000 for the Grand Prize distinction, for a total of \$15,000.

El Pollo Borracho packs a punch of fresh, zesty flavor by marrying tequila-lime chicken, elote corn, jalapeño peppers, and Tajin seasoning with Real California Oaxaca and Queso Fresco cheeses, and creamy California crème fraîche.

The Plant-Forward category winner was Giovanni Labbate, the owner of Tievoli Pizza Bar in Palatine, Ill. Labbate took home the \$5,000 prize for his *Sunset in Sonoma* recipe, which is a colorful ode to Northern California's wine country and features a garlic confit cream sauce, sharp California Cheddar, purple potato slices, caramelized onions and mushrooms. It is topped with pesto-whipped Real California Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses.

In the Real Californian category, Vincent Sbarro, owner of Vinnie's Pizzeria & Forno di Sbarro in Concord, Calif., received \$5,000 for his *Cali King* pizza, which pairs four unique Real California cheeses with tender eggplant, fire-roasted red bell peppers, and sliced Castelvetrano olives to tastefully showcase the best of California dairy and produce in each savory bite.

The nine other chef competitors each received \$500 for reaching the bake-off competition finals.

"This year's pizza contest showcased the use of California dairy at its finest," said Mike Gallagher, Business and Market Development Consultant for the CMAB. "The judges were impressed by the variety of California cheeses and how chefs used them to elevate their recipes, such as a pesto-whipped Ricotta featured in one of the winning pizzas. There was a clear recognition by our finalists of the quality these products bring to the table."

The 5th Real California Pizza Contest, held at The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Copia in Napa, Calif., was open to professional chefs and culinary students across the United States.

A record number of participants entered the 2023 contest, which led to the most competitive finalist selection in event history.

The competition was judged by a renowned panel of judges including 13-time World Pizza Champion and owner of 22 culinary concepts, Tony Gemignani; certified pizzaiolo and award-winning executive chef Glenn Cybulski; and professional chef and 2022 Real California Pizza Contest Grand Prize Winner David Jacobson. Judges based scores on a range of factors including taste, texture and the inventive use of cheeses made with Real California Milk.

"As the country's number one producer of milk and Mozzarella, a big percentage of our dairy products go into pizza," said John Talbot, CEO of the CMAB. "A healthy pizza industry is important to our California dairy industry. Maintaining our standing as a national leader in the pizza category is essential to our business."

The 2023 Real California Pizza Contest finalists and winners:

Cal-Mex

- GRAND PRIZE AND CATEGORY WINNER: Bill Crawford, Righteous Slice, Rexburg, Idaho
- Ahmad Butler, Miller Butler, San Pedro, Calif.
- Chris Decker, Truly Pizza, Dana Point, Calif.
- Marcus Medina, Hella Pie Pizza, Tracy, Calif.

Plant-Forward

- CATEGORY WINNER: Giovanni Labbate, Tievoli Pizza Bar, Palatine, Ill.
- Audrey Kelly, Audrey Jane's Pizza Garage, Boulder, Colo.
- Jordan Lawson, La Fiamma Wood Fired Pizza, Bellingham, Wash.
- Lars Smith, State of Mind Public House, Los Altos, Calif.

The REAL Californian

- CATEGORY WINNER: Vincent Sbarro, Vinnie's Pizzeria & Forno di Sbarro, Concord, Calif.
- Charles Cullison, Charlie's Pizzeria, Kingman, Ariz.
- Matt Hutchinson, Pizaro's Pizza, Houston, Texas
- Peter Reinhart, Johnson & Wales University, Charlotte, N.C.

Details on the bake-off event, chef finalists and the CMAB are available on the [Real California Pizza Contest website](#). An online recipe book with all 12 final pizzas, as well as exclusive videos from the contest, will be released online in September.

California is a reliable, consistent source of sustainable dairy products used by chefs throughout the world. As the nation's largest dairy state, California boasts an impressive lineup of award-winning cheesemakers and dairy processors, that help drive dining innovation nationwide.

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About Real California Milk/the California Milk Advisory Board

The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB), an instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, is funded by the state's dairy farm families who lead the nation in sustainable dairy farming practices. With a vision to nourish the world with the wholesome goodness of Real California Milk, the CMAB's programs focus on increasing demand for California's sustainable dairy products in the state, across the U.S. and around the world through advertising, public relations, research, and retail and foodservice promotional programs.

The Foodservice Division of the CMAB supports foodservice operators and distributors that use Real California dairy products. The CMAB offers marketing and promotional support for foodservice operators that purchase dairy products with the Real California Milk seal, which means they are made with 100 percent milk from California's more than 1,100 family dairy farms, using some of the most sustainable dairy practices in the nation.

For more information on sourcing cheese from California, contact the foodservice team at 209.883.6455 (MILK), businessdevelopment@cmab.net or RealCaliforniaMilk.com/Foodservice, [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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