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**TWELVE PROFESSIONAL CHEFS NAMED FINALISTS IN NATIONAL PIZZA
COMPETITION FEATURING REAL CALIFORNIA CHEESE**

*Live bake-off event in Napa to award \$30,000 in prizes and showcase innovative foodservice
pizza recipes across three new categories*

Tracy, Calif. – June 24, 2025 – The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) today announced the 12 professional chef finalists for the 2025 Real California Pizza Contest, a nationwide competition to find the most innovative foodservice pizza recipes featuring Real California dairy products.

In its seventh year, the contest attracted more than 200 entries from chefs across the U.S., each vying for a share of \$30,000 in prize money and recognition as the best of the best in pizza. Finalists will compete in a live bake-off July 29th at the Culinary Institute of America at Copia in Napa, Calif., showcasing their recipes across three new categories: On the Menu, The Big Cheese, and Innovative Wildcard.

Each category winner will receive \$5,000, with one selected as the Grand Prize Winner and awarded an additional \$5,000. All other finalists will receive \$1,000 each.

The 2025 contest categories and finalists are as follows:

On the Menu: An innovative pizza recipe currently featured on the entrant's regular or seasonal menu, using two or more Real California cheeses or dairy products.

- Edward Stalewski – Mercurio's, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- David Goldy – Wild West Pizza, Lompoc, Calif.
- Sean Dempsey – Dempsey's Brewery Pub & Restaurant, Watertown, S.D.
- Sergio Balderas – Truly Pizza, Dana Point, Calif.

The Big Cheese: A creative take on America's favorite – the cheese pizza – featuring Real California Mozzarella and at least two additional Real California cheeses.

- Salvatore Trupiano – Mangia e Bevi, Oceanside, Calif.
- Kira Zabrowski – Much Ado About Pizza, Pleasanton, Calif.
- Randy Lewis – Hearth Wood Fired Pizza & Catering, San Leandro, Calif.
- Charles Cullison – Charlie and the Pizza Factory, Kingman, Ariz.

Innovative Wildcard: A unique and original pizza recipe that showcases Real California Mozzarella and highlights the chef's creativity in a cheese-forward pizza.

- Marcus Medina – Hella Pie Pizza, Tracy, Calif.
- Vanessa Vinsick – Caliente Pizza & Drafthouse, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Adam Sachs – Toscano Brothers, San Francisco, Calif.
- Ryan Mondragon – Sanctuary Pizza, Modesto, Calif.

“This year's Real California Pizza Contest drew a record number of chef entries, highlighting the incredible versatility and appeal of California-made cheeses and dairy products in the pizza category,” said Mike Gallagher, Business and Market Development Consultant for the CMAB. “Chefs and pizzaioli nationwide continue to choose California dairy for its superior quality and consistency. As the country's leading producer of Mozzarella and the second largest cheese producer overall, California is at the forefront of innovation in foodservice. We're excited to see how this year's finalists bring that innovation to life across our new contest categories.”

At the July 29 bake-off finals, chefs will prepare their pizzas onsite for blind judging by a panel of acclaimed pizza experts:

- Tony Gemignani – Chef, restaurateur, international pizza authority, and President of the World Pizza Champions
- Glenn Cybulski – Certified pizzaiolo and award-winning executive chef
- Laura Meyer – International pizza champion, restaurant owner and co-founder of Fork to Future

The judging panel selected the 12 finalists from over 200 blind-judged entries from across the United States. All finalist recipes incorporate cheeses made with sustainably sourced milk from California's more than 1,000 family dairy farms. Chefs selected from over 200 varieties and styles of Real California cheeses, each bearing the Real California Milk seal.

Additional details on the bake-off, chef finalists, and CMAB's foodservice partnership support are available at <https://realcaliforniamilkfoodservice.com/pizza-contest/>

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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 milk from California's more than 1,000 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), email businessdevelopment@cmab.net, or visit RealCaliforniaMilkFoodservice.com, [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

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