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**CHEF SALVATORE TRUPIANO WINS GRAND PRIZE FOR CREATIVE USE OF
REAL CALIFORNIA CHEESE IN NATIONAL PIZZA CONTEST**

*Three New Champions Crowned and \$30,000 in Prize Money Awarded in
Real California Milk's 7th Annual Pizza Bake-off Event*

Napa, Calif. – August 1, 2025 – Following a bake-off competition where 12 professional chefs crafted innovative pizzas highlighting California cow's milk cheeses, the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) today announced three new pizza champions in the 2025 Real California Pizza Contest, the premier national search for the best pizza recipes that feature Real California Cheeses.

Chef Salvatore Trupiano, CEO of Mangia e Bevi in Oceanside, Calif. won the contest's Grand Prize and the Big Cheese category award for his *Creamery Crown* recipe. *The Creamery Crown* combines Real California Mozzarella, Cream Cheese, Carmody, Dry Jack, and Crème Fraîche in a decadent balance of creamy, tangy, and nutty flavors.

Trupiano took home \$10,000 – \$5,000 as a category winner, plus \$5,000 for the Grand Prize distinction.

In the On the Menu category, Chef Edward Stalewski of Mercurio's in Pittsburgh, Pa., took home the \$5,000 category prize for his *Iron Crust* pizza – a bold, flavor-packed creation prepared in a

cast iron pan featuring cupping pepperoni and layered with Real California Mozzarella, Provolone and white Cheddar cheeses, topped with whipped Ricotta and grated Gouda.

Chef Marcus Medina of Hella Pie Pizza in Tracy, Calif. won the \$5,000 Innovation category prize for his *Hellapeno Za'pper*, a pizza that pairs four Real California cheeses – Mozzarella, Cheddar, Cream Cheese, and Dry Jack – with maple bacon, fresh jalapeños, and smoked hot honey.

Each of the nine remaining finalists received \$1,000 for advancing to the pizza bake-off.

“Each year, this contest demonstrates how chefs across the country continue to use California dairy products to push culinary boundaries,” said Mike Gallagher, Business and Market Development Consultant for the CMAB. “This year’s pizza recipes were especially exciting with bold, authentic flavors and inventive spirit. The judges were impressed by the versatility of Real California cheeses and how they were highlighted.”

Now in its seventh year, the contest, which was open to professional chefs and culinary students across the U.S., received a record number of participants, leading to the most competitive finalist selection in its history. The bake-off final was held at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Copia in Napa, Calif.

The judging panel included renowned industry leaders such as Tony Gemignani, 13-time World Pizza Champion and owner of 22 culinary concepts; Glenn Cybulski, certified pizzaiolo and award-winning executive chef; and Laura Meyer, International pizza champion, restaurant owner and co-founder of Fork to Future. Pizzas were scored based on taste, texture, visual appeal, and the inventive use of Real California cheese.

“California remains the leading producer of milk and Mozzarella in the U.S., and it’s clear that chefs nationwide recognize the value of our state’s sustainable, high-quality dairy products,” said Bob Carroll, CEO of the CMAB. “From bulk Mozzarella to artisan cheese, Real California dairy products continue to raise the bar on flavor and performance throughout the foodservice industry.”

The 2025 Real California Pizza Contest winners and finalists are as follows:

The Big Cheese Category

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

On the Menu Category

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

Innovation Category

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

Additional details, videos, and recipes from the bake-off event will be available in an online recipe book launching this October that will feature all finalist pizzas and tips for working with Real California Cheese in foodservice. For further information, visit <https://realcaliforniamilkfoodservice.com/pizza-contest/>.

California's reputation as the leading dairy state continues to inspire chefs with more than 200 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheeses and a full catalogue of dairy ingredients made with sustainably sourced milk from California dairy farm families. Learn more at <https://realcaliforniamilkfoodservice.com/>.

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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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