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**CHEF ZACK CALDER WINS GRAND PRIZE FOR CREATIVE USE OF REAL
CALIFORNIA DAIRY IN NATIONAL PIZZA CONTEST**

*New Champions Crowned and \$20,500 in Prize Money Awarded in Real California Milk's 8th
Annual Pizza Bake-Off Event*

Napa, Calif. – July 16, 2026 – Following a live bake-off event where eight professional chefs crafted original pizzas showcasing the quality and versatility of Real California dairy products, the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) today announced a new champion in the 2026 Real California Pizza Contest, the premier national search for the best pizza recipes featuring Real California dairy.

Selected from more than 200 entries submitted by professional chefs across the country, this year's finalists competed at The Culinary Institute of America at Copia in Napa, Calif., preparing their pizzas live before a distinguished panel of industry judges.

Chef Zack Calder, Owner of Left Coast Pizza in Dayton, Nev., won the Contest's Grand Prize and the On the Menu category award for his *Valley Heat, Vine Sweet* pizza. The recipe pairs sweet fruit, spicy heat, and savory toppings, all brought together with Real California fresh mozzarella, Monterey Jack, and queso fresco for a creamy, layered flavor that celebrates bold California-inspired ingredients.

Calder received \$7,500, which included \$5,000 as a category winner, plus an additional \$2,500 for earning the Contest's Grand Prize distinction.

The additional winner in the California Freestyle category, Chef Jimmy Henry of Jimmyhank Pizza in Harleysville, Penn. earned the \$5,000 category prize for his *Motor City Elote* pizza. Inspired by classic Mexican street corn, this Detroit-style pizza combines Real California low-moisture mozzarella, cotija, and crema with roasted corn, smoky spices, and bright, zesty flavors to create a fresh take on a favorite dish.

Each of the six remaining finalists received \$1,000 for advancing to the live bake-off event.

In a special team three-cheese pizza bake-off, Ryan Ososky from Dtown Pizzeria in West Hollywood, Calif. and Oscar Venegas from Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco, Calif. teamed up to win the top prize. Their winning three-cheese pizza combined Real California low-moisture mozzarella, hatch chile-flavored Jack cheese, and a parmesan-style cheese to create a rich, nutty flavor profile with a subtle kick. The pair shared the contest's \$2,000 prize.

"Real California Mozzarella continues to inspire chefs to create signature pizzas that are both innovative and menu-worthy," said Katie Cameron, Director of Foodservice for the CMAB. "This year's finalists demonstrated exceptional creativity while showcasing the quality, versatility, and performance of Real California dairy products. Their passion and talent made this one of our strongest competitions to date."

Now in its eighth year, the contest consisted of two categories: On the Menu, recognizing pizzas with strong commercial menu appeal featuring Real California Mozzarella and at least one additional Real California dairy product; and California Freestyle, celebrating original pizza creations featuring at least three Real California dairy products while encouraging chefs to showcase California-inspired ingredients and bold culinary creativity.

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 evaluated on taste, texture, appearance, creativity, and the effective use of Real California dairy products.

"California continues to lead the nation in milk production and Mozzarella manufacturing, providing chefs with an unmatched selection of high-quality dairy products," said Bob Carroll, CEO of the CMAB. "The creativity displayed during this year's contest reflects not only the incredible talent of today's pizza professionals, but also the exceptional flavor, consistency, and versatility that Real California dairy products bring to foodservice menus."

The 2026 Real California Pizza Contest winners and finalists are as follows:

On the Menu Category

- CATEGORY AND GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Zack Calder, Left Coast Pizza, Dayton, Nev.
- Finalist: Melinda Carbajal, Simply Pizza Truck, Brighton, Colo.
- Finalist: Randy Lewis, Hearth Wood Fired Pizza & Catering, Oakland, Calif.
- Finalist: Ryan Ososky, Dtown Pizzeria, West Hollywood, Calif.

California Freestyle Category

- WINNER: Jimmy Henry, Jimmyhank Pizza, Harleysville, Penn.
- Finalist: Patrick Clifford, Skorch'd Pizza, Sacramento, Calif.
- Finalist: John McCaffrey, Yellow Bridge Brewing Tap and Table, Greensburg, Penn.
- Finalist: Oscar Venegas, Tony's Pizza Napoletana, San Francisco, Calif.

Additional details, photos, videos, and recipes from the bake-off event will be available in an online recipe book launching this fall, featuring all eight finalist pizzas along with tips and inspiration for incorporating Real California dairy products into foodservice menus. For further information, visit RealCaliforniaMilkFoodservice.com/pizza-contest.

California's reputation as the nation's leading dairy state continues to inspire chefs with more than 200 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheeses and a full portfolio of sustainably produced dairy products made with milk from California dairy farm families. Learn more at 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, award-winning California cheeses, and dairy ingredients across retail and foodservice channels in the state, throughout 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, pizza chefs, restaurants, and distributors that use Real California dairy products. The CMAB offers marketing and promotional support for operators that purchase dairy products bearing the Real California Milk seal, which signifies they are made with milk from California's family dairy farms. Through programs including the Real California Pizza Contest, the CMAB helps showcase innovative foodservice pizza recipes and culinary applications featuring California cheeses and dairy products.

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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