

Aye! Arr! How to get
your swagger on
Scene, E1

ON THURSDAY: Carla Meyer
reviews the new "Pirates" movie



DRAFT: What will Kings do with 10th pick? | C1
THE PILL: New version puts periods on hold | A7



CELEBRATING OUR **150th** ANNIVERSARY

The Sacramento Bee

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Upbeat portrait of U.S. Muslims

Study finds most
embrace America,
denounce extremism.

By Jennifer Garza
BEE STAFF WRITER

Though many say their lives are more difficult in the post-9/11 world, Muslim Americans are largely happy and have assimilated into American society, according to a survey released Tuesday.

Many believe integration is important and have embraced this country's values and attitudes, the first nationwide survey of its kind has found.

Dems drop pullout call

WAR SPENDING PLAN

Democratic congressional leaders near agreement with the Bush administration on legislation to pay for the Iraq war.

- The emerging compromise bill doesn't set a timeline for troop withdrawal but includes a provision that would set standards for the Iraqi government.

- It would cost about \$120 billion and include as much as \$8 billion for Democratic domestic priorities.

Decision on war funds
is called a wrenching
reversal for leaders who
oppose Bush on Iraq.

By Carl Hulse
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — Congressional Democrats relented Tuesday on their insistence that a war spending measure set a date for withdrawing U.S. combat troops from Iraq. Instead,

they moved toward a deal with President Bush that would impose new conditions on the Iraqi government.

The decision to back down was a wrenching reversal for leading Democrats, who saw their election triumph in November as a call to force an end to the war. It marked the first time since taking power in Congress that the Democrats had publicly agreed to allow a vote on war financing without a timetable for troop withdrawal.

Democrats are working under a self-imposed deadline to finish a war

spending bill that Bush can sign this week — before the Memorial Day recess — in order to avoid holding up funds needed in Iraq and Afghanistan and being bashed by Republicans over the holiday recess for not supporting the troops.

But even so, many Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, indicated they would not support the war funding, meaning that a significant number of Republicans would have to sign on to

► SPENDING, Page A14

INSIDE

Tensions rise
with string
of deadly Iraq
attacks.

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Pfc. Alejandro "Alex" R. Varela, 19, of Orangevale is remembered as a hero.

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HOLIDAY TRAVEL
**WHEELS
IN MOTION**

lawmakers joined the
ied 223 Democrats to
ep the bill to passage.

G thinks small

rocter & Gamble Co. will
o convince consumers
less is better when it
es to laundry detergent.
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of "Tide 2X Ultra" and
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supposed to wash the
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By Jim Downing
BEE STAFF WRITER

Will American consumers pay more for olive oil that claims to be even more pristine than extra-virgin? Will they even be able to tell the difference?

With the value of the "extra-virgin" designation diluted by fraud and dozens of new California labels looking for a way to stand out in a tight market, some in the olive-oil business think it's

time for a higher standard.

This week, Claudio Peri, a food science professor at the University of Milan and the founder of a movement he calls "Beyond Extra Virgin," is at the University of California, Davis, to sell his idea to California's emerging olive oil industry. A two-day conference wraps up today.

The problem, say Peri and many in the California olive oil industry, is that

much - if not most - of the extra-virgin oil on the U.S. market doesn't deserve the label. Extra-virgin oil requires a strict harvest and processing regimen that yields certain flavor qualities recognizable to expert tasters. Many of the major label extra-virgin brands don't make the cut, they say.

"The globalization of the olive oil industry is homogenizing the market. It

► OIL, Page D4

exercisers

Pounds are shed as pills augment healthy lifestyle.

By Candice Choi
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - You won't lose weight in your sleep or shed pounds while eating anything you want - that's the sobering message from the maker of a weight-loss pill poised to hit shelves next month.

Tuesday opened in New York City for Alli, the first approved by the ration.

y marketing ap- stampedes to the the drug's fate itical giant's abil- at diet pills aren't

ridiculously high lls. That leads to word-of-mouth," nalist with WBB ge D5

cars, gets Maserati outlet

Sacramento auto dealer Rick Niello has pulled off a luxury-car coup: He's just been awarded the area's first Maserati dealership.

His Niello Co. will start selling the sporty, high-performance Italian cars this summer at the former Saab dealership at 2030 Fulton Ave. That's right next to a Jaguar dealership that Niello



BOB SHALLIT

Together with the Niello-owned BMW store just to the south, the dealer now has three ultra-exclusive brands on one small strip of auto row.

Getting Maserati to

commit to a local dealership wasn't easy, Niello says.

Sacramento "hasn't exactly been a hotbed (for sales) of exotic cars," he says. But he says he was able to con-



WU YI

The Chinese vice premier said that both sides should "firmly oppose trade protectionism." She also said, "Confrontation

China tells U.S. at trade talks

By Martin Crutsinger
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration pushed for concrete results in high-level trade talks with China that began Tuesday, but the head of the Chinese delegation bluntly warned against confrontation.

Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said it was important that the two days of talks produce results to build trust between the two

and he said the two sides should work to build a "road map to the future."

The administration is eager for success stories to show Congress, where lawmakers blame America's soaring trade deficits and the loss of one in six manufacturing jobs since 2000 in part on China's trade practices in such areas as currency manipulation and copyright piracy.

The U.S. delegation also raised

to many of the company's
lition subscribers for about

European Union regula-
gave Universal Music
ip clearance Tuesday to
BMG Music Publishing for
it \$2.09 billion in a deal
will create the world's
st music publishing com-

Payless ShoeSource Inc.
Tuesday it will buy com-
ig shoe store chain Stride
for about \$800 million.
ess also said it will change
orporate name to Collec-

'EXTRA-VIRGIN' OIL IS THE NUTRITIOUS CHOICE

● Extra-virgin olive oil: To produce this top-grade oil, olives must be pressed shortly after harvesting and the oil must meet certain chemical standards, such as a low level of acidity. Extra-virgin oil can have no flavor "defects" and also must have at least one of the dozens of defined "positive" flavor traits, from grassiness to mint to the taste of nettles.

● Virgin olive oil: This grade of oil can be produced with a less strict – and less costly – regimen. For

instance, it can be pressed from olives that have fallen from trees and lain on the ground. Virgin oil is also allowed to have flavor "defects," ranging from fusty to musty to rancid. Very little oil on the U.S. market is sold as "virgin."

● Olive oil: Oil labeled simply "olive oil" has usually been refined with heat or chemicals to weaken the bad flavors produced by careless harvest practices, such as allowing the olives to sit in the sun and ferment. Olive oils sold in the

United States as "extra light" often fall into this category as well.

– Jim Downing

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Most of the fat in any grade of olive oil is monounsaturated fat, which can help to reduce LDL (bad cholesterol) levels when substituted for saturated fats, such as butter. Extra-virgin olive oil contains higher concentrations of antioxidants than lower grades. Antioxidants, broadly speaking, help to repair damage in the body's cells.

Oil: Policing quality called impractical

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really depletes the average quality," said Peri, 69, in an interview Tuesday.

But policing quality in the international olive oil market isn't practical, so Peri on Tuesday challenged California producers to adopt a new, higher set of standards for themselves – and perhaps take on the task of teaching chefs and consumers what extra-virgin oil ought to taste like. He has signed up 30 labels in Italy already and hopes to make his organization global.

The keys to top-quality oil: Get olives from the orchard to the press in less than 24 hours, so they don't have a chance to go bad. Bottle only fresh oil and don't blend it with anything inferior.

Extra-virgin or not, olive oil has become a hot item in U.S. supermarkets, with sales volume doubling from 1996 to 2006, to roughly 60 million gallons. The average American consumes just under a quart of olive oil a year; consumption in several Mediterranean countries is more than 12 times greater.

While those with refined palates say many of the big-selling brands taste moldy or rancid, U.S. consumers seem to like them. The familiar flavors of major-label oils tend to rate better with non-experts than do the fruitier, more pungent flavors of oils that win extra-virgin tasting competitions, said Paul Vossen, a UC Davis extension specialist who is an expert on olive oil.

Whether America is ready for the real extra-virgin oil will have major implications for the future of California's olive oil industry, which is counting on strong growth in demand at the premium end of the market.

More than 200 California labels are now in stores, with

prices often twice those of imports, a difference producers attribute in part to high land and labor costs, as well as to adherence to strict extra-virgin processing standards. In an interview last year, Vossen said that it's very difficult to produce a half-liter of true extra-virgin olive oil for less than \$9 – whether in Italy or California.

This year, the state's olive oil production is expected to be as much as 700,000 gallons, up nearly threefold since 2001. The Sacramento Valley is California's leading olive oil region; there's even an oil from the fruit of the trees on the UC Davis campus.

Still, California brands accounted for less than 1 percent of U.S. olive oil consumption in 2006. Imports from Italy account for 74 percent.

Extra-virgin oil dominates most supermarket displays, though many import brands also offer a plain "olive oil" or an "extra-light" oil for a dollar or two less.

International standards dictate what sort of oil ought to carry what label. But U.S. food law doesn't recognize those standards, so their enforcement effectively is left to importers and grocers.

Claims of oil fraud are tough to validate, since there's no industrywide testing program. But impostors show up even in prestigious competitions, said Darrell Corti, who runs Corti Brothers Market in Sacramento and is the chief judge of the Los Angeles International Extra Virgin Olive Oil Competition, the nation's biggest olive oil event.

In this year's contest, held last week, 118 of the 396 entrants didn't meet the extra-virgin grade's basic standards, Corti said.

At Tuesday's conference at UC Davis, which drew 200 attendees from Italy and the domestic olive oil industry, Vossen led a tasting of oils from around the world.

Olive oil is tasted in small cobalt-blue glasses, to hide color differences. The taster sniffs, slurps the oil and then lets it slide down the throat. Green apple slices cleanse the palate between tastings.

The audience, apparently including many experienced tasters, quickly voiced its disapproval of an oil revealed later to be a major Italian import. One loud voice compared it to window cleaner.

The third oil, a premium variety from Greece, produced a soft chorus of coughs. Many good oils are valued for their cough-inducing pungency, Corti said. As in: "That's a nice two-cough oil."

California olive oil producers in the audience seemed open to Peri's proposal. Amy Bridge, a new Placerville-area olive grower who plans to launch her Mad Dog Mesa label after this year's harvest, said she'd favor a designation that would help distinguish her artisan product from mass-market alternatives.

But Corti was a bit skeptical that a new set of rules would drive a general improvement in the olive oil on the market.

"You can't legislate good quality," he said.

Corti urges customers to try a range of oils and simply use what tastes good. He carries more than 40 different olive oils in his store. In his home kitchen, Corti uses five different brands, includes a light Ligurian oil for his endive and kumquat salad.

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