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Contact: Malei Weir
mw@mooncatcher.com
(805) 239-0020

Foodies Flock to Central Coast Wine Country for Santa Maria Style Barbecue

California's Barbecue Capital Set to Sizzle in 2009

Santa Maria, CA—In the Santa Maria Valley on California's Central Coast, barbecue isn't just another food, it's a way of life.

Here, the 150-year-old tradition of Santa Maria Style Barbecue never goes out of style, and now more and more "foodies" are flocking to the area to savor this sizzling phenomenon.

Famed chef Bobby Flay came to the Santa Maria Valley to showcase Santa Maria Style Barbecue on his Food Network show *BBQ with Bobby Flay*. The hit wine-centric movie *Sideways* extensively featured the Hitching Post restaurant, a mainstay of the local barbecue experience. *Sunset* magazine once called Santa Maria Style Barbecue the "best barbecue in the world." And the new book *Renewing America's Food Traditions* calls this signature cuisine "a mainstay of California's culinary heritage."

Such high praise combined with a growing societal appreciation for authentic regional foods is driving renewed interest in Santa Maria Style Barbecue—as is the emergence of the Santa Maria Valley wine country, which just placed two wines in the *Wine Spectator's* list of the Top 100 wines of the world.

The secret to Santa Maria Style is found in its indigenous ingredients and methods, which deliver an abundance of flavor out of a relatively simple preparation.

The traditional cuts are top-block sirloin and tri-tip, a triangular bottom sirloin cut that originated in the Santa Maria Valley. The meat is rolled in a mixture of salt, pepper and garlic salt before being barbecued over coals of red oak, a native local oak species that contributes a smoky, hearty flavor. The classic Santa Maria Style Barbecue menu includes fresh salsa, grilled French bread dipped in sweet melted butter, tossed green salad and slow-cooked pinto beans. Pintos are small pink beans originated in the valley.

The origins of Santa Maria Style Barbecue date back to the mid 1800s, when local rancheros would host Spanish-style barbecues each spring for their vaqueros, or cowboys, as well as family and friends. Over time, the unique qualities of these homegrown cookouts became known as Santa Maria Style Barbecue.

Local restaurants offering Santa Maria Style Barbecue dishes include the Far Western Tavern (which is now celebrating 50 years of same family ownership), Hitching Post, Shaw's Steak House, Jocko's Steak House, Historic Santa Maria Inn's Garden Room, F. McLintocks, A.J. Spurs and others.

Those wishing to prepare their own Santa Maria Style Barbecue at home can purchase packaged seasoning, pinto beans, red oak chips and salsa from Susie Q's Brand, a family-owned company specializing in local flavors. Cowboy Flavor is another purveyor of local barbecue foods.

For information about Santa Maria Style Barbecue as well as local lodging, wine tasting and more, visit www.santamaria.com or call the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce & Visitor and Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779.

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