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FOOD

'The Cider Donuteur' is living in Maine. Here's what he's loving — and his tips for a satisfying road trip.

By Lauren Daley Globe Correspondent,
Updated September 17, 2024, 2 hours ago

Alex Schwartz eats cider doughnuts at Thompson's Orchards in New Gloucester, Maine. ALISON JOHNSTON

When I reach Alex "The Cider Donuteur" Schwartz, he's just back from a trip that blew his doughnut-loving mind.

"I'm stunned by how good these doughnuts were. That's my headline," he tells me on our recent call, a day after his trek to Thompson's Orchard in New Gloucester, Maine.

In New Gloucester, he stood — flanneled up and biting into a spongy cinnamon-sugar-dusted cider doughnut — on a gravel path, surrounded by plants, trees, and greenhouses under a clear September sky.

These are the conditions in which "The Cider Donuteur" thrives. He is constantly hunting for big "small farm-stand energy," as he puts it.

The former Cambridge resident has made a name for himself locally as the cider doughnut expert and cartographer.

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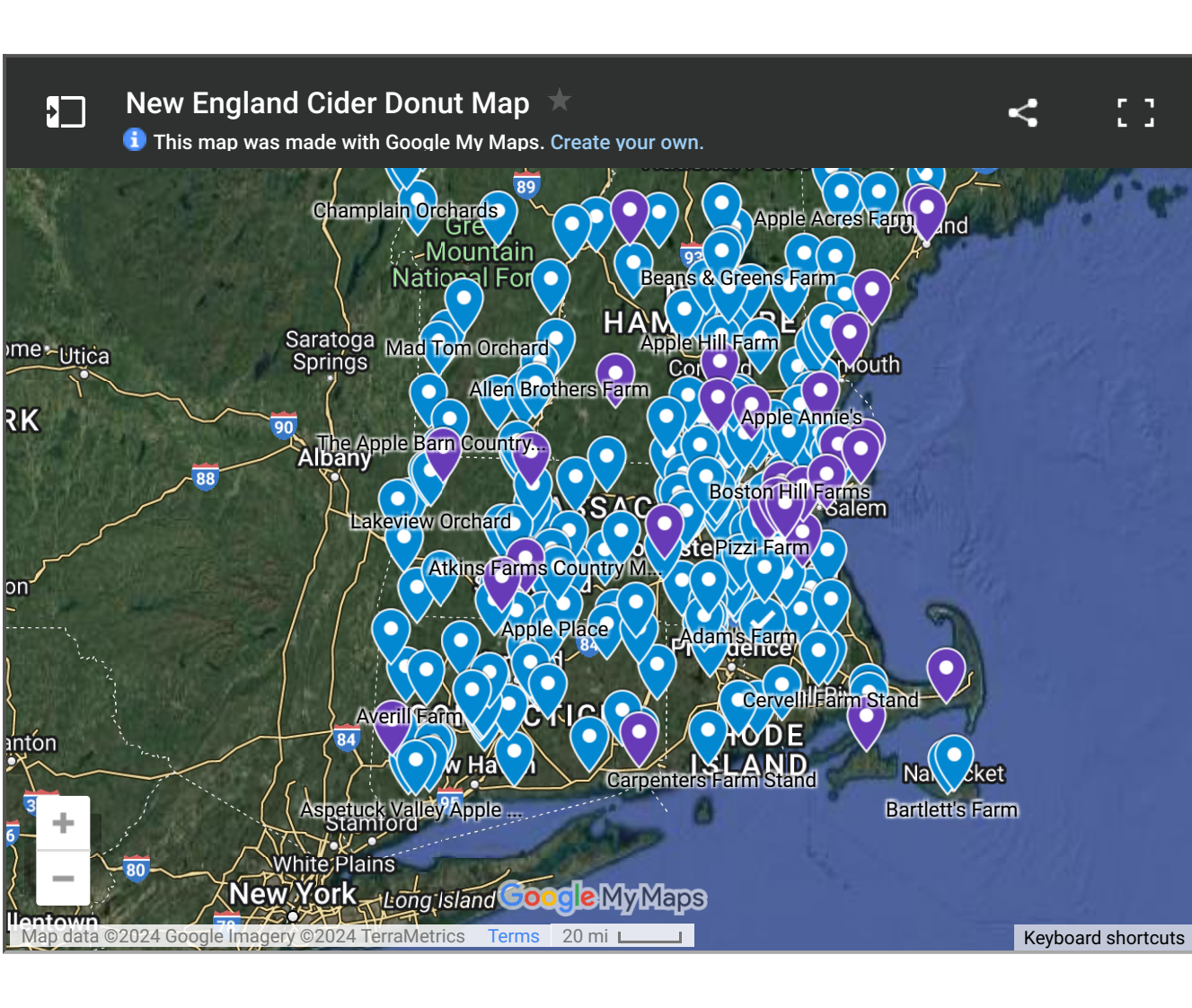
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His crowd-sourced apple cider doughnut map now boasts some 400 spots, mostly in Massachusetts, but as far south as southern Connecticut, and as far north as Enosburg Falls, Vt.

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Since beginning his map quest in 2020, the cider doughnut specialist has moved to the Maine coast.

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Autumn officially arrives this Sunday, and with it, The Cider Donuteur kicks off his fifth fall as New England's seasonal treat guide.

I picked the Worcester Polytechnic Institute grad's brain to find out what he's loving and discovering lately in the world of cider doughnuts.

So you must have immediately sought out cider doughnut spots when you moved to Maine.

Of course. Thankfully, when I was driving up from Boston, I could check the map — it's helpful for me, as well. I haven't been to all 400 spots. I've been to a number, but a lot are user-contributed. Just yesterday, I got the chance to hit up Thompson's. And wow. Spoiler alert: It's my favorite Maine-based cider doughnut.

Alex Schwartz eats cider doughnuts at Thompson's Orchards in New Gloucester, Maine. ALISON JOHNSTON

What did you like about it?

There are different [categories I use] to rate doughnuts. The first: density and moisture. Thompson's was a perfect mix: soft, springy, moist. With cider doughnuts, that [spectrum] can go from hard, crumbly, and dry, to all oil. Thomson's was right in this perfect spot.

Next, sweetness and flavor. Here, I could taste the apple come through, but not super overpoweringly. It's got this great cakey-doughnut taste in the batter.

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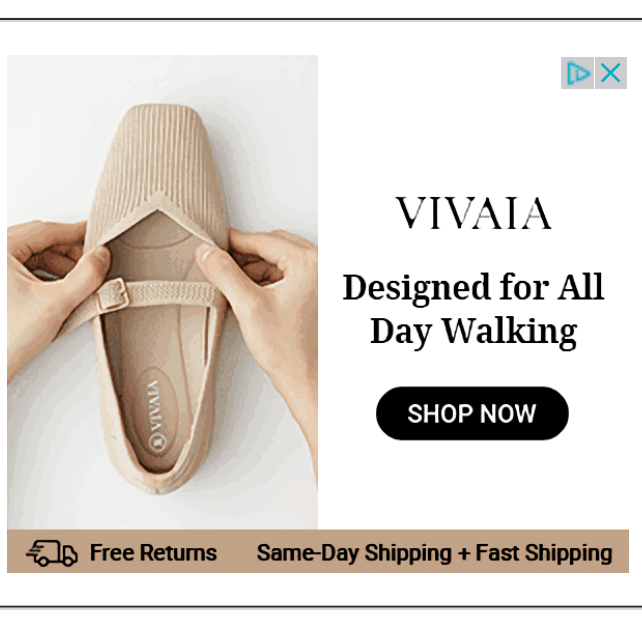
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Then you've got the dip [or topping]. Thompson's offered cinnamon sugar, sugar, and plain — I love that they had options. I like to do plain and cinnamon-sugar and mix them back and forth.

Also, the frying of the actual doughnut. Thompson's wasn't too crispy or crunchy or fatty — it was a perfect bit of crunch, and a springy inside. Overall, everything was well-balanced. It tasted incredible. Also, they make them hot.

Ooh, right.

That's another important part of it. There's the romantic ideal of opening the bag and having steam rise. Because it's about the doughnut — but it's also about where you are. The crisp autumn air, seeing everyone in jeans and flannel, opening a hot bag and just having that moment of: "OK, yes. It is definitely fall. I'm feeling it." It's a whole experience.

What are some other Maine spots you've liked?

Rocky Ridge Orchard in Bowdoin, Maine, has good doughnuts. Apple Acres Farm in Hiram, a little off the beaten path, has good doughnuts. MacDougal Orchards in Springvale. But Thompson's is my top pick.

Russell Orchards manager Miranda Russell peers though a freshly made cider doughnut last fall. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

What spots are worth the drive from Boston?

If you're coming up from Boston, stop at Russell Orchards in Ipswich. That was my 2023 number-one pick, tied with Bolton Spring Farm in Bolton.

I know Russell Orchards is a really popular spot. What did you like about Bolton?

Their doughnuts taste very similar to Thompson's — a perfect mixture of elements in a beautiful package. Sometimes you eat half a doughnut somewhere and you're like, "OK, I'm full." At Bolton, you eat one and think: "OK, I can eat five more," which is really dangerous. Just the perfect mix of elements. And the spot is adorable. The owner's been perfecting the recipe for decades.

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What's your childhood doughnut origin story?

I grew up in Connecticut, near Danbury. The first exposure I had to cider doughnuts was the Big E Fair. I remember being around 5 years old, getting a bag of mini-doughnuts there, having that steam-from-the-bag experience. Blew my mind.

Alex Schwartz holds a cider doughnut from Parlee Farms in Tyngsborough in 2021. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

If people were to use your map to take a cider doughnut road-trip from Boston to Maine, sounds like they should hit up Russell, Bolton, and Thompson's. What are a few other spots?

Apple Annie in Brentwood, N.H., is really good. The doughnuts are crispy, more on the fried dough-side of the doughnut world. Smolak Farms in North Andover is great. When I went, they had a line out the door, so that, in and of itself, was a testament. I ended up buying a bag to bring home.

Stone Mountain Farm in Belmont, N.H. Cider Bellies in Meredith, N.H. — it's technically a stand inside of Moulton Farms. They have wonderful options. You could get maple drizzle, cinnamon sugar, lemon drizzle, chocolate drizzle. They're trying all kinds of interesting things.

Any recommendations for gluten-free?

I haven't found a farm-stand with great gluten-free doughnuts. There's a coffee shop in Portland, Maine, that bakes their own gluten-free cider doughnuts, and they're actually really good: Coveside Coffee.

Russell Orchards apple cider doughnuts. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

What's your favorite part of the overall cider doughnut experience?

Picking a good view and taking that first bite. On Wachusett Mountain, they have a cider doughnut shack [Bullock Lodge] halfway down one of the runs. One of my most favorite cider doughnut memories is on the ski hill. You pop your skis off, walk in, they have a fire going inside this little cabin, and they sell cider doughnuts. I brought it outside and sat on a picnic table in the snow and ate the doughnut. Can't beat that.

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What other suggestions do you have for people using the map to plan a tasting-road-trip?

I have it broken into two categories: Farms and orchards, and bakeries and restaurants. I wanted to include [the latter], but it's not the same energy.

As far as what I look for, you can almost tell when you're pulling into the parking lot. For farm equipment, you're looking for them having big barrels of apples. If it's adjacent to an orchard, you're in a good spot. A roadside stand may not have something hot because they'll have to prepackage it and drive it up. So for me, it's worth it to go straight to the farm.

What would you pair it with? Cider, coffee, tea?

I've done hot cider, cold cider, and just nothing. It depends. There's no wrong way to do it.

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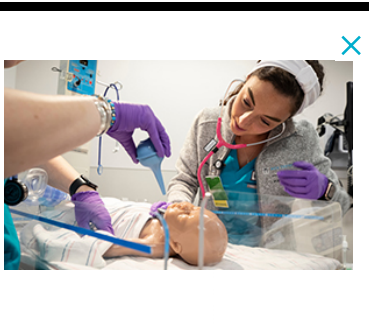
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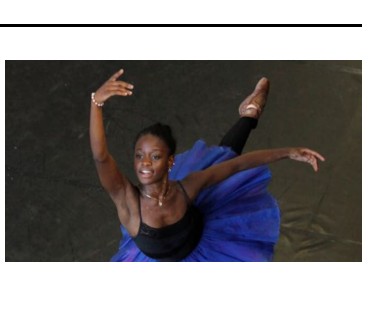
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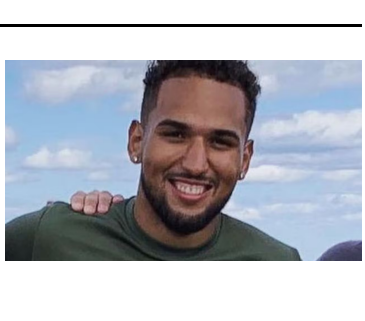
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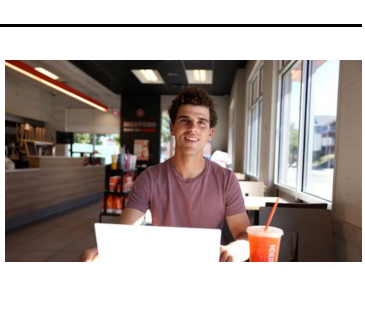
The Patriots are playing safe, old-school football — 3 yards and a cloud of dust — and it's not fun to watch.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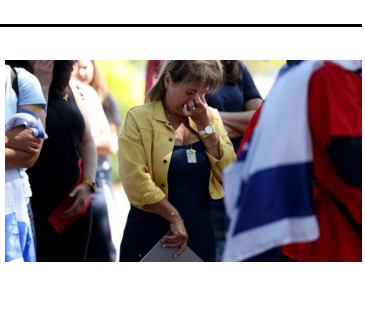
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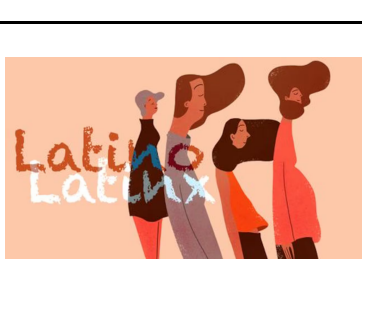
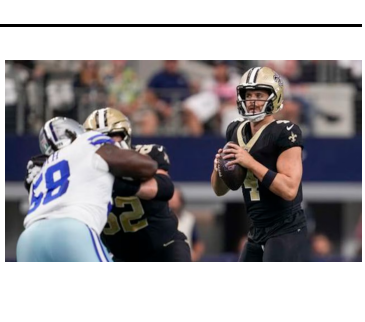


OPINION

To Latinx or not to Latinx

Despite increased awareness of the term, only 4 percent of Latino adults use Latinx to describe themselves, according to a new report. Why is the term so strongly rejected?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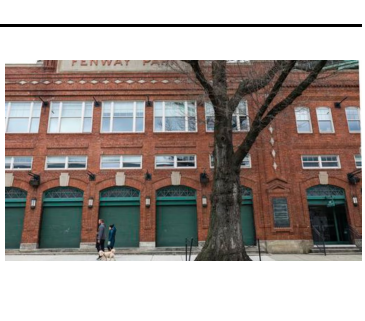
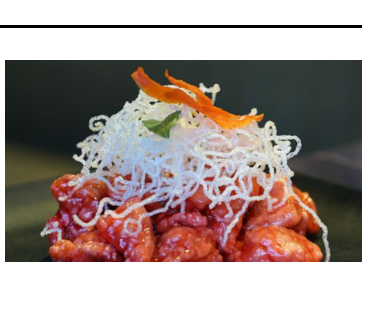
NFL Week 2 in Review: Of course the Saints are exploding on offense — they hired a 49ers coach

It's remarkable how well Kyle Shanahan's offense travels to other teams, and most impressive is the performance of 33-year-old quarterback Derek Carr.


RED SOX

Red Sox do not intend to renew contracts for handful of longtime instructors, scouts

As part of an overhaul of the team's pitching development efforts, three longtime pitching coordinators were informed they won't be back.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A first look at 9 Dragons at The Brook, a new Kowloon restaurant in Seabrook, N.H.

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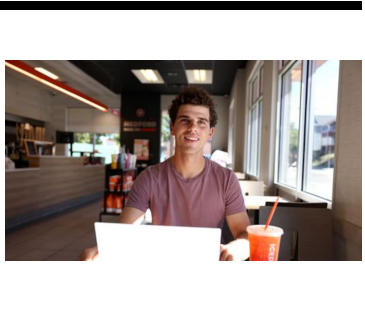
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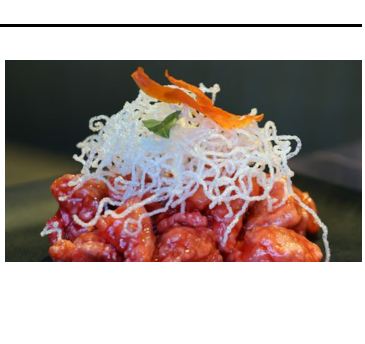
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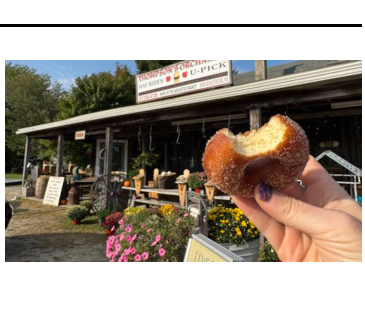
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