Web surfers go gourmet

While some dot-coms have deflated, gourmet food has boomed on the Internet.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Picked wild in a Bulgarian forest, prized chantarelle mushrooms are packed into crates, flown to Paris, then to a refrigerated warehouse in New Jersey filling Web site orders in days.

In a cheese cellar in Nantes, France, a computer screen shows a visitor to Cheese-online.com wants a seven-pound wheel of brie. It's whisked to the customer's doorstep in Cincinnati

Shoppers at D'Agostino Supermarkets in New York pick from 15,000 specialty items from yellow Caribbean starfruit to \$75 Italian balsamic vinegar aged for 20 years.

Gourmet isn't just for connoisseurs anymore.

Whether it's creamy black caviar from Iran or silky foie gras from France, today's consumers can indulge in novelties nearly anytime - fruits of a global economy that's modernized delivery and spawned an army of entrepreneurs touting once-obscure products.

Helped by last decade's economic boom in the United States, such consumption has created a \$40 billion U.S. specialty foods industry, expanding by a third since the early 1990s. Gone are the days when gourmet cuisine was an exotic treat for restaurantgoers or tourists in faraway places.

"The world is too small to use a word like 'exotic,"' said David Sneddon, owner of Fairway Market, a New York seller of everything from pig's feet to caviar. The trend comes at a price: four slices of fresh foie gras - fattened duck or goose liver ordered over Dean & Deluca's Web site tops \$100. Moreover, all that consumption is harming ecosystems, from vanishing sturgeon in the Caspian Sea to Thai mangrove forests razed for shrimp farms.

Easy access to special foods also has ruined some of their mystique.

Some things should only be available in certain places," said Edward Behr, editor of The Art of Eating magazine, based in Peacham, Vt. "It certainly is more exciting to discover a special food in some small village in Italy than it is to discover it in Dean & Deluca.'

Such concerns are hardly slowing gourmet's spread.

Using refrigerated air freight and computerized invoicing and overcoming customs hassles and the occasional lost container purveyors are shipping products thousands of miles to homes, restaurants and stores, often within 24 hours.

Digital TV may be held back

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Digital television promises clearer pictures, more channels and new data services - but it hasn't yet delivered brisk sales.

The industries involved are all pointing fingers at one another. Now, the government is looking at stepping in to speed up the process.

Broadcasters say digital TV sets are too expensive and argue their digital programming must be offered immediately on cable systems to reach a wide audi-

TV makers assert that broadcasters have not produced enough compelling content to make people want to buy digital TVs. And cable companies say carrying digital broadcast channels right now - while they must still offer the same programming in analog format - could force them to drop popular cable programs from their lineup.

The Federal Communications Commission, which has set a soft deadline of 2006 for the switch from analog to digital TV, is looking to resolve some of these disputes. The commission took the issue off the agenda for its meeting Thursday but is still expected to act on the matter as early as this week.

Broadcasters want the commission to require that all new TVs be capable of receiving digital signals, saying this would give them a large enough audience to spur the development of new digital program-

Digital TV sets are now sold separately and cost several thousand dollars.

Broadcasters are supposed to return their analog channels by 2006 or when digital television reaches 85 percent of the market - whichever is later. In the interim, stations will have two channels - one in digital and the other in analog format - so people can still watch broadcast shows on their existing analog TVs.

"Reaching the 85 percent digital penetration level ... will require that new receivers be capable of handling digital signals."

> **Edward O. Fritts** broadcast industry's chief lobbyist

"Reaching the 85 percent digital penetration level that Congress required before analog television broadcasting comes to an end will require that new receivers be capable of handling digital signals,' Edward O. Fritts, the broadcast industry's chieflobbyist, wrote commission members this month.

FCC Chairman William Kennard last year recommended that Congress order the agency to adopt a 2003 deadline by which all new TV sets can receive digital signals.

TV makers argue that any requirement would limit choice by driving up prices.

"It's an unnecessary tax on consumers," said Michael Petricone, vice president of technology policy for the Consumer Electronics Association. He said consumers already have a number of ways to upgrade to digital television, including integrated TV sets and special set-top boxes.

The FCC also plans to address another thorny question raised by broadcasters, who want both their analog and digital signals carried by cable companies during the transition.

Currently, cable operators are legally obligated to carry analog broadcast TV channels in their cable lineups. That ensures that cable customers can still see over-the-air programming - like NBC or Fox they would normally receive for free.

Men's fashion returns to trusted roots

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MILAN, Italy - The new millennium man is a survivor. Having weathered the stormy 1990s, he is ready to reclaim his male ego and be himself.

The symbol of this re-found identity is the necktie, which after a decade of disuse makes a big comeback on the Milan runway, where the fall-winter 2001-2002 menswear preview showings got under way over the weekend.

In traditional silk and knobby wool or more eccentric leather

and fur, wide and tied in a generous knot, the tie not only accessorizes the traditional suit but also replaces the scarf when paired with a pullover or shirt.

"The tie is a masculine jewel," Donatella Versace said backstage after her latest menswear collection was presented Sunday.

In a famous fashion battle with Giorgio Armani, Donatella's slain brother Gianni had decreed the demise of the tie at the end of

The new Versace tie comes in a bold geometric pattern or in

Earlier Sunday, Dolce & Gabbana sent out a parade of 20 models in slacks, silk shirts and matching monochrome silk ties with ostentatious tie pins.

Far from relegating menswear to a retro classic style, the tie represents a newfound

The stylish dresser of the new millennium in fact can be whatever he wants, whether it be dashing dandy, grimy grunge, bigwig business man or sensational sex symbol.

Omaha makes gains at Eppley air terminal sengers served was just more than

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OMAHA — A record number of passengers were served at Eppley Airfield last year but it has not reached its capacity.

The record 3.81 million pas-

1 percent above 1999's 3.77 million passengers.

The increase came despite a 15.3 percent decline in passengers on United Airlines, traditionally the airport's busiest carrier.

500 Help Wanted

The terminal was built in 1986

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

to handle 5 million passengers, Omaha Airport Authority **Executive Director Don Smithey**

The authority should begin planning a terminal expansion when passenger traffic hits 4.2 million passengers, Smithey said.



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ed 3 M/F to share large, nice home. Close to NL. Hot tub, W/D. \$200 plus 1/4 utilities. John

467-1014. Roommate needed now to May. 14th & Superior, 2 bedroom/bath, big. \$283+electricity. Tony. 770-3572.

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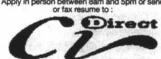
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