



Leslie Wiser is a Taiwanese-German American grower who focuses on Asian chile peppers and heritage produce.

Gabrielle Lurie/S.F. Chronicle

Saving rare seeds is an ‘act of resistance’

Collective preserves Asian varieties adapted to extreme weather

By Ko Lyn Cheang
STAFF WRITER

Farmer Kristyn Leach held a heap of tiny emerald seeds in her palm with great reverence. She told the dozen-odd women gathered to help thresh and winnow at Leach’s Sebastopol farm not just to admire the seeds’ beauty.

“I want you to try to look at a seed in a way that you can feel the seed looking at you,” Leach said. “That reflection is all your ancestors looking at you.”

The seeds belonged to the molokhia plant, also known as jute mallow, whose leafy greens have been used to make a savory, slimy soup in the Middle East and Africa since the time of ancient Egyptian pharaohs.

“Cleopatra is looking at me!” responded Nadia Barhoum, a Palestinian American grower.

Leach and Barhoum are part of a collective called Second Generation Seeds, breeding and saving seeds from rare and heirloom varieties of Asian, Palestinian and North African fruits and vegetables.



Rachel Bujalski/For the S.F. Chronicle

Kristyn Leach, a Korean American farmer, holds Korean soybeans at her farm in Sebastopol. Leach is part of a collective called Second Generation Seeds.

Through careful selection, the group saves the seeds best adapted to extreme weather, the result of climate change.

Operating out of Leach’s Sebastopol farm, the \$1.5 million Gohyang Seed Campus serves as a home base for Bay Area growers in the collective to process and house the

hundreds of seed varieties they produce.

As climate change and other ecological crises threaten food systems across the globe, Leach and her counterparts believe a diverse Asian seed library is key to food security and keeping alive their culinary traditions. Moreover, they said it pro-

motes independence from major agriculture companies, which control most of the seed market. Just three corporations own a majority of patents for new seed varieties, a U.S. Department of Agriculture report found.

“These seeds have seen so much, the most tumult-

Seeds continues on A8

Killings plummet in S.F. and Oakland

Big cities’ homicides in 2025 fell to lowest point in half a century

By Danielle Echeverria
STAFF WRITER

The Bay Area’s three largest cities continued to see drops in homicide in 2025, each of them hitting decadeslong lows, the Chronicle found.

San Francisco and Oakland saw particularly sharp declines. San Francisco’s 28 homicides in 2025 were the fewest since 1954, according to a Chronicle analysis of police department and FBI data, and Oakland’s 57 killings were the fewest since 1967.

San Jose, which typically sees fewer homicides than San Francisco and Oakland, still saw a noteworthy drop: Its 26 total killings were the lowest number since 2010.

The Bay Area drops, which build on decreases in killings in 2024, are part of a nationwide trend. Homicides across the country in 2025 probably had the largest one-year drop ever recorded — the third straight year setting such a record, according to crime analyst Jeff Asher. Several other cities are likely to hit the same kind of historic lows as San Francisco and Oakland, he found, including Baltimore, Detroit, New Orleans and Philadelphia. And smaller cities are seeing improvements too: East Palo Alto, for example, finished the year with no killings at all for the second time since 2023.

The declines show “tremendous progress that should be celebrated,” he wrote, while acknowl-

Homicides continues on A7

Dozens brave cold and rain to plunge into 2026

By Joaquin Palomino
STAFF WRITER

Soggy weather didn’t stop dozens of brave bathers from plunging into the frigid, 54 degree waters at Ocean Beach to wash away the old year and kick off the new one.

Children in swim trunks better suited for summer played with long strands of seaweed, while some adults stayed bundled in their winter attire, keeping warm until it was time to jump into the sea Thursday morning.

While the New Year’s Day Polar Plunge has drawn hundreds of participants in past years, the rain kept the crowd small — but dedicated — in 2026.

“I tried not to think about the weather,” said Rich Ranky, who had done three previous plunges and planned to go home to a hot cup of tea after running into the Pacific Ocean. “It feels distinctively crazy and San Franciscan. ... It’s a life affirming moment.”

Around 10:30 a.m., the group ran across the soggy sand and dove into the waves, frolicking in the chilly waters while yelling “Happy new year” and high-fiving each other. Most people returned to the relative warmth of the beach after about a minute,

Plunge continues on A9

Meet godmother of Korean food explosion

By Cesar Hernandez
ASSOCIATE RESTAURANT CRITIC

I ate a lot of Korean food in 2025.

There were jumbo chicken burgers glazed in fiery Buldak ramen-flavored sauce at Los Angeles-based Chimmelier, which expanded to the Bay Area with locations in Berkeley and Oakland in quick succession. I tried gloriously rich marinated crab at Tang Jip, a homestyle soup chain, and yukhoe (Korean beef tartare) piled over fried onigiri at the highly anticipated Oken in Oakland. San Francisco gained a sool jib, a stylish Korean drinking den, with Jilli — another

Los Angeles import.

I started to notice a common neighbor. Chimmelier in Oakland was 10 paces away from Ohgane, a Korean barbecue mini-chain. In Alameda, Tang Jip and another location of Ohgane were so close, the buildings could almost hold hands.

The connection ran further than I thought.

Ohgane and Chimmelier joined forces to create smashburger spot Oh G Burger. Ohgane, it turned out, has ties to Oken; both are part of the OMC Hospitality group. Donghyuk “Dustin” Lee, director of operations for OMC Hospitality, confirmed that the group also runs Tang Jip

Korean continues on A7



Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

Micha Oh, shown at Tang Jip in Hayward, runs a 20-year-old empire that includes 30 restaurants, the bulk of them Korean, in the Bay Area and beyond.