

English articles

It's useful to read articles in English, even if you don't understand every word - it will help you increase your vocabulary and keep up to date with things happening in English-speaking countries!

*This page will be updated on **Mondays**. The first article is aimed at a B1 and upwards level and the second article is aimed at a B2 and upwards level*

Articles of the week



The Vatican closes the Sistine Chapel to the public and prepares for a papal conclave



By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Exit tourists. Enter cardinals.

The Vatican has closed the Sistine Chapel, where cardinals will gather for the conclave to elect the next pope after the death of Pope Francis on April 21 at age 88.

Francis was buried Saturday after a funeral in St. Peter's Square that gathered world leaders and hundreds of thousands of others, and a nine-day period of mourning is continuing before the conclave can start.

But the church is at the same time turning its attention to the next steps.

Key is preparing the Sistine Chapel for the red-robed cardinals who will gather at the Vatican in the heart of Rome to choose the next pope in an ancient process fictionalized in the 2024 film "Conclave."

One key task: installing the chimney where ballots will be burned after votes.

Those visitors who managed to enter on Sunday considered themselves lucky, since there is no telling how long the conclave will last, and how long the gem of the Vatican Museums will remain off-limits.

"I think we felt very lucky to be able to be the last group of visitors to come in today," said Sumon Khan, a tourist from the United States. "You know, our trip would not have been complete without seeing this beautiful place."

According to a schedule determined by church law, the conclave can only begin after the nine-day mourning period. It is expected to start between May 5 and May 10.

When it does, the cardinals will enter solemnly to participate in a secretive process said to be guided by the holy spirit that will result in the selection of the next leader of the 1.4 billion-strong Catholic church. The choice will determine whether the next pontiff will continue Francis' reforms, with his focus on the poor and marginalized and the environment, or whether they will choose a pontiff closer in style to conservative predecessors like Benedict XVI focused on doctrine.

For inspiration, the cardinals will also have the great beauty of the frescoes painted by Michelangelo and other renowned Renaissance artists. The most recognizable is Michelangelo's Creation of Adam, showing God's outstretched hand imparting the divine spark of life to the first man.

The chapel is named after Pope Sixtus IV, an art patron who oversaw the construction of the main papal chapel in the 15th century. But it was a later pontiff, Pope Julius II, who commissioned the works by Michelangelo, who painted the ceiling depicting scenes from Genesis from 1508 and 1512 and later returned to paint the Last Judgement on one of the walls.

When the conclave opens, cardinals will chant the Litany of Saints, the solemn, mystical Gregorian chant imploring the intercession of the saints, as they file into the chapel and take an oath of secrecy. The chapel's thick double doors will close and the master of liturgy will utter the Latin words "Extra omnes," meaning "everyone out."

The secretive process is part of a tradition aimed at preserving the vote from external interference.

The world will then wait for a sign that a successor to Francis has been chosen. Black smoke coming from the chimney in the Sistine Chapel will indicate that they haven't achieved the two-thirds majority for a new pope.

But when a pope is finally chosen, white smoke will rise and bells will toll.

Associated Press video reporter Pietro De Cristofaro contributed from Rome.

How bugs and beet juice could play roles in the race to replace artificial dyes in food



By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

ST. LOUIS (AP) — As pressure grows to get artificial colors out of the U.S. food supply, the shift may well start at Abby Tampow's laboratory desk.

On an April afternoon, the scientist hovered over tiny dishes of red dye, each a slightly different ruby hue. Her task? To match the synthetic shade used for years in a commercial bottled raspberry vinaigrette — but by using only natural ingredients.

“With this red, it needs a little more orange,” Tampow said, mixing a slurry of purplish black carrot juice with a bit of beta-carotene, an orange-red color made from algae.

Tampow is part of the team at Sensient Technologies Corp., one of the world's largest dyemakers, that is rushing to help the salad dressing manufacturer — along with thousands of other American businesses — meet demands to overhaul colors used to brighten products from cereals to sports drinks.

“Most of our customers have decided that this is finally the time when they're going to make that switch to a natural color,” said Dave Gebhardt, Sensient's senior technical director. He joined a recent tour of the Sensient Colors factory in a north St. Louis neighborhood.

Last week, U.S. health officials announced plans to persuade food companies to voluntarily eliminate petroleum-based artificial dyes by the end of 2026.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. called them “poisonous compounds” that endanger children's health and development, citing limited evidence of potential health risks.

The federal push follows a flurry of state laws and a January decision to ban the artificial dye known as Red 3 — found in cakes, candies and some medications — because of cancer risks in lab animals. Social media influencers and ordinary consumers have ramped up calls for artificial colors to be removed from foods.

A change to natural colors may not be fast

The FDA allows about three dozen color additives, including eight remaining synthetic dyes. But

making the change from the petroleum-based dyes to colors derived from vegetables, fruits, flowers and even insects won't be easy, fast or cheap, said Monica Giusti, an Ohio State University food color expert.

"Study after study has shown that if all companies were to remove synthetic colors from their formulations, the supply of the natural alternatives would not be enough," Giusti said. "We are not really ready."

It can take six months to a year to convert a single product from a synthetic dye to a natural one. And it could require three to four years to build up the supply of botanical products necessary for an industrywide shift, Sensient officials said.

"It's not like there's 150 million pounds of beet juice sitting around waiting on the off chance the whole market may convert," said Paul Manning, the company's chief executive. "Tens of millions of pounds of these products need to be grown, pulled out of the ground, extracted."

To make natural dyes, Sensient works with farmers and producers around the world to harvest the raw materials, which typically arrive at the plant as bulk concentrates. They're processed and blended into liquids, granules or powders and then sent to food companies to be added to final products.

Natural dyes are harder to make and use than artificial colors. They are less consistent in color, less stable and subject to changes related to acidity, heat and light, Manning said. Blue is especially difficult. There aren't many natural sources of the color and those that exist can be hard to maintain during processing.

Also, a natural color costs about 10 times more to make than the synthetic version, Manning estimated.

"How do you get that same vividness, that same performance, that same level of safety in that product as you would in a synthetic product?" he said. "There's a lot of complexity associated with that."

The insects that could make 'Barbie pink' naturally

Companies have long used the Red 3 synthetic dye to create what Sensient officials describe as "the Barbie pink."

To create that color with a natural source might require the use of cochineal, an insect about the size of a peppercorn.

The female insects release a vibrant red pigment, carminic acid, in their bodies and eggs. The bugs live only on prickly pear cactuses in Peru and elsewhere. About 70,000 cochineal insects are needed to produce 1 kilogram, about 2.2 pounds, of dye.

"It's interesting how the most exotic colors are found in the most exotic places," said Norb Norbrega, who travels the world scouting new hues for Sensient.

Artificial dyes are used widely in U.S. foods. About 1 in 5 food products in the U.S. contains added colors, whether natural or synthetic, Manning estimated. Many contain multiple colors.

FDA requires a sample of each batch of synthetic colors to be submitted for testing and certification. Color additives derived from plant, animal or mineral sources are exempt, but have been evaluated by the agency.

Health advocates have long called for the removal of artificial dyes from foods, citing mixed studies indicating they can cause neurobehavioral problems, including hyperactivity and attention issues, in some children.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that the approved dyes are safe when used according to regulations and that “most children have no adverse effects when consuming foods containing color additives.”

But critics note that added colors are a key component of ultraprocessed foods, which account for more than 70% of the U.S. diet and have been associated with a host of chronic health problems, including heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

“I am all for getting artificial food dyes out of the food supply,” said Marion Nestle, a food policy expert. “They are strictly cosmetic, have no health or safety purpose, are markers of ultraprocessed foods and may be harmful to some children.”

The cautionary tale of Trix cereal

Color is powerful driver of consumer behavior and changes can backfire, Giusti noted. In 2016, food giant General Mills removed artificial dyes from Trix cereal after requests from consumers, switching to natural sources including turmeric, strawberries and radishes.

But the cereal lost its neon colors, resulting in more muted hues — and a consumer backlash. Trix fans said they missed the bright colors and familiar taste of the cereal. In 2017, the company switched back.

“When it's a product you already love, that you're used to consuming, and it changes slightly, then it may not really be the same experience,” Giusti said. “Announcing a regulatory change is one step, but then the implementation is another thing.”

Kennedy, the health secretary, said U.S. officials have an “understanding” with food companies to phase out artificial colors. Industry officials told The Associated Press that there is no formal agreement.

However, several companies have said they plan to accelerate a shift to natural colors in some of their products.

PepsiCo CEO Ramon Laguarta said most of its products are already free of artificial colors, and that its Lays and Tostitos brands will phase them out by the end of this year. He said the company plans to phase out artificial colors — or at least offer consumers a natural alternative — over the next few years.

Representatives for General Mills said they're “committed to continuing the conversation” with the administration. WK Kellogg officials said they are reformulating cereals used in the nation's school lunch programs to eliminate the artificial dyes and will halt any new products containing them starting next January.

Sensient officials wouldn't confirm which companies are seeking help making the switch, but they said they're ready for the surge.

“Now that there's a date, there's the timeline,” Manning said. “It certainly requires action.”

Dee-Ann Durbin contributed reporting from Detroit.

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