



THE WILDCAT WAY TO WELLNESS

Kentucky Food Heritage

Kentucky's food and cooks are historically renowned. This publication provides a historical perspective on cooking and eating in the Commonwealth. It also provides advice on eating tasty and healthy regional foods that can be prepared quickly.

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The challenges we face today in appropriately feeding ourselves are largely a matter of our time, skills, and eating behaviors. Eating today is easier than it ever has been. What may not be so easy is the recognition of the *right* food choices, those which meet our physical needs and our sense of belonging to our family and regional community while still preserving our environmental and economic stability.

Taking the time to re-establish important food rituals and methods of commerce is likely to benefit our own well-being and that of our families and our communities. The value of purchasing and preparing foods to eat at work and home needs to be recognized and fostered. Take the time to preserve Kentucky's food heritage and to play your part in its future. Your food choices today will influence the way the world looks tomorrow. The extra effort required to serve local, fresh, and healthy foods will be worth your while.

Early Cooking

As the first state west of the Allegheny Mountains, Kentucky's lifestyle reflects old Virginia's colonial ways. Kentucky has also been influenced by its own native culture and the ethnic and religious groups that settled here. We tend to be fond of our own brand of food such as fried chicken, greens, grits, and corn bread.

An old saying goes, "The less food you have, the more you know about cooking." Kentucky cooks in the early 1900s made their own butter and cottage cheese, canned their own produce, baked breads and desserts, and cured meats. Growing, preserving, and preparing food occupied much of the homemaker's time and resources. Looking today at antique butter churns and molds, we can be thankful for modern advances in agriculture and food systems.

At the beginning of the 20th century, cooking and housekeeping remained hard work, as shown in the following chart, “Cooking and Eating in Kentucky—A Brief History.” In the early 1900s, few tools were available to make cooking easier. The most strenuous activities were getting water from the

well (when no running water was available) and carrying wood for the stove. If you needed milk, you went to the cow. Even families with moderate incomes hired someone to assist with food preparation.

But at the same time, convenience foods such as mass-produced, sliced bread began to

The chart below shows how growing, cooking, and eating have changed in Kentucky over the last 1,000 years:

Cooking and Eating in Kentucky—A Brief History



11th Century Native Americans occupied the land now called Kentucky. In the western part of the state at the meeting of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers lived the Woodland people. The Woodland people gathered a variety of crops and hunted animals for food and medicine. This area provided a wealth of natural resources, including water transportation and wildlife.

14th Century Native Americans of the mound-building cultures, the Mississippian people, lived in permanent settlements in Western Kentucky, which allowed them to develop and experiment with annual crops.

16th Century Native American tribes such as the Cherokee raised crops of corn, beans, various squashes, and sunflower seeds. They gathered fruits and vegetables, hunted game, and speared or trapped fish.

17th Century People from Africa arrived in bondage, bringing okra, black-eyed peas, collard greens, yams, and watermelons to Kentucky and the rest of the South.

18th Century The first Europeans explored Kentucky in the mid-1700s. By the late 1700s, pioneer settlements were established, bringing Scottish, English, and German influences to Kentucky. The Europeans learned from the Native Americans and contributed cattle, pigs, chickens, cabbage, turnips, apples, peaches, and apricots to the local diet.

19th Century During the 1800s, Kentucky cooks began to publish books to share their culinary achievements. In 1839, Lettice Bryan published *The Kentucky Housewife*. In 1874, *Housekeeping in the Bluegrass* was published by the women of the Presbyterian Church of Paris. In 1884, *The New Kentucky Home Cook Book* was published by the Maysville Methodist Episcopal Church. *The Kentucky Cookery Book* by Mrs. Peter A. White was published in 1891, and Mrs. John G. Carlisle's *Kentucky Cook Book* was published in 1893.

be introduced. The first U.S. health food craze was born in Battle Creek, Michigan, when Kellogg's introduced corn flakes in 1906. In the 1920s and '30s, widespread availability of electricity and refrigeration forever changed the way we cook and eat. These conveniences made it possible for ever-smaller families to prepare and manage their own meals without domestic help. Since World War II, our food choices have changed significantly, with the availability of year-round produce, a vast array of new food products, and menus that are influenced by both ethnic and traditional cuisines. Introduction of frozen foods and the microwave oven have dramatically affected food preparation techniques and development of new food products.

Over the last 25 years Kentuckians have developed a taste for fast food and have not been eating enough fruits and vegetables. Consider these facts:

- Only one in five Kentucky adults eats the five daily servings of fruits and vegetables recommended for good health. U.S. consumers are averaging 1½ servings of dairy foods per day, only half the amount recommended for good health.
- Soft drink consumption in the United States has increased 111 percent over the last quarter century.
- In 1997, U.S. food consumers ate 75 percent more sugar and sweeteners than did their counterparts in 1909.

On the other hand:

- Annual consumption of added fats and oils declined seven percent between 1993 and 1997, with total fat consumption recently averaging 33 percent.
- Consumer awareness of the link between dietary fat and risk of heart disease increased 25 percent between 1988 and 1995.

While fat consumption is approaching the recommended level (30 percent of calories) and cardiovascular diseases are on the decline, overweight and obesity are on the rise.

Our ancestors relished the variety of fruits and vegetables described in *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Cookery* (1992). Plenty of fresh vegetables were available in the summer months, including mustard greens, collards, "sallet" greens, tomatoes, onions, lettuce, cucumbers, peppers, okra, English peas, cabbage, beets, beans, carrots, sweet potatoes, and squash.

During the winter our ancestors, lacking refrigeration and having limited food preservation techniques, managed to serve pickled beans and cucumbers, dried beans and field peas, kraut, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, cabbage, turnips, and dried apples. Corn bread, biscuits, and yeast breads were served with meals. Jams, jellies, honey, relishes, and chutneys added flavor. These foods, with smaller amounts of dairy foods, meat, poultry, and fish, formed the diet in much of Kentucky in the early to mid-1900s.

The good old Southern breakfast of grits, country ham, biscuits and redeye gravy is a thing of the past. ...a survey of the eating habits of the residents of a small Southern town...found that the typical breakfast is now cold cereal, milk, toast, coffee, and juice...

This is all very depressing. For years, I've heard that the South will rise again, but nobody told me it would rise to a breakfast of cold cereal...

—Charlie Robins, *Tampa* (Fla.)
Times, 9/26/80

Quoted in *Southern Food* by
John Egerton, 1987

Fruits and Vegetables

In such a land of plenty, it seems a shame that 80 percent of Kentuckians in the 21st century do not eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, because plant foods appear to offer special protection against many diseases, including heart disease, certain cancers, and diabetes. Today fresh, frozen, or canned produce can be prepared by steaming, sauteing, stir-frying, microwaving, stewing, or baking.

Food today is relatively inexpensive, with the average U.S. food budget around 11 percent of take-home income. Calories are easy to come by, but physical activity is hard for many people to work into a daily routine, so weight control is more of an issue than ever.

The food choices of the future, for well-being and sustainability, will need to be lower in both calories and sweets. We will need to learn to be more active in a world of conveniences, televisions, automobiles, and computers. In order to achieve healthier eating patterns, Kentuckians will need to consume greater quantities of whole grains, fresh produce, lean meats, and low-fat dairy products.

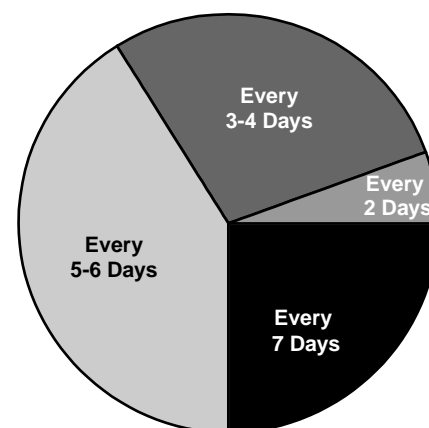
Less Time in the Kitchen

According to The Kitchen Report II, a 1999 survey conducted for the National Pork Producers Council, most family meal preparers (83 percent) like to cook. But are cooking skills becoming rare? Figure 1 shows the frequency of weekly dinner preparation in today's U.S. homes.

Kentuckians, like other U.S. citizens, are spending more time outside the home earning a living and less time preparing meals at home. Savvy consumers who desire more home-cooked meals are learning to use new combinations of convenience foods with fresh, local, and ethnic ingredients. Many meals during the week are prepared with help of the microwave and are one-dish wonders for easy serving and cleanup. Weekends and holidays provide opportunities to share meals with family and friends. An invitation to a home-cooked meal has become one of the hottest tickets in town. In today's world, people appreciate the time and skills required to set the table for a real meal.

What is motivating the food selections of U.S. consumers today? They report that taste is the most important consideration in choosing the foods they eat. The cost of the food is the second most important consideration, followed by convenience, nutrition, and weight control concerns (Glanz et al., 1998).

Figure 1. Frequency of weekly dinner meal preparation in U.S. homes.



I remember food and its daily preparation as a meaningful part of our lives. There were no frozen dinners, no quick-fix meals to be picked up at the supermarket.

—Betty Layman Receveur,
“Mama’s Favorite” in *Savory Memories*, L. E. Beattie; ed., 1998.

The desire for convenience was evident, as reported in The Kitchen Report II. It showed that most food consumers (98 percent) use convenience items like salad mixes, shredded cheese, canned and frozen foods, and prepared deli dishes.

Cooking with Kentucky Foods Today

In the year 2000, Kentuckians have many choices. Our ancestors would be amazed at the variety and convenience of foods available in the 21st century. And, as always, we should be knowledgeable about our food supply in order to make informed decisions about food purchases and eating behaviors. The movement toward sustainable local food systems has been under way for some time. The book *21st Century Basics*, published in 1990, noted the following trends:

As we race toward the end of the 20th century, culinary experts are hard at work trying to define the cooking and dining trends that will carry us into the new millennium. While opinions may vary on some fine points, there appears to be a consensus on three basic trends:

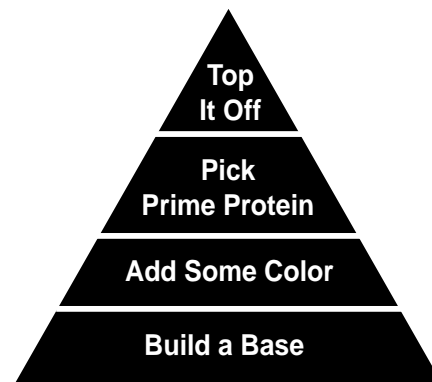
- A continuing emphasis on lighter, fresher, healthier ingredients and methods of preparation that reflects a realization that part of the pleasure of good cooking is the contribution it makes to our general well-being.
- An embracing of the best methods of preparation and ingredients of the world's cuisines.
- A return to basic, home-style cooking with a new emphasis on freshness and lightness and enlivened by a wide range of exotic new ingredients that are fast becoming supermarket staples.

Indeed, these trends are the ones that have taken shape in the year 2000. Food today is more affordable, safer, of greater variety, and more convenient than ever before.

Guide for Good Eating

With today's food supply, responsible food consumers can prepare affordable, tasty, quick, and healthy meals and snacks. To reshape your diet, *The Wildcat Way to Wellness* offers this guide:

- Build a base of good sandwich bread, corn bread, quick breads, bagels, tortillas, pasta, cereals, and whole grains. Buy locally produced baked goods and learn to use flavored baking mixes you can enrich with oats, wheat germ, and fruits. Make your own pancakes, muffins, and quick breads with a reduced-fat baking mix.
- Add some color with plenty of fruits and vegetables prepared any way you like them. Colorful fruits and vegetables generally contain more nutrients. Fresh produce in season, canned tomato products such as salsa and sauces, frozen vegetables, and canned beans can make up



But I am a Southerner, and everyone knows we have all been preoccupied with food and stories since birth...
I have always loved to eat, loved to be around other people eating. Why, I even love pictures of people eating.
—Fannie Flagg, Southern author
Original Whistle Stop Café Cookbook, 1993



your five fruits and vegetables a day. Think about what you like in this category and keep it on hand.

- Pick prime protein from milk, eggs, cheeses, yogurt, meats, poultry, soy, and beans to add satisfaction and important nutrients. Today's pork, beef, and chicken products come in stir-fry and stew cuts, which are ideal to add to a plant-based diet.
- Top it off by enriching your diet with flavors, using relishes, pickles, chutneys, honey, herbs, spices, oils, butter, and margarine. Choose flavorful, heart-healthy oils like olive, soy, peanut, or canola. Flavored oils such as roasted garlic oil deliver concentrated taste in small amounts.

Your county Extension office has a variety of resources to help you learn the skills you need to serve healthy meals that your family will like. Contact your Extension agent for Family and Consumer Sciences to learn more about the food and nutrition programs in your county.

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