



Gravy

This traditional song heralds the arrival of cold weather:
“When it’s chitlin’ cookin’ time in Cheatham county/ I’ll be courtin’ in them Cheatham county hills/
And I’ll pick a Cheatham county chitlin’ cooker/ I’ve a longing that the chitlins will fill.”

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NEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Introducing the Fellowship of Southern Chefs, Farmers, and Artisans

by Angie Mosier

In February of 2007, four chefs, two farmers, a ham curer, and a miller gathered around a table at Blackberry Farm, on the cusp of the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, to lay down the infrastructure for the Fellowship of Southern Chefs, Farmers, and Artisans.

The idea behind the Fellowship came from SFA member John Shelton Reed who, in addition to coediting *Cornbread Nation 4* for the SFA, is a member of the august Fellowship of Southern Writers. Reed suggested that the SFA might sponsor a similar congress for the benefit of the region’s most accomplished and respected food professionals.

In short, the idea was to host a gathering where great food and drink fuel great conversation and intellectual exchange. Attending that inaugural gathering were:

Founding Chef Fellows

Ben Barker and Karen Barker, *Magnolia Grill*, Durham, NC

Leah Chase, Dooky Chase, *New Orleans*, LA

Louis Osteen, *Louis’s at Pawley’s*, Pawley’s Island, SC

Frank Stitt, *Highlands Bar and Grill*, Birmingham, AL

Founding Farmer Fellows

Margaret Ann Toohey and David Snow, *Snow’s Bend Farm*, Coker, AL

Founding Artisan Fellows

Allan Benton, *Benton’s Smoky Mountain Country Hams*, Madisonville, TN

Mark Guenther, *Muddy Pond Sorghum Mill*, *Muddy Pond*, TN

Glen Roberts, *Anson Mills*, Columbia, SC

In meetings at Blackberry Farm, the group adopted a mission statement: “The Fellowship of Chefs, Farmers, and Artisans fosters camaraderie and mentorship, honoring the bounty of the South and the hands that grow, nurture, and interpret its harvest.”

What’s more, while at table it became evident that the Fellows wish to share knowledge and “best practices” across disciplines. The vision statement they adopted reflects as much: “To provide a forum for chefs, farmers, and artisans to break bread and share knowledge while reinforcing the sustaining bridge between field and table.”

And now, at the next Taste of the South event—a January 3-5, 2008, benefit for the SFA staged annually at Blackberry Farm—the Fellows will inaugurate a new class:

Chef Scott Peacock, *Watershed*, Decatur, GA

Farmer Alex and Betty Hitt, *Peregrine Farm*, Saxapahaw, NC

Artisan Jeremy and Jessica Little, *Sweetgrass Dairy*, Thomasville, GA

Eventually, the Fellowship will be a separate and self-governing organization. To start, however, the SFA will act as an incubator. And Georgeanna Milam Chapman, who recently completed her coursework in the Southern Studies graduate program at Ole Miss, will serve as the Fellowship’s administrator.

The SFA and the Fellowship invite you to join them for a weekend of great food, wonderful conversation, and lively presentations at Blackberry Farm. Mark your calendars for January 3-5. Better yet, call Anne Marie Williams at Blackberry Farm (865-984-8166) and book the full weekend or, if you’re not able to join us for the entirety, the gala dinner on Saturday night. For more information on Blackberry Farm, point your browser to www.blackberryfarm.com.

SAVE THE DATE

Taste of the South Weekend
Honoring the SFA's Fellowship of
Southern Chefs, Farmers, and Artisans
January 3-5

Blue Grass and Brown Whiskey
A Field Trip to Louisville, Kentucky
July 11-13

⇒ GRAVY ⇐

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Pork, Rice, and Crawfish: Donald Link Talks about Pigs

by Tom Head

Even before the Chinese calendar declared this the year of the pig, pork was going through a revival in American cooking. Donald Link's housemade sausages and charcuterie, his roast suckling pig, and his Kurobuta pork belly received rave reviews at Herbsaint, the New Orleans restaurant he opened with Susan Spicer, so it made sense that he should name his next restaurant Cochon. This devotion to the pig led to his being named Best Chef: South by the James Beard Foundation earlier this year.

Link comes by his fondness for pork honestly. His family is rooted in Acadia Parish, around the towns of Rayne and Crowley, the heart of Louisiana rice-growing country. Although south Louisiana is usually thought of as a French settlement, Link's family was German (the village of Rayne hosts an annual Germanfest in October).

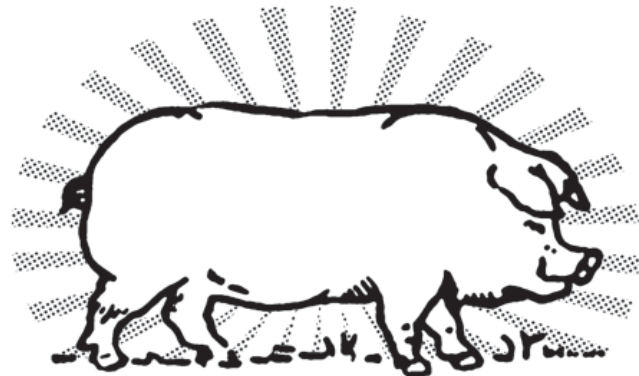
"The three main food groups when I was growing up," Link says, "were pork, rice, and crawfish." He recently returned to Acadia Parish to join his uncles and cousins for their annual sausage-making day and found, to his amazement, that in a day they make about 2,000 pounds of sausage, to be divided among ten families. "There was a pile of pork trimmings and shoulders ten feet high," Link says.

While the quantity of sausage is impressive, the reasons for it are unfortunate. "The kids just won't eat blood sausage or headcheese, so the ingredients for many of the traditional dishes now just go into sausage. Fast food and TV dinner may have ruined the next generation."

Part of the reason for the diversity of Link's own pork cookery is, he admits, that he buys whole pigs and wants to use every part. Between the two restaurants, he uses on average about three whole pigs a week. "It's a challenge to sell it all—it sells at different rates," so in addition to the usual hams, ham hocks, ribs, sausage, and boudin, he makes salami, cracklings, headcheese, pork jerky, bacon, and other dishes. (As well as at the restaurants, some of his charcuterie is available at St. James Cheese Company at 5004 Prytania in the Uptown neighborhood.)

Link buys locally raised pork, organic when possible. "It's more important to stay with a good farmer than with strict organic standards," he says. "Grocery store pork is often pretty nasty—it has often been killed more than a month earlier and has stuff smeared all over it. I want to know the kill date and what the pig has been eating." He has done some experimenting with older breeds of pig and thinks that the American Guinea Hog is the "Kobe beef of pork" with great fat and marbling.

Donald Link's cookbook will be published by Clarkson Potter late next year. His boudin balls were served at the Saturday night Year of the Pig Feed at this year's symposium.



Letter from the President

It is next to impossible to be involved in the SFA and fail to notice our deep attachment to the pig. We talk, eat, praise, commemorate, cheer, chew on, and sing about the pig. I am all for pigs. I respect their place of honor in the history and foodways traditions of the American South. They are as smart as they can be. And what could be cuter than one of Farmer Eliza MacLean's Saxapahaw, North Carolina pile-ups of Ossabaw piglets? But all this pig love aside, I have to admit when I assumed the presidency of the Southern Foodways Alliance in 2006, I thought that pigs might step down from the dais for a bit and take a well-deserved rest in recognition of my Jewish heritage.

Do not get me wrong—I was not asking them to disappear—just to “chill” for the sake of my people. I figured we could venerate another iconic southern animal for a few months. How about the chicken? Jews across the nation would understand my promotion of fried chicken, and chicken soup. What could be better? But, no! John T. tells me, “It’s the Year of the Pig!” I ignore him, because he thinks it is always the Year of the Pig. He keeps talking about the Year of the Pig. I finally ask, “You mean it REALLY is ‘the Year of the Pig?’” John T. nods enthusiastically.

So, folks, it is true. This is, according to the lunar calendar, the Year of the Pig, and I am blessing it, as only a Jewish woman

from Arkansas can. Here is my contribution to the Year of the Pig: a recipe for Pork Cake from the archives of the Georgia Historical Society. Oy! I mean sooiie!

Marcie Cohen Ferris

Pork Cake

One pound of raw pork chopped very fine; add half a pint of boiling water, 1 pound of seeded raisins, 1/2 pound of shredded citron, 2 cups sugar, 1 cup molasses, 1 teaspoon soda dissolved in a little water. Mix these ingredients; add 1 tablespoon cloves, 1 tablespoon cinnamon, and 1 tablespoon nutmeg. Stir in 3 cups sifted flour to reach the consistency of common cake mixture. Bake at approximately 300 degrees for 1 hour and 40 minutes.

– Mrs. Rigden

From *Sweet and Meat and Other Good Things To Eat*, compiled and published by the Ladies Society of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, Savannah, Georgia, 1917.

North Carolina Pool Room Food

by Mike Cavanagh

There were three pool rooms in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina in the late 1960s, and I worked at the best one. It was the Orton Cigar Store, and it shared a large basement space with the Orton Barber Shop. These establishments were all that was left of the Orton Hotel, which had burned down to the first floor decades before.

Men, and all our customers were men, came to the Orton to play pool and drink beer, sometimes not in that order of priority. At night these activities could take up so much time that the customers got hungry, and we offered enough sustenance for the players to stay in the game long enough for their luck to change and for the drinkers to counteract their alcohol intake. During the day, the food allowed a billiards addict to get in a quick game or two on his lunch hour.

The Orton carried every conceivable brand of candy bar, even the weird Zero with the polar bear logo; an equally wide range of packaged crackers, always called “nabs”; a comprehensive selection of nuts; and a dozen or so varieties of cellophane-wrapped cakes and cookies. The regular customers all had their favorites.

Our counter also featured items less commonly available: gallon jars of pickled hot sausages and pickled hard-boiled eggs (pickled in the spicy vinegar left when all the sausages were sold); and, sometime, jars of pickled pigs feet and red beet eggs.

We also sold Dandy brand sandwiches, delivered in individual cellophane wrappers each morning by Dandy

himself, a Mr. McDaniel whose father-in-law owned the local Holsum bakery. And the sandwiches could be remarkable. I never learned who made them, but they reflected a Southern attitude to food that makes it hard to believe you could find them somewhere else.

There was the pimento cheese, fairly bland and homogenous in its original state, but a sensational treat when toasted to lava in our sandwich grill. (I’m afraid that machine would be called a panini press today.)

There were chicken salad and ham salad sandwiches, and ham sandwiches with slices of hard-boiled egg and dill pickles. There was a Poor Boy sandwich made of cold cuts and cheese, the only one not served on white bread. It came on a roll with sesame seeds, exotic for the time.

Two sandwiches were so popular that people would often come in the morning when Mr. McDaniel made his rounds and ask me put them aside for later. Presumably a by-product of the chicken-salad manufacturing process, these sandwiches, made from chicken livers and gizzards, were a relative rarity: They consisted of 10 or so of the little organs, coated in a peppery batter and deep fried, nestled between two slices of Holsum’s finest.

Nobody came to the Orton for the food, but it was good, fresh, wholesome, and homey. Not much to distract you from your game or your beer, it was just what you wanted at the time. And I want one of those chicken gizzard sandwiches right now.

Farming in the Future

by Timothy C. Davis

If you're anything like me – i.e. neither raised on a farm nor born in a barn – you probably heard the phrase “farm bureau” growing up and associated it with kids wearing those iconic navy blue FFA jackets with the weird gold script.

I was worse than most. My mother and father (and my mother's and father's mother and father) grew up on farms and, indeed, made their living from said farms. But I thought rather little of farmers, if I thought of them at all. My Pops had a pretty good backyard garden back then, growing okra, squash, dill, cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, radishes and turnips. However, except for rare instances, I pretty much blocked out where my food came from. I found it at the supermarket, and figured it was their job to do all the research/moralization/whathaveyou.

An embarrassing number of years later, I did become interested. I hunted down local growers. I bought from farmers' markets. I ate locally “produced” meat and fish, if at all. However, as is the case with any life fortunate enough to know change and growth, I found that the more I learned, the more realized I knew so very little.

My thirst for knowledge needed slaking. Where to go for political news, and issues facing farmers? To study long-term,

even decades-long weather patterns for my region and home state? To find out about food safety issues? To merely support farmers and, by extension, my region in general?

As with so many things, the answer lay at my fingertips. My current home state of South Carolina recently started two Web sites, www.savorSC.com and www.CertifiedSCgrown.com, to help the average working stiff learn how buy local, and chat about their favorite foods, food producers, and food preparers. Indeed, on most such sites, you can even link to farmers directly. Many other states have similar sites -- many through the state Farm Bureau. The easiest way to access all these resources is to simply Google your home state and “farm bureau,” or, perhaps easier still, go to www.fb.org, which has links to farm bureaus in all 50 states, and even some specific counties.

Regardless of how you use these sites, they can be interesting resources for folks traveling from out of state poking around for locally grown produce and meats, or for folks in a given state who might want to deal with farmers (and understand the issues that affect them) directly, as opposed to secondhand.

I'm not a Future Farmer. Never was. But that doesn't mean I can't help the farmers of the future – and myself, all at the same time.



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