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Food and Farming

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Bread Baking Now and Then

By ReadWorks

Did you know that bread is one of the earliest human inventions? Bread is a food made of flour and water. Other ingredients and shape can vary. Scientists have learned that humans have been eating bread in some form or another for 30,000 years.

Ancient Egyptians ate a lot of bread. In fact, because they had no potatoes or rice, bread was the most important carbohydrate source in the ancient Egyptian's diet.

Egypt gets little rain. Ancient Egyptian farmers relied on the annual flooding of the Nile River to irrigate their fields. Egyptian farmers paid a portion of their grain harvest to the Egyptian treasury.

Archaeologists have discovered illustrations of bakeries and loaves of bread in ancient Egyptian burial sites. Professional bakers and home-bakers used the same production techniques. Home-bakers, usually women, baked only the bread they would need for that day.

Egyptians used a grain from emmer wheat for their bread. The grain was ground by hand on a millstone. This process cracked and crushed the grain into coarse flour. The flour was mixed with water and sometimes a little old dough. It was placed in a pot and baked in a clay oven.

This Egyptian bread was a flatbread. Indian naan and Middle Eastern pita are two examples of flatbreads eaten today. At the end of the ancient Egyptian period, however, around 300 B.C., Egyptian bakers added to their bread an important ingredient: yeast. Yeast is a microscopic fungus.

It makes bread rise.

Today bread production is more complicated. Yes, you can still bake your own bread at home with store-bought flour and yeast. You can also buy bread made at small bakeries. But the fluffy bread you see in grocery stores in the United States today is made in large commercial facilities. These commercial facilities, or plants, have business contracts to bake many different bread brands.

Most breads today are made using four basic ingredients: flour, yeast, salt, and water. Farmers across the United States grow wheat in large quantities. Half of the wheat produced is used in the United States. The other half is exported to other countries.

Grain is processed into flour by companies which then sell the flour to commercial bakeries. These bakeries produce the dough and bake the bread, then package it and arrange for its distribution to stores.

Farmers Farm

By ReadWorks

Business people do business, musicians make music, teachers teach, and farmers farm. Right? Yes, but there have been times when a farmer's right to farm has come under attack. You might be thinking, "How can someone be prohibited from pursuing his or her occupation?"

Farmers generally sow seeds in rural land: land that is far from cities. They need the open space, as many farms are very large, spanning over 400 acres on average—that's over 300 football fields! And some cover even more ground; corn farms considered "large" must be over 500 acres!

Farms also come with their share of smells and sounds that aren't always pleasant. Drive past a dairy farm or a pig farm on a hot summer day, and you'll understand! Farming in rural areas typically means farming near fewer people, so neighbors don't have to worry about waking up to tractors coughing and roosters crowing right next door.

There is a current trend of people looking for a break from the noise and other troubles of cities, which sometimes means moving to the country; however, they may face different kinds of noise and troubles in rural communities. For example, big feedlots, where hundreds of cattle and thousands of chickens are raised, are noisy, smelly, dirty operations. Farm equipment can also be noisy. Wide croplands can mean lots of dust and pollen in drier times, which can aggravate sensitive lungs.

Some people get angry about these things and sue farmers based on public or private nuisance laws. A nuisance is someone or something that infringes on a person's ability to enjoy his or her

property, or that threatens the health and safety of a community.

Farm practices that are unregulated or dangerous and cause harm to the public—contamination of water supplies, for example—are definitely taken seriously in court. However, farmers often find themselves under attack for things that are simply facts of life on a farm. These "nuisance" lawsuits became so prevalent across the United States that farmers were beginning to suffer. Being forced to change standard practices or relocate feedlots or fields can hurt a farmer's business.

So, lawmakers began to create protective measures in favor of farmers. These are called "right to farm" laws, and they are now enacted in every state. Essentially, they are what they sound like: laws that protect a farmer's right to conduct his or her business. How do they do that?

Right to farm laws start by informing residents about the presence of a farm and its farming methods. The right to farm laws let the public know that farms do affect surrounding areas and that, to some degree, these effects must be accepted by people living near a farm. The laws also inform residents about the limitations of local nuisance ordinances, letting people know what is or is not considered a reasonable complaint.

Right to farm laws do not completely shield farms from lawsuits. Before action can be taken against a farmer, however, a court must ask some important questions: What is the degree of harm being caused? Does the activity in question threaten health, or is it just inconvenient? Are effects of the purportedly damaging activity lasting or temporary? How long has the farm been practicing its methods without coming under criticism?

These are important factors upon which a court evaluates a case. If a farmer has been contaminating water supplies and causing excess pollution, thereby harming the community, that farmer may indeed have to change his or her ways.

But if the farmer's techniques have done nothing but keep a neighbor from a backyard barbecue because of the smell of manure or noise of machines, then the neighbor might just have to get used to living in the country!

From City to Farm

By Samantha Gross

Jason Detzel was bored with his work as a psychologist for the United States Air Force, and he was tired of spending all day in an office. Many people enjoy working in an office environment with computers, but Dr. Detzel felt that in the city he was losing touch with something important. So the Richmond, Virginia, resident quit his job and started a farm.

He and his business partner found 80 acres of available land in a small town called Claverack, N.Y., and signed a 10-year lease. They bought hammers, crowbars, nails, and wood. While some farms used a lot of machinery, they decided they wanted to do as much as possible with their own hands. They built a corral for the cows so that the cows would stay inside the pasture where they could move around and graze. They built pig shelters where the pigs could be protected from the weather in the winter. They built a house for the chickens where the hens could lay eggs and Dr. Detzel could collect them.

After almost a year and a half, Diamond Hills Farm had grown to include 10 pigs and 20 cows, including a baby calf that Dr. Detzel was feeding with a bottle. The farm was also home to 100 laying hens, which provided eggs, and 100 other chickens that would be used for their meat. After many months of growth, Dr. Detzel felt like he'd already made something important—both for himself and for the land he and his partner owned.

"I'm definitely happier being out in the fields with my animals. Even if there are bad days, I'm still happy," Dr. Detzel said. "When you're inside all day, you don't get to see nature working."

After starting the farm, Dr. Detzel began seeing many aspects of nature at work. Instead of driving

around the farm, he usually walked, and he could feel the texture of the earth beneath his boots. In the winter, the farm became a blinding sea of white. In the summer, it turned into a lush sea of green. Dr. Detzel's work didn't bore him anymore.

"The job is different every day on the farm. It's amazing," he said. "You're a farmer. You're a veterinarian. You're a plumber. You're definitely a carpenter a lot. With animal husbandry, all that stuff is different every day on the farm. You're a jack of all trades, master of none. That's what I like about it."

As a farmer focusing on raising animals, one of Dr. Detzel's most important tasks was to grow a lot of healthy grass for the animals to eat. Each morning, he rang a bell to let the cows know it was time to move to another section of the corral in another part of the pasture where there was plenty to eat. The droppings, left by the cows and chickens that followed behind them, helped grow more green grass to replace what the cows had eaten.

Learning how to manage the animals had been one of the biggest challenges of starting the farm, Dr. Detzel said. He learned that it was important to stick to a routine. That's why he rang the same bell and called to the cows in the same way each day. The routine helped keep the cows calm and cooperative.

"They weigh much more than I do, and they could push through much, much bigger things than I could ever build," he said of his animals. "So it's a matter of keeping them where you want them by keeping them happy."

The cows were most happy, he knew, if they were someplace with lots of good water and plenty of healthy grass. If they weren't satisfied with the amount of grass in a pasture, they always let him know with their loud mooing.

It wasn't easy for Dr. Detzel to be accepted by the other farmers in his community. With all his tattoos, he looked very different. When he started the farm he was in his early 30s, while most other farmers were older. There weren't many young people starting farms, because it had become harder and harder for small family farms to make much income.

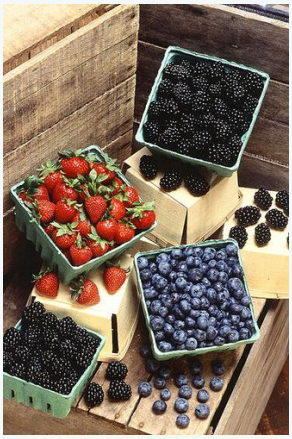
Dr. Detzel said that had begun to change when more people became locavores. A locavore is someone who tries to eat food grown and raised nearby. By shopping at their local farmers market,

many locavores hope to reduce the amount of energy used to ship food long distances. Many locavores like knowing where their food comes from and being able to talk to the farmers about what chemicals were used and how the animals were treated. Some locavores say food that travels less and spends less time in storage tastes much better.

Dr. Detzel likes his new job, but it's much harder to make money. As of July 2013, he was working two jobs—40 hours a week at a local deli and 35 hours or so each week on the farm. But he says it's worth it. "I'm much happier," he said.

Healthy Eating, Healthy Planet

By ReadWorks



BEING HUMAN

Humans are unlike any other animal on Earth. Our unique brains and bodies allow us to use the world's resources in ways no other animal can. No other animal can claim it's been to the bottom of the deepest ocean, to the top of the tallest mountain, *and* even up and out of Earth to the moon. On a simpler level, do you know of any animal that can build a two-story, single-family brick home with an attached garage?

Or just make one of the four toilets in the house?

While exercising our profound abilities (like making toilet bowls), we have fundamentally changed our planet and, in many ways, we've made it *our* planet. We've cut down entire forests to construct towns and cities. We've replaced the trees and plants with buildings, and paved over the forest floor with roads. These activities help us live, but they also create pollution that affects the air we breathe and the water we drink.

EATING FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Luckily, we can reduce the impact our activities have on the planet. One such activity is growing food. Think of all the land, equipment and work that go into a potato farm, an apple orchard or a

cattle operation. By eating the right foods grown in the right way, we can limit the effects our farms and ranches have on the environment and eat our way to a healthier planet!

EAT LIKE SQUIRRELS

A great way to limit your impact on the planet is to follow other animals' way of eating. Squirrels, for instance, eat nuts found close to their tree house. Elephants eat the trees and bushes that grow around them. Killer whales eat the fish swimming with (and away!) from them. What these animals are doing is eating in-season and locally. We can do the same.

EAT IN-SEASON

Most of our favorite fruits and vegetables don't grow year-round and have their own natural season. Modern farming techniques have changed that, and we can have almost anything any time of the year. But when this produce is grown during its natural off-season, it may not taste the same. If we eat with our foods' natural seasons, we are eating in sync with nature.

EAT LOCALLY

Eating locally means consuming produce that is grown close to your home. It will definitely limit your choices, but it will ultimately lower the impact you and your eating habits have on the environment. An easy way to get local produce is to shop at a nearby farmer's market.

Love to eat grapes? Well, you can eat them in-season and locally...if you moved around the world a lot to follow the seasons! Grapes are a summer fruit so during the winter, many northern American supermarkets buy them from farmers in Chile, which is more than 4,000 miles away!

GROW YOUR OWN

One of the best things you can do to be a lower-impact animal is grow your own food. It may seem like a lot of work but people and communities all over the country grow some or all of their own food. There are many benefits to growing your own food.

One benefit is just learning about where your food comes from. Most produce found in your grocery store has stickers or signs that tell you where it was grown. Let's say you pick up a tomato and learn the tomato was grown hundreds of miles away before getting into your hand. If you grew a tomato in your backyard, school or local community garden, not only would you save a trip to the grocery

store, you would save that tomato a long trip, and the planet a lot of resources.

Another benefit of growing your own food is that your food is fresher. It can take weeks for produce to get from the farm to your supermarket. By growing your own food, those weeks become just days, hours or even seconds. Now that's fresh!

COMMUNITY

When you buy food that is grown locally, you're also supporting your own community. The money you spend goes toward your neighbors' jobs and businesses and keeps your community strong and unique.

HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY PLANET

Although human activities alter the planet more than any other animal, there are many things we can do limit our impact. The impact of growing and raising our food on the planet is high but by eating locally, in-season, and even growing our own food, we can make the planet a better place while eating great food!

Sticky Fingers, Helping Hands

By ReadWorks

Who doesn't enjoy a chocolate bar?

Okay, maybe not everyone loves chocolate, but a lot of people do. No matter the vehicle—ice cream, cake, as a beverage, or simply in a candy bar—chocolate is enjoyed by millions of Americans. It's readily available, too; all you have to do for a taste is visit a corner market or a drug store, and you'll find a shelf of various chocolate bars waiting.

A lot goes into a chocolate bar, though, and ultimately, its origins trace back further than the grocery store checkout line. Your favorite Halloween candy has roots even deeper than the company that manufactured it. The next time you get to indulge, take a look at the candy wrapper. What's the most important ingredient in a chocolate bar, the one that makes chocolate...well, chocolaty? It's cocoa.

The origins of that corner-store chocolate bar start in fields along the Equator, in countries in South America, Africa, and South Asia. Cocoa comes from the seeds of cacao trees, which thrive in hot, humid climates. This is why most of the world's supply comes from places like Ghana or Nigeria in West Africa. Some cocoa is harvested in countries like Brazil, near the cacao tree's original habitat.

Chocolate farming may sound like a dream job, but unfortunately, the reality of life on a cocoa farm is less than idyllic. Cocoa farms are usually located in small villages in remote areas of countries

that are still developing a lot of the luxuries taken for granted by people who live in first world countries: running water, reliable electricity, accessible education, and so on.

The demand for chocolate throughout the world is high, so farmers work extremely hard to pick cocoa pods. The average workday hours an American may be used to do not apply on these farms—workers don't get scheduled breaks or eight-hour shifts. Laws restricting child labor don't apply here, either. Some cocoa farms use slave labor, buying and selling people as young as children to work long days in dangerous conditions.

Additionally, many of these cocoa farmers aren't making much money, even though the world population loves its chocolate! Sometimes, greedy middlemen—a term for the marketers and salespeople who buy cocoa pods from farmers and sell them to chocolate makers around the world—buy for very little and sell for a much higher price. This means the traders are the ones making money, instead of the farmers.

As people involved in the global trade of cocoa began to find out about the slavery, child exploitation, and unsafe conditions on cocoa farms, they started to demand change. National and international regulations emerged to help regulate the labor and trade of other crops, such as coffee and tea. Cocoa joined the list of commodities that could be "fair trade."

Fair trade is a term that applies to anything farmed or made and traded, usually from small communities in developing countries to bigger communities with first world economies. The fair trade movement aims to fix the ugly scenarios on places like cocoa farms: lots of hard work, no access to medicine, not enough food, and definitely no fair pay.

To be certified as a fair trade product, a farm must adhere to some important rules. First of all, farming practices must be earth-friendly. Sustainability is a big issue for farmers worldwide, and fair trade organizations take it seriously. If a farm can't treat the land well, will it also treat its workers poorly?

Then, the concept of fair trade requires living and work conditions for laborers that are safe and clean. Fair trade certified operations promise better lives for the people doing the work. Fair trade organizations also prohibit the use of child labor and fight back against slave trafficking.

Finally (and this is where the "fair" part of fair trade really comes in), fairly traded products typically sell at higher prices to consumers so that the producers—the cocoa farmers—are getting

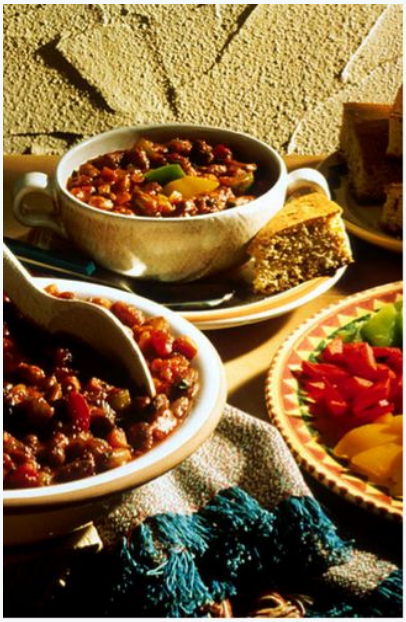
paid a fair amount, often designated by the country's minimum wage.

Becoming fair trade certified is a process, and certification is sometimes expensive. However, once an operation is fair trade certified, the farmers start to earn more money, as their products sell at a higher price. With increased profits, working conditions will also improve.

How can you tell the difference between fair trade chocolate and something that isn't? Look at the label on the candy you're about to enjoy. If there's a symbol on it that reads "Fair Trade Certified," you'll know that the cocoa in your chocolate bar didn't come from a farm that hurts its workers—and that's definitely something sweet.

The Roots of Southern Food

By ReadWorks



A plate of food at Martha Lou's restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina, is a beautiful sight to behold. Vibrant, brightly colored vegetables sit side by side on a white plate. Stewed okra, turnip greens, fried chicken, and cornbread are on the plate. Sweet iced tea is in a glass, and for dessert there is banana pudding.

The food Martha Lou cooks is called "Southern food" or "soul food." Southern food people eat today originated in the American South, but it can now be found all over the United States. Southern food is the result of hundreds of years of trade across oceans. It is mostly the result of cultural exchange between Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans.

Before the first Europeans arrived in North America, the Native Americans living in various parts of the continent had different diets, depending on the plants and animals in their region. Some of the crops Native Americans ate included corn, squash, and beans. Generations of Native Americans improved the crops by selecting seeds for the next harvest from the tastiest crops. They also hunted animals such as squirrels and bison. Each tribe had its own cuisine and cooking habits, but they shared many of these common ingredients.

When the Europeans first arrived in North America, they had never tasted American plants before. The first European settlers brought their own seeds with them. Spinach, turnips, and radishes are all vegetables that came from Europe. In time the Europeans began to eat the American plants as well. Because corn and squash were originally from America, they were sometimes easier to grow in America than the European vegetables. Over time a new "American" diet evolved with dishes that used produce from both Europe and America.

But Southern food doesn't only come from European and Native American cultures. Many of the vegetables, fruits, and grains eaten in the South today came from Africa. In the 1600s, the first Africans arrived on the shores of North America. They came against their will and were sold into slavery. These Africans brought their own food with them across the Atlantic Ocean. Lots of delicious vegetables, legumes, fruits, and grains grew in Africa. Yams, black-eyed peas, watermelon, and some kinds of rice all came from Africa. As more and more Africans were brought to North America as slaves, African produce took root in American soil. Most of the slaves in the United States were in the South. So rice fields covered the wet marshlands along the coast of South Carolina. Black-eyed peas sprung up across the Deep South, from Georgia to Alabama.

Slavery in the United States lasted until 1865, when the 13th Amendment abolished slavery. After the end of slavery, many African Americans continued to live in the Southern states. Over time, the food culture of African Americans and European Americans in the South grew closer, and became what we now call "Southern food."

In time, the produce from Europe, Africa, and America were grown side by side in gardens and fields. The different produce also found their way onto the dinner plate together. Think about what was on that plate of food at Martha Lou's Southern food restaurant: stewed okra, turnip greens, fried chicken, and cornbread. Each produce item came from a different place. Okra came from Africa. Turnip greens came from Northern Europe. And cornbread? Native Americans were making something like cornbread long before European settlers arrived in North America, and the European settlers made their own version of European breads using corn instead of the wheat they had used on their home continent.

Southern food spread throughout the United States when African Americans from the South moved to major cities across the country. From 1900 to 1970, more than 6 million African Americans moved

to big American cities in the North, Midwest, and West. They left the South to seek fair treatment and more opportunities. They brought with them the foods and traditions of their past home.

Southern food traditions are still changing today. As new immigrants from other parts of the world move to the United States, they bring their own food traditions. There are now Asian-Southern restaurants in Atlanta and Caribbean soul restaurants in New York City. New patterns of migration and trade will change the foods that we eat and create new cuisines.