



***Cooking for the (future) President:
President James K. Polk State Historic Site
Where Did This Food Come From?***

Historical Overview

From early American Indians to modern megafarm operators, North Carolinians have long been farmers. The people who have tilled the fields and tended the livestock have changed over time. The types of crops and animals produced, as well as the tools and methods used to nurture them, have differed, too. But agriculture remains a cornerstone of North Carolina's economy, and its development reveals much about our state's history. Some of North Carolina's plants and animals are native to North America, and others were introduced from Europe and Africa. Over time, the state's American Indian, European, and African populations exchanged information about farming and food.

Materials

Articles: "They Were the First to Use This Land: Native American Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture," "European Farmers in a New World," and "African Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture."

Activity Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Answer Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Procedure

1. Introduce this activity by discussing how many of the foods we grow and eat today came from other places. Ask the students if they can name any of these "foreign" foods and where the foods came from.
2. Divide the class into three groups. Each group will work together to read an article and complete the top portion of the activity sheet, listing foods mentioned in the article. Reunite the class to complete the bottom portion. Make copies as needed.
3. Lead a group discussion, asking the students about their reactions to what they have learned. Were they surprised by where foods originated? How does this affect their views about where our foods come from? Why is the list of foods introduced from Africa shorter than the other two lists? (Africans who were taken from their homelands and brought to North Carolina during the colonial period had little time or opportunity to bring plants, seeds, or livestock with them.)

They Were First to Use This Land: Native American Influences of North Carolina's Agriculture

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

Who were the first? You might have guessed that the natives whom the earliest Europeans met were first. And that would have been a good guess. But, even before these natives were first seen by Europeans four hundred years ago, their ancestors were living in this land that has become North Carolina.

Ideas that native storytellers have passed along from generation to generation tell us that these native ancestors have always lived on this land. Archaeologists, though (at least some of them) believe these ancestors migrated here during the Ice Age. (Others are studying new evidence from recent discoveries to see if the ancestors of America's native peoples may actually have been around thousands of years earlier.)

Regardless, these people were the first to use this land. They did not use it to grow or raise food, however—they did not farm it. They did not cultivate crops on it or raise domesticated livestock on it. Instead, they hunted on it and gathered from it what they needed to survive.

Archaeologists describe the earliest of these people as members of the Paleo-Indian culture. Paleo-Indians hunted and gathered their food in the wild. [They lived more than 10,000 years ago.] . . .

A second culture of people, the Archaic Indian culture, lived from about 9000 B.C. until about 2000 B.C. They, too, were hunters and gatherers. However, the Archaic Indians had the advantage of a better climate that supported a larger variety of animals and plants. These natives still migrated to find food, following animal herds and gathering ripening plants, nuts, and berries. They might have traveled to the coast in the spring for fish and seafood; to the "flatlands" in the summer for nuts, fruits and small game; and to the mountains in the fall for berries, roots, herbs, and large game. . . .

By about 2000 B.C., the Woodland Indian culture started settling in villages. More importantly, they started learning to plant, tend, and harvest some of the food they needed. The villages of the Woodland Indians were often established along rivers and streams—places where the soil was rich and where water was easily accessible. Here, the women, who had already taken on the role of being the community's farmers, generally grew squash, beans, and maize for food.

While the Woodland Indians had begun to grow some crops for food, they still ate large amounts of wild plants they gathered from their surrounding environment. The women gathered fruits, berries, and cherries, as well as nuts, seeds, roots, and wild sweet potatoes. The men continued to hunt wild game, such as turkeys.

European Farmers in a New World

By Wayne Rudolph

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

Like a three-legged stool, American farming stands on the contributions of three strong legs—one leg representing the legacy of the native farmers of this land, a second recognizing the contributions of imported Africans, and a third noting the impacts of European immigrants.

For the most part, Europeans had been farming fields in their homelands that had been cleared for hundreds, even thousands, of years. In the area that became North Carolina, though, they found only small areas that had been cleared. These areas had been cleared, used, and abandoned by the natives. More often, the newcomers found a land that was covered with huge trees or dense undergrowth—no place for a farm that needed open space and sunlight. So they cleared the land. . . .

Once sunshine could reach the ground, the Europeans began farming. They created small hills among the stumps and girdled trees where they could raise crops. Where they could, they planted rows of crops in open fields.

All of these practices were similar to the practices of the native people in this area. In fact, some of the practices were learned from those natives. But, for the most part, that was the end of similarity. The natives and the Europeans had long used different methods of supplying shelter, clothing, and food. . . .

The earliest immigrant farmers had quickly learned to raise corn using seeds and techniques they learned from the native peoples who already lived here. But they had to use familiar farming techniques from the Old World to raise “small grains” they had brought with them—oats, rye, and barley, but mainly wheat.

Raising these grains could not be done using the native ways—by planting a few seeds on the tops of raised hills. Instead, English farmers introduced European practices to raise these European crops. Those practices included draft power as well as a variety of European equipment and tools that could make use of that power. . . .

When the Europeans arrived, they also introduced domesticated livestock. Animals that had not provided meat during the long ocean journey to the colonies became the parents of American herds and flocks of goats, sheep, hogs, cattle, and poultry. Horses and oxen were also brought from Europe—but not for food! These animals improved land transportation and provided draft power for farm work.

In addition, the European immigrants brought cultivated plants with them. Many types of garden vegetables, cooking herbs, and tree fruits like apples, peaches, and pears were quickly introduced to the colonies. . . .

African Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture

By Peter H. Wood

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

By the time of the Tuscarora War (1711–1715), natives, Africans, and Europeans were in constant contact. They watched each other, they taught each other, they learned from each other. They exchanged information about warfare and trade, about religion and music, about housing and language, and about farming and food.

At first, the natives, because they had lived in the area the longest, had the most to teach the newcomers about unfamiliar plants, strange animals, different soils, and local weather. But soon the Europeans and Africans were learning and borrowing ideas and practices from each other . . .

Though the people from Africa could not bring material possessions with them, some slave trading ships transported cargoes of African animals, plants, and seeds with their human cargo. Other African cargo entered the United States on other kinds of transport ships from Europe or Asia.

Two of the crops that were introduced from “Guinea,” as Africa was sometimes called by Atlantic traders, included peanuts and cotton. As Africans were reunited with these plants, they guided some planters to grow them. They also taught how to raise “guinea corn” to feed hogs and poultry and how to use “guinea grass” as fodder.

In addition, these Africans sometimes raised “guinea melons” in their gardens and “guinea hens” in their barnyards. Africans in the colony often raised yams and okra in their garden plots, as well. Over time, they showed Europeans how to cook and eat these unfamiliar delicacies, too.

One of their largest contributions was rice. Africans were the pioneers who knew about rice. Rice, which came from the “Rice Coast” of West Africa, proved to be a crucial moneymaking crop along parts of the coastal Carolinas and Georgia during the 1700s. Persons who were captured from this part of Africa became valuable assets in the New World—they knew how to plant, harvest, and process the valuable grain.

Activity Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Directions: Not all of North Carolina's agricultural products are native to the state. Many items were brought here from other places. As you listen to or read the articles, list in the space below the agricultural products that are mentioned.

Directions: As a group, list each product under its place of origin.

Introduced from Europe	Introduced from Africa	Native to North Carolina

Answer Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

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apples	guinea corn	pears	turkeys
barley	guinea grass	poultry	wheat
beans	guinea hens	pumpkins	wild berries
cattle	guinea melons	rice	wild fruits
cherries	hogs	rye	wild game
cooking herbs	maize, or corn	seafood	wild nuts
cotton	oats	sheep	wild plants
fish	okra	squash	wild roots
garden vegetables	peaches	sweet potatoes	yams
goats	peanuts	tobacco	

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