

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



Chickens today lay more eggs

The age-old question still remains, "What came first, the chicken or the egg?"

Folks will debate the issue from now to eternity because the use of poultry and eggs as food goes back to very early times in the history of man.

The North American poultry industry had its humble beginnings when chickens were first brought to this country by the early settlers. As villages and towns were established, and increased in size, the nearby farm flocks were also increased. Surplus eggs and meats were sold or bartered for groceries and other supplies in nearby towns.

Eventually, grain production to the West, the development of transportation facilities, the use of refrigeration and artificial incubation further stimulated poultry production in the latter part of the 1800s.

Since World War II, changes in poultry and egg production and processing have paced the whole field of agriculture. Practices in all phases of poultry production — breeding, feeding, management, housing, marketing and processing — have become very highly specialized.

The net result is that more products have been made available to consumers at favorable prices, comparatively speaking, and per capita consumption has increased.

THE PRODUCTION of eggs relates to the fecundity of the chicken. The term fecundity is used to describe the inherent capacity of an organism to reproduce rapidly. In chickens, fertilization is not a necessity to egg laying. Thus, the hen can lay eggs continuously without being mated.

A typical 5- to 6-month-old hen can lay anywhere from 170-260 eggs per year. Feeding, breeding, management and disease control has raised these numbers steadily since 1930 when the average 5- to 6-month-old hen would lay only 120 eggs per year.

The processing of quality eggs begins at the farm level. Once a good flock of layers has been established, good feeding and management is required to get maximized potential from the birds. Frequent gathering of eggs maintains high quality because if eggs are exposed to ambient temperatures for extended periods, quality declines rapidly.

Once collected, the eggs are sprayed with edible mineral oil to preserve quality and then cooled rapidly to prevent spoilage. After being transported to a central location, eggs are washed. Then, on the basis of a number of physical characteristics of the egg, the eggs are graded, sized, boxed and marketed.

Eggs are graded according to their size, quality and weight. In addition, other factors can lead to various grades due to an egg condition of the white and yolk, the size of the air cell in the egg itself, cleanliness and soundness of the shell.

IF ALL THIS sounds a bit complicated, add to the fact that the poultryman must keep a constant rotation of laying hens as the layers have a tendency to poop out after the hazy age of 12-15 months, when they start laying smaller, lower-grade eggs.

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JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

Maria Stea ("Mama Marie") of West Bloomfield, who was born in southern Italy, gathers each year with family members and friends to make all the tomato sauce they will need until the next annual workday.

Tomato sauce — old-country style

By Janice Brunson staff writer

MARIA STEA'S earliest memory of making tomato sauce as a child in southern Italy includes rising at 4 a.m., when it still very, very dark outside, and laboring throughout the long day and night until "it very dark again" and the job was finally completed.

Stea and assorted family members and friends gathered each September at her parent's home in Bart to process by hand eight bushels of meaty Naples or San Marzano tomatoes, grinding the fruit in an iron trough with heavy iron weights until "our hands scratched and bleeding."

After simmering the sauce in an enormous copper pot over a wooden fire, the women filled 150 freshly washed wine bottles with the thickened puree, tightly corking the bottles and tying off the tops with string.

When Stea was 15, the job was made considerably easier. A modern mortar and pestle replaced the antiquated iron trough and weights, separating pulp and skins from the tomato meat.

Later, when the family rented the only bottle capping machine in town and even invested in one of their own — a truly modern device that promised to end forever the tedious cooking and tying — the experiment proved to be a terrible disappointment.

"Many bottles break," Stea, now 56, said.

WHEN IT comes to preparing

Puglia-style tomato sauce today, little has changed since Stea's earliest memories.

Each September, family and friends gather at "Mama Marie's" in West Bloomfield, washing, grinding, straining, simmering and canning tomato sauce in the old way for use throughout the year.

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Italian home town inspires many dishes

By Janice Brunson staff writer

Puglia in Southern Italy is often called a green and golden tablecloth because of its many fields of wheat and vegetables. In addition to cauliflower, eggplants and tomatoes, the area is abundant in artichokes.

First cultivated more than 600 years ago, artichokes were once considered an aphrodisiac. They also

have great curative value, according to Maria Stea who was born, raised and now owns a villa in the region.

"They very good for upset stomach," Maria said. When she prepares artichokes, everything served may be eaten.

Puglia is also noted for olive oil. Huge cloths are wrapped around tree trunks and workers shake them

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Doc's right Apples are good picks

By Janice Brunson staff writer

AN APPLE A DAY keeps the doctor away.

"It's no joke," according to Marilyn Paillier, representing the Michigan Apple Committee, an organization that helps market the state's apple harvest.

"Apples are one of the healthiest things you can eat. They contain no cholesterol or salt. They are high in fiber and trace vitamins and minerals, and they are low in calories."

That said, Paillier changes into a succulent Paula-red, a strain developed in Michigan years ago by Lewis Arends in memory of his beloved wife, and now one of the state's major varieties.

"In my opinion, it's the best, best apple of the season," said Joe Heider, who has managed Lexington Orchards, 80 miles north of Detroit, since retiring from the U.S. Navy in 1977.

The 100-acre orchard has a dozen or more "pick trees" in southern Michigan where, with assistance may come from France straight from the U.S.

Although this year's harvest is already well under way, picking is expected to continue at some orchards through October.

THE SUMMER of '88 drought, however, has affected the harvest.

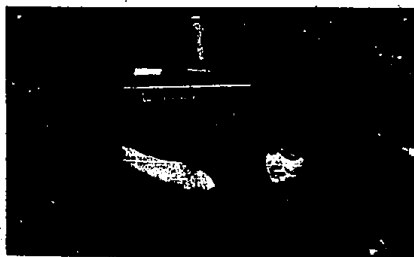
Most telling, perhaps, is Michigan's position as an apple exporter. Last year, the state ranked second in the nation, exporting some 24 million bushels of apples. This year, exports are expected to drop to 16.7 million bushels, squeezing Michigan into third position behind Washington and New York.

While Heider's apples are "a damn good natural fruit" and his harvesting season is "right on target," some varieties, like the popular McIntosh, "are gonna be smaller."

Other U-pick growers, like Jay Ward of Ypsilanti and Mary Emmett of Superior, are experiencing later-than-usual harvests.

Ward, whose family has owned Ward's Orchards for 138 years, started picking McIntosh apples in mid-September, a week to 10 days later than normal.

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Nearby orchards

Area U-pick orchards include:

• Erwin's U-Pick and Country Store, corner of Pontiac Trail and Silver Lake Road in South Lyon; 487-4701 or 487-0196.

• Plymouth Orchards and Cider Mill, on Warren Road between Napier and Gotterdam roads in Superior Township; 488-2398.

• Spitzer Orchards and Cider Mill, on Clyde Road off U.S. 25 in

Hartland, between Brighton and Fenice; 483-7493.

• Ward's Orchards, on Whitaker Road off I-94 in Ypsilanti; 482-7744.

• Foreman's Orchard, no longer a U-pick but sells harvested apples in bulk, Seven Mile between Beck and Napier roads in Northville; 248-1254.

For daily hours and exact costs, all operators recommend calling first.

Kids' choice Apples favorite snack

By Janice Brunson staff writer

When a group of 6- to 12-year olds were recently asked their favorite lunch bag fruit, the majority responded with a resounding "apples."

In a nationwide survey of adults, nearly three-fourths selected apples from a list of 13 choices as their preferred fruit for snacks.

Nearly everyone, it seems, likes apples.

Aside from pies, on ice cream or in pancakes, apples are increasingly used in more esoteric concoctions that please the palate and provoke raves for the chef.

The following recipes are from the "Apple Recipe Book," gourmet delights culled from restaurants, schools and chefs who entered a cooking contest earlier this year sponsored by the Michigan Apple Committee.

APPLE-PETA CHEESE TRIANGLES (MILITROPETYARIA)
1 pound clarified butter
1 pound phyllo sheets
2 28-ounce cans of apple pie filling

¼ tsp. cinnamon
½ pounds crumbled feta cheese
¼ cup grated Romano cheese
4 eggs, beaten

Combine sugar, cinnamon and apple filling, mixing well. In a separate bowl, combine feta cheese, Romano cheese and eggs, mixing well. Fold apple mixture into cheese mixture.

Cut phyllo dough in half. Take one sheet of dough and butter half the sheet. Place 2 tablespoons filling on the bottom half of dough that has been buttered. Fold unbuttered half over filling, like a flag. Butter top side. Bake in a 375-degree oven until brown, about 30 minutes. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Serve warm.

submitted by
Deno Chalton of Clawson

APPLE CHEESE SOUP
4 Tbsp. butter
3 cups shredded cheddar cheese
¼ cup flour, divided
3 cups apple cider
2 cups milk, scalded

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