

GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

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Welcome to February.

I hope your 2024 is off to a good start. I am looking forward to the Spring fair season and to seeing all of you. The season is shaping up to be a busy one. I'll keep you all in the loop as I confirm some new venues.

Gwen

In this issue

Evolution of the Modern Diet (Part 2)

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1900-1919

What's new



The Urbanization of Our Diet

Last month we took a look back, way back, to see where the human diet began as a way of figuring out how we got to where we are today. A mere 200 years ago, just a blink in the span of evolution, we were still primarily sourcing our own food. General Stores were beginning to fill in some things, but our diets were surprisingly, relatively unchanged from the indigenous people the early explorers met when they first landed. We still cooked over open flame, we still grew a large portion of our grains and produce and we still struggled with preserving what we had, but couldn't consume immediately.

The earliest methods of food preservation, drying and smoking, were great for meats and grains, but what about fruits and vegetables? Pickling helped, but not everything lent itself to that method. Around 1809, in response to a request from his government, a Frenchman named Nicolas Appert, discovered that heating and sealing food prevented it from spoiling. While the government was looking for a way to sustain its armies and navies, the method was a game changer for everyone.

Being able to preserve food that used to be perishable meant more than feeding an army, it meant food could travel further away from its source for everyone. In many ways, this opened the door for cities to really grow and expand. They were no longer limited by the need to have farmland close by, nor did the farmers have to stay so close to towns and cities to sell their wares. The beginnings of a true urban/rural divide was on the horizon.

Canning also allowed for combinations of items to be consumed. You could mix several types of fruit in a single jar. (Perhaps the earliest fruit cocktails started that way). This led to experimentation, jams and jellies of all sorts, different cuisines

could be shared. These were the predecessors of those 40,000 SKU's we mentioned last month.

And yet, the food was still relatively unadulterated. Farmers could keep up with the demand and life continued on. As the population grew, however, small local farms were not able to keep up with the demands. Larger companies began to buy up land and to produce vast quantities. Grocery stores got bigger and bigger and so did we.

Science chimed in, offering to develop varieties with higher yields, pesticides to prevent loss, chemicals to keep moisture in, more chemicals to keep moisture out, and ultimately, hormones to increase production. Dupont launched a slogan in 1935, "Better Things for Better Living...Through Chemistry" that carried them all the way to 1982 when the "Through Chemistry" part was dropped. While Dupont intended the phrase to instill faith in big business, it is also an apt description of how the world, in general, approached solving almost everything.

Somewhere along the way, we really took a left turn. We have moved very far away from the old family farm just down the road in more ways than just one. For many Americans today, where their food comes from might as well be Mars. Many people have never laid eyes on a cow or chicken, much less felt the crisp snap of a fresh green bean straight from the garden. Many people don't know that you can eat the skin of a fresh cucumber, or that *truly* fresh basil has the most amazing aroma. Mass production, through any means possible, became the rule of the day.

Some think that the pressure to create more, faster and cheaper is at the heart of many of the food allergies and sensitivities that so many people deal with. In place of the all-natural, locally grown food we used to eat, we now consume large quantities of processed or altered food. Our systems did not evolve the means of processing the types of molecules we are now taking in. You could spend a lifetime looking for answers, but at the end of the day, I am not so sure that the **Why** is as important as the **What's Next**.

With all of the resources the US has access to, you'd think that there would be some sort of standard definition of a healthy diet. Some oversight keeping our food sources safe. Enter the FDA. Hundreds, if not thousands of doctors, nutritionists, inspectors all running around trying to make sure that our food is safe. While many, if not most, of their standards are necessary, there seems to be one area that they just can't seem to wrap their collective heads around – What constitutes a healthy diet? For all of their effort, we still don't have a definitive answer.

You can ask 100 experts and get 100 different answers. Fat is bad, fat is good, sugar is bad, sugar is ok in moderation, eggs are terrible for you, eggs are an amazing source of protein. You

know the drill. How are we supposed to sort through all of this and make reasonable decisions about our own diet, health and welfare?

The real problem is that every scientist, every author, every media outlet has its own bias. Even I have a bias that shapes the books I read, the articles I discount, the conclusions I draw, and, ultimately, the information I choose to share. The bias is not intentional, usually, but we each process new information through the filters of our own experiences. Certainly, some big businesses fund research programs designed to prove that their products are THE answer, but most research is undertaken with genuinely good intentions.

This bias shows itself in many ways. A news outlet may have a slot to fill, so a recent study from a major university pops up and whether or not it has been confirmed, duplicated or had any peer review, it is out there for all the public to see. The next thing you know, your local supermarket is carrying Habanero Dusted Crickets because some study said that capsicum and cricket keratin may reduce the risk of toenail fungus. I know that is a bit of hyperbole, but you get my point.

So, back to our original question. How do you know what is a good diet and what isn't? After reading last month's newsletter and up to this point in this month's article, I think you can take a pretty good guess what my bias is. It is hard to argue the fact that 99% of human history was built on a fresh, unadulterated, unmanipulated diet. I am not suggesting that we all get fire pits and hunt, forage or grow our own food, but I am suggesting that maybe reducing the amount of processed food we consume is not such a bad idea. Paying attention to labels and looking for organic produce or hormone-free meat certainly help. It doesn't always have to be expensive, there are lots of companies out there producing responsibly sourced and prepared food at a reasonable cost.

Here at Gwen's Blends, I make every effort to find the freshest, healthiest ingredients from responsibly run distributors. The popular opinion that healthy eating is bland and boring is one of the misconceptions that I wanted to dispel with Gwen's Blends. There is nothing boring about Peri peri Chicken, or Cajun Shrimp and Rice. Spices are an incredibly easy and inexpensive way to bring excitement and flavor to the table, both figuratively and literally. It isn't even all that hard to accomplish. It just takes a little planning.

So, at the end of the day, it really boils down to paying attention, reading labels, and taking the time to treat yourself and your loved ones well by sharing the love of good food. Hopefully, our spice blends become a part of your healthy diet journey!

Be well!



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!

The first two decades of the 20th century

1902 -Karo Corn Syrup first sold in stores and Jell-O was touted as the “America’s Most Famous Dessert” by *Ladies Home Journal*

1903 – Milton Hershey invented the Hershey bar

1904 – St. Louis World’s Fair introduced the following to the world: Cotton Candy, Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, Dr. Pepper, Waffle Cones

1905 – Lombardi’s in NYC opened the very first licensed, brick and mortar pizzeria

1906 – Planters Peanuts launched. Also, William Kellogg launches Corn Flakes.

1907 – Hershey adds chocolate kisses to their menu

1912 – Oreos introduced

1913 – Peppermint Lifesavers appeared

1914 – Tastykakes hit the shelves

1916 – Kraft first debuted processed cheese

1917 – Planters peanut debuts Mr. Peanuts

What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Pick your Own Variety pack!

available only at fairs.

Pick any combination of 6 mini-blends for \$15.00

Recipes available.

Festivals

March

March 22-24

Capital Arts & Crafts Fair Spring 2024

Dulles Expo Center

10:00-5:00 (4:00 on Sunday)

April

April 20

Spring Craft Fair

5994 Plank Road

Fredericksburg, VA

9:00-3:00

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I’ll add them to the list.

Don’t want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I’ll remove you.

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Check out the website

www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up in the store!