

## **Home Food Production** **A home-based lesson plan**

### Historical Background

In the colonial and early American time periods, almost all Virginians lived on farms in rural areas. Farm families produced almost everything they needed for food products on their farm by planting a variety of crops and raising a variety of livestock. They purchased a few supplies that they could not produce on the farm, such as salt, sugar, and coffee. Even up through the 1950s, many Louisa County families produced most of what they ate on their farms and only purchased similar items. Farm family members spent a lot of time growing crops, raising animals, and processing the crops and livestock products into food products for their tables.

Butter has been a popular food product in America since the first colonists arrived. Barrels of butter were brought over on the Mayflower with the first pilgrims. European colonists also brought cows with them to the Americas so they could make butter in the new world.

Making butter was a lengthy process. First, you milked a dairy cow. Then, the milk was stored in a special dish in a cool place. The dish allowed the cream to separate from the milk and rise to the top. After a half day or so, the cream was ready to be skimmed off the top using a **cream-skimmer**. Then, the cream was allowed to sour by being kept at room temperature for about a day. Next, the cream was poured into a wooden or **earthenware butter churn** and mixed by moving the stick called a **dasher**, or **churn dash**, up and down. After a while, you would have butter, a solid, and buttermilk, a thin liquid. This process took so long that people came up with special butter churning songs to pass the time. Then, they drained the buttermilk and added and drained cold water to flush out any remaining buttermilk. This was important because excess buttermilk will spoil butter. After the water was drained away, salt was added to preserve the butter. Farm families stored milk and other dairy products in **spring houses** or **diary** outbuildings, or they could place the containers in a cold creek.

Corn has been a staple crop in Virginia since before the arrival of colonists. Corn grew better than wheat or rye in the fall. It was easy to grow and grew quickly. Virginian colonists called cornmeal "Indian meal" because Native Americans taught the colonists how to grow corn and produce cornmeal. Colonists began to use cornmeal as a common grain to make bread. Even to this day, cornbread is a popular food in southern America.

Before the 19th century, cornbread in Virginia was dense. During the 19th century, bakers started using **chemical leavening agents** like Saleratus, which was a precursor to baking soda. Modern day cornbread relies on baking soda or baking powder to cause the bread to rise and be light and airy.

In order to make today's cornbread recipe, you would have had to grow the corn and wheat and grind the grains to make cornmeal and flour. You also would have had to milk a cow and make butter. And you would have had to raise chickens and collect their eggs. Aren't you glad we have grocery stores today?

Key Words

*Cream-skimmer* - a shallow metal spoon used to separate the cream from fresh or raw milk



Photo Credit: Museum of English Rural Life

*Earthenware* - a type of pottery that must be glazed in order to hold liquids



Photo Credit: Wikipedia

*Butter churn* - a device used to make butter from cream through a mechanical process, usually a pole, also called a *dasher* or *churn dash*, inserted through the lid of the churn

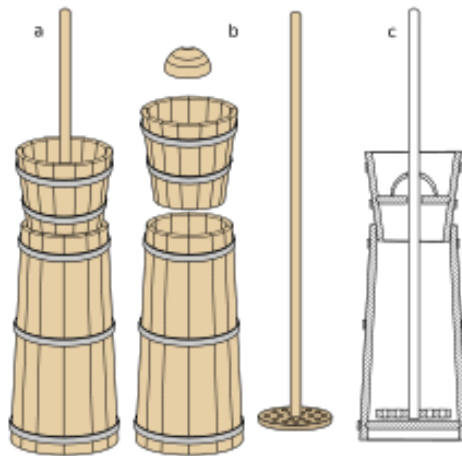


Photo Credit: Wikipedia

*Spring house* - a small building, usually with a single room, built over a natural spring. The spring water maintains a constant cool temperature inside the spring house throughout the year and they were used to store meat, fruit, and dairy products.

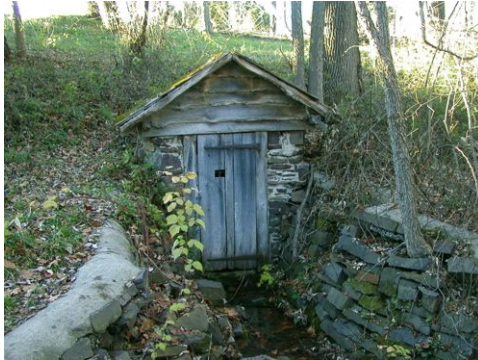


Photo Credit: Wikipedia

*Dairy house* - a small building with brick or stone floors that were dug down a couple feet beneath the ground level and thick, insulated walls which kept the room cool enough to store dairy products. Sometimes springs ran through them which also helped to keep them cool.



Photo Credit: Colonial Williamsburg

*Chemical leavening agent* - a baking ingredient used to cause doughs and batters to expand through the release of gases within the dough or batter as it bakes. Today we use yeast, baking soda, and baking powder.

Activity - Butter Making

Supplies

- Heavy cream or whipping cream
- Mason jar (or container that won't leak when you shake it)
- Salt
- Marbles (Optional - If used, they will decrease the time it takes to make the butter.)
- Strainer

Directions

1. Fill the jar or container halfway with cold cream.



2. If using marbles, add a couple to the jar or container.
3. Screw on the lid or seal the container and start shaking!
4. When you see the texture start to change, add a pinch of salt and continue to shake.
5. You are done shaking when there is a solid butter and liquid buttermilk.



6. Use a strainer to separate the buttermilk and butter. You can wash the buttermilk off with cold water.
7. Place butter in a clean container. The butter can be stored in the fridge for 2-3 days.

Activity - Baking Corn Pone

Built in 1740, Byrd Mill was thought to be the oldest continually operating mill in the country until it burned down in the 1960s. Download the brochure for Byrd Mill to read about the mill and the products it made. You can also read recipes from Byrd Mill's pamphlet on whole grain recipes, including the modified recipe found below.

Supplies

- Cornmeal
- Flour
- Milk
- Sugar
- Salt
- Baking powder
- Butter
- Egg
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Bowl
- Mixing spoon



Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
2. Mix  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of flour, 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of cornmeal, 1 teaspoon of salt, 4 tablespoons of sugar, and 2 teaspoon baking powder in a bowl.
3. In a smaller bowl, crack an egg into 1 cup of milk and beat the eggs until it is mixed in.
4. All the milk and egg mixture to the dry ingredients.
5. Add 2 tablespoons of melted butter.
6. Pour into a greased baking pan and bake for 15-30 minutes until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.