



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

September 12-13, 2014

Future of Food Series Part IV: The Evolution of Diet

by Sarah Janes Ugoretz

This week, we return to our exploration of National Geographic's Future of Food series. In the latest featured article, "The Evolution of Diet," Ann Gibbons—author of *The First Human: The Race to Discover Our Earliest Ancestors*—opens the discussion with a simple question: "Could eating like our ancestors make us healthier?" This is an incredibly timely conversation of a topic that has gained quite a bit of attention as of late. I'm referring of course to the Paleolithic Diet, better known by its abbreviated form—the Paleo Diet. Paleoanthropologist Peter Ungar of the University of Arkansas sheds some light on the craze surrounding this new Stone Age-inspired diet. One of the principle tenants underlying the Paleo Diet is the idea that we modern humans have not had sufficient time to evolve from hunter-gatherers to those who consume farmed foods. Supporters often ground this point in a discussion surrounding the general youthfulness of agriculture—it only came to the fore about 10,000 years ago. One of the Paleo Diet's staunchest advocates, Loren Cordain, an evolutionary nutritionist at Colorado State University, draws from modern-day studies he has conducted on traditional hunter-gatherer societies. Having found that 73 percent of the societies he studied obtained at least 50 percent of their daily caloric intake from meat, Cordain thereby encourages his fellow humans to focus on eating lean meat and fish, while limiting intake of beans, cereal grains and dairy products. Doing so, he insists, will allow us to avoid the "diseases of civilization"—heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer.

Numerous studies, including a few referenced in this piece by Gibbons, partly substantiate Cordain's findings—that eating a diet of non-processed foods can help us avoid these so-called diseases of modern civilization. However, researchers are less quick to get behind Cordain's and the Paleo Diet's meat-centric ideology. Gibbons lays out one of the major unwavering concerns here, which I touched on back in July: with the global population expected to reach nine billion by 2050, we need to ask ourselves which diet is best. "Simply put, a diet that revolves around meat and dairy, a way of eating that's on the rise throughout the developing world, will take a greater toll on the world's resources than one that revolves around unrefined grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables."

Moreover, if you look deeper into what academic studies on both historic and modern hunter-gatherer societies have found, they echo what Gibbons has said: that "the real Paleolithic diet wasn't all meat and marrow." While it appears that hunter-gathers the world over crave meat more than any other food, the amount of meat they are actually able to secure and consume on a regular basis varies widely. Overall, researchers have estimated that meat provides around 30 percent of

their annual caloric intake (with the notable exception of the Inuit and other groups residing in the Arctic, who typically obtain 99 percent of their calories from seals, narwhals and fish). Amanda Henry, a paleobiologist at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology points out that: "There's been a consistent story about hunting defining us and that meat made us human." This picture, however, is incomplete. We are instead reminded that man the hunter is backed up by woman the gatherer, and that during lean times, what these societies really subsist on are plant foods.

Speaking directly to and perhaps contradicting one of the arguments that advocates of the Paleo Diet make—that humans are not evolved enough to eat grains and other farmed foods—Henry has identified the presence of starch granules on fossil teeth and on stone tools dating back 100,000 years. These findings suggest that humans may indeed have been consuming grains and other plant foods long enough to have evolved the ability to tolerate them. "What bothers a lot of paleoanthropologists is that we actually didn't have just one caveman diet," says Leslie Aiello,

This Weeks' Box

ASSORTED TOMATOES: Dice and incorporate into a corn & black bean salad along with sweet peppers and a little bit of jalapeño. Remember it's best to ripen tomatoes at room temperature and never store them in the refrigerator.

ITALIAN GARLIC: Make your own garlic butter by mixing minced garlic cloves in softened butter. Salt to taste. Store in the refrigerator for a week or freeze up to three weeks.

RED OR YELLOW GRAPE TOMATOES: Roast with garlic and olive oil, then puree along with a touch of vinegar and olive oil to make a roasted tomato dressing to drizzle over an arugula salad with Parmesan cheese.

GREEN BELL PEPPERS OR ORANGE UKRAINE PEPPERS: Slice thinly and either grill or cook them on a hot griddle along with sliced onions. Serve with grilled skirt or sirloin steak.

MINI SWEET PEPPERS: These aren't just another sweet pepper. Their flavor and sweetness surpass other sweet varieties, and they're cute! Please note, do not confuse the mini-sweet peppers with jalapeños. The mini-sweet peppers are packaged in a small paper bag. The jalapeños are packed loose in the box.

EDAMAME: Edamame are fresh soybeans. While they are typically boiled and then popped out of their shell, they can also be roasted. Toss pods with oil, a splash of tamari and a sprinkling of chili powder. Roast in the oven until the beans are tender. When you eat them, use your teeth to squeeze the beans out of the pod. You'll get the flavorings from the outside of the bean. Do not eat the pod.

CARROTS: Making mashed potatoes? Add a few chunks of carrot to the potatoes while they are cooking. Mash the carrots and potatoes together and you'll have orange mashed potatoes!

CAULIFLOWER OR BROCCOLI ROMANESCO: Cut into florets and dip into tempura batter. Fry until golden and crispy, then serve with a tasty dipping sauce.

GREEN TOP GOLD BEETS: Separate the roots from the greens and cook separately. Make a tasty salad with thinly sliced beet greens, slices of cooked beets, baby arugula and fresh corn. Toss the salad with a honey lemon vinaigrette.

ARUGULA: Make a quick pasta dish by tossing together cooked fettuccine, halved grape tomatoes, garlic, olive oil and a handful of arugula.

SWEET CORN: Cut the corn off the ear and use the corn kernels to make corn fritters or stir the fresh corn kernels into cornbread batter. The key to "sweet" corn is to keep it cold and use within several days.

LEEEKS: See vegetable feature

JALAPEÑO PEPPERS: Be careful not to confuse these with mini-sweet peppers! The jalapeños are dark green with a rounded bottom and are packed loose in your box.

PURPLE VIKING POTATOES: While this is still classified as a waxy potato, it is more starchy and dry than some of our other varieties. It's excellent in soups, used for mashed potatoes, or roasted potatoes.

CHOICE: EGGPLANT—Look to other cultures for some interesting eggplant recipes. This vegetable can be found in Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Greek, Turkish and Lebanese cooking.

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president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. "The human diet goes back at least two million years. We had a lot of cavemen out there." Where the Paleo Diet goes wrong is that it fails to replicate the wide diversity of foods hunter-gatherer societies have historically eaten. At the same time, the strong possibility that those who subscribe to this diet will fail in mimicking the active lifestyles that safeguarded our ancestors from diabetes and heart disease is often downplayed.

What this really comes down to is the notion that no one diet epitomizes the ideal human diet. Rather, one of the wonders of Homo erectus—and this has typically been true of humans today—is that we've been able to adapt to our environments throughout time. Adaptation is one thing, but many humans today are currently facing a new sort of dilemma. Touching on the evolution of cooking and what this development has meant for us humans, Gibbons explains how, by cooking our food, our guts get to spend less time trying to break down energy. What this means is that we're allowed to extract more fuel by doing

less work. Unfortunately, many of us have gotten a little too good at this. As Gibbons says, “For the first time in human evolution, many humans are getting more calories than they can burn in a day.” So, where does this leave us? Whether you’re the type of person who needs to have a regimented diet, or someone whose schedule doesn’t allow for much home-cooking, Gibbons leaves us with a succinct message: “If most of the world ate more local fruits and vegetables, a little meat, fish, and some whole grains, and exercised an hour a day, that would be good news for our health—and for the planet.” We will all need to figure out what sort of diet works for us individually, based on our predilections and the various responsibilities we’re faced with on a daily basis, but I would say that this framework certainly seems like a good place to start.

Vegetable Feature: Leeks

While leeks are in the onion/allium family, they “add more of a whisper and less of a shout” in terms of their role in cooking as stated by Chef Deborah Madison. Nigel Slater, in his book *Tender: A Cook and His Vegetable Patch* describes leeks as “the onion’s refined sister, brought here by the Romans, for the times you want the latter’s silken texture...” Leeks have a long white shank that turns to more of a bluish green color as you reach the top of the leek. The lower white portion is tender and consists of many layers of thin flesh stacked upon each other. The upper dark portion tends to be more coarse and thicker. The upper portion is best used in making vegetable or meat stocks. When the lower white portion is cooked, the leeks become soft and silky. They are more mild in flavor in comparison to onions, with a distinct flavor of their own. They have fewer sugars than onions, so they will not caramelize in the same way as an onion.

Leeks pair well with many fall vegetables including potatoes, celeriac and fennel. They are often incorporated into soups and egg dishes. It is best to take your time and cook leeks more gently and slowly over medium heat. Leeks become creamy and silken when simmered in butter or olive oil. They pair well with white wine, cheese, chicken, bacon, fish and fresh herbs.

As leeks are growing, we “hill” dirt up around them several times during their growing season. We do this in part for weed control, but it also helps to keep the lower portion of the leek nicely blanched. As a result, you may find some dirt has found its way in between the layers within a leek. You’ll want to make sure you rinse leeks well before using. You can do this by simply cutting the leek in half and holding it under running water while separating the layers with your hands. You can also slice or chop the leeks and then wash them in a sink of water and dry them in a colander. Store leeks loosely wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator until you are ready to use them.

Produce Plus

Cipollini Onions, 5 pounds - \$23

Shallots, 5 pounds - \$23

Mini Sweet Peppers, 5 pounds - \$31

Jalapeño Peppers, 5 pounds - \$18

Orange Italian Frying Peppers, 10 pounds - \$35

(These are a sweet pepper that can be roasted or just frozen raw)

Baby Red Beets, 10 pounds - \$25

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Seared Salmon with Braised Leeks & Potatoes

Recipe adapted from a recipe published in *Salmon, A Cookbook* by Diane Morgan, by Diane Morgan.

Serves 4

- 3 large or 4-5 small leeks
- 4 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 medium potato, peeled, small-diced
- 1 cup white wine
- ½ tsp salt, plus more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1-2 Tbsp olive oil
- 4 salmon fillets, 4-6 oz each
- 1 Tbsp fresh herbs, chopped (parsley, tarragon, thyme, or other)
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Cut the leeks in half lengthwise and cut into ½-inch pieces. Rinse leeks in a colander to thoroughly clean them. Drain well.
2. In a medium sauté pan, melt the butter over medium heat and swirl to coat the entire bottom of the pan. Add the leeks and sauté for 8-10 minutes or until softened.
3. Add the potatoes, wine, and ½ tsp salt and black pepper. Cover and simmer for 30-35 minutes or until potatoes are tender, leeks are silky and nearly all the liquid has been reduced.
4. Remove from the heat and set aside partially covered to keep it warm until you are ready to serve it.
5. In a separate sauté pan, heat olive oil over medium high heat until it shimmers in the bottom of the pan. Season the salmon fillets with salt & pepper. Place salmon in the pan, skin side up. You should hear a nice sizzle when you put the salmon in the pan. Sear the salmon on that side until it is golden brown and has a nice crust. Turn the salmon over and continue cooking, skin side down, to the desired degree of doneness.
6. Just before serving, add the fresh herbs to the braised leeks and potatoes. Adjust seasoning as needed. To serve, place a portion of the braised leeks and potatoes on each plate and place the seared salmon on top. Top each piece with freshly grated Parmesan and serve.

Apple, Leek & Cheddar Quiche

Recipe borrowed from Andrea Chesman’s *Recipes from the Root Cellar*.

Serves 4-6

Pastry for a 9-inch or 10-inch single-crust pie

3 Tbsp butter

1 large leek, trimmed and thinly sliced

1 large apple, peeled, cored and chopped

2 Tbsp all-purpose flour

½ tsp dried thyme

1 cup firmly packed grated smoked cheddar or sharp cheddar cheese (4 ounces)

3 eggs

Milk or cream

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. Roll out and fit the pastry into a 9 or 10-inch pie pan. Fold the overhang under and flute the edges of the dough.
3. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the leek and sauté until limp, about 3 minutes. Add the apple and sauté until the leeks are tender, about 3 minutes. Stir in the flour and thyme.
4. Sprinkle ½ cup of the cheese into the pie shell. Layer the leek mixture on top of the cheese. Cover with the remaining cheese.
5. Beat the eggs in a glass measuring cup. Add enough milk to make 1½ cups. Season with salt and pepper. Pour over the pie filling.
6. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until puffed and browned. Let stand for at least 10 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Enjoy for brunch, lunch or supper!