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Pan American Menus Emphasize Spiced Dishes

Marian Loofe
Iowa State College

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Marian Loofe tells of the food habits of our neighbors in the countries of South America.

Four meals a day instead of three make up the food pattern for our Pan-American neighbors. They awaken to an early, light breakfast, have a heavy lunch or dinner at noon which is followed by tea in late afternoon and later, supper.

With characteristic individuality, the native foods of the different South American countries vary almost as much from each other as they differ from our American diet.

However, some universal characteristics in their food set it apart from our cookery. Highly spiced foods are typical of their native dishes. With this greater use of spices, their dishes also contain more oils than we prefer. Our use of white sauces and larger quantities of milk in cookery is foreign to these people, who use little milk in their food.

Particularly along the western coast of South America fruits are grown and used in abundance. Salads are rarely made with fruit; however, South Americans share our liking for fruit juices.

Although they seldom combine fruits for an appetizer before a meal, a first course of watermelon and cold ham is becoming a popular alternate for their customary appetizer of soup.

In Uruguay the most common dish is Puchero. This is similar to the traditional American stew but it is cooked with more water. Sausage and other meats are combined with a variety of vegetables. Although the vegetables in the Puchero may vary, large quantities of tomatoes, peppers and onions are included without fail.

The cakes in Uruguay consist of many thin layers filled with jam. They are kept extremely moist by the addition of homemade cherry wine at intervals. A jam used frequently as a cake filler is that prepared by boiling milk and sugar together for several hours.

The food of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is noted for being both inexpensive and excellent. Here, as in the rest of the country, fruit, potatoes and root vegetables are used more extensively than in the United States.

One of Brazil’s famous national dishes transforms the lowly bean into a gourmet’s treat through a flavor-some combination with native vegetables and meats.

The most popular form of meat cookery is the barbecue of whole or half animals. Since wartime food rationing has not yet spread to the countries south of us, the barbecue continues to be popular, subject only to natural meat shortages.

Further north and closer to our country, the food begins to resemble more closely the cookery in our southern states.

In Central America food is still extremely spicy but certain dishes are similar to our foods. Meat here is eaten immediately without undergoing the “ripening” period which we prefer. This is due to their lack of refrigeration. Pork is the most popular meat and no lamb is eaten in this section. Meat cookery primarily consists of dishes combining both vegetables and meats.

In Costa Rica rice is served at every meal. Corn is eaten only after it has thoroughly dried on the cob and is used as a cereal. The Tortilla, a flat cake made of corn, is a popular food.

Another popular vegetable is one which resembles a banana. It is cooked with other vegetables when green and is either baked or fried when ripe.

When the people are unable to purchase milk, they prepare a drink of brown sugar and water cooked together.

Puerto Rican food still more closely resembles cookery in the southern half of the United States. The food here is more highly spiced than we prefer, however.

Noodle soup is served with every meal and cereals in general are basic in the diet. Rice is very popular. With cereals, the Puerto Ricans mix meats, vegetables and fish. Codfish and oysters are favorites for this mixture.

Spanish ancestors of the present-day population brought with them a soup, “Saltecho,” which is a common main dish. This is made of many vegetables.