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HOME PROJECTS IN FOOD PREPARATION

By JOSEPHINE MCMULLEN

"THIS was the greatest help to my college work." "At least I've learned what I can't cook and I'm sure I learned to cook some things more skillfully than I could last term." These two comments were made by sophomore home economics students on their efforts last summer to prepare the meals for their families for two weeks—a project required of all home economics sophomores.

This project grew out of a felt need for more actual cooking experience. Frequently senior girls in the home management houses lamentingly say, "I've never cooked a thing in my life except what I've done at school" or "I've cooked but I haven't planned, and everything seems so impossible.

The first such project planned in the summer of 1924 emphasized minimizing the number of utensils used and the length of time of preparation. Although the girls wrote enthusiastic reports of their work—one girl telling of "an exceptionally good chocolate cake to a picnic and hearing the approval of taking an exceptionally good meat croquette to a picnic and hearing the approval of taking an exceptionally good meat croquette"—yet, the Food and Nutrition Department went to all home economics girls would have an opportunity for helping at home anyway and the work was discontinued.

Still the need was evident. Girls were spending their summers away from home, working, traveling, or visiting, and seniors were still saying, "I haven't had any experience," so in the summer of 1925 a different project of food preparation based on a series of daily menus for the family was planned. The improvement of this project every year is now a prerequisite for the course in meal planning.

"The motto of Iowa State College "Education with Practice" is further applied.

Letters are written to the mothers from the foods and nutrition faculty explaining the nature of the project and asking their cooperation, and girls have the opportunity to write to their laboratory instructors or confer with them about the project. The report is mailed in as soon as it is finished so that the instructor is prepared for a personal conference early in the fall. Add to this the comradeship between mother and daughter, the understanding and confidence gained in planning together in the home, and the project is a pleasure as well as a valuable experience.

The results desired are:

1. Ability to plan series of meals, giving attention to family's food needs and resources.
2. Ability in meal preparation; good management in the use of time, energy, and food materials.
3. Ability to prepare standard products—not that as skill increases, the time required and the number of dishes used decrease.

Since results are what we expect and consequences are what we get, the 200 reports of these projects show a great variety of consequences. At least several hundred tragedies, surprises, joys and sorrows are recorded in these sheets. Each girl records the menus prepared and in the summary lists (1) the name of every product prepared, (2) the number of times prepared, and (3) remarks, questions, suggestions or criticisms about recipes; management; menus, etc.

The number of people served; location of the home (rural or urban) size of the kitchen, kind of fuel used, water supply for the kitchen, labor saving devices and methods are also included to give a better picture of the actual working conditions for each girl.

Usually the story begins "It was very difficult at first to plan, cook and serve all of the meals, but at the last the work was easier and I could do it much quicker" or several say "I have always cooked, but I never planned my work before." The size of families ranged from 3 to 10 persons with an average number between six and seven, so it was not just playing house. As many as 70 different kinds of prepared foods appeared in some reports and most of them averaged 70 differently prepared foods.

Many of the menus still show an over abundance of fried potatoes and meat with a lack of fruit, whole grain cereals and milk, but because the work was done in the summer months, vegetables are used frequently and with a great variety of planning. The girls tried—"they have proven in their explanations that "The family has become a part of the habit of having potatoes for breakfast and it doesn't seem right not to"—or "poached eggs did not appeal to the men on work days."

Only one girl interpreted her results in terms of fair or good "luck." In general they were working to please the family and to educate them to eat those which best fulfill the aims of the project.

The following group of foods is recommended for the students to select those which best fulfill the aims of the project:

1. Beverages.
2. Cereals (cooked) (left overs).
3. Confections, frostings, fondant or fudges.
4. Desserts (cornstarch custards; fruit, frozen, gelatin.)
5. Eggs, cheese (poached, omelet, rarebit, souffle, fondue.)
6. Fish (fresh, dried, canned; left overs.)
7. Flour mixtures (griddle cakes or waffles, muffins, biscuits; cakes with and without fat, pastry, cookies, drop and roll; yeast bread and rolls; doughnuts.)
8. Meat and poultry (tender and tough cuts; left overs.)
9. Salads and salad dressing.
10. Sandwiches.
11. Vegetables—green, red, yellow, white. (Strive for variety in preparation and service; left overs.)

Surely meal planning and preparation will be less dreaded after completing such a project, and in thus serving themselves are the girls not serving others?