



Have You Heard?

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Home Economist

Flour Is The Foundation
Imagine a world without cookies, bread, cake doughnuts, pretzels, spaghetti, biscuits, pies, pancakes, muffins, pizza, waffles, or rolls! What an untasty picture! Happily, North America's reputation for bountiful harvests rests in a large measure on the magnificent wheat crops grown on millions of fertile acres. There are essentially two kinds of wheat grown: hard and soft. (A third wheat, important to the American diet but not to most homemakers, is a hard wheat variety called durum, which is used in making pastas.) Experienced bakers know there

is not one particular flour best for all types of baking. Various flours have different characteristics making each more suited for one product than another. How, then, does the novice choose a flour most suited to her purpose? The key to flour differences is gluten - formed when the water soluble proteins present in wheat are combined by manipulation in the presence of a liquid. The variation of protein content in each type of wheat correlates with the baking characteristics of a particular flour. The amount of protein present in a flour determines the amount of gluten which can be developed and this determines the

suitability of each type of flour for various baked products.

Hard wheat, grown on western prairie land, has a high gluten content and is milled into "bread" flour. Hard wheat flour has great elasticity that allows it to be stretched and rolled into an incredibly thin sheet for strudel or phyllo, or folded and rolled again and again to make puff pastry and Danish dough.

Bread flour has returned to the shelves of supermarkets after an absence of two generations. If bread flour is scarce in your market, you may substitute "unbleached" flour. This flour is bleached in an aging rather than a chemical process, and it is milled from a blend of hard wheats.

Soft wheat, grown in the milder regions of middle and eastern America, produces a flour lower in gluten, one that is ideal for baking such products as pastries, crackers, pretzels, cookies and cakes. At the lower end of the gluten scale is "cake" flour. It has only enough gluten to hold the cake together in the oven while a delicate and tender, yet stable, structure of cells is firmed. A little higher up the gluten scale is "pas-

try" flour, which is ideal for pie and tart doughs because it can tolerate a considerable amount of fat, such as butter, lard or margarine, without becoming tough. If you cannot find pastry flour on your supermarket shelves, a satisfactory substitute can be blended at home with 60 percent cake flour and 40 percent bread or unbleached flour.

At mid-range on the gluten scale is "all-purpose" flour, a blend of soft wheat flours, which has been developed by the nation's millers to take care of a wide range of baking needs — from breads and biscuits to pies and cakes. It can be substituted for other flours in recipes that call for bread flour or pastry flour. It will not rise as high as bread flour or be as tender as pastry flour, but it is a worthy substitute.

It is easy to check the protein or gluten content of a flour by looking at the paragraph of nutritional information on the package. Although figures vary somewhat from brand to brand and mill to mill, here is the range: bread flour, 14 percent; unbleached, 12 percent; all-purpose, 11 percent; pas-

try, 8 percent; and cake, 7 percent. Flour freezes and keeps for periods of a year or more. If you have extra freezer space, watch supermarket shelves for bargains. A final and important note about flour: For all doughs, the measurement of one of two ingredients must be taken as approximate — the flour or the liquid. The ability of the flour to absorb moisture varies from harvest to harvest, bag to bag and month to month as the humidity changes and the flour absorbs or releases moisture. If a recipe calls for a precise amount of flour, the liquid must be added carefully so as not to overload the flour. If the recipe calls for a precise amount of water, add the last portion of the flour slowly and carefully. It is better to have a moist dough that will stiffen in your refrigerator than a hard and unforgiving cannonball for which there is no hope. In batters, the measurement of flour and liquid can be precise. The determining factor then becomes the length of time the dough will be in the oven. The burden rests on the temperature and the length of oven time to correct any imbalance there is in the moisture of the dough.

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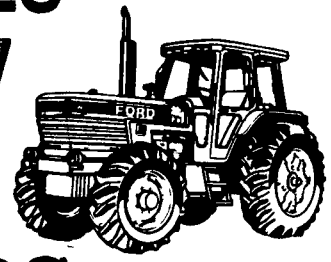
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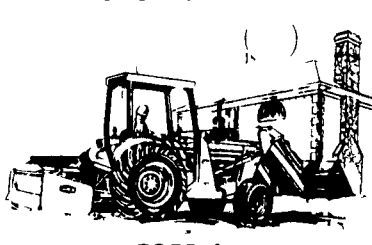
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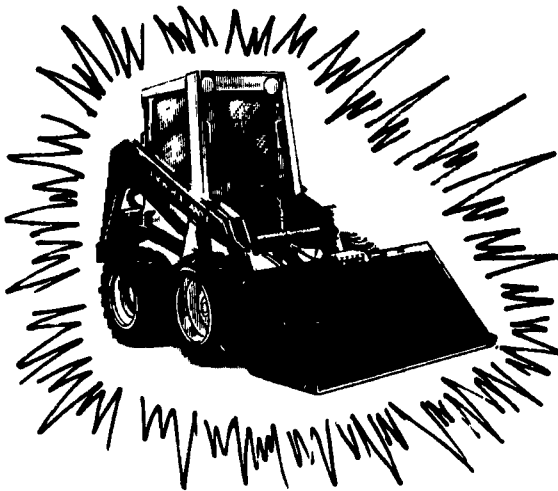
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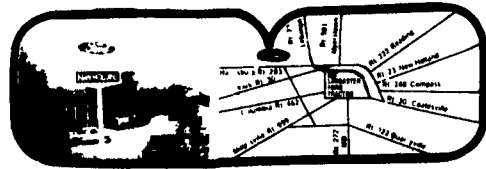
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