

Workshop Focuses On Light, Lean, Easy

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Food And Family
Features Editor

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — Consumers searching for lean meat cuts may be disappointed in the flavor if not properly cooked.

"Low-fat meats should not be overcooked or they will be dry and tasteless," said Fay Strickler, family and consumer science agent for Berks County. Thermometers, she stressed, are required to keep from overcooking and undercooking meats.

"People often think they know when food is done by looking at it, but that can be misleading. Meat color — pink or brown — can fool you," Strickler said.

Insert meat thermometer in the thickest part of the muscle, not against the bone. Read instructions carefully for preparing meats.

For example, ham is precooked and needs only to reach an internal temperature of 140 degrees. Remove the meat from the oven when it reaches an internal temperature of five degrees less than the prescribed temperature. Allow the ham to set 30 minutes, and the temperature will rise an additional five degrees.

When selecting lean beef or pork cuts, look for cuts that have the word "loin" in the name, such as tenderloin, sirloin, and

loin chop. The food pyramid recommends two to three servings daily of two- to three-ounces of meat. A 3-ounce serving is meat about the size of a deck of cards or the size of your palm.

Variety and moderation are the key, Strickler said, when attempting to lose weight by following a low-fat diet.

Although many people overeat the recommended amount of meats, Strickler said that people who eliminate meats completely from their diets are often pale and do not have a good skin color.

Many consumers believe that red meats are higher in fat than white meats. But this isn't always true. Chicken thighs contain a higher amount of fat than many beef cuts.

Contrary to some people's misconceptions, lowfat cooking is no more costly or time consuming than using higher fat meats.

"Choose the economical, less tender beef cuts for slow cooking. These include cuts from the chuck and round to make pot roasts and pieces of beef for stews and soups. The long, slow cooking process ensures fork-tender, moist, and flavorful beef," Strickler said.

Meats are cooked by two different methods: moist and dry heat.

"Lean meats must be cooked with a moist method to keep them from tasting too dry," Strickler said.

"Learn basic cooking methods and adapt them to your recipes," Strickler said.

Moist heat methods include the following:

- Braising — Slowly brown meat or poultry on all sides using small amount of oil, if necessary, in a heavy pan.

Pour off drippings. Season with salt, herbs or spices as desired. Add a small amount of liquid (as little as two tablespoons may be used; however ¼-½ cup is recommended, such as water, juice, wine, broth, or stock.

Cover tightly to provide a moist atmosphere for cooking. Simmer on low heat on top of range or in oven until fork tender.

Vegetables should be added toward the end of cooking to prevent overcooking.

The cooking liquid may be re-

duced or thickened after removing fat to make a sauce.

- Stewing — Coat meat or poultry lightly with seasoned flour, if desired.

Slowly brown on all sides using a small amount of oil, if necessary, in heavy pan.

Pour off drippings.

Cover meat or poultry with liquid such as water, juice, wine, broth or stock.

Season, as desired. Cover tightly and simmer on top of the range until fork tender.

Vegetables should be added toward the end of cooking time to prevent overcooking.

Reduce or thicken cooking liquid after removing fat, if desired.

- Poaching — Season meat, poultry or fish, as desired. For roasts, tie with heavy string at 2-inch intervals, if needed. Brown on all sides in nonstick pan. Pour off excess drippings.

Cover meat, poultry, or fish with liquid. Season with additional ingredients, if desired. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until done.

- Steaming — Place fish on a steamer pan or perforated tray. Set into pan, above simmering liquid.

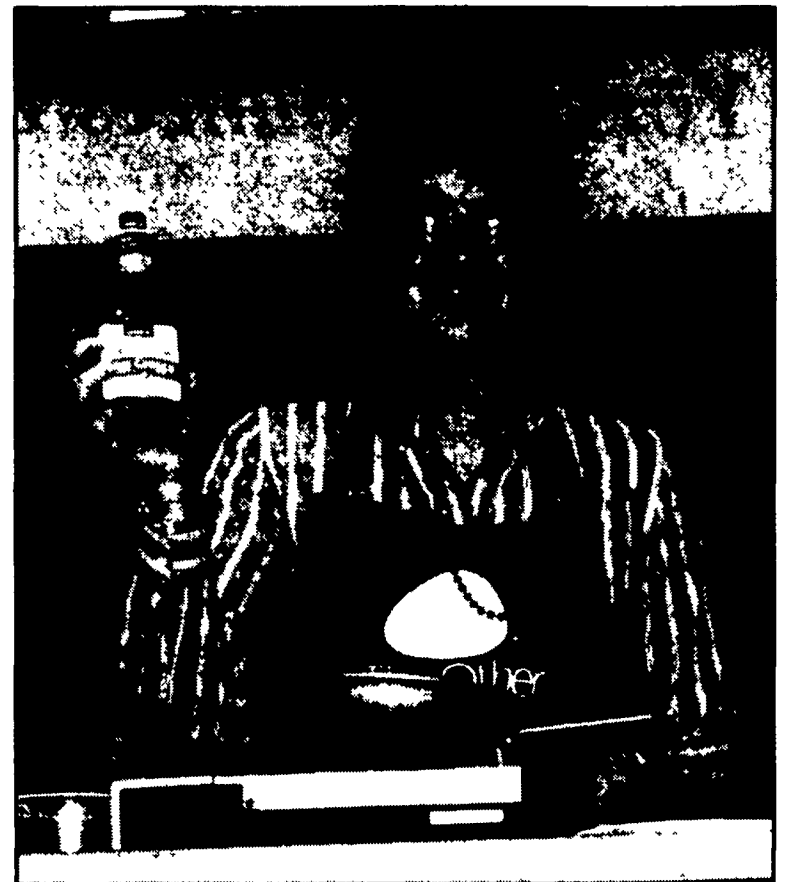
Cover pan, and continue steaming at low heat until fish flakes.

Strickler and her staff cooked a variety of meats for taste testing during a recent workshop on light, lean, and easy cooking. Here is one of the recipes.

LAZY DAY STEW

2 pounds lean beef cubes
1½ cups green beans
2 teaspoons quick-cooking tapioca
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup water
2 cups carrots, sliced
2 cups potatoes, sliced
2 medium onions, diced
1 cup celery
1 can tomato soup
1 tablespoon brown sugar
Place beef cubes (do not brown) in single layer in 2½-quart casserole. Add veggies and sprinkle with tapioca and salt over top. Pour tomato soup and water over seasoning. Sprinkle with brown sugar and cover tightly. Bake at 325 degrees for three hours. Do not peek. Serves 4-6.

Jane Brobst
Hamburg



Fay Strickler, family living and consumer science agent for Berks County Extension, recommends using rubs and marinades to enhance the flavors of low-fat meats.

Marinade Recipes

BARBECUE MARINADE

½ cup chopped onion
1½ tablespoons packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
¼ cup each cider vinegar and catsup
1 tablespoon each prepared horseradish and water
½ teaspoon coarse grind black pepper
Cook onion and brown sugar in oil in small saucepan over medium heat until onion is tender, about 3 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and continue cooking over medium heat 3 to 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat; cool thoroughly before adding to meat or poultry. Makes about ¼ cup.

LEMONY ORIENTAL MARINADE

¼ cup fresh lemon juice
3 tablespoons chopped green onion
1½ tablespoons each reduced-sodium soy sauce and vegetable oil
¼ teaspoon grated fresh ginger
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper pods
Combine all ingredients, stirring until well-blended. Makes about ½ cup.

SOUTHWESTERN MARINADE

¼ cup prepared salsa (mild, medium, or hot, as desired)
2 tablespoons each chopped cilantro and fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
Combine all ingredients, stirring until well-blended. Makes about ½ cup.

RED WINE MARINADE

¼ cup red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard
2 cloves garlic, minced



Lazy Day Stew is quick, easy and tasty.

¼ teaspoon dried Italian seasoning
¼ teaspoon coarse grind black pepper

Combine all ingredients, stirring until well-blended. Makes about ½ cup.

~ Allow about ¼ to ½ cup marinade for each 1 to 2 pounds of meat. Turn meat occasionally during marinating so that all sides are equally exposed to the marinade. For flavor only, marinate for 15 minutes or as long as 2 hours; for tenderizing, at least 6 hours. Remaining marinade may be brushed on the meat during grilling, or used as a sauce provided it is brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute prior to serving.

Rub Recipes

LEMON-ROSEMARY RUB

1½ teaspoons grated lemon peel
1 teaspoon dried rosemary leaves, crushed
¼ teaspoon each salt, dried thyme leaves and coarse grind black pepper
2 large garlic cloves, minced
Combine all ingredients. Store in an airtight container. Shake before using to blend. Makes enough to season 2 pounds of meat.

SOUTHWESTERN RUB

1½ teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon dried oregano leaves, crushed
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
Combine all ingredients. Store in an airtight container. Shake before using to blend. Makes enough to season 2 pounds of meat.

SPICY SEASONING MIX

3 tablespoons chili powder
2 teaspoons ground coriander
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1½ teaspoons garlic powder
¼ teaspoon dried oregano leaves
½ teaspoon ground red pepper
Store in an airtight container. Shake before using to blend. Makes enough to season 2 pounds of meat.

~ Use rubs on tender cuts of meat to add flavor. To apply the rub, simply cover the outside surface of the meat with the seasoning blend prior to cooking. Flavors usually become more pronounced the longer the seasoning mixture is on the meat.

Set Nutrition Record Straight

DENVER, Colo. — Through their beef checkoff, America's beef producers recently launched a first-of-its-kind advertising campaign that compares the nutritional benefits of lean beef and skinless chicken.

The ads use government data to illustrate that lean beef compares favorably to skinless chicken breast in terms of fat, yet provides greater amounts of some essential nutrients.

As the new ads point out, six of beef's leanest cuts have, on average, just one more gram of saturated fat but eight times more vitamin B12, six times more zinc, and three times more iron than chicken's leanest cut: the skinless chicken breast.

This information is based on sound science and is according to a USDA database that lists the nutrient compositions for all foods (www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp).

Wade Zimmerman, a Colorado beef producer, Cattlemen's Beef Board member, and chairman of the Joint Nutrition & Health Committee, said "20 years of misinformation about beef and conventional wisdom has led many consumers to believe that skinless chicken breast is the 'gold standard' of healthy eating. The facts don't support this conventional wisdom."

Mark Thomas, NCBA vice president for global marketing, said this is not an "anti-chicken" campaign. "We're not saying 'don't eat chicken.' We are saying that you can feel good about eating lean beef," he said. "With so much conflicting nutrition information out there, it's time to set the record straight. People love beef. And now they can enjoy lean beef for its great taste and its nutrient benefits."

"The truth is, lean beef is a nutrition powerhouse," said Mary K. Young, M.S., R.D., NCBA executive director of nutrition. "We've launched this campaign to let beef lovers know that lean beef compares favorably to the fatty acid profile of skinless chicken breast but gives you more essential nutrients like zinc, iron, and vitamin B12."



On the low-fat menu are scallops, salmon, beef, and pork dishes. Sampling the variety are workshop attendees Michael Reese, Reading; John Bernhardt, Reading, Leroy Frey, Bern Township; and Joe Menet, Robesonia.