

Fast and Flexible Low Cost Recipes for a Family or Fifty: A Cookbook for Emergency Feeding Programs and Limited-Resource Audiences

Isobel E. Miller, Wilella Daniels Burgess, M.S., * April C. Mason, Ph.D.,
Department of Foods and Nutrition,
Purdue University, 1264 Stone Hall,
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-1264;
Tel: (765) 494-8186; Fax: (765) 494-0906; E-mail: willie@cfs.purdue.edu

*Author for correspondence

An estimated 1 in every 10 Americans uses the services of emergency feeding programs to fulfill part of their nutritional needs.¹ More than 150,000 food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, meal sites, and meal delivery programs operate in the United States.² Most of these programs are small, operate on a shoe-string budget, rely on volunteers, and use commodity, donated, and salvaged foods. Preparing safe, nutritious meals or food bags with little expertise and a variable food supply is a common challenge for meal program staff, volunteers, and food pantry clients.

Fast and Flexible Low Cost Recipes for a Family or Fifty was developed to help emergency feeding programs and limited-resource audiences effectively use donated and commodity foods in planning and preparing safe, nutritious, quick, and tasty meals (Fig. 1). Advisory panels, colleagues, and agency representatives helped develop a list of criteria for the cookbook. Application of these criteria resulted in a cookbook with the following characteristics: all recipes are quick, easy to prepare and cook, require no special equipment, use low-cost ingredients, and are nutritious and tasty. Further, the recipes use a limited number of readily available ingredients, such as commodity or often-donated foods, and are flexible so that the same basic recipe can be used with a wide range of foods, including fresh, frozen, or canned varieties. Recipes are appropriate for quantity

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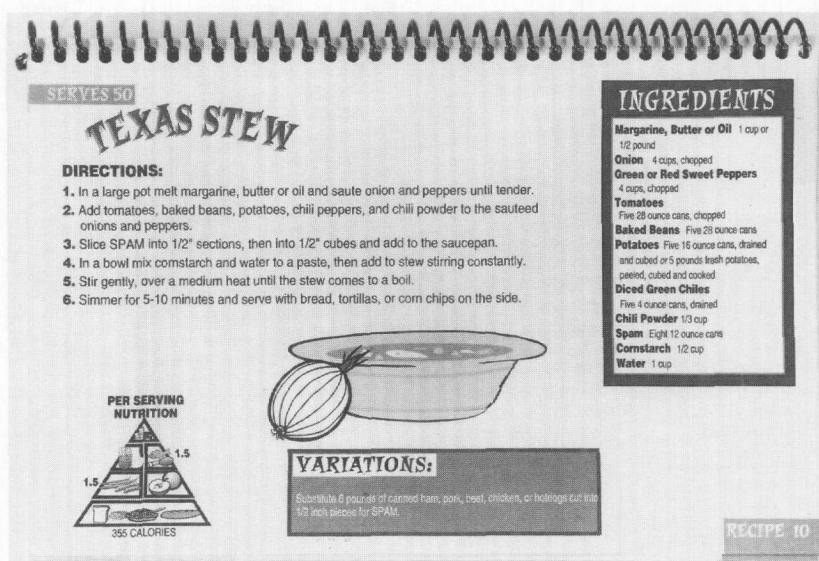


Figure 1. Recipes are simple, flexible, and visually appealing with instructions for a family on one side of a page and for 50 on the flipside.

production (as in a meal program) or for home production (for inclusion in a food bag). To make the cookbook a teaching tool, nutrition information highlighting the Food Guide Pyramid³ and serving sizes and food safety information focusing on safe cooking and storing temperatures are included. The cookbook also includes a week's worth of sample dinner menus and an "Index of Ingredients" to aid in menu planning, and to help home cooks and agency volunteers find ideas for a nutritious dish/meal using foods currently on the shelf. Finally, the cookbook is visually appealing and inexpensive.

Recipes were tested for clarity of instructions, ease of preparation (for many recipes, the ability to use a can opener is the main cooking skill required), and taste acceptance. Project members tested family-size recipes at home and large-quantity recipes in the university cooking laboratory. Food from the quantity recipes was served as the evening meal at a local homeless shelter. In both testing situations, the food preparers were asked to evaluate the recipe for clarity of instructions and ease of preparation. Recipe instructions were modified to improve clarity when needed. Taste testers were

asked to evaluate the product using a simple questionnaire to rate their preferences, likes, and dislikes. As might be anticipated, evaluations varied depending on individual taste. For example, the Tamale Pie was rated "too spicy" by some and "not spicy enough" by others. Recipe taste testing at the homeless shelter took place every Wednesday night throughout the summer of 1996 with guests evaluating each element of complete meals, including a main dish, side dish, and dessert. Each menu was prepared at a cost of less than \$1.00 per person, retail. At the beginning of the testing, guests merely circled their preferences; very few individuals offered additional "comments." By the end of the testing period, however, many participants were adding suggestions, praise, vetoes, and insights into life as a homeless person. One participant wrote, "The corn salad is both colorful and funky and we certainly need color and funk in this place." Another commented, "No one ever asked us what we think before. I love this every week; I feel so special."

Each recipe in the cookbook was analyzed for nutrition and caloric content using the Personal Chef⁴ computer program. The number of calories

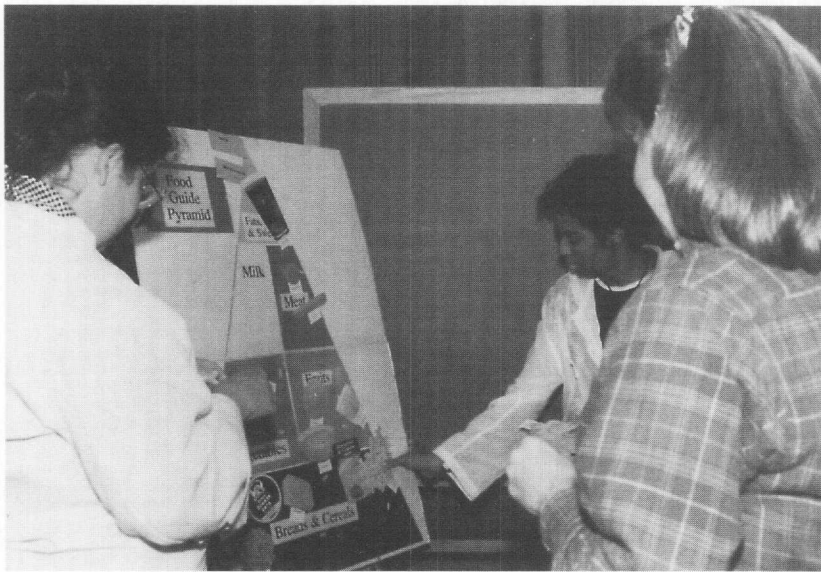


Figure 2. The cookbook can be used as a tool to teach healthy meal planning based on the Food Guide Pyramid.

per serving is indicated below a representation of the Food Guide Pyramid that illustrates the food groups that are provided by one serving. The serving size and nutrition information listed are based on USDA recommendations; however, the actual portion served at the homeless shelter was often quite different (usually larger). "When people only have one meal a day," said the shelter coordinator, "we give them as much as we have available."

Fast and Flexible Low Cost Recipes for a Family of Fifty was introduced at a national video conference workshop in October 1996. The cookbook was included with the out-of-state conference materials, and 278 participants at the 20 workshop sites within the state received complimentary copies. The cookbook was used in workshop activities as a tool for teaching the basics of the Food Guide Pyramid and for

creative menu planning and food bag analysis (Fig. 2).

Feedback from the advisory panels and workshop participants has been positive and over 1200 copies of the cookbook have been sold nationally. Follow-up surveys from cookbook recipients in our state indicate that the cookbook is helping families more effectively prepare meals at home, is helping feeding programs prepare nutritious meals in quantity, and is helping food pantries educate clients about the use of provided foods through inclusion of selected recipes in food bags. The Family Nutrition Program (FNP) in our state is using the cookbook as a training tool and incentive for client families. To date, this program has distributed over 1500 copies. FNP educators report that the cookbook is an excellent incentive for encouraging participants to complete the five-lesson

FNP program. Cookbook recipients like the short, easy recipes and even novice cooks have been able to follow the instructions. One mother of three children reports trying an average of one new recipe each week. Before FNP training and receipt of the cookbook, she fed her family noodles almost every night. She credits *Fast and Flexible* with helping her improve her children's diet with more well-balanced meals.

Although the target population for this project was limited-resource audiences and emergency feeding programs, college students, busy parents, and others with limited time, money, and/or cooking skills will find recipes in the *Fast and Flexible* cookbook that provide a welcome and less expensive change from the local fast-food carry-out.

NOTE/REFERENCES

1. Second Harvest 1993 Research Study. Chicago, IL: VanAmburg Group, Inc., 1994.
2. Reeves D. The changing politics of hunger. In: 1995 World Food Day Study/Action Packet. Washington, DC: U.S. National Committee for World Food Day, 1995.
3. Nutrition and your health: dietary guidelines for Americans. 4th Ed. Home and Garden Bulletin No. 232. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995.
4. Parson's Technology; One Parson's Drive, P.O. Box 100, Hiawatha, IA 52233-0100.

Cookbooks are available for \$5.00 from Purdue University Agricultural Communications Service, Media Distribution Center, 301 South 2nd Street, Lafayette, IN 47901-1232 (1-888-398-4636). Reference item number CFS-657.