

The Farm

Essay on the Most Economical Food, &c., for Harvest Hands—No. 5.

The matter of cooking for harvest hands is a branch of domestic duty to which the mistress of a farm house is called upon to devote her attention for a short time during every year, and as it is a somewhat arduous undertaking, it requires no small amount of tact and forethought on her part. It is one of those departments of housekeeping which can very seldom be delegated to an under servant, but requires at least the supervision, if not the actual labor, of the mistress or housekeeper.

My experience on the subject so far has all gone to show that, in one particular, at least, man differs but very slightly from any other animal that has been brought into servitude; that is, he works better when he is well fed. It is, in my opinion, poor economy to give men who are working hard all day in the hot sun from early morning till perhaps sun-down at night, "just anything that is easiest got," thrown rather than set upon the table, in any "any way that is handy" fashion.

If you want your workmen to render cheerful service give them plenty of good, wholesome, nourishing food; let them see that you care for their comfort; have your table tidy and keep your dining room as cool and free from flies as possible.

While everything that is provided should be good of its kind, I would not recommend that much labor or material be spent in making rich cake or any very great variety of pastry. I do not think this is what is needed in a farm house; it is nourishing food that will strengthen the muscle and repair the waste of the system, which should be found on the table that is surrounded by workmen. I think that to almost every meal there might, as staples, be found something like the following: meat, good bread and butter, biscuit and some kind of pie. A change might be made by occasionally substituting for the biscuit buns or currant loaf.

In addition to these staples there should invariably be potatoes to dinner and at least one other kind of vegetable such as may be in season, also some one or more of seasonable relishes, such as lettuce, cucumber, radish, &c., and generally some kind of pudding. To tea, if desired, a sponge cake or jelly cake might be added once in a while, and apple sauce or berries and cream. Breakfast is sometimes varied by having boiled eggs or toast.

A nice dish for dinner is to have baked apples served with cream and sugar, instead of pudding. While everything should be made good (it is poor economy to make pies and biscuits too tough and hard to be eaten), at the same time any approach to "greasiness" in cooking should be avoided. Biscuits may be spongy and pie crust rich, light, and flaky, without being greasy. It is a daily repairing and not a daily oiling that the human machinery requires.

Biscuits and pies should be made at least passably good and then baked in a moderately hot oven. Mixtures of flour and fat dried, rather than baked, in a slow oven, are neither palatable nor nourishing. Cold meats, too, should be always kept in a cool place to prevent the fatty parts becoming oily.

I am aware that in every household accidents will occur in the cooking. The bread may be sour or hard, the biscuits or pies mismanaged, or the meat badly cooked, but when this state of things is the exception and not the rule, they are readily looked over and put up with for once, by men who possess an ordinary amount of good nature.

On account of living at a distance from town, the meat part of our bill of fare consists chiefly of dry salt pork (some summers we have corned beef.) My plan is to use the hams and shoulders during the harvest, reserving the fatter parts for the cooler weather, when the men are not working so hard. We usually have the butcher call once a week, but after first going the rounds of his town customers and then driving four miles into the country, his stock, to say the least, is not always attractive, and it is difficult to obtain a good cut unless it has been previously ordered. Sometimes

a nice change is made by having to dinner a pair of roast chickens or a chicken pie. Occasionally, too, a lamb is taken from the flock and killed, which varies the monotony of salt meat somewhat. Usually one half of the lamb is exchanged with some neighbor who kills at another time. I find, when the farm hands are not numerous nor the family large, that half a lamb is quite as much as can be disposed of, without waste, before the men seem to tire of it. I think they do tire of lamb or mutton sooner than any other kind of meat.

I prefer having cold meat for supper and breakfast. It does not necessitate quite so much work. Apart from that I think it is healthier, and the men appear to relish it better than hot meat at those meals.

I will now proceed to give, as requested, a bill of fare for one week.

Monday—Breakfast 6 o'clock, a.m., sharp; fried ham, buns, pie, coffee. Lunch, carried to the field at 9 a.m., hot biscuit, apple pie, coffee. Dinner at 12 o'clock (punctually), fried bacon cut from the shoulder, boiled potatoes, baked dry beans, rice pudding, currant loaf, tea. Lunch carried to the field at 4 o'clock, p.m., cold biscuit, custard pie, coffee. Supper: when the men quit work for the night, cold ham, buns, raspberry pie, sponge cake, tea.

Tuesday—Breakfast (hours for each meal always the same), cold boiled ham, potatoes sliced and warmed, biscuits, apple pie, coffee. Lunch, buns, currant pastry, coffee. Dinner, fried ham and eggs, potatoes, green peas, apple pie, biscuit, tea. Lunch, hot biscuit, custard pie, coffee. Supper, cold ham, currant loaf, apple pie, raspberries and cream, tea.

Wednesday—Breakfast, cold pork, warmed potatoes, buns, toast, coffee. Lunch, apple pie, biscuit, coffee. Dinner, fried bacon and onions, green beans, hot biscuit, baked apples with cream and sugar, tea. Lunch, currant loaf, custard pie, coffee. Supper, cold shoulder of pork, buns, raspberry pie, baked apples.

Thursday—Breakfast, cold pork, fried potatoes, biscuit, apple pie, coffee. Lunch, biscuit, raspberry pie, coffee. Dinner, roast beef, potatoes baked with the meat, Yorkshire pudding, apple pie with cream, tea. Lunch, apple pie, currant loaf, coffee. Supper, cold roast beef, custard pie, biscuits, raspberries and cream, tea.

Friday—Breakfast, fried ham, potatoes, buns, apple pie, coffee. Lunch, hot biscuit, currant pastry, coffee. Dinner, Irish stew with toast, side dish of cold pork, potatoes, bread pudding, apple pie, tea. Lunch, biscuit, raspberry pie, coffee. Supper, cold pork, apple pie, biscuit, apple sauce, tea.

Saturday—Breakfast, fried ham and eggs, potatoes, buns, apple pie, coffee. Lunch, custard pie, currant loaf, coffee. Dinner, hot boiled ham, potatoes, green peas, steamed pudding, buns, tea. Lunch, currant pastry, apple pie, coffee. Supper, cold boiled ham, hot biscuit, raspberry pie, jelly cake, tea.

No cooking is done on the Sabbath, dinner being previously prepared on the Saturday, giving all an opportunity to spend the day in rest and devotion.

Invariably to every meal there is bread and butter, and, as I have before said, at least some one of the many relishes which are to be found in almost every farmer's garden during the summer.

It is a very difficult matter to lay down any fixed rule as regards a bill of fare, as the providing for each day is more or less dependent on circumstances, and every week is not alike. Frequently a change is made by substituting, as I have before said, for some of the fried meat dinners of the first of the week roast chicken or chicken pie, and by sometimes having lamb; the beef, too, is not on all occasions a roast, and in that case, of course, is served up in the most appropriate way.

We raise yearly quite a number of chickens and at times some other kinds of poultry, but none of it is ever marketed; the whole of the surplus stock finds its way to our own table, and we do not consider that their use is extravagant. In fact I think it is more economical to use fowls which are raised on the farm with very little expense than to buy fresh meat, especially when prices rule as high as they have done lately.

Oatmeal might sometimes be prepared for breakfast if the men liked it, and I might say here, although not exactly bearing on the subject in question, that it is a good plan to stir a few spoonfuls of oatmeal into the water which the men carry to the field to drink.

The lunching of the men may appear to some to be unnecessary and consequently not economical.

I think, however, there are some advantages to be gained by the practice. For one, the farming operations are all conducted on strictly temperance principles, which is not always the case where lunch is not given. Then the men work longer hours, thus getting through their work sooner than they otherwise would, and at the same time, while working longer hours, they do not do so grudgingly but cheerfully, as though they took a real pleasure in it. I am aware that lunching makes more work in the house, and that, too, at a season when the rest and recreation which many of our sisters in the cities and towns are enjoying is very tempting, and we almost envy them their ease, yet there is a certain satisfaction in conscientiously performing, to the best of our ability, every known duty of that station in life in which Providence has placed us. A woman may be called upon to work and yet she need not necessarily degenerate into a common drudge or become a mere machine; performing a daily routine, neither her womanly dignity nor her intellectual ability need be one whit lessened in consequence. I might say, too, that although the work is hard it does not continue long, not more than four or five weeks on an average, unless the farm is unusually large, and when they are over we can take to ourselves a little well earned rest and recreation.

In conclusion I would say that nothing should be wasted. It is the duty of every woman to "look well to the ways of her household" in this matter. It is the constant dropping of little leaks that dribbles away the profits. Every housekeeper would do well to choose for her motto the words of our Divine Master when he said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost." Dry bread should be toasted or made into puddings. Stale buns and biscuit, too, can be worked up in the latter way. A nice way to use up dry bread is to soak well in either milk or water, smash it well with a pounder, then season with sage and onion and bake in the same pan in which the beef is roasting. At the table it is served up with the meat. I find most men like this kind of dressing, and it not only uses up the dry pieces but it makes the meat go further. Scraps of meat, too, should be saved in a cool place free from flies. When sufficient is collected a little onion and potato should be added and the whole made into a stew, which, with the dry bread of the previous day toasted and laid round the edge of the platter, makes a nice dish for dinner, supplemented by cold meat, and in some such way as this everything should be made to serve some purpose.

Weeds and their Seeds.

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On September 28th one vigorous Pursley plant (*Portulaca oleracea*) contained 9 branches, the average branch 15 branchlets, the average branchlet 212 seed capsules, one average seed capsule 75 seeds, thus making for an estimate a grand total of 2,146,500 seeds.

June 21st, an average plant of Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) contained about 1,000 pods, each pod at least 20 seeds, and more bloom to come. A better specimen showed 2,200 pods and still blooming; a vigorous specimen had 4,400 pods at least, and still blooming. The number of seeds to a plant may therefore be estimated at from 20,000 to 80,000. A fair sample of Mallow (*Malva rotundifolia*) had 1,100 blossoms and more to come, each bloom producing 15 seeds; the estimate for the plant, therefore, 16,500.

A fair sample of Chick-weed (*Stellaria media*) showed 123 flowers and capsules, each of which produced from 7 to 10 seeds. A better plant showed 471 capsules, and many had opened and fallen. This plant flowers during a very long season, and the number of seeds upon the plant at one time may be safely estimated at from 1,000 to 4,000.

A plant of Corn Speedwell (*Veronica arvensis*) showed 43 pods with 90 seeds to a pod. A more vigorous plant showed 175 pods and about 101 seeds to a pod; another plant had 78 pods, and still another 123 pods. The number of seeds can therefore be estimated at from 4,000 to 15,000 to the plant. A specimen of the Thyme-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*) had 142 pods with about 58 seeds to the pod, or an estimated number of 8,000 seeds to the plant.

A fair, rather smallish plant of black mustard, (*Sinapis nigra*) had about 120 blossoms and pods. One pod had fifteen seeds; the estimate, therefore, 1,800 seeds to the plant.