

A New England Harvest Breakfast

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Massachusetts Correspondent

GILL, Mass. — I believe my love of breakfasts comes from my great-grandmother. “Gramma John” ran a bed-and-breakfast, which she called a “boarding house,” from the early 1930s to the late 1950s and even served such guests as first lady Grace Coolidge, wife of President Calvin Coolidge. For her breakfasts, Gramma John cooked food that Grampa John, a woodworker by trade, either raised himself or bartered from a local farm. And that’s the way my family was brought up — by eating what we and our friends grow. In following grandpa’s tradition, I still choose to get as many of my breakfast ingredients sourced as close to home as possible, even though some of our friends find this backwards, and “quaint” is a word I often hear from city folk. But when I do purchase locally grown food, I know that my money goes to the farmer — my friends. And, because some of these farms are within walking distance, we can often shop for groceries without using any gasoline.

Eating healthy is extremely easy,



Isaac dreams of pumpkin pie. Last spring, he bought the plants at the farmers market and recently harvested these plump pumpkins.

living in such an agricultural area. Grains, vegetables, meat, dairy, fruits, eggs and even local nuts are all within walking distance. We make our own maple syrup and grow our own apples (though most of the apples in the recipes below come from neighboring towns). When we

eat a breakfast of French toast, it is topped by our maple syrup and last year’s hickory nuts that we harvested 1/4 mile down the road. My wife drinks Massachusetts-grown cranberry juice, and for a beverage, nothing beats the 45-minute-old milk that we get from the Ayrshire herd down

the road, at Upinngil’s farm stand.

The sausage we use in our breakfasts comes either from neighboring farms or from Foster’s Supermarket nearby in Greenfield, Mass. Foster’s makes their own “Dave’s Sausage,” a very delicious sausage. (Dave died years ago and, then my father took over the recipe for a few years.)

Several years ago, when my wife’s doctor told us that “developing gestational diabetes may be the best thing that ever happens to you,” Joyana and I knew it was a line to calm us during our third pregnancy, hopefully ending with an infant this time (as it turned out, the third pregnancy was the charm, with our 7-year-old son, Isaac, as the proof). The line did not calm us, but we did start watching what (and, more importantly, how much) we were eating. As I took over cooking duties in the house then, I was often referred to as “The Carb Nazi.” Despite the negative tone of my new nickname, I wore the badge proudly.

To this day, years later, the badge remains, and I have taken it upon myself to return the breakfast meal — a meal that seems, to me, way too heavy on the carbohydrates — to its tasteful duty of preparing us for a solid day of

work. I am an amateur chef, but I especially enjoy cooking these simple, low-carb breakfasts, which, my family calls, “meals to weep for.” I make a point of using only local ingredients (except for spices, baking powder and olive oil), usually just from our town. Sometimes the ingredients may come from a town or two away. Although the meals are incredibly delicious, I keep the recipe very easy. Besides these breakfasts below, we also like to prepare local Finnish pancakes, egg dishes, crepes and omelets.

Since I don’t like to follow recipes, the recipes below are contrived and not filled with details. I cook by handed-down knowledge from my mother, which before that, came from Gramma John, as well as by sight and feel. For example, is the result too moist? Add flour. No bubbles? Add more powder. Not browning? Add oil.

When Isaac was three he often asked his grandparents during visits if they were feeding him “fresh and local food.” My intent is that these breakfasts will always remain an early morning New England harvest treat, and hopefully, one day, Isaac will continue our local, healthy, breakfast tradition.

Meal 1

Squash pancakes (topped with cranberries, hickory nuts and maple syrup)
Ham slice
Sliced fresh apple

Squash Pancakes

- 1/2 cup cooked winter squash, pureed or mashed (our family prefers buttercup squash)
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1-1/4 cups flour (I use wheat, buckwheat, and oat flours, mixed)
- 1/2 cup oats
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoons baking powder
- Pinch of salt

Mix all ingredients until just blended. Cook on greased griddle until done. Serve pancakes with heated ham and apple slices. Yields 8 pancakes.



Meal 2

Cinnamon-raisin French toast with maple syrup
Applesauce
Sausage
Fresh apple slices

French Toast

- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup milk
- Bread slices (our family prefers cinnamon-raisin)
- Dash of nutmeg (not needed if you use cinnamon-raisin bread)

In shallow bowl, make egg mixture by scrambling egg with milk. Dip both sides of bread slice into egg mixture. Scrape egg excess off bread. Place bread into oiled frying pan and cover. Fry over medium heat, until bottom side turns golden brown. Flip over, then cook until second side has turned golden brown.



Quick Applesauce

- Apples to fill saucepan, cut up (Use at least three varieties — yes, it really does make a difference. In this batch, I simmered MacIntosh, Gala and Empire apples.)
 - 1/2 cup apple cider
 - Dash each, cinnamon, nutmeg and ground cloves, to taste
 - Cranberries (optional)
- Simmer the apples with spices (to taste) in the cider. No sweeteners are needed. No food mill required. When cooked, spoon applesauce onto plate.

Meal 4

Breakfast sandwich
Fresh apple slices
Fresh cranberries

Breakfast Sandwich

- 2 eggs
 - 1/2 cup milk
 - Chopped onion
 - Vegetables of your choice, chopped, optional
- Saute onion and vegetables (optional). Scramble eggs and cook until done. Cut the cooked eggs in half and use half for each sandwich.

Bread

4 slices of cheese
Ham slice

For this sandwich, simply prepare a cheese sandwich, but add the egg, ham and vegetables between the slices with the cheese and grill.



Meal 3

Omelet
Sweet potato home fries
Raspberries

Omelet

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 4 slices Cheddar cheese
- Chopped onion, to taste
- Vegetables of your choice, chopped, optional

Sausage, cooked and chopped into pieces
Oil or butter, for frying

Heat oil or butter slightly. Saute onion and vegetables (optional). Put egg mixture in frying pan, cook until nearly done, mixing in onion, vegetables and sausage.

Sweet Potato Home Fries

- Sweet potatoes
 - Olive oil
- Wash and dice sweet potatoes. Coat frying pan with olive oil. Cover. Cook over medium heat, flipping occasionally, until crispy.



Photos by Steve Damon

Meal 5

Yogurt topped with hickory nuts and cranberries
Harvest biscuit
Fresh fruit such as pear, apple, cranberries, raspberries

Biscuit

- 1-1/2 cups flour (I use wheat, buckwheat and oat flours)
- 1/2 cup oats
- 3/4 cup milk
- 2-1/2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1/2 cup chopped fruit (I use pear, apple, cranberries and raspberries)

Mix the flour, oats, milk and baking powder together. Add fruit. Drop the batter onto a greased pan and bake at 400 degrees for 13 minutes. Once done, remove from baking pan. Serve while still warm. Yields 6 biscuits.



HARRISBURG, Pa.

— Jared Vamvakias of Boyertown, Pa., in Berks County, placed second in the junior division of the Keystone Lead Line Sheep Show at the Keystone International Livestock Exposition in Harrisburg on Oct. 8. This photo of Jared was missing from the winners shown in the Oct. 15 issue of Lancaster Farming, page B4.



Photo provided by PDA

How Far Away Were the Breakfast Ingredients?

20 feet: Damons’ Dirt, Gill, Mass. (raspberries, onions)
damons_of_gill@yahoo.com

1/4 mile: Flagg Farm, Gill, Mass. (squash, nuts)
agcom@gillmass.org

1/2 mile: Upinngil, Gill, Mass. (dairy, grains)
pickens@crocker.com

1/2 mile: Little Red Hen Bakery, Gill, Mass. (bread)
pickens@crocker.com

1/2 mile: Malcolm Eggs, Gill, Mass. (eggs)
pickens@crocker.com

6 miles: Four Star Farm, Northfield, Mass. (grains)
fourstar1@comcast.net

7 miles: Foster’s Supermarket, Greenfield, Mass. (sausage)
413-773-1100

11 miles: Wells Tavern Farm, Shelburne, Mass (ham)
carrie@wellstavernfarm.com

12 miles: Graves-Glen Farm, Shelburne, Mass. (maple syrup, pears)
damons_of_gill@yahoo.com

13 miles: Clarkdale Fruit Farm, Deerfield, Mass. (apples)
ben@clarkdalefruitfarms.com

14 miles: Pine Hill Orchards, Colrain, Mass. (cider)
413-624-3325

16 miles: Aisle o’ View Farm, Shutesbury, Mass. (cranberries)
adamsteelezucker@gmail.com

18 miles: Commonwealth Dairy, Brattleboro, Vt. (yogurt)
www.commonwealth-dairy.com