

# OUR BOUNTIFUL LAND: THE STORY OF FOOD

BEFORE 1825

**A**merican Indians lived in our part of the country long before white settlers arrived and long before statehood. The two major tribes were the Ojibwe (sometimes called Chippewa or Anishinabe) and the Dakota (Sioux).

Thanks to our region's great variety of soil types, terrain, weather and growing seasons, nature provided everything these early people needed for survival year round. The Ojibwe lived and traveled among the northern lakes and forests of what would later become Minnesota. Living in harmony with nature, they caught fish and hunted bear, elk, deer, ducks and geese. They harvested wild blueberries, cranberries, plums and other fruits. They tapped maple trees to make maple syrup and maple sugar as they feasted from nature's bounty. In time, they became food producers as well as hunters and gatherers. In summer Ojibwe women planted corn, pumpkins and squash. They harvested wild rice growing in northern lakes.

The Dakota settled in the south and southwestern plains areas of what is now Minnesota. Dakota villages dotted the banks of many rivers (see map). River water was needed for drinking and crops, and the softer soil along riverbanks made for easier tilling. Dakota men hunted wild game, including bison. Dakota women were farmers, harvesting corn and squash. They ate most of the food as it ripened, but always stored some for winter eating and spring planting.

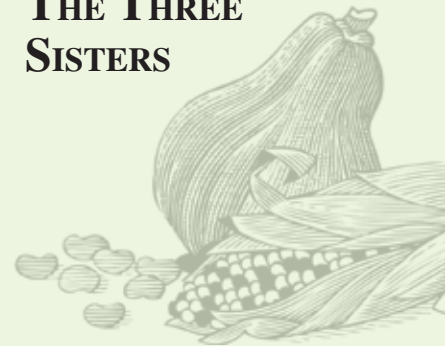
By the early 1820s, things were changing. Fort Snelling was built on a hill overlooking the meeting point of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. The troops at Ft. Snelling needed a lot of food. Colonel Josiah Snelling ordered that 200 acres of land beside the Minnesota River be tilled for crops. Along with native foods, they



Illustration Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

planted wheat and oats that had been brought from Europe and the troops ate well. Reports say about 4,500 bushels of potatoes were stored for winter. Not bad for starters!

## THE THREE SISTERS



In native lore, corn, beans and squash are often called the "Three Sisters." This name came from the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse (also known as Iroquois).

Many considered these crops to be special gifts from the creator. They were very important in the agriculture and nutrition of most of the Native people of the Americas. When planted together, the three sisters help each other. Corn provides support for beans. Beans absorb nitrogen from the air with the help of bacteria living on their roots. Corn needs a lot of nitrogen to grow. The large squash leaves shade the soil, slow weed growth and discourage animal pests.

Many stories, customs and celebrations have been created about the Three Sisters. Surf the web or check out the library to learn more.

## THINK AND DISCUSS:

1. Why did the Indians in northern Minnesota and southern Minnesota eat and grow different foods?
2. How did the lives of people change when they learned to raise their own food instead of having to go out and search for it?



Use a detailed Minnesota map as a guide to:

- Label four rivers where Indians settled.
- Label the location of Ft. Snelling (see clues above).
- Label two lakes that were important Ojibwe food sources.

# OUR BOUNTIFUL LAND: THE STORY OF FOOD

1825-1970

**M**ore settlers from Europe and Canada came after Fort Snelling was built in 1819. Without grocery stores or feed stores, early pioneers had to get food for their families and livestock from their own farms. They cleared land with hand tools and simple plows pulled by horses or oxen. They hunted wild game and ate wild fruits. They planted gardens and grew potatoes, corn, squash, turnips and other vegetables. Their few farm animals could give them meat, milk and eggs, but those animals needed food, too. Poor crop years and long winters were scary for pioneer families. Where would they get enough food? How would they store the foods grown in summer so they would last through the winter? They learned to salt, pickle, smoke, dry and preserve foods in cellar dugouts so they would not spoil.

Settlers kept coming, and Minnesota became the 32nd state in 1858. Many of the new Minnesotans lived in towns and cities. They were consumers, not producers, of food. Some of their foods and supplies were shipped to them by rail or river from cities farther east. But mostly, they turned to the local farmers to feed them. Oats, corn, hay, wheat and eventually soybeans became huge food crops feeding our families and livestock. Fruits and vegetables grew in gardens and orchards all over the state. Beef cattle, milk cows, hogs, sheep, goats and poultry provided food. Modern railways, highways, air routes and two main waterways—the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes—carried tons of our ag products to people around the world and brought new foods here.



**Huge farms called bonanza farms sprung up in the 1870s, mainly in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota. They grew thousands of acres of wheat. Huge crews and the latest machinery harvested the wheat, which was ground into flour at mills in Minneapolis. The huge bonanza farms only lasted about 15 years.**

Photo Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



**In 1935 the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) brought electricity to farming communities. This greatly changed lives! It was much easier for farm families to store food year around through refrigeration. The cook's job got easier when electric stoves replaced wood burners.**

Photo Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



## HELP FROM MACHINES

The land provides the bounty—but help from machines boosts the amount and variety of foods in our lives. New machines changed how many a farmer could feed:

In **1830**, the family and a few farm animals.

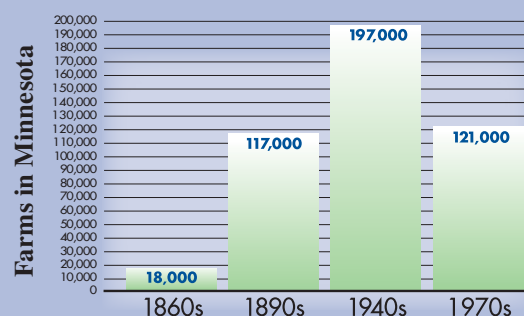
In **1900**, the family, the farm livestock and **five** other people.

In **1950**, the family, many more farm livestock and **20** other people.

How was this possible? John Deere's steel plow and Cyrus McCormick's reaper, invented in the 1830s, saved labor. New and better plows broke up the tough, gummy prairie soils and large fields were planted and harvested. Tractors, invented in 1904, gradually replaced horsepower. It was only the beginning. By 1938, Machinery Hill at the State Fair showed over 75 pieces of machinery. Improved plows, tractors, combines and other machines kept coming. More food could be grown with less work. Farmers could farm much more land. They bought more land and farms became larger. By 1970, Minnesota agriculture was helping to feed the world.

## THINK AND DISCUSS:

1. Imagine living without electricity. What would your life be like?
2. How did the lives of people change when they could go out and buy their food instead of having to grow it?



## Study the chart to answer:

- What trends do you see?
- What facts above help explain these farm numbers?



# OUR BOUNTIFUL LAND: THE STORY OF FOOD

1970-2009

Minnesota's food story since 1970 has meant big changes for producers, processors and all of us.

## Bigger Farms

Farms keep getting larger. Modern technology and machinery help make that happen. Today's poultry farmers can raise thousands of turkeys or chickens on one farm. One dairy farmer might have 500 or more cows. Crop farmers can plant and harvest hundreds of acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and more.



## Science Discoveries

Scientists play a big role in today's food industry. Think about some of their amazing work: new plant varieties; plants that can resist pests, diseases or drought; animals that are healthier and leaner; new ways to keep the food supply clean, fresh, safe and healthy.

## World Markets

Improved storage, refrigeration and transportation means foods come to us from markets all over the world. Strawberries from Mexico can be picked in the morning and sold in our stores the same day.



Farmers' markets offer us hundreds of fresh foods throughout the growing season.

## NEW MENUS, NEW CHOICES

Each group of newcomers brings their own tasty foods, flavors and traditions. That means more choices for all of us! Today's supermarkets are packed with thousands of foods for us to choose from besides the locally grown. Some stores have whole sections of food from countries around the world. You can pick up the fixings for Chinese chow mein, Mexican tacos, Asian stir-fry, Thai peanut sauce or Indian curries in one-stop shopping. Not only are there more food choices, there are more places to buy food. You can buy food in farmers' markets, co-ops or directly from a favorite farmer. You can even shop online and have food delivered to your house. What would the pioneers think?



Photo Courtesy University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station

## Contributions from Newcomers

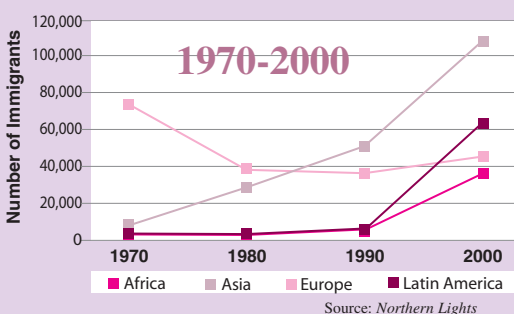
Minnesota is home to many new immigrants. They include people from Southeast Asia, India, Latin America, Mexico, Somalia and many other nations. Many newcomers moved to small towns and rural areas to work in agriculture. From fields to processing plants and grocery stores to restaurants, immigrants make huge contributions to our food industry every day.

The vegetable in the cover photo is bok choy.



## THINK AND DISCUSS:

### Immigration Trends into Minnesota



1. From where have most of the immigrants in Minnesota come in the 1900s?
2. What foods do you enjoy that came to us through immigrants?

## Fast Fact:

In 2007, about 10% of Minnesota's residents were immigrants and their U.S. born children under age 18.

(Source: Center for Immigration Studies)