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Foodways A 4-H Folkpatterns Project – Family Food Traditions/Setting the Table
Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service
4-H Club Bulletin

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Family Food Traditions



Food Presentation

PURPOSE: To get an idea of what foodways were passed down or are being passed down in your family

YOU'LL NEED: A family member older than you (could be mother, stepfather, adopted brother, cousin, grandparent, or the woman you call "Aunt")

Paper **or** short-item cards **or** a tape recorder

Pen or pencil **or** cassette tapes

TIME: One or two hours

HOW TO DO IT: Ask an older member of your family some of the following questions. Record the answers on paper, a short-item card, or a tape recorder. You'll get an idea of the range of foodways traditions your family has and you might even hear about some things you'd like to try later.

— How was the table set for everyday meals? For special meals?

— When did you usually eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner?

— What was the largest meal of the day?

— What foods were usually eaten in a typical meal?

— What did you call the meal served at noon? In the evening?

— If a prayer was included, who said it? What was said?

— Were there any old sayings or traditions that had to do with food?

— On what holidays would special meals be made?

— Who usually served the meal, set the table, and cleaned up?

— Was there any order as to whom was served first?

NOW WHAT? Ask somebody outside of your family these same questions. Make up a display showing how traditions are similar or different.



Food Presentation

Setting the Table

- PURPOSE:** To become aware of family traditions in presenting food
- YOU'LL NEED:** Paper and pencil
Some dishes and silverware
A camera (optional)
- TIME:** One meeting
- HOW TO DO IT:** Bring flatware and plates to a meeting. Set the table in the way it is done for a regular meal at your house. What differences do you see in the ways different families set their tables? If you have any family heirloom silverware or dinnerware, perhaps you could borrow the pieces to display at a meeting. Try setting these heirloom pieces in the way you think they were originally used.
- NOW WHAT?**
1. Interview other people about the ways they set their tables. Be sure to get a wide mix of people—older, younger, and from different cultural backgrounds. How does the table setting relate to the food served?
 2. Interview someone who works in the china department of a store. How does he/she present dinnerware? What are the uses of different sizes of plates, knives, and forks? Photograph various table settings and explain why they are set that way. Make this into a display to encourage others to share table setting ideas with you.