

Non-traditional Comestibles Suitable for Holiday-specific Ingestion

C. M. Cobb

Department of Plant Biology and Pathology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick New Jersey 08901, USA

Thanksgiving celebrations traditionally involve the ceremonial consumption of a flightless avian species, *Meleagris gallopavo*. Prepared as the centerpiece of an intricate meal that may also include *Ipomoea batatas*, *Cucurbita pepo*, *Brassica rapa*, etc., *Meleagris gallopavo* is widely perceived as an indispensable component of the holiday's festivities. Presented here is the first report of a successful Thanksgiving feast lacking *Meleagris gallopavo*.

Introduction

Historically an American and Canadian holiday, Thanksgiving occurs on the fourth Thursday of November and the second Monday of October, respectively, with similar but unrelated celebrations also occurring in Croatia and Grenada. Dating back to the Pilgrims' early interactions with Native Americans in the seventeenth century (Siskind, 1992), the holiday is traditionally observed as a time for members of extended families to temporarily congregate in a designated area, offer expressions of gratitude to one another ranging from genuine to vague to insincere (rarely, absent), and "celebrate material abundance" (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991).

Critical to this ritual is the selection, preparation, and subsequent consumption of a large, cultivated variety of *Meleagris gallopavo*, with the two former steps generally being assigned to the patriarch (Grandfather, personal communication). Many methods for *Meleagris gallopavo* selection (Hickoff, 2009; eHow, 2005) and preparation (Hoffman, 1995; Lagasse, 2001) have been published elsewhere; however, the conditions under which this report was investigated were not ideal and as such required radical departures from established Thanksgiving protocols.

A sizeable family can easily consume an entire specimen of *Meleagris gallopavo* in one sitting even if such a feat may require certain members to ingest more than is recommended (a process known colloquially as "seconds" or, less commonly, "thirds"). However, this solution is not feasible in less ideal situations, such as an inexperienced first-year graduate student who finds himself unable to participate in familial celebrations

taking place 2,200 km away. In such cases, alternative culinary preparations may be warranted and, even, desirable. In testing the suitability of non-traditional alternatives, the following conditions were assumed:

- 1) The subject (i.e., the person preparing the meal) is mildly irresponsible and incapable of anticipating holiday-specific operating hours of local food vendors.
- 2) The subject possesses minimal culinary skills or appropriate kitchenware.
- 3) The subject does not wish to expend a lot of time (s) or energy (J).

Materials & Methods

Experimental Design

Entrée and side-dish selections were determined by ease of preparation as well as cultural considerations. Preliminary arrangements took into account the ethnic background and stated preferences of a certain guest who the subject wished particularly to impress. Two experiments were performed with one involving the subject and his four friends two days prior to Thanksgiving Day (TD) and the other involving the subject and his step-father on TD. Important differences between both experiments are outlined in Table 1.

| | Friends | Step-father |
|------------------|---------|------------------|
| Green Curry | Yes | Yes ^a |
| Cucumber Yoghurt | Yes | Yes |
| Rice and Quinoa | Yes | Yes |
| Lentils | No | Yes |
| Dessert | Fondue | Bananas |
| Wine | Yes | No |

Table 1. Meals in both experiments were similar with noted exceptions above. **A.** Pectoral mass derived from different source (0.91 kg, Kirkland Signature).

Green Curry Chicken

Oil extracted from seed of *Glycine max* (14.8 mL, LouAna) was heated on flat hydrophobic surface for 30 seconds. Seasoned paste comprising various parts of *Capsicum frutescens*, *Allium sativum*, *Cymbopogon citratus*, *Alpinia galanga*, *Allium cepa*, *Piper nigrum*, *Coriandrum sativum*, *Cuminum cyminum*, and *Citrus hystrix* as well as sodium chloride (29.6 mL, Thai

Corresponding author: Cody Cobb (codycobb@eden.rutgers.edu).

Kitchen) was introduced to oil and heated for additional 30 seconds. Pectoral mass from *Gallus gallus domesticus* (0.91 kg, Tyson) was prepared into thin strips to increase surface area, applied to oil-paste mixture, and heated until incipient effects of Maillard reactions were observed (Thorpe and Baynes, 2003). After approximately 3 minutes, medium-sized specimens of *Allium cepa* (app. 100 g, Pathmark) and *Capsicum anuum* (app. 100 g, Pathmark) were stirred into mixture, covered with processed endosperm of *Cocos nucifera* (414 mL, Thai Kitchen) and brought to boil. Approximately one minute before completion, extracts from *Engraulis encrasicolus* (14.8 mL, Thai Kitchen) and *Citrus limon* (app. 5 mL, Pathmark) were stirred into reaction.

Cucumber Yoghurt

Skin and seeds were removed from fruit of *Cucumis sativus* (app. 300 g, Pathmark) with remaining mass introduced to milk of *Bos taurus* containing active cultures of *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Bifidobacterium animalis*, and *Lactobacillus casei* (355 mL, Brown Cow). Two minced cloves from bulb of *Allium sativum* (3 g, Pathmark), similarly minced leaves and stem of *Anethum graveolens* (14.8 mL, Pathmark), and oil extracted from fruit of *Olea europaea* (59.1 mL, America's Choice) were added to final mixture and stored at 4 °C until serving time.

Base Grains

Two varieties of grain, *Oryza sativa* (Blue Ribbon Golden) and the pseudocereal *Chenopodium quinoa* (Earthly Delights), were prepared in 1:2 grain to water volume, briefly brought to boil, and left to simmer in background while other reactions took place.

Lentils

Fruits from leguminous species *Lens culinaris* and *Phaseolus vulgaris* were prepared from Madras Lentils kit (285 g, Tasty Bite) in boiling water for 5 minutes. Used only on TD.

Desserts

Dessert two days prior to TD consisted of molten extract from seeds of *Theobroma cacao* (326 g, Ghirardelli) in which were dipped fruits of *Fragaria x ananassa* (Pathmark) and *Ananas comosus* (Pathmark). Dessert on TD consisted solely of slices from seedless fruits of *Musa* varieties (Pathmark).

Libations

Two selections of alcoholic beverages were chosen at random from a licensed distributor (Rite Aid Pharmacy). The first, Alizé Gold Passion, is a mixture of fermented fruit of *Vitis vinifera* cv. Ugni blanc and non-fermented juice extract of *Passiflora edulis*, with 16% of the total volume comprising hydroxyethane. The final mixture was reportedly blessed by a Catholic priest, though this function has no known effects on the taste of or subsequent physiological reactions induced by the liqueur. The second, Acacia Chardonnay, was not used due to technical reasons (Fig. 1).

Results

Both experiments yielded favorable responses from participants. This assessment was based on three factors: 1) number of compliments given by participants, 2) amount of leftovers and willingness of



Fig. 1. Shit.

participants to indulge in "seconds", and 3) number of phone numbers obtained from participants of particular interest.

The number and nature of compliments (Fig. 2) were characteristic of both experiments. Especially noteworthy was the significant lack of negative comments ($p < 0.05$). Leftovers were of negligible quantity after the first experiment and were not refrigerated (Fig. 3). However, though leftovers were produced after the second experiment, this was likely due to the addition of Madras Lentils to the meal and the decrease of participants from five to two. The third factor, an indirect measurement that considers extra-experimental concerns such as subject hospitality, music selection, and overall presentation in addition to meal taste and suitability, entailed the acquisition of a particular participant's phone number, which was successful (data not shown).

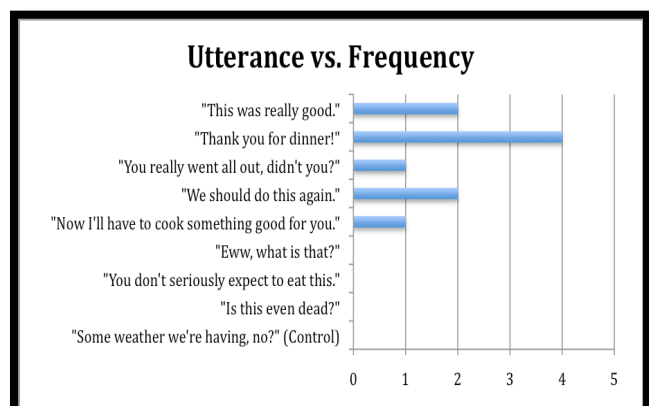


Fig. 2. All positive comments were uttered at least once. No negative comments were reported.

Discussion

The pleasant experiences of all participants in both experiments offer enough compelling evidence to conclude that TD celebrations do not require the use of *Meleagris gallopavo* in culinary preparations, at least

under conditions described herein. Whether TD celebrations lacking *Meleagris gallopavo* can be scaled to accommodate extended families has yet to be determined.

Results also indicate the importance of eclecticism and variety. Previous research erroneously concluded *Anethum graveolens* as being the traditional source of seasoning for Cucumber Yoghurt specific to the ethnic background of the participant of particular interest, whereas in fact leaves of *Mentha spicata* or *Mentha x piperita* cv. Persian Mint Field are used (Javid, personal communication). Nevertheless, the participant expressed appreciation for the variety and consumed the remainder of her meal without incident. Additionally, the overall eclectic nature of the meal (combining elements of Thai, Greek, French, and graduate student improvisation) made positive impressions on the subject's step-father.

Further research in testing the suitability of non-traditional comestibles in a more traditional setting will be possible in approximately one month's time.



Fig. 3. Negligible leftovers were discarded under proper disposal protocols.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge his professor, Lena Struwe, for offering the extra credit assignment for which he hopes this report qualifies; his step-father, Gordon Schroeder, whose visit made the author's TD significantly less lonesome; and his four friends who were polite enough to compliment his cooking even if they felt otherwise.

References

- Hickoff, S. (2009). *Turkey calls and calling: guide to improving your turkey-calling skills*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.
- Hoffman, V. (1995). *The Great turkey cookbook*. Hoffman Press.
- Lagasse, E. (2001, November 20). *Brined and roasted turkey recipe* : Emeril Lagasse : Food Network. Retrieved from <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/emiril-lagasse/brined-and-roasted-turkey-recipe/index.html>
- Siskind, J. (1992). The Invention of thanksgiving. *Critique of Anthropology*, 12(2), 167-191.

Thorpe, S.R., & Baynes, J.W. (2003). Maillard reaction products in tissue proteins: new products and new perspectives. *Amino Acids*, 25, 275-281.

Wallendorf, M., & Arnould, E.J. (1991). "We gather together": consumption of thanksgiving day. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(1), 13-31.

Writer, e.C. (2005, November 11). *How to Select a turkey*. Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/how_5501_select-turkey.html