Culinary Delights

From colonial times to the present, South Carolina has been the home of dynamic culinary traditions. Home cooking is one of the state's melting pots. It is where European, African, Caribbean, and Native American produce and methods converged to create distinctive staples such as shrimp and grits, Hoppin' John, barbeque, okra soup, and shrimp pilau.

Today, South Carolina home cooking inspires chefs throughout the United States.

Receipt Books

The SC Historical Society has handwritten "receipt books" in its collection, often containing recipes for medicines and cleaning products alongside food preparation instructions. For example, Isabella Timmons, writing in 1831, included recipes for ketchup, sponge cake, and pudding right next to remedies for scurvy.

Women created the recipes, sometimes borrowing ideas from friends or the enslaved, and usually consisted of little more than a list of ingredients, the assumption being that a cook would be experienced enough to figure out the rest on her own.

Many consider The Carolina Housewife, compiled by Sarah Rutledge (1782–1855) and first published in 1847, to be the classic southern cookbook. It contains over six hundred recipes of "dishes that have been made in our own home." Rutledge was the daughter of Edward Rutledge, who was a member of the Continental Congress and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Growing Medicine

In the early colonial period, enslaved Africans worked side by side with enslaved Native Americans, and the two cultures shared their knowledge of herbal medicines, often trading these secret recipes with the white planters for favors or even their freedom.

As trade increased between the colonies and other countries, the colonists began purchasing medicine from merchants, but these cures did not always work on the diseases that raged in the lowcountry. However, the enslaved African Americans maintained a strong connection to the earth, and the white planters often sought these natural remedies for their ailments.

To learn more, visit www.schistory.org or www.schseducation.org
Carolina Agriculture

Historically, rice and cotton were the major agricultural crops of South Carolina, but the state’s rich soil also produces timber, tobacco, pecans, peanuts, peaches, nursery plants, and a variety of vegetables such as corn and soybeans. In the South Carolina Encyclopedia (2006), Eldred E. Prince Jr. notes that “for most of its history, agriculture virtually defined South Carolina, and no other single force has so profoundly influenced the state’s economy, history, demographics, and politics.”

Although tourism, especially along the coast, gives every appearance of being South Carolina’s chief enterprise, much of the state is farmed or preserved for hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

Indigo

Born in Antigua to the Lieutenant Governor of the island, George Lucas, Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-1793), is credited with the successful development of the indigo industry in South Carolina. Sent to the Carolina Colony at the age of sixteen with her mother and sister, Eliza experimented with various crops and agricultural endeavors on her father’s three plantations. She had great visions of contributing to the growth of the colony, including growing oak trees to supply lumber for ship building.

Eliza fought through criticism and sabotage to create a prosperous indigo crop that grew into an industry that represented 1/3 of South Carolina’s exports by the time of the Revolutionary War. The impact of indigo on the South Carolina culture is represented in the blue color of the state flag, and more importantly, the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame inducting Eliza Lucas Pinckney in 1989.

Cotton

Before the Civil War, some coastal planters found that long-staple Sea Island cotton was more profitable than rice. However, with the end of slavery, that crop languished.

After the invention of the cotton gin and the rise of textile mills in England and New England, politicians and inland planters heralded short-staple upland cotton as South Carolina’s economic savior. Many farmers remained committed to growing only upland cotton well into the twentieth century.

Rice

As the first major export of the lowcountry, rice was responsible for the economic preeminence of the area for two hundred years. “Carolina Gold” rice first arrived in the lowcountry in the 1680s.

It is a long-grain rice that grows on tall, golden stalks. For nearly two centuries, South Carolina was the largest producer of rice in North America. In the 1840s, De Bow’s Review reported that a variety called “Gold Seed Rice,” or “Carolina Gold,” was “highly esteemed by foreign consumers.” However, rice cultivation was extremely labor intensive, and by the late nineteenth century, imports from Asia dominated the market.

Growing Tea

Prior to European settlement, Native Americans consumed “black drink,” made from the caffeinated leaves of a tree called yaupon holly. British colonists made tea drinking a habit and hallmark of sophistication. After the American Revolution, French botanist Andre Michaux (1746–1802) imported tea plants and cultivated them in South Carolina.

Dr. Charles Shepard Jr. (1842–1915) established the first successful tea plantation in America in Summerville in 1888. Pinehurst Tea Plantation thrived until Shepard died in 1915. After his death, the plantation faltered and the plants grew wild on the outskirts of town. In 1963 the Lipton Tea Company transported the old Pinehurst plants to Wadmalaw Island.

In the 1980s, commercial production began on Wadmalaw Island and now the Charleston Tea Plantation produces and markets American Classic Tea, a variety that is adapted to the preparation of iced tea.
The elite planters of Charleston founded the **South Carolina Agricultural Society for Promoting and Improving Agricultural, and Other Rural Concerns** in August 1785 to experiment with crops and varying growing techniques unique to the region.

In 1795, they changed their name to the **Agricultural Society of South Carolina**, electing officers, collecting dues, and hosting farmers markets in town. The group discussed new farming ideas as they battled issues such as the disastrous boll weevil which plagued the cotton fields of the Carolinas. The exclusive society managed to keep growing and promoting their efforts despite gaps of interest throughout their history.

Established in 1785, the Agricultural Society of South Carolina promoted the importance of agriculture in the state and the advancement in farming techniques. South Carolina Historical Society Collection.

Members of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, 1926. South Carolina Historical Society Collection.

**Images from the Agricultural Society of South Carolina files ca. 1920s-1940s, South Carolina Historical Society Collection.**

- **Cabbage**
- **Potato Field 1929**
- **Asparagus**
- **600 hampers per acre, Romaine, Gray Hill, SC**

**History of the Agricultural Society of South Carolinay by C. Irvine Walker, 1919**

“It is a very well known fact that the prosperity of Charleston as well as any other place, has been and will be greatest when surrounded by a prosperous 'nearby' country. Therefore, it is to the evident material interest of the City to make our 'nearby' county prosperous. No agent for this purpose has been more persistently active and beneficial than our Society.” (Walker, p. 2)

“Very few Societies have been formed in this Country with so splendid an entourage of notably distinguished men as its officers. Of these twelve first officers of the Society, one was a Signer of the Declaration of Independence, two were United States ministers (to Great Britain and France) one United States Senator, four were Members of Congress, three were judges, one of whom was Chief Justice of the United States, four were Governors of South Carolina and five were Revolutionary Officers.” (Walker, p. 8)

**Commissions and Departments**

Today, the **Agriculture Commission of South Carolina** oversees the marketing of agriculture sales in the state and is appointed by the Governor. The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture** and the **United States Department of Agriculture** continue to enforce regulations, collect statistics and data, and provide ongoing education and resources for today's farmers.
Farm to Table
By the Numbers

2017 Top Counties: Land in Farms
1. Orangeburg
2. Williamsburg
3. Anderson
4. Horry
5. Colleton

2017: Acres of Crops
- Soybeans: 390,234
- Hay: 342,124
- Corn: 337,940
- Cotton: 24,887
- Peanuts: 11,058

2017: Livestock Inventory
- Cattle: 326,114
- Goats: 40,726
- Pigs: 48,069
- Horses: 41,811
- Sheep: 12,627

13,542 Female Farmers 2017
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 161
- Asian: 114
- African American: 2,570
- Hispanic/Latino/Spanish: 423
- White: 35,876
- More than one race: 227

96 Family Farms 2017
2,737 Farmers under 35 in 2017

2018: 9,669 Eating & Drinking Locations in SC

$10.7 billion 2018 estimated food & drink sales
234,200 2019 state employment

Information gathered from: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service