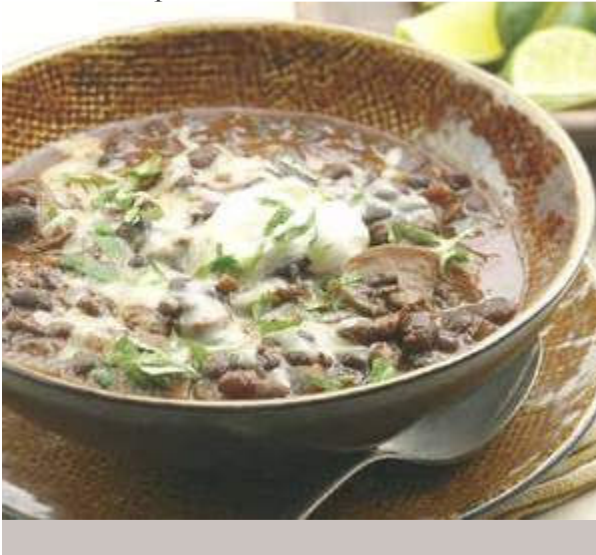


## The Food Network looks at 2006

Post staff report



ZOOM

We've already seen sauerkraut sales soar and the sensible switch from low-carb weight-loss diets to healthful whole grains. So long, Atkins. What else could we see happen to American cooking and dining habits in the new year?

Here's a peek into the Food Network's crystal ball:

Health

**Breakfast of champions:** Fueled by parental concerns about childhood obesity and data on better school performance among breakfast eaters, look for even more cereals, bars and breakfast beverages, such as drinkable yogurt.

Also, breakfast gets a makeover with the addition of more high-quality products: artisanal bacon, yogurts, whole-grain cereals, etc.

**Reality portioning:** Restaurants take a cue from Spanish tapas and further the "small plates" craze, which encourages food experimentation and socializing. Look for more single-serving and calorie-controlled packaging, too.

**Whole grains gain strength:** The USDA's new food pyramid recommends 3 ounces of whole grains a day, half of our daily grain intake. Where will it all come from? Our bets are on quinoa, farro, quicker-cooking brown rice and whole-white-wheat products. (Editor's note: The old style of pillow-soft, all-white Wonder Bread has encountered slowing sales and resulting financial trouble. We expect that kids will miss making dough balls. Now can the big bakeries improve hamburger buns? )

**Salads everywhere:** Expect to see more main-course salad options on menus. (Editor's note: However, Wendy's fast-food chain has dropped its fruit salad for lack of sales.)

Luxury

**Artisanal meats:** Consumers continue to look for authentic foods: meats/sausages/salami. (Editor's note: Then the marketers of spiral-sliced hams had better look out. Consumers will not continue to pay big prices unless they perceive that the pre-cut cured pork is truly higher quality and lower in salt content than regular hams at more reasonable prices.)

**Greening of the chains:** Whole Foods' success and expansion will continue the trend of more "green" products in mainstream supermarket chains.

**Democratization of luxury foods:** Affordable pod coffee machines, wine by mail, charcuterie, four-star world cuisine (no longer just French-haute), high-quality bar chocolate will continue to attract consumer dollars.

**Induction trophy kitchens:** The cool-to-the-touch cooktop of magnetic technology has spread throughout Europe, and will become more mainstream here in high-end kitchens.

**World flavors:** Global comfort foods are here. Culinary comfort is not just chicken soup and mashed potatoes anymore. Comfort food is reflecting the internationalization of the American pantry. (Editor's note: Go ahead. Get a noodle fix with some pad thai or that grilled-cheese buzz by way of quesadillas with plenty of cheese between crispy tortillas.)

Convenience

**The blurring of snacks/meals:** As we graze throughout the day, a meal may be composed of a series of snacks; look for healthier snack choices.

**Meal-assembly kitchens:** Home cooks gather in pro-kitchens to jointly prep one week's meals. This is recreational cooking with a big incentive for busy people - another example of the ways food and entertainment are rubbing shoulders.

**Quick prep for the home cook:** Whether from the supermarket salad bar, meal-assembly pro kitchens, food clubs, people are looking to take the drudgery and guesswork out of cooking dinner. (Editor's note: What's next? Government-run cafeterias?)

**Cooking for one:** As single households multiply, we'll see more no-waste, single-portion sizes in frozen and packaged foods.

**Online food shopping:** This will finally catch on, at least in urban areas. Drawn by the ability to save time, eliminate impulse buys and control expenses, this techno-shopping has appeal - to men as well.

What's hot

**Citrus flavors:** Especially grapefruit and pomelo. (Editor's note: The best sorbet is still grapefruit, though it doesn't sound like it would be a favorite sorbet.)

**Sauerkraut:** Some speculation about kim chi and kraut warding off avian flu will undoubtedly bolster sales. It's been touted as everything from a cancer preventative to a libido booster. It has celebrity advocates, such as Heidi Klum and Bruce Willis. Don't bother looking for it; in 2006 it's likely to find you.

**Goat:** California ranchers respond to a growing Latin and Caribbean population in the U.S., and they crave roti and barbecue.

**Tortillas:** Latin goes mainstream as tortillas gain shelf space on the white-bread aisle.

**Sliders:** The nation's favorite sandwich takes on a diminutive size, perhaps because bitty burgers bring less guilt.

**Ironic cultural food marriages:** Whether it's Celtic chutneys, caviar soul food, Mexican-Chinese food or a Judeo-Latino bistro, look for new, inspired and somewhat tongue-in-cheek takes on global cuisine.

**Flights of beers:** The introduction of Belgian, seasonal, and local beers into national markets may mean more bars and restaurants offering flight-style tastings of beers, you know, like wine-tastings: beers divided by category, region, etc. Expect a widespread launch of high-end beers that sell for over \$100 a bottle, and even the existence of beer sommeliers in restaurants. Beer is poised for a surge.

**Spanish wines:** Drink them with the hottest cuisine, which is also Spanish, and we don't mean chili-hot to the palate. We're talking "hot" as in popular.

Here's a tasty chili recipe:

One Man's Champion Chili

**Ingredients:**

2 pounds beef chuck, cut into 1/2-inch pieces (trim off any large pieces of fat)

About 7 cups water

1 cup tomato sauce

1 teaspoon salt, divided

1 dried chile "pasilla negro"

1 onion, cut into eighths

3 garlic cloves, sliced

1/2 cup plus 1-1/2 tablespoons ground California chile (chile California "molido"), about 2-1/2 ounces

1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/2 cup (1 stick) plus 1 to 2 tablespoons butter, divided

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon cider vinegar

Yield: Serves 6

**Instructions:**

Put the small beef cubes in a large saucepan, cover with water, bring to a boil and skim. Add tomato sauce and 1/2 teaspoon salt and simmer until the beef is tender, about 1-1/2 hours.

Open the chile pasilla negro, remove the seeds and stem and soak the chile in hot water until it softens. Discard soaking liquid. Puree the onion, garlic and chile pasilla in a food processor. Add the California chile and cayenne and process to a paste.

Melt 1/2 cup (one stick) butter in a medium frying pan, add the chile paste and cook over medium heat 5 minutes, stirring often to prevent burning. Add the cumin.

Add the paste to the beef and cook 15 to 20 minutes more, stirring often. Taste and add 1 to 2 tablespoons additional butter, the sugar, vinegar and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste, until the flavor is smooth.

Nutrients per serving (1/6 of recipe): 440 calories; 35 grams protein; 18 grams carbohydrates; 24 grams fiber; 24 grams fat; 14 grams saturated fat; 106 milligrams cholesterol; 663 mg. sodium.

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