

Pork

ASSIGNMENT 7

Read the following assignment. Then read pages 85–89, 380–381, and 383 in *The Professional Chef*. Pay special attention to these key terms as you read:

- Hock/shank
- Picnic ham
- Boston butt
- Prosciutto
- Tenderloin

The Basics of Pork

Over 5,000 years ago, people in ancient China recognized that pigs were almost entirely edible. Few animals could be expected to feed so many people for so long—with so little waste. The Chinese of that era cured the skin of pigs. They grilled the ears, feet, and tail. They made sausage from the intestinal casings and blood. The muscles and organs were cooked by almost every means imaginable, and the lard from pigs was used to cook everything else.

For many of the same reasons that the ancient Chinese people loved pigs, the residents of the American Deep South have always been pig lovers too. During the period before the Civil War, the average Southerner ate five times more pork per year than beef. It was, by far, the most popular meat in the region.

Even during the Civil War, pigs retained their popularity because of their heartiness. Regardless of the conflicts going on in the hillsides around them, the pigs could be found happily rooting out in the forest—close at hand when it was time to start planning for supper.



Like the Chinese, Southerners recognized that virtually every part of a pig could be eaten. What they didn't eat right away was cured as bacon, ham hocks, fatback, or ham and eaten later. The powerful social forces in the South quickly led to the tradition of neighborhood barbecues, where pigs were roasted, shredded, and then covered with a gooey sweet sauce.

Depending on the way a pig is fed, the pork it yields may have a higher or lower ratio of fat and calories. Today, pork has almost 80 percent less fat and half the calories that it did in the 1950s. As nutritional guidelines began to emerge in America, people became more conscious of the fat content in food and, as a result, began to eat less pork. Hog farmers consolidated their efforts and systematically created a lower-calorie pig. The pig of the twenty-first century lives indoors in a climate-controlled environment and eats lower-calorie feed. The efforts of farmers have paid off.

Activity 8

Following the example on page 381 of your textbook, cut a bone-in pork loin into five pork chops. Set them aside for Activity 9. You'll need the following:

Kitchen Supplies

- Handsaw
- Boning knife

Ingredients

- Bone-in pork loin



Self-Check 7

Questions 1–3: Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

_____ 1. Center-cut pork loin comes from the rear half of a swine.

_____ 2. Grading systems for pork are usually reliable.

_____ 3. Pigs are usually slaughtered under one year of age.

4. List two preparations derived from a pork loin.

5. List three types of pork that may be fabricated from the ham cut.

Check your answers with those on page 45.

ASSIGNMENT 8

Read the following assignment. Then read pages 428–439 in *The Professional Chef*. Pay special attention to these key terms as you read:

- Poêléing
- Spit roasting
- Rendered juices
- Barding
- Larding

Cooking Method: Roasting

Roasting is a dry-heat cooking method that heats food by surrounding it with hot, dry air in a closed environment. The term is usually used with reference to baking breads, pastries, vegetables, fruits, and fish.

On page 428, *The Professional Chef* takes up the debate about roasting versus baking. When pigs were roasted on a spit over a bonfire in the forest, there was little doubt that they were roasting. When they're put in the oven in a pan to be roasted or baked, the distinction isn't as clear.

Your text states that roasting refers most often to whole birds or fish, and large cuts of meat meant to serve many people. The term *baking* applies only to single-portion-sized food. (The trouble with this distinction is that whole cakes and breads are considered baked, not roasted. Besides that, portion size seems a strange way of determining the difference between otherwise identical cooking techniques.)

It's true that roasted foods are often cooked on top of the stove before being placed in the oven. However, if that's the distinction, there will have to be more names for cooking methods that start by browning food on the stovetop.

The truth is that, over time, the differences between roasting and baking have blurred. We're not tempted to say that a cake, baked in the oven, is roasted because it doesn't have the browned meatiness we associate with roasting. Yet when a fish cooked in the oven comes out with crispy, golden skin or a chicken develops a delicious, smoky aroma, the term *roasting* comes to mind—even though we could easily say it had been baked.

The two words may have become interchangeable by now. But whatever you choose to call it, the pork chops you'll be making in Activity 9 will be moist and succulent after being cooked in the dry, heated air of the oven (Figure 12). (You may notice that the recipe is called Baked Stuffed Pork Chops, even though the chops are browned in bacon fat on top of the stove before being baked—a distinction that was supposed to be reserved for roasting.)



FIGURE 12—A combination of cooking methods can be used to create a tender pork chop.

The thing to keep in mind is that the words are far less important than the result. The sage, bacon fat, parsley, and garlic in the stuffing will infuse the meat as it bakes, and the jus de veau lié will add the final touch of elegance. It will be a dish you'll be proud to serve.

Activity 9

With the pork you cut into chops for Activity 8, prepare the Baked Stuffed Pork Chops on page 465 of *The Professional Chef*. (Note: As with the lamb shanks in Assignment 5, you've prepared only 5 pork chops instead of the 10 chops requested in the recipe. So you'll simply reduce this recipe by half.) You'll need the following:

Kitchen Supplies

- Utility knife
- Dish for chops
- Pan
- Chef's knife
- Baking sheet
- Bowl
- String or skewers
- Tongs

Ingredients

- Pork chops
- Salt
- Pepper
- Rendered bacon fat
- Onion
- Celery
- Garlic
- Dried bread crumbs
- Parsley
- Sage
- Chicken stock
- Jus de veau lié or demi-glace

Achieving Mastery

Just as you did with beef, veal, and lamb, you can work toward culinary mastery by learning to prepare pork with each cooking method (Figure 13). Try the following recipes:

Sautéing pork

- Noisettes of Pork with Green Peppercorns and Pineapple, page 504

Steaming pork

- Steamed Dumplings (Shao-Mai), page 838

Stewing pork

- Pork Goulash, page 599

Grilling pork

The Professional Chef doesn't include a recipe for grilling or broiling pork, so you may use this recipe instead:

Grilled Pork Chops in Cognac-Dijon Glaze

Kitchen Supplies

- Mixing bowl
- Whisk
- Tongs

Ingredients

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Cognac
- 1 T Dijon
- 1 T Balsamic vinegar
- 4 pork chops

1. Combine Cognac, Dijon and Balsamic.
2. Pour mixture into saucepan. Reduce by half.
3. Coat pork chops with mixture.
4. Place chops on grill. Brush with remaining sauce.
5. Grill for three to four minutes per side.

FIGURE 13—Your experiment with different cooking methods for pork will pay off sumptuously.



Cured Pork

Curing or smoking produces a fragrant scent and somewhat sweet taste in pork. Bacon, smoked ham, and prosciutto are some of the best examples of this process.

To cure pork, a curing salt is applied to the meat that helps preserve it and give it a distinct flavor. Today that mixture is made up of 94 percent table salt and 6 percent sodium nitrite.

Throughout history, the curing process has been valued for its ability to extend the life of meats. Before refrigerators, a slab of bacon would be wrapped and shoved into a sack before a long journey. When the country mouse goes to visit the city mouse in Aesop's fable (written around 550 B.C.), the country mouse tucks away a chunk of bacon for the trip.

Oddly enough, the term "bring home the bacon" seems to have always applied to men and matrimony. It's said that the term originated in England when the monks at a monastery offered a slab of bacon to any married man who would take an oath that he hadn't wished to be single for at least a year. The wives of the village waited expectantly at home to see whether or not their husbands would bring home the bacon.



Self-Check 8

Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

- _____ 1. Spit-roasting and baking refer to the same cooking method.
- _____ 2. Inserting small strips of fat into food is known as barding.
- _____ 3. Searing uses oil to cook an item quickly and completely.
- _____ 4. Roasted foods are often served with jus or gravy made from pan drippings.
- _____ 5. In roasting, a rack will improve air circulation.

Check your answers with those on page 46.
