

Traditional American Foods

Matthew N. O. Sadiku, Sarhan M. Musa

Roy G. Perry College of Engineering, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA

Uwakwe C. Chukwu

Department of Engineering Technology, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC, USA

Abayomi Ajayi-Majebi

Department of Manufacturing Engineering, Central State University, P.O. Box 1004, Wilberforce, OH, USA

ABSTRACT: Food plays a big role in American culture. As a nation founded by immigrants from around the world, the range and variety of American foods are as great as its ethnic diversity. The multicultural, egalitarian society of the United States makes it difficult to identify specific foods that accurately and inclusively represent the country. However, many dishes can be regarded as “American.” Popular traditional American foods of all time include hamburger, French fries, pizza, hot dogs, bagel, shrimps, lobster, chicken tenders, ice cream, donuts, potato chips, salads, cookies, cake, barbecue, cheesesteak, pork, canned or dried vegetables, and drinks like soda and wine. This is not an exhaustive list but only representative and somewhat subjective. This paper compiles different popular American foods one can expect in restaurants and streets all over the nation.

KEYWORD: food, culture, American traditional American food, fast food, slow food, soul food.

INTRODUCTION

Food says so much about a nation’s history, climate, and culture, and America is not exception. United States is the home of immigrants from different nations. As a result, the US is among the best because of the famous food of different countries where people immigrated from. They have perfected the art of making pizza, hamburgers, French fries, chocolate chips, cookies, etc. Most of their dinner dishes are dominated by meat such as steak, chicken, or beef patty, that is served with potatoes or some other vegetables.

New York-based photographer Henry Hargreaves and food stylist Caitlin Levin created an interesting maps of countries using famous delicacies from each region. An example of such a map for the United States is shown in Figure 1 [1]

Traditionally, eating involves slow food, which takes time to prepare. The introduction and popularization of fast food has shifted our habits toward eating efficiently. Fast is quick, busy, controlling, aggressive, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, and quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: fresh, calm, careful, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, and quality-over-quantity. These two concepts co-exist with each other. Eating away from home is becoming increasingly common, and the use of fast food restaurants is growing rapidly. Eating out is an outcome of changing food and eating habits of the consumers towards

convenience in the present time-starved societies. Some of the fast foods are harmful to our health. For example, French fries are regarded as a “junk food” or an accompaniment to a burger or sandwich in most countries [2,3].

DIFFERENT AMERICAN FOODS

American foods are made up of many different cultures, in all sorts of combinations. However, many dishes can be called regarded as “American.” The popular traditional foods in North America include hamburger, French fries, bagel, shrimps, pizza, sandwich, apple pie, cheese, hot dogs, pancake, sausage, lobster, chicken tenders, ice cream, donuts, potato chips, grits, croissant, macaroni, spaghetti, waffles salads, popcorn, cookies, cake, barbecue, cheesesteak, pork, meatballs, corn, baked beans, sweet potato, pecan, fruits, and drinks like soda and wine. This list is not exhaustive because it does not cover every item consumed in the US. Most of these foods are born in America, while some are not. Some of them are traditionally made for special occasion such as Valentine’s Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Here, we cover the most popular foods [4-6]:

1. *Hamburger*: The hamburger with French fries is the most popular food in America. The popularity of the hamburger in the US is indisputable. The hamburger was invented in 1900 by Louis Lassen, a Danish immigrant at Louis’ Lunch in New Haven, Connecticut. US burger is shown in Figure 2 [5]. McDonald's, Wendy, Burger Kings, and many more fast food restaurants make hamburgers readily available 24/7. Americans are addicted to eating hamburgers and this causes obesity for both adults and children. This cuisine has made such a mark on us that it seems like everyone has a little love affair with it. Burgers are a central part of American food and culture. Besides hamburger, there are other kinds of burgers such as Cheeseburger, Chicken Burger, and Tofu Burger. A simple burger is made with onion, lettuce, tomato, bacon, mayo, cheeses, and mustard. Burger are customized with all sorts of toppings and patty options.
2. *Pizza*: This is one of American favorite foods. Statistics show that Americans eat a whopping 3 billion pizzas per year with the average American eating around 40 pizzas a year. Pizza is often customized with all sorts of toppings such as pepperoni, sausage, onions, bell peppers, ham, mushrooms, and pineapple. The most popular pizza topping is pepperoni. Pizza is one of the best ways to feed large groups of people. Popular pizza restaurants include Pizza Hut, Little Caesar’s, Papa Johns, and Domino Pizza. Typical Italian pizza is shown in Figure 3 [5]. Pizza is based on the traditional Italian dish, brought by Italian immigrants to the United States.
3. *Hot Dogs*: These are the classic ballpark food and carnival/theme park food. They are a cheap and easy to make. A hot dog is made in many ways, but they are pork or beef sausage cooked and placed between a long bread bun. It is a popular street vendor food in busy cities like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. There are regional variations of hot dogs. Figure 4 shows some hot dogs [6].
4. *Pancake*: This is the front-runner for American breakfasts. Pancakes are essentially flat cakes, made with wheat flour and buttermilk and pan-fried in oil or butter. They are eaten along with a variety of condiments like syrup, bacon, and eggs. It can be served at breakfast, lunch or dinner. Perhaps the most famous type of pancake is the very thin French crêpe. What the British call a pancake is only slightly thicker than a French crêpe and is quite dissimilar to the fluffy American dish that bears the same name.
5. *Sandwich*: A typical sandwich consists of two slices of bread with a layer of ingredients such as peanut butter, jelly, jam, bacon, cooked chicken breast, tomatoes, mayonnaise, and lettuce. The toasted bread is sandwiched between a few slices of these ingredients. It is easy to make and affordable. It could serve as a staple of American childhood food. There are different kinds of sandwich depending on the ingredients. Examples include Cuban sandwich, roast beef, sandwich, chicken sandwich, turkey sandwich, and club

sandwich, A typical Cuban sandwich, originally invented by Cuban immigrants in Florida, is shown in Figure 5 [7].

6. *Steak*: Americans love to eat beef, especially steak. Steak is a popular food throughout the nation and is frequently served during special occasions. It is also often eaten as a regular part of many people's meals. Steak is made from various cuts of beef and cooked in different ways. Basically, steak is a big piece of beef sizzling on a grill. Salt, pepper, and spices can be added as desired. There are several steakhouses all over the nation. The steak is lightly seasoned with salt, basted with melted butter, and grilled over a live fire. It is traditionally served with gravy and potatoes.
7. *Fried Chicken*: Fried chicken results when you dip chicken in a bit of flour and then fry it. It often comes in the form of fried or baked chicken breast or wings. Nuggets, fingers, popcorn, bites, and patties are favorite ways to eat fried chicken.
8. *Donut*: This is a circular-shaped dough with a hole in the center. This sweet treat is fried or baked, and then covered in sugary coatings like plain sugar icing, chocolate, or other flavors. It is eaten mainly for breakfast across the nation, but it can be eaten any time. One can find donuts in many settings, from offices to churches, in tiny corner stores and supermarkets.
9. *Salad*: There are different salads depending on the ingredients. We have sweet salad, taco salad, fruit salad, jello salad, Cobb salad, seafood salad, etc. with different kinds of dressing. Sweet salad is made of sour cream/whipped cream and mixed with oranges, pineapple, and coconut and is served cold/chilled. The Cobb salad is traditionally made with four types of greens, fried chicken, hardboiled eggs, bacon, bleu cheese, tomato, and avocado.
10. *Soul Food*: Traditional African American foods are often referred to as "soul food." Soul food has a rich and important history that ties African American culture to its African roots. Popular fruits and vegetables used in soul food cuisine came from African traditions. These include rice, okra, greens, potatoes, cabbage, watermelon, corn, cornmeal, and yams. Chicken, fish, beef, and goat were seen as important sources of protein in the African culture. Since rice is a staple in many African dishes, African Americans adapted their cooking with the food items that are most accessible, creating some of the most renowned soul food staples. Frying or barbeque is known as a popular way to cook meat in the African American culture, and has also become widely popular throughout the US. Soul food also includes popular desserts such as fruits or vegetables, such as sweet potato pie, pecan pie, or peach cobbler. Although soul food may unite Black people, its iconic dishes, including fried chicken, pigeon peas, collard greens, sweet potatoes, and cornbread are really a fusion cuisine [8]. A typical soul food is shown in Figure 6 [9].
11. *Miscellaneous*: Other foods not as popular as the dishes mentioned earlier are considered here.
 - *Macaroni and Cheese*: Whether eaten as a side or as an entrée with meat or vegetables added, macaroni and cheese is a favorite across the board.
 - *Barbecue*: This is really all about the method of cooking (hence the variations in regional seasoning) meat such as beef, pork, chicken, or turkey. Smoky barbecue ribs have become one of the most famous dishes in the world.
 - *Apple Pie*: This is perhaps the most American of pies. It is commonly used for dessert. It predates the formation of the United States. Apple pie first came to the US by way of British, Swedish, and Dutch immigrants,
 - *Cornbread*: This is a soft baked bread made with cornmeal. Corn has been a staple ingredient among the Native Americans, who created the first version of cornbread.

- *Spaghetti*: This is essentially boiled spaghetti combined with tomato sauce and ground beef meatballs. The dish was originally invented by Italian immigrants who came to America in the 19th century.
- *Mashed Potato*: Americans love mashed potatoes and they usually eat it as part of a meal.
- *Sweet Potatoes*: These have become popular with those who enjoy their sweetness. They are often eaten as part of a meal and they come in a various forms.
- *Potato Chips*: Americans eat a lot of potato chips with different flavors. The chips are everywhere you go, in the supermarkets, at parties, etc.
- *Ice cream*: This is loved by people all over the US. There are over two hundred versions of ice cream made from coconut, strawberry, vanilla or any other flavor.
- *Grits*: This is a cornmeal porridge formed by boiling. Grits are frequently served as part of a breakfast dish or supper entrée.
- *Popcorn*: This comes from a variety of corn kernels that “pop” when heated up; hence the name popcorn. Different flavors give popcorn an added boost in its taste. Watching movies at the theater is never complete without a bucket of popcorn.
- *Smoothies*: These are made with fresh fruit juice, yogurt, and crushed ice. They can used for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Different flavors provide different smoothies.
- *Drinks*: Tea (iced or sweet) and sodas are a popular beverage that go along with the American food cuisine. Typical drinks are illustrated in Figure 7 [4].

One would observe that every food culture or cuisine is a combination of the natural environment and the human use of and adaptations to that environment. The Diet of an average American has been the consumption of highly refined, high in sugar, high fat, and highly processed food. The Standard American Diet is illustrated in Figure 8 [10].

BENEFITS

Cooking is a popular hobby in America and some people have their own recipe books. Most Americans do not cook often because they can save time and effort by eating out. There is one of the reasons why fast food business is very lucrative. There are also many cooking shows on television and social media, showing different foods and offering their own recipes.

CHALLENGES

In general, doctors and nutritionists classify people as either underweight, healthy weight, overweight, or obese. We are in the midst of a national obesity crisis. Today, about 65% of adults and 15% of children and adolescents in the US are overweight or obese. Americans are becoming the fattest people in the world [11]. The obesity epidemic was the predictable result of Americans gorging on unprecedented quantities of highly processed foods.

One of US Government’s most important responsibilities is to protect the health of the American public. At the moment, about half of all American adults have one or more preventable, chronic diseases, due mainly to poor quality eating habits and physical inactivity. In 1980, the US government officially recommended that all Americans eat a low-fat diet. The top 10 sources of calories in the US diet, according to the USDA’s 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, are [12]:

1. Grain-based desserts (like cakes, cookies, and donuts)
2. Breads made with yeast

105	ISSN 2690-9626 (online), Published by “Global Research Network LLC” under Volume: 4 Issue: 3 in Mar-2023 https://globalresearchnetwork.us/index.php/ajshr
	Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

3. Chicken and chicken dishes
4. Soda and sports drinks
5. Pizza
6. Alcoholic beverages
7. Pasta and pasta dishes
8. Mexican dishes
9. Beef and beef dishes
10. Dairy desserts (like ice cream and cheesecake)

Low-fat diets do not make people become fat. Every American is encouraged to aim for a healthy weight and be physically active daily. Let the food pyramid in Figure 9 guide your food choices [13].

American-style fast food has spread to other nations as well. French fries contain high fat and cholesterol which can lead to obesity and cardiovascular diseases. An average American is taller and heavier when compared with Asians from China, Japan, and Korea. In America, the main protein would be some sort of beef or chicken eaten with bread. One pays a lot for food in America.

CONCLUSION

As a nation of immigrants, American cuisine is mostly fusion food and consists of the cooking style and traditional dishes prepared in the United States. It has been significantly influenced by Europeans, indigenous Native Americans, Africans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and many other cultures. Some dishes that are typically regarded as American have their origins in other countries. Early American Natives used a number of cooking methods in early American Cuisine that have been blended with early European cooking methods [14]. The American dishes covered in this paper are only representative and not exhaustive. A lot of women's magazines offer recipes and cooking tips for procuring, preserving, and presenting food that create a shared national culture. More information about traditional American food can be found in the books in [15-23].

REFERENCES

1. "You are what you eat: U.S. food geography,"
<https://blog.richmond.edu/livesofmaps/2017/10/06/you-are-what-you-eat-u-s-food-geography/>
2. M. N. O. Sadiku, T. J. Ashaolu, and S. M. Musa, "Slow food: A primer," *International Journal of Science, Environment and Technology*, vol. 8, no. 4, Aug. 2019, pp. 912-917.
3. M. N. O. Sadiku, T. J. Ashaolu, and S. M. Musa, "Fast food: An introduction," *International Journal of Trend in Research and Development*, vol. 6, no. 6, 2019, pp. 80-83.
4. "Most popular foods in America," September 2021,
<https://www.inthekitchenwithmatt.com/most-popular-foods-in-america>
5. "10 Favourite American foods of all time,"
<https://food.ndtv.com/food-drinks/10-american-foods-777850>
6. "Traditional American dishes you need to try,"
<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/10-traditional-american-dishes-you-need-to-try/>
7. "100 Most popular American foods & beverages," January 2023,

- <https://www.tasteatlas.com/100-most-popular-foods-in-usa>
8. R. Terry, "How black culinary historians are rewriting the history of American food," February 2020, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2020/02/26/food-african-american-history>
9. V. Hayford, "The humble history of soul food," January 2018, <https://www.blackfoodie.co/the-humble-history-of-soul-food/>
10. "Standard American Diet – SAD | Root'D by Freakin Healthy," <https://www.freakinhealthy.com/rootd-blog/standard-american-diet-sad-rootd-by-freakin-healthy/>
11. S. Klein, "Fat land: How Americans became the fattest people in the world," *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, vol. 113, no. 1, January 2004.
12. L. Schuler. "The real reason Americans are so fat," January 2017, <https://www.menshealth.com/weight-loss/a19536794/reasons-americans-are-fat/>
13. https://www.etsy.com/listing/1351659956/healthy-food-pyramid-chart-for-kids?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_us_e-art_and_collectibles-prints-digital_prints&utm_custom1=_k_Cj0KCQiAiJSeBhCCARIsAHnAzT_Fcy82aEirxrPNW8JKA8cauDi5V3iFV9sacnfDfMfuz6jG3TphBEcaAgNEEALw_wcB_k_&utm_content=go_304499915_22746212675_78727443155_aud-318222619806:pla-106555091555_c__1351659956_12768591&utm_custom2=304499915&gclid=Cj0KCQiAiJSeBhCCARIsAHnAzT_Fcy82aEirxrPNW8JKA8cauDi5V3iFV9sacnfDfMfuz6jG3TphBEcaAgNEEALw_wcB
14. "American cuisine," *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_cuisine
15. H. C. Covey and D. Eisnach, *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods And Foodways From The Slave Narratives*. ABC-CLIO, 2009.
16. C. C. Hinrichs and T. A. Lyson (eds.), *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*. University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
17. C. F. Adams, *Nutritive Value of American Foods in Common Units*. Agricultural Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, 1975.
18. W. O. Atwater and A. P. Bryant, *The Chemical Composition of American Food Materials*. US Government Printing Office, 1906.
19. E. Kim, *Korean American: Food That Tastes Like Home*. Clarkson Potter, 2022.
20. B. Wolf and A.F. Smith, *Real American Food: Restaurants, Markets and Shops Plus Favorite Hometown Recipes*. Rizzoli International Publications, 2009.
21. R. Wharton, *American Food: A Not-So-Serious History*. ABRAMS, 2019.
22. D. Rosengarten, *It's All American Food: The Best Recipes for More Than 400 New American Classics*. Little, Brown, 2009.
23. S. Liberman, *American Food by the Decades*. ABC-CLIO, 2011.



Figure 1. US map using famous delicacies from each region [1].



Figure 2. American hamburger [5].



Figure 3. Italian pizza [5].



Figure 4. Some hot dogs [6].

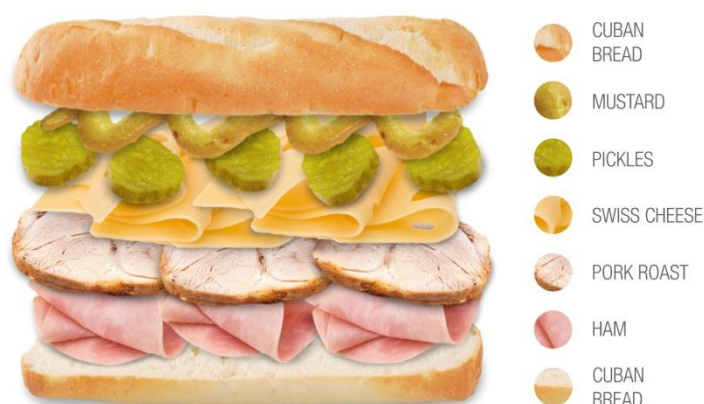


Figure 5. Cuban sandwich [7].



Figure 6. A typical soul food [9].



Figure 7. Typical drinks/soda [4].

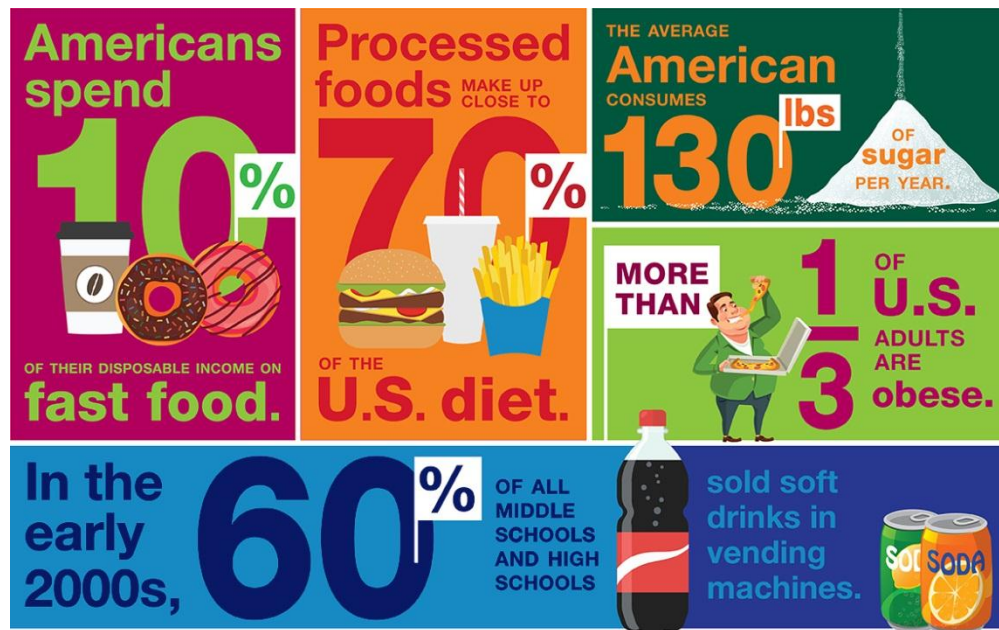


Figure 8. The Standard American Diet [10].

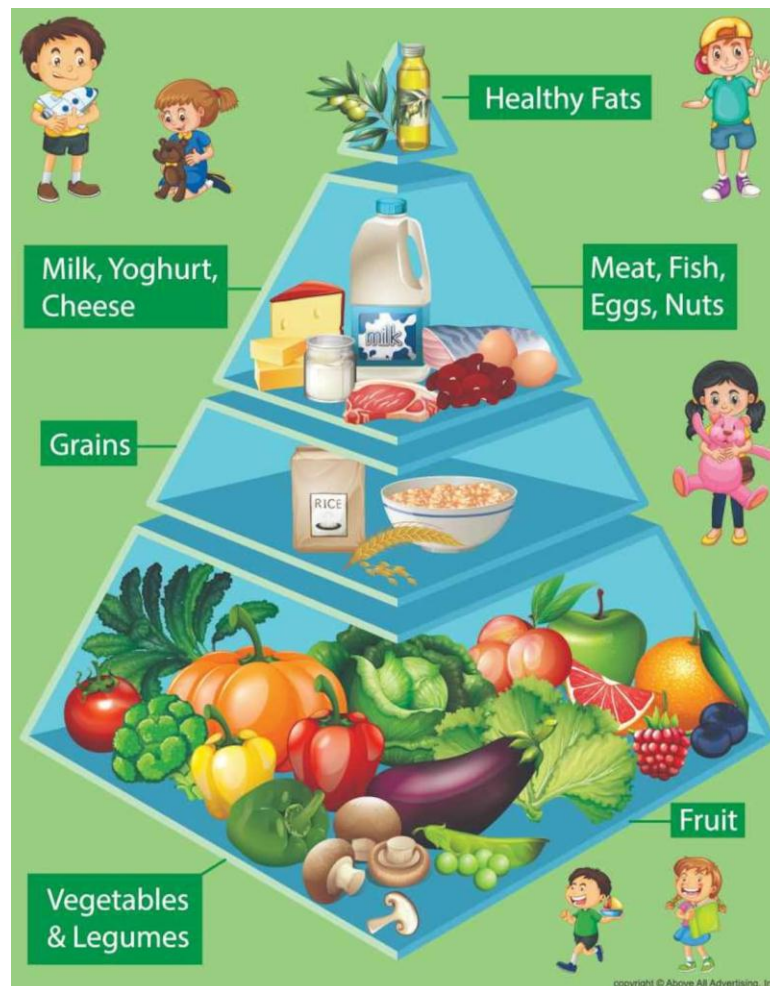


Figure 9. Food pyramid should guide your food choices [13].