

produced on the eastern seaboard originated as a by-product of the culling of dairy herds and the slaughter of over-age oxen.

As the farming frontier moved across the Alleghenies into the Midwest, the center of pig, cattle, and corn production moved with it. Soils and climate were ideal for corn. Farmers in the Ohio Valley could easily harvest more than they could sell, given the rudimentary nature of the roads and the great expense of transport by wagon. The best way to market the surplus was to feed it to pigs and cattle and then walk them back across the mountains to the cities on the eastern seaboard. (Actually, the best way to market the corn was to convert it to bourbon and ship it in jugs, but the federal government taxed away the profits from the distilleries and made "moonshine" illegal.) Under the noisy cracking whips of the drovers—the original southern "crackers"—the corn harvest walked itself to market, and the very feature which had made pigs abominable to the ancient Israelites—their appetite for grains—made them lovable to the American farmer. Soon canals and railroads provided better means of getting across the mountains, putting an end to the colorful era of the whip-cracking drovers and greatly expanding the potential for marketing corn-fed pigs and cattle.

With better means of transport, Corn Belt farmers dispensed with their wood pigs and switched over to new breeds which were heavier and better larded. These "lard pigs" could be raised profitably without supplementary foraging. They were fed almost exclusively on corn and then sent for slaughter and packing to Cincinnati in such great numbers that the city became known as "Porkopolis." Corn on the hoof now became pigs in a barrel or "condensed corn." Pork reigned supreme. Before the Civil War, Americans consumed more of it than any other foodstuff except wheat. Never in human history had such a prodigious quantity of grain been harvested with the sole intent of converting it into animal flesh.

In the developing Corn Belt, farmers raised beef cattle as well as pigs. The cattle ate prairie grass and hay until they matured, and then they were fattened up on corn and trailed across the

mountains to the eastern cities. Pigs and cattle from the Ohio Valley were often driven together. The cattle ate stores of corn sold along the trail; the pigs followed behind, feeding on the cattle dung which contained much undigested corn residue.

Which meat was preferred, beef or pork? During late Colonial times and the early nineteenth century as far as salted or barreled meat was concerned, pork was preferred over beef in most sections of the country. My main evidence for this is that despite the fact that far more pork than beef was produced, the price of salted pork was always higher than the price of salted beef. This was true even in the Northeast, which was the region most partial to beef (for reasons I'll explain in a moment). For example, in Philadelphia in 1792, a barrel of pork was worth \$11.17 while a barrel of beef was worth only \$8.00. This disparity continued until the outbreak of the Civil War. Since the ordinary American was brought up on salted meat, and salted pork cost more than salted beef, it would be hard to say that beef was the preferred type of animal flesh. Henry Adams noted that corn was eaten three times a day—as salt pork. One foreign visitor noted that in Europe to ask for food was to ask for bread; but in the United States, to ask for food was to ask for salt pork. And in James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Chainbearer*, the rustic housewife says: "Give me the children that's raised on good sound pork afore all the game in the country. Yams is good as a relish and so's bread; but pork is the staff of life."

Admittedly, there were important sectional differences. In the South and Midwest, the passion for pork was so great that beef took second place whether it was fresh or preserved. From the eighteenth century on "Southerners gloried in their pork." Virginians regarded their hams as superior in flavor to any in the world, and no Colonial landlord could do business without serving ham and other cuts of pork. In fashionable Williamsburg it was the custom "to have a plate of cold ham upon the table; and there was scarcely a Virginian lady who breakfasts without it." In Colonial North Carolina it was "pork upon pork and pork upon that." Early in the nineteenth century in places like Tennessee, meat