

January is Pork Month

It's cold outside and that means comfort food in my book. North Carolina Pork fits the bill perfectly. It is a delicious lean meat and is a great way to start off the New Year. North Carolina is the second largest hog-producing state in the nation, yielding approximately 15% of the national supply. Fresh pork is leaner than it has ever been! Packed with protein, pork is a healthy choice for mealtime. Let's celebrate 2011 with friends and family and cook up some delicious and nutritious NC Pork.

Stuffed Pork Chops

4 pork chops butterflied

1 cup bread crumbs

½ cup chicken or vegetable broth

1 garlic clove, minced

½ cup mozzarella, shredded

¾ cup orange pepper, diced

½ tsp. fresh thyme, chopped

1 celery stalk, chopped fine

2 Tablespoons Olive Oil

Kitchen string

Salt and Pepper for the pork chops

Combine the bread crumbs through the celery. Salt and pepper the pork chops then fill each with your stuffing mixture and tie with a piece of kitchen string. Heat the olive oil in a skillet on medium high heat and brown the chops for 3 minutes on each side. Transfer to a 9 X 13 baking dish.

Add to your skillet:

1 cup chopped onion

¼ cup butter

1 cup chicken or vegetable broth

1 cup white wine

Cook on medium heat for 6-8 minutes. Add the ingredients to the baking dish with the pork chops. Bake for 1 hour, uncovered at 350 degrees.

Sausage and Egg Casserole

1 pound sausage

5 slices bread, cubed

2 cups milk

½ pound sharp cheese, grated

4 eggs, beaten

1 tsp. salt (optional)

Sauté the sausage, breaking it up with a fork as it cooks. When the sausage is cooked and brown throughout; drain off any grease. Butter a 9 X 13 casserole dish and spread the cubed bread evenly on the bottom. Add the sausage and cheese. Beat the eggs, add the milk and salt. Pour egg mixture over the sausage and cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Lisa's Note: This can be made ahead of time and refrigerated until ready to bake. If so, cook it a little longer.

Pork Loin with onions and field peas

1 (1 pound) pork loin

1 (16 oz.) package frozen field peas

1 ½ tsp. dry mustard

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. pepper

½ tsp. garlic powder

½ cup all-purpose flour

2 Tbsp. vegetable oil

1 large sweet onion, sliced

1 (10.5 oz.) can chicken broth

Place liner in crock pot or spray with cooking spray. Place peas in bottom of cooker. Combine spices and sprinkle over the pork loin. Dredge the loin in flour. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and cook the loin on each side until just brown. Transfer pork to slow cooker. Reserve drippings in the skillet and add the onion. Cook onion for 6-7 minutes until tender. Add the chicken broth and scrap the bottom of the pan to get the loose particles. Cook for 2 minutes then spoon over the pork. Cover and cook on low for 6 hours.

Lisa's Note: This dish is comfort food and so easy to make. It is worth the extra steps in the skillet. Delicious served over rice with cabbage or collards.

Bacon wrapped crackers

1 sleeve low sodium or salted-tops crackers (if using the salted- tops, add ½ tsp. salt to grated cheese)

1 pound bacon

4 Tablespoons grated, Parmesan cheese

2 Tablespoons shredded, Parmesan cheese

Cut the bacon strips in half. Wrap each cracker with one half strip of bacon, leaving the open end at the top of the cracker. Place the grated parmesan cheese in a bowl and dip the top side of the cracker with the bacon in it to coat the bacon. Place crackers on a wire rack in a baking pan. Sprinkle each with the shredded parmesan cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 17 to 20 minutes depending on how crisp you want your bacon. Makes 36 bacon wrapped crackers.

Lisa's Note: I like my bacon crisp for these so I cook them for 20 minutes. These are a great hit with men at any party or gathering.