

NATIVE AMERICAN



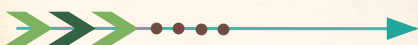
# Farming & Agriculture



NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION  
THE OKLAHOMAN



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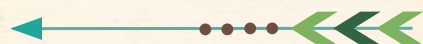


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# Choctaw, Farming & Agriculture



Sources: Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department, Choctaw Nation Agriculture Outreach Program and Choctaw Nation School of Language

Choctaw people lived in balance within the landscape of their homelands, present-day eastern Mississippi and western Alabama. As a result, Choctaw people have been recognized as the best agriculturalists of all of the Southeastern Tribes (Romans 1770). The Choctaw people draw part of their identity from cooking and eating old Choctaw family favorites.

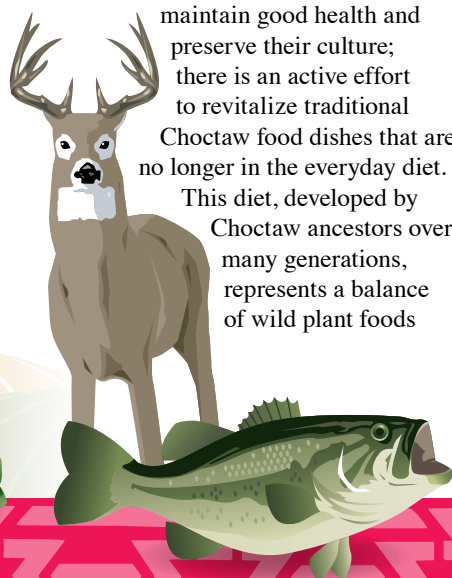
Their culinary repertoire includes meat from both large and smaller animals, as well as plant foods collected in season. Traditional foods are still eaten by some Choctaw families today to maintain good health and preserve their culture; there is an active effort to revitalize traditional Choctaw food dishes that are no longer in the everyday diet.

This diet, developed by Choctaw ancestors over many generations, represents a balance of wild plant foods

and animal products that were eaten according to the seasons. In the spring, women collected leaves from young, succulent plants such as poke, dock and stinging nettles, providing the Vitamin A, calcium and iron needed to supplement dried food rations that had been stored over winter. In the summer, they collected edible fruits like grapes and blackberries, grains like sump weed seeds, and oily hickory nuts, while the men provided protein by fishing and hunting small game. In the fall, women gathered acorns, while the men hunted the larger animals that the acorns attracted, their meat and hides prime for the coming cold. In the winter, the community dug starchy tubers like greenbrier roots, and welcomed the Vitamin C provided by fresh persimmons. In the 1500s, the Spanish brought Shukha (pigs), Wak (cattle), Takkon (peaches), and Shukshi (watermelons) to the Choctaw homeland. By the late 1700s, Choctaw farmers added leeks, garlic, cabbage, hogs, chicken and ducks (Romans 770:84).

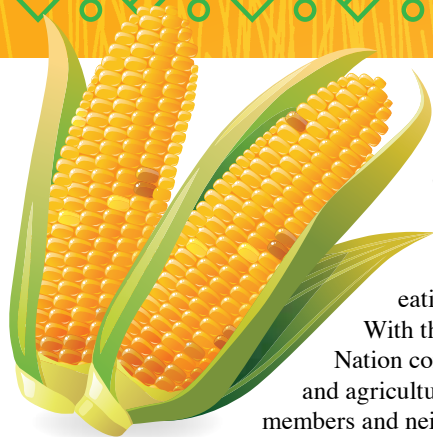


Gwen Coleman Lester





Choctaw people shared these dishes with visitors to their homeland and influenced world history as Europeans took Native American foods worldwide. For example, Choctaw cuisine is the basis of American soul food, it contributed significantly to Cajun cuisine, and corn is the third most important food crop world-wide. Corn was domesticated in Mexico and brought north. Choctaw farmers developed four varieties of corn – **Tanchushi**, **Tanchi hlimishko**, **Tanchi tohbi** and **Tanchi bakanli**. These corn varieties, along with beans, were shared with the Spanish when they arrived in Choctaw country in the mid-1500s; later, some varieties made their way to the rest of the world.



One of the greatest threats facing Choctaw traditional culture today is a decreasing connection with the land. Today, the Choctaw traditional foodway offers insights into healthy eating, local food, and sustainability.

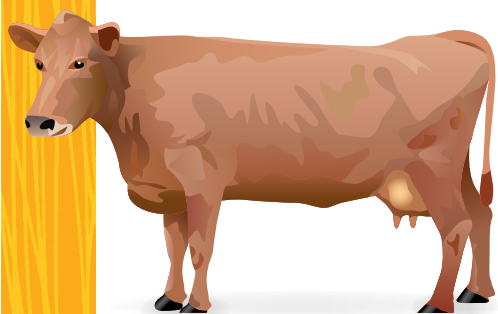
With this in mind, the Choctaw Nation continues to preserve farming and agricultural history by teaching tribal members and neighbors how to be agriculturally minded. The tribe's Historic Preservation program grows out the seeds for highly threatened Choctaw heritage crops that have been collected and encourages Choctaw families to do so as well. These unique crop varieties represent the efforts of centuries of work on the part of Choctaw farmers, tending the crops and selecting the best seeds each year. Compared to today's commodity crops, these tend to be higher in nutrition, flavor, and sustainability.

Three hundred years ago, Choctaw communities began maintaining three distinct types of highly efficient agricultural fields: small family garden plots planted between the houses in a village, large community fields located down in the bottom land adjacent to the village, and patches of pumpkins and melons located away from the village. These fields utilized Choctaw advanced permaculture practices developed over 15,000 years of sustainable land use.

Choctaws began raising cattle in the 1730s. By the 1770s, many Choctaws spread out into previously unsettled land in order to better graze their livestock. By the start of the Trail of Tears in 1830,

the Choctaw cattle herd numbered about 43,000 head (Carso 2005). Around the same time, Choctaw farmers began growing and

harvesting crops as separate families, like their Euro-American neighbors. This was not without consequence. Within decades after the Trail of Tears, these harsh land practices resulted in the decimation of the soils in the Choctaw homeland.



Today, some of these ancient Choctaw varieties of crop plants survive by only a few hundred seeds. Crop varieties

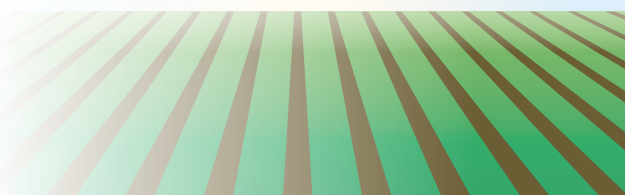
being preserved today include **Tanchi Tohbi** (the traditional Choctaw flour corn), **Tanchi hlimisko** (the traditional Choctaw yellow hominy corn), **Choctaw Sweet Potato Squash** (a 30lb variety with amazing flavor and shelf life), **Smith Peas** (a small field pea brought out of Mississippi in 1882), **Lambsquarter** (a native green, with a better nutritional profile than raw spinach), **Huazontle** (a variety of domesticated Lambsquarter, grown by



Choctaw ancestors in 500 BC) and **Perique** (a traditional Choctaw variety of tobacco, one of the most expensive in the world). Future plans include distribution of seeds to interested Tribal families and teaching them how to cultivate them. This will help to expand rural markets, shrink the local food desert, and make these healthy, Choctaw-produced food ingredients more widely available.



The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's ancient land-management practices are still valued today as the tribe harvests large crops of pecans, hay, cattle and buffalo from thousands of acres of tribally owned and cultivated land. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Agriculture Outreach program utilizes Ag in the Classroom and works with Head Starts, Daycare and public school students to teach and promote agriculture education. Working with tribal extension agents, Agriculture Outreach works with the USDA as well as Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, assists with local livestock shows and works with tribal members on their agriculture needs.



# Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Farming and Agriculture



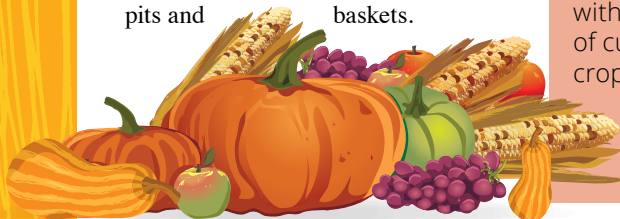
**Written by:**  
**Pat Thompson,**  
**Oklahoma**  
**Ag in the**  
**Classroom**

The Citizen  
Potawatomi  
people came to  
Oklahoma from the

Great Lakes area during the Indian Removals. They are relatives and allies of the Ojibwe and Ottawa tribes, and the name "Potawatomi" refers to their role as "fire keepers" in that alliance. They are Algonquian-speaking people, and their name for themselves is "Nishnabek" (related to the Ojibwe word "Anishinabe.") There are around 33,000 Potawatomi Indians today.

Potawatomi women planted and harvested corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, and gathered wild rice and berries. The men hunted deer, elk, and wild birds and caught fish. They converted forests into enriched agricultural fields using an ancient technique known as "slash and burn." During Gtegangises (Planting Moon), tools made of bone, stone and wood were used to cultivate crops, including peanuts, potatoes, onions, melons and the "Three Sisters" (corn, beans and squash).

Crops and a variety of nuts (acorns, chestnuts and beechnuts) were harvested during Dgwaget (fall) and stored for the winter in underground pits and baskets.



Early in the spring, when their food was about to run out, the Potawatomi tapped maple trees for syrup. They collected sap in birch bark pails and poured it into log troughs hollowed from basswood trees. The large surface area and shallow depth of the troughs was ideal for ice formation. Every morning, ice was removed, leaving a more concentrated sugar solution behind. The concentrated solution could then be boiled to make sugar.

Wooden evaporating dishes were placed on flat stones over the coals of a fire that burned night and day. In the old times, families would all move together to "sugar camp," where firewood and equipment had been stored the year before. Most of the time was spent stirring. When the syrup reached just the right consistency, it was beaten so that it would solidify in the desired way, into soft cakes, hard candy, and granulated sugar. Then it was stored in birch bark boxes called makaks, and sewn tight with spruce root. Given birch bark's natural preservatives, the sugars would keep for years.

## Student Activity:

Read both stories that explore this history of Maple sap. Compare the two stories. Which one is a fable and which one is fact? What is the moral of the fable?

## Vocabulary

**agricultural** — having to do with the science or occupation of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising

**allies** — groups associated or united with another for some common purpose

## NANABOZHO AND THE MAPLE TREES



When Nanabozho, the Anishinabe Original Man, our teacher, part man, part manido, walked through the world, he took note of who was flourishing and who was not, of who was mindful of the Original Instructions and who was not. He was dismayed when he came upon villages where the gardens were not being tended, where the fishnets were not repaired and the children were not being taught the way to live. Instead of seeing piles of firewood and caches of corn, he found the people lying beneath maple trees with their mouths wide open, catching the sweet syrup of the generous trees. They had become lazy and took for granted the gifts of the Creator. They did not do their ceremonies or care for one another. He knew his responsibility, so he went to the river and dipped up many buckets of water. He poured the water straight into the maple trees to dilute the syrup. Today, maple sap flows like a stream of water with only a trace of sweetness to remind the people both of possibility and of responsibility. And so it is that it takes forty gallons of sap to make a gallon of syrup.

*Stories excerpted from Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Maple Sugar Moon," Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants, Milkweed, 2015.*



## HOW THE SQUIRRELS TAUGHT THE PEOPLE TO MAKE SUGAR

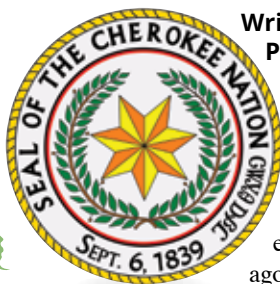
It is said our people learned to make sugar from the squirrels. In late winter, the hungry time, when caches of nuts are depleted, squirrels take to the treetops and gnaw on the branches of sugar maples. Scraping the bark allows sap to exude from the twig, and the squirrels drink it. But the real goods come the next morning, when they follow the same circuit they made the day before, licking up the sugar crystals that formed on the bark overnight. Freezing temperatures cause the water in the sap to sublimate, leaving a sweet crystalline crust like rock candy behind, enough to tide them over through the hungriest time of year.

Our people call this time the Maple Sugar Moon, Zizibaskwet Giizis. The month before is known as the Hard Crust on Snow Moon. People living a subsistence lifestyle also know it as the Hunger Moon, when stored food has dwindled and game is scarce. But the maples carried the people through, provided food just when they needed it most.

*Stories excerpted from Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Maple Sugar Moon," Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants, Milkweed, 2015.*



# Cherokee, Farming & Agriculture



Written by:  
**Pat Thompson,**  
**Oklahoma Ag in**  
**the Classroom**

The Cherokee may have been raising squash as early as 3,000 years ago. Even earlier, some scientists think

they may have been cultivating plants such as marsh elder, lambsquarters, pigweed, and sunflowers. For at least the last 1,400 years they have been raising beans and corn. During the Mississippian Period (800 to 1500 CE), the Cherokee ancestors developed a new variety of corn called eastern flint which closely resembles modern corn. Corn was central to several religious ceremonies, especially the Green Corn Ceremony. The Cherokee cleared woodlands for cultivated fields in a practice called “slash and burn” or “swidden” agriculture. This involved felling larger trees and burning shrubs and grasses. New fields would be cultivated with a digging stick. These fields would be used until the soils became depleted. Then the depleted fields would be left alone to lie fallow, and new fields would be cleared. Cherokee society was matrilineal. In matrilineal societies, a person’s clan and tribal membership are traced through the mother rather than the father. The women were the farmers and were in charge of the fields and gardens. Villages were surrounded by vast communal cornfields. The entire community, women and men, worked in these fields. The women and children tended smaller household gardens near their homes. Children used blow darts to scare away small animals and birds. In the household gardens were a smaller variety of corn, beans, squash, pumpkins



and sunflowers. To plant corn, the women would dig small holes about two inches apart, place seven kernels of corn in each hole and cover the hole with a small hill of soil. Pumpkins, beans and sunflowers grew in between the rows of corn.

Nitrogen-depleting corn was planted with nitrogen-fixing beans. Pole beans were allowed to climb on the tall stalks of corn. The men helped clear the larger communal fields but spent most of their time at war and hunting deer, bear, and elk. Like tribes in the west, the Cherokee also hunted bison but a smaller breed, called timber bison, which is now extinct. Children used darts blown through hollowed-out river cane to hunt smaller game—squirrel, rabbit, opossum and game birds. The English Lieutenant Henry Timberlake visited the Cherokee in 1762. He was surprised to find that the women did most of the farm labor.

By the mid-1700s Cherokees were growing apples from Europe, black-eyed peas from Africa and sweet potatoes from the Caribbean. By the late 1700s they were growing watermelon from African and peach trees introduced by the Spanish. Peaches were pounded and mixed with flour to make bread and cooked and dried for winter storage or used to flavor soups and beverages.

In the mid 1700s, an Anglo-American captive, Mrs. Bean, introduced the Cherokee to dairy cattle and taught them to prepare and use dairy foods. This provided some nourishment even when hunting was bad. With the introduction of dairy farming the Cherokee began to amass large herds and farms, which required more manual labor. This would soon lead the Cherokee into using slave labor. The same Anglo-American captive taught Cherokee women to set up looms, spin thread or yarn and weave cloth. At this time, the Cherokee were wearing a combination of traditional hide (animal skin) clothing and loomed cloth purchased from traders. Weaving their own cloth would make the



## Vocabulary

**Communal**— of or relating to a community

**Community**— shared ownership or participation

**Cultivated**— to loosen or break up the soil

**Depleted**— reduced in amount by using up; exhausted, especially of strength or resources

**Extinct**— no longer existing

**Fallow**— land for crops allowed to lie idle during the growing season

**Matrilineal**— relating to, based on, or tracing descent through the maternal line

**Nitrogen**— a colorless tasteless odorless element that occurs as a gas which makes up 78 percent of the atmosphere and that forms a part of all living tissues

**Nitrogen-Fixing**— a process of combining atmospheric nitrogen with other elements to form useful compounds

**Swidden**— an area of land cleared for cultivation by slashing and burning vegetation

*The soil is so remarkably fertile that the women alone do all the laborious tasks of agriculture, the soil requiring only a little stirring with a hoe to produce whatever is required of it; yielding vast quantities of peas, beans, potatoes, cabbages, Indian corn, pumpkins, melons, and tobacco, not to mention a number of other vegetables imported from Europe, not so generally known amongst them, which flourish as much, or more here than in their native climate; and, by the daily experience of the goodness of the soil, we may conclude that, with due care, all European plants might succeed in the same manner. - English Lieutenant Henry Timberlake (Timberlake, 42)*

## Vocabulary

**Climate**— the average weather conditions of a particular place or region over a period of years

**Fertile**— producing vegetation or crops plentifully

**Flourish**— to grow well

Cherokee people less dependent on traders. It also led to a change in terms of gender roles. Women began spending more time in the home weaving and doing household chores. The men began taking more responsibility for the farm work. By the 1820s, Cherokees were practicing small-scale woods ranching of hogs and cattle, hunting and gathering, and fishing. Farms ranged in size from two to 10 acres at that time and were arranged in

kin-based groups along the stream and river valleys. Cherokee land was valuable farming land with the ideal climate and necessary 200 frost-free days for growing cotton. Some Cherokee farmers began growing cotton to sell. This put them in competition with Anglo-American farmers who were also trying to make money growing cotton. For this and a combination of other reasons, the government decided to move the Cherokee from their ancestral lands in the east to the land in the west, known then as Indian Territory and now as Oklahoma.

**Loom** — a frame or machine for weaving threads or yarns to produce cloth

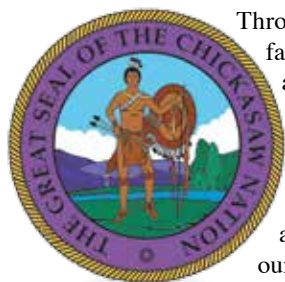
This removal took place in two phases, 1836 and 1839. One group left voluntarily in 1836 and another group was forced to leave in 1839. This forced removal came to be known as the “Trail of Tears.” Many Cherokee died on the Trail of Tears. Most of those who died were women and children. Although they lost many of their tools, horses and livestock on the journey, the Cherokee took up farming again when they got to the new land. The women had sewn seeds from their old fields into the hems of their skirts. They used these seeds to start over. Economically, the Cherokee benefited from the good soil of the new territory. By 1859 there were over 100,000 acres in cultivation, and Cherokee farmers were averaging over 35 bushels of corn an acre. The tribe had over 240,000 head of cattle and were exporting 50,000 head a year, worth over \$1,000,000, to eastern markets. Flatboats and steamboats connected Cherokee towns with centers of US trade as far south as New Orleans.

**Economic** — of, relating to, or based on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

**Export** — to carry or send abroad especially for sale in another country

Wild Potato Clan Ah-ni-ga-to-ge-wi or Wild Potato Clan (originally Kituwah clan, has also been known as the Bear Clan, Raccoon Clan and even Blind Savannah in different regions) — Were known to be farmers and gatherers of the wild potato plants in swamps (hence the name gatogewi = “swamp”) and along streams to make flour or bread for food, and were so named after them. The wild potato was a main staple of the older Cherokee life back east (Tsa-la-gi U-weti). Historically, members of this clan were known to be keepers of the land and gatherers. The clan color is green and their wood is birch. Their flag is yellow with green stars. According to Cherokee folklore, plants are sacred. They not only feed us but also have healing powers. An old Cherokee story is that when animals were being over-hunted by humans, the animals decided to get together and hold a counsel. They decided to infect humans with disease. Each animal came up with a different disease. However, the plants were still friendly toward humans so each plant came up with a cure for one of the diseases that infected humans. Today, as with the general population, there are very few Cherokee farmers. But there are some who are trying to revive some of their traditional healing plants by gathering and saving heirloom seeds and providing the seeds to tribal members to plant in their gardens.

# Chickasaw Nation, Farming and Agriculture



Throughout history, farming and agriculture have been an integral part of the Chickasaw way of life. In ancient times, our ancestors lived

in villages where they grew corn in communal fields and divided the harvest among the villages. This was the primary crop, and it fed the villages year round. After European settlement and colonization, Chickasaws established family farmsteads. On these farms, they cultivated cotton and raised livestock such as cattle, hogs and horses. They used horses and oxen to pull wooden plows with iron plowshares. They used the scythe and other hand tools for tending and reaping. The United States established agents and blacksmiths to provide tools and to make repairs. The tools made large cultivation easier to produce superior crops.

Chickasaws depended upon the crops raised in household gardens and common fields to sustain them throughout the year. Seeds were saved from each year’s harvest and vegetables were planted in rotation with the seasons, and any excess was preserved for later use. Each Chickasaw family built a corn crib to protect food kept in storage. They set four tall posts deep into the ground and build a timber floor on top of the posts, high above the ground. A

small, four-sided building constructed of timber walls covered in clay daub sat on top



*Reproduction of the mural painted at the Marietta Post office that depicts a Chickasaw family making pashofa.*

of the floor. This design kept the food cool and dry. A removable ladder allowed access to the food stored inside. By rubbing oil on the posts, they kept the dried corn and squash, nuts and seeds, and dried meats and fruits safe from rodents and other small animals.

Many traditional Chickasaw foods and recipes have withstood the test of time. Chickasaw families continue to cook and enjoy many of the same foods their ancestors enjoyed long ago. Most notably, this includes the Three Sisters, grape dumplings and pashofa.

The Three Sisters is a vegetable medley of corn, squash and beans that are planted together so each plant can support and nourish each other. Today, many Chickasaws enjoy Three Sisters Stew.

Corn, beans and squash have provided nutrition for the Chickasaw people for generations. These three sisters grow together and support each other as they thrive. Traditionally, the vegetables were planted together in late May or early June. In gardens, small mounds were built two feet apart at the base and four feet apart at





the top. In the center of each, several corn kernels were planted in a small circle. After the corn grew about a hand high, pole beans were planted in another circle in the mound, about six inches outside the corn. A week later, squash seeds were planted around the outer edge of the mound. The beans grew up the cornstalks, which were strong enough to hold the weight. The squash grew out and covered the ground, keeping out the weeds and keeping in the moisture. These plants provided for each other, just as they provided for Chickasaw families.

Corn has long been a staple of the Chickasaw diet. Corn grew across the Chickasaw Homeland, in the Southeastern United States, and Chickasaws long ago began to domesticate it as a crop. They planted vast fields around households, tending the crops and harvesting together. Much of the corn was dried and stored for later use and large gatherings. Families also received corn from the harvest, and most grew their own in household gardens. While some was eaten fresh, most was dried and saved for use throughout the year. Women used corn pounders made from hollowed out tree trunks to crack and grind dried corn. Corn provided the main ingredient for many foods. Generations were nourished from pashofa and corn cakes. The corn pounder was a household item for Chickasaw women.

Pashofa is a traditional dish that consists of cracked corn (hominy) and pork, covered in water and boiled for several hours. Chickasaws have enjoyed pashofa for centuries. Traditionally, cooking pashofa required many hours of close attention. Women came together to prepare enough to feed an entire village. This required several pounds of cracked corn. When the time came to prepare pashofa, corn pounders were used to crack hominy kernels. Next, the corn was poured into boiling water in a pashofa kettle. Pork was added and it continued to cook until the mixture was soft and soupy. It could take a good portion of the day, depending on how much was prepared.

One of the most important steps in cooking pashofa was to stir the pot regularly. This ensured the corn would not stick to the bottom of



the large iron pots. Pashofa paddles were designed specifically for this purpose. They were carved with long handles, broadened at one end like a spoon, only flat with a straight edge for scraping. The strong heartwoods of hickory, bois d'arc and oak trees were used. Because they were made so well, these paddles last several generations, handed down like a family treasure from one family to the next. The handles wore smooth after many years of use, a legacy of the loving, hardworking hands of our ancestors. Pashofa was, and still is, served at large gatherings of our people, for celebrations and ceremonies.



Next to the corn pounder, the pashofa kettle was a necessary item in Chickasaw households. Prior to European trade, Chickasaw women crafted large clay vessels for cooking pashofa. The process of making these pots took much labor and many hours of preparing the clay, building and fashioning the pot by hand and waiting for the clay to dry before firing. Though the pots were well-made and served many people, the metal kettle began appearing as European trade increased. They were virtually indestructible and spared hours of making ceramic pots. Many pashofa kettles were handed down among Chickasaw families for generations.

Grape dumplings were traditionally made from the wild "possum grapes" that hung from vines on trees throughout the Chickasaw Homeland of Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. Though "possum grapes" are no longer used, it is still a dish revered by many.

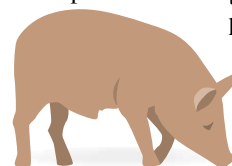


**CHICKASAW  
CULTURAL CENTER**

These dishes, all served at the world-renowned Chickasaw Cultural Center, are just part of the unique and vibrant culture of the Chickasaw people. Ongoing, concerted efforts to ensure this part of the culture continues, for generations to come, is a point of emphasis for the Chickasaw Nation.

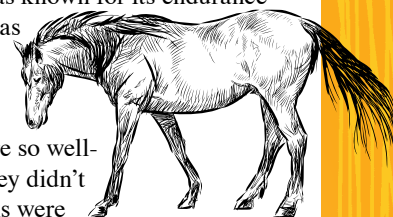
Pigs were not native to the Chickasaw Homeland but were introduced by Spanish explorers.

One explorer, Hernando de Soto, came in contact with Chickasaws in 1540. During one battle with the Spanish, many pigs



were captured and many simply escaped into the woods. Several breeds descended from these pigs including the Choctaw Pig. Soon after, Chickasaws began to domesticate the pig and raise it in pens on their farms. The bacon was known to be more streaked, firm and better tasting because the pigs were fed on the hickory nuts, acorns and chestnuts of the Chickasaw Homeland.

The Chickasaw Horse was known for its endurance and speed. Although it was shorter than other breeds of horses, it was stocky, muscular and powerful. It had tough feet that were so well-adapted to the terrain; they didn't need shoeing. Their necks were very short, so they had to spread their front legs to reach the grass. Chickasaw horses were used for transportation, hunting and carrying large game. They were an important part of the daily lives of ancient Chickasaws.



Cotton Gin Port, located in Monroe County, Mississippi, strengthened the Chickasaw economy at a critical time in our history.



As Chickasaws moved onto family homesteads and built farms to raise livestock and crops, cotton became a major commodity. Built in 1800, Cotton Gin Port was the first cotton gin in the Chickasaw Homeland and one of the first in the surrounding region. The cotton gin decreased the time and

labor it took to separate the cotton from the cottonseeds. Cotton Gin Port was located on the west bank of the Tombigbee River. People from all over the area come to process and ship their cotton, along with many other products, down the Tombigbee to the gulf at Mobile, Alabama.

Still a favorite pastime of many, fishing was traditionally used as an important means for food. There were many rivers and creeks in the Homeland from which to fish. Chickasaws built berms along the water's edge to allow fish in, but not out. Once trapped, fish were caught with hands or spears. Natural poison, made of crushed buckeyes, green walnut hulls and shoestring root, was also used. When the mixture was thrown in the water, the fish become stunned and floated to the surface for easy capture.



*Turning Deep Roots  
Into a Bright Future*



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