



REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

The Geography of Your Breakfast by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.

Ever wonder about where your food comes from? Most of don't. Even when we do, we tend to think about the local, regional, or national place where the food was produced. But what about where the food first came from?

Take this short quiz:

1. Where do potatoes come from originally?

Most people think potatoes are European and a lot of people specifically think of Ireland because of the potato famine of the 1840s. But potatoes are actually from the Americas. The

first potatoes didn't even enter Europe until the late 1500s.

So your hash browns are American, but what about some other common breakfast foods?

Corn Flakes & Grits: American. Corn, known as *maize* throughout the world, predates human habitation in the New World. The oldest evidence of a human meal of corn is from about 7,000 years ago.

Toast: Toast is made primarily from wheat, a crop that whose ancestors (*einkorn*, for example) where being grown as long as 10,000 years ago in the Middle East. The butter on top is also quite old, possibly going back to ancient nomadic peoples of Asia but certainly used by ancient Sumerians in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). If you use margarine, you have Napoleon III to thank. He sought a replacement to butter in the late 1860s.

Bacon: Bacon, as you probably know, comes from pigs. Wild pigs could be found almost everywhere in the northern hemisphere in prehistoric times, but the first evidence of domestication is from Turkey. Because it is a scavenger, pork was banned from many diets.



Milk/Cheese/Yogurt: Wild cattle were common in the northern hemisphere and were domesticated by the ancient peoples of modern Greece and Turkey. Cheese was being made by the ancient Sumerians by 2500 BC, so it's pretty old. Yogurt was an important part of Eastern European cultures, but was probably introduced by Mongol and Hun invaders from the steppes of Asia.

Orange & Grapefruit Juice: Oranges are originally from Malaysia, but developed for thousands of years before getting to the modern orange. The original was small and bitter compared

to today. Grapefruit descended from the pomelo, a wild fruit from Indonesia and mainland Southeast Asia.

Eggs: Modern chickens may come from wild varieties of Southeast Asia. Many groups raised chickens, but the eating of eggs developed slowly, because it was more important to have chickens rather than eggs. Of course, ancient peoples ate wild eggs, but understood that restraint was needed to prevent species from being wiped out. In time, farming techniques allowed enough eggs for eating and reproduction.

Further Research

1. Check out the mammoth *History of Food* by Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, published by Barnes & Noble Books of New York. It covers the origins of just about everything.
2. Two good books on the geography of the American diet are *No Foreign Food* by Richard Pillsbury and *The Taste of American Place* Edited by Barbara G. Shortridge.
3. For ancient diets, try *Food in Antiquity: A Survey of the Diet of Early Peoples* Dan and Patricia Brothwell.
4. If you want to try some ancient recipes, check out *A Taste of Ancient Rome* by Ilaria Gozzini Giacosa.

Links:

- The Food Timeline www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food.html
- Research Centre for the History of Food & Drink <http://www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/centrefooddrink/>
- The Food Museum <http://www.foodmuseum.com/>
- Food Resource <http://food.oregonstate.edu/>