

Monday, February 17, 2003

Savannah Morning News.

Chittlins; a lip-smacking delicacy

From snout to tail, African-American cooks used every part of the pig, making a delicacy out of discards.

By Kimberly Starks

Special to the Morning News

In pre-emancipation times, enslaved Africans were given the discards after a pig slaughter -- ears, tongue, jowls, tail, guts and trotters. Out of necessity, these less-than-desirable scraps were stewed, pickled and slow-cooked to bring out the most flavor and to tenderize the often tough meat.

But the part of the pig that has gotten the most foul reputation is perhaps the chitterlings.

Consisting of the pig's large intestine, chitterlings can produce an aroma so foul many find them too repulsive to eat. But connoisseurs insist that with proper preparation and the right blend of seasonings, chitterlings or chittlins are a lip-smacking delicacy.

When pigs are slaughtered, chitterlings are the quickest to spoil, so they were historically the first thing eaten, said Michael Ray, owner of Ray's Butcher Shop.

"Back then, chitterlings were the first thing my father ate after he slaughtered pigs because there was no refrigeration," he said.

Chitterlings are typically sold frozen, by the bucket, and can be found in most area grocery stores. Jones Red and White food store sells a variety of scrap meats such as chitterlings, hocks, chicken feet, pork maws and ears.

Co-owner Mike Jones says these meats are used as main dishes and to season vegetables and other sides as an integral part of good old Southern cooking.

"When collard greens are plentiful, there is a need for seasoned meats to go along with the fixings," Jones said.

True to their reputation, chitterlings can create a lingering stench that can make your eyes tear up when it's cooking and have to be prepared more carefully than other parts of the pig.

But thorough cleaning will eliminate much of the odor. It must be soaked and rinsed several times in fresh water and the fat and debris has to be picked off by hand.