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## In the Family Tradition

By Warren Johnston  
Valley News Staff Writer

Margaret Osha is winding back the clock to a simpler and healthier time. It is the time before fast food and processed food dominated the meals in American households, the time when she was growing up on her family's dairy farm in Northfield, Vt., and they ate what they raised.

Osha and her husband, Stuart, own and operate Turkey Hill Farm in Randolph Center, where they practice the dietary traditions of their childhoods -- they eat what's grown on their farm or purchased from other local farms.

"It's like going back 45 or 50 years," Margaret Osha said last week during a conversation at their home, which sits on a hillside overlooking their 50-acre farm.

The Oshas have a micro dairy with a few cows, and they raise chickens for eggs and meat, and pigs and calves for meat. And what they don't eat, they sell in their farm store, which features raw milk, eggs, vegetables, maple syrup and pastured poultry, pork and veal. They have a bed-and-breakfast apartment for farm visitors, and Margaret Osha holds cooking classes throughout the year in her spacious kitchen.

"My parents had a small herd of Jerseys that they pastured. It was a wonderful childhood, a great life. My mom was an avid cook. She was my true inspiration. Every time I have a cooking class, I always tell them about the inspiration of my mom, and I tell them if they have family recipes, to hold onto them, and if they don't, to make sure that they get them," Osha said.

Although her father used chemicals and pesticides on the fields, her mother was adamant that the family's garden be organic, a concept that wasn't widely practiced at the time, Osha said. "She really believed in controlling bugs by prevention and by organic means. I have always admired her for how we lived as a family."

When Osha was older, the realities of making a living on a small dairy farm became her burden.

During the 1970s, when she was in her 20s, Osha worked on the farm with her parents. Her father's health declined, and she ended up purchasing the farm with their help, but making a go of it was more than she anticipated.



Margaret Osha, who teaches cooking in Randolph Center, is winding back the clock to a simpler and healthier time. "My mom was an avid cook. She was my true inspiration." (Valley News — Jason Johns)

“My dad told me it would be hard, and it was harder than I thought. I was young. I held on for a very long time and did a lot of different things to make a go of it. The thing that I really enjoyed most was having a few cows that I milked, and I raised some really nice milk-fed veal from the cows that were out on the pasture. We sold eggs, and I made cheese. I was really into the food. I've always loved agriculture and the passion of being intimate with my food.”

Despite trying to diversify, she couldn't make the business viable.

“I dairy farmed as long as I could, and it was a really sad day when the cows left. I stood in the barn, and there was something about that silence. It was just deafening.”

She also couldn't get dairy farming out of her head, and tried and failed twice more before she decided to give up large-scale farming and sold the Northfield farm.

“A number of years ago, Stuart went back into dairying. We had an organic dairy on the family farm in Northfield. We had a lovely herd. But Stuart had health issues, and, in 1998, it really forced us to consider downsizing. I had been there for 45 years, and we sold the farm. It was the hardest thing that I've ever had to do. We moved to Randolph Center in 2001, and in 2003, Stuart was diagnosed with stage-three colon cancer. So that led us to look into food even deeper than we previously had.”

Despite the heartache of selling the farm and of Stuart Osha's illness, Margaret Osha said, they found a warm and welcoming community in Randolph Center that eased them through their difficult times.

“As hard as it was to sell our farm, that had been in our family for three generations, we love living here. This has been the most incredible place. We have the best community around here. I never realized how isolated we were in Northfield. Here, everybody is doing something similar to what we're doing in creative and innovative ways. It's a wonderful community,” she said.

After Stuart Osha was diagnosed with cancer, they started following the way of eating recommended by the Weston A. Price Foundation, a nonprofit charity devoted to spreading the word about eating habits before the pre-industrialized food era. That's also when Stuart Osha started getting better, she said. In addition, “he retired from his business (the Holden Insurance Agency), and I think that made a big difference too.”

Weston Price was a dentist who, during the 1920s, noticed that an entire generation of Americans were developing bad teeth. For a decade, he traveled the world and visited indigenous people and discovered many of them had good teeth without any dental care. He studied their diets and found a correlation between the types of foods they were eating and their health. They ate what they raised and were not exposed to industrialized food. His book *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration* was published in 1939 and was the inspiration for establishing the foundation in 1999.

The charity was established to continue Price's research and to disseminate information about his work through education and activism, the Foundation's website says.

The group's dietary recommendations include: eating whole, natural foods; eating only foods that will spoil (but consuming them before they do); eating naturally

produced milk products from pasture-fed cows; eating fat that comes only from grass-fed animals; eating organic raw and fermented vegetables and fruits.

Also emphasized are getting plenty of sleep, exercise and sunlight, thinking positively and practicing forgiveness.

“Essentially, that's a lot of what the Weston A. Price Foundation is about. It's about eating nutrient-dense food, including fat,” Osha said.

“He came up with eating a lot of vitamin A and D, and what he called the ‘X-factor,’ which is now believed to be vitamin K that is found through grass-fed animal products. That's much different than what we're being told in mainstream nutritional health,” she said.

“One of the wonderful things about this diet is that in order to be able to get these good animal fats, the animals have to be out on grass (and not corn fed). It's not confinement industrial-based agriculture, it's grass-based agriculture. That was the thing that always made sense for us. Stuart grew up on a small farm in East Brookfield. They always pastured their cows, and it makes total sense. It's so good and better for you.

“Lard has been demonized since the early 1900s, when they came out with Crisco. Now, they're saying that if pigs are raised outside on pasture, you don't have to worry about the lard. We render it and fry potatoes. It's the best diet in the world.”

Another thing the diet emphasizes is lacto-fermentation of vegetables and fruits.

“You can do chutneys, fresh, crispy sauerkraut and other fermented vegetables. If you take the vegetables and chop them up, add sea salt and let them ferment for a few days before you put them into the refrigerator, they're wonderful.”

Osha started her “Farmer's Kitchen” cooking classes this year and has had participants from as far away as New Jersey, New York and Boston as well as from the Upper Valley. Some of the class topics included: preparing and cooking a turducken; wild foraging; lacto-fermentation; cheese making; and learning to use raw milk.

The classes also offer information about buying the healthiest food choices. “I just feel so strongly that people don't know how to choose their food.”

Here are some Margaret Osha's recipe recommendations for holiday meals:

## **Pasture-Raised Turkey**

Growing up on our hillside farm in Vermont, Thanksgiving was our most celebrated holiday.

Cooking a local, pastured turkey is not a lot different from cooking a supermarket variety. Where you will notice the difference is in the flavor of the pastured bird, particularly a heritage breed, which is far superior to any confinement-raised turkey; guaranteed. Pastured turkeys are often leaner than those purchased in the supermarkets, so you might need to add about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of water to the bottom of the roasting pan early on in the cooking time, but not always.

I do not roast the turkeys that we raise to the USDA recommended internal

temperature. I feel the temperature of 180 internal degrees is too high to ensure maximum flavor and juiciness. A temperature of 160 to 165 degrees is my preferred temperature, but the ultimate decision is yours and what you feel most comfortable with. If you like eating the stuffing inside the bird, the internal temperature of the stuffing must reach 165 degrees.

Brining is optional, but does result in a lusciously juicy, beautifully browned bird. Just be sure that you don't add any salt to the turkey as it cooks. My neighbor Susan Reid, who is the editor of the *Baking Sheet* at King Arthur Flour, shared this recipe with me a few years ago. I have adapted it by adding maple syrup instead of sugar. You can add some white wine to the brine as well to increase volume. The recipe can be doubled for larger birds. Pasture-raised turkeys don't have to be brined. They are juicy enough without it.

For the brine:

**1 quart of water**

**½ cup of kosher salt**

**¼ cup of maple syrup**

**1 tablespoon dried thyme**

**1 bay leaf**

Simmer until salt (and sugar if you are using it) is well dissolved. Allow to cool to room temperature and add 1 gallon of cold water to the mixture.

In a non-reactive vessel, soak the turkey in the brine overnight. When the turkey is removed, rinse well and pat dry with paper towels.

Place breast side up in a roaster pan. I like to let the turkey come to room temperature just before roasting; it helps the bird cook more evenly. Remove any of the brine that has dripped into the roasting pan, before stuffing or roasting.

**For the turkey:**

Whether you brine the night before or not:

Starting at the top of the breast, run your fingers under the skin of the breast, rubbing the flesh with a mixture of softened unsalted butter and chopped fresh rosemary, thyme or any herb combination that you like. It works well to purée the butter and herbs together in the food processor until smooth. Two sticks of butter are generous for an 18- to 20-pound turkey. Rub the remaining herb butter mixture into the skin of the entire bird.

Roast turkey, stuffed or unstuffed, in a pre-heated 325-degree oven. I cook the turkey covered for about a third of the roasting time and then uncovered it for the remainder, basting often. A brined turkey tends to brown faster, so you can always tent the bird with aluminum foil if needed. I use an instant-read thermometer for accuracy and allow approximately 16 minutes per pound. Keep in mind that the internal temperature will rise a few degrees after the birds comes out of the oven. Let the turkey rest for 30 minutes before carving.

## **Fresh Whole Berry Cranberry Sauce**

**12 ounces of cranberries, preferably from Vermont**

**½ cup of water**

**½ cup of maple syrup**

Rinse cranberries in a colander and remove any berries that are overripe and soft.

In a 2-quart saucepan combine maple syrup and water. Bring to a boil; add cranberries and return to a boil. Reduce heat and boil gently for about 10 minutes stirring occasionally. Listen and you will hear the cranberries pop as they cook! After 10 minutes remove from heat and cool completely at room temperature. Refrigerate until serving time.

## **Thanksgiving Stuffing**

Preparing delicious homemade stuffing is one of the most value-packed, time-honored skills a home cook can master.

I make my own homemade bread for all of my stuffing. I especially like a recipe that I adapted from a traditional Anadama bread recipe that I call Anadama local. This bread uses oatmeal and corn from an heirloom grinding corn that we grow. This is a 100 percent whole wheat bread, with the addition of a portion of the wheat grown by the Beidler Family Farm in Randolph Center. Anadama local is sweetened with maple syrup instead of traditional molasses. If you aren't into making your own bread or if time simply doesn't allow, I am sure there are very nice loaf style breads from local bakeries available. I use a loaf pan style of bread and not the crusty artisan loaves. Crusty loaves are simply delicious, but I don't like them for the purpose of making stuffing. I prefer to use mostly fresh herbs. I like a combination of fresh rosemary, thyme and parsley. I bring my herbs in the house for the winter, all except for the summer savory, which I use dried.

This is what you need to make a fabulous traditional Thanksgiving stuffing:

**2 loaves of loaf style whole grain bread (for a 15 pound-plus turkey, or if you really like lots of stuffing).**

**A bunch each of fresh rosemary, thyme and parsley**

**1 tablespoon dried summer savory**

**2-3 medium onions (If you want to be dazzled or to dazzle during preparation, red onions add color to the uncooked stuffing, and are a gorgeous contrast to the bread pieces and the fresh herbs.)**

**1½ pounds of your favorite ground pork or turkey sausage (If you like sausage with fennel seed it is a good addition)**

**Kosher salt**

**Fresh ground pepper**

**Chestnuts or pecans are a nice addition, but optional**

**3 to 4 cups of stock (approximately, this depends on the absorption of**

## **the bread)**

### **6 tablespoons melted butter, less if you are making a smaller quantity of stuffing**

Preparing the stuffing:

Break up as much bread as you feel you will need into small pieces into a large bowl. Chop up the fresh rosemary, thyme and parsley and add to the fresh breadcrumbs, along with the summer savory and mix. Add the chopped onions. Pan fry and lightly brown the ground sausage and add to the breadcrumbs. Up until this point, making stuffing is very forgiving. You can use more or less sausage, more of one herb than the other.

Mix these entire ingredients together, including any pan drippings from the sausage, and take a moment to see how beautiful these ingredients look together and how wonderful the mixture smells.

This is when I add the kosher salt and freshly ground pepper. If you have brined your turkey you might want to err on the light side with your addition of salt, the juices coming from the turkey will be a bit salty. Now is a good time to add nuts if you like. To your pan that you used to fry the sausage add a couple of cups of chicken stock and the butter. Scrape the bottom of the pan for all of the juices and melt the butter. Pour this mixture over your breadcrumbs, until the mixture just comes together, adding more of the liquid stock if needed. If you add too much stock, the stuffing will be too soggy. If you are using my method of cooking the stuffing outside of the bird, you can refrigerate until needed. Sometimes I prepare all the ingredients for the stuffing the day before and I add the butter and stock just before the meal.

### **Stuffing the bird:**

I loosely stuff the inside of the turkey with apple quarters, rosemary and torn bread pieces, moistened with stock. It's more important to me, removing the turkey from the oven when it reaches desired internal temperature than eating the inside stuffing.

### **Adding the stuffing to the roasting pan:**

I add the stuffing around the turkey the last 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 2 hours of roasting time, carefully removing it from the oven. I usually don't drain off any of the liquid from around the turkey; once again, a pasture-raised bird is usually leaner, anyway. I mix the stuffing and the drippings together around the turkey with a spoon. There should be enough drippings and liquid in the pan to perfectly moisten the stuffing, if not, you can always add more stock to the pan. I loosen and mix the stuffing with a spoon every 30 minutes until the turkey is done incorporating any additional juices.

After the turkey comes out of the oven, you can remove the stuffing from the pan. Cooking your turkey this way cuts down on the pan drippings for gravy, so I plan ahead and stew the neck and giblets -- with the exception of the liver -- to make up the difference. (The liver cooks much faster than the other giblets. It can be sautéed in a separate pan with butter, chopped and added at the last minute.)

Tent the turkey with foil and let the turkey rest for at least 30 minutes before carving to seal in all of the juices. A well-carved turkey will enhance the final texture

and beauty of presentation. And this stuffing will bring you many compliments ...  
enjoy!

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