Foodways, Families, and Festivities: Ethnobiology and Cultural Conservation in a Rural Missouri Community

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Abstract
Food customs and traditions bind human groups together in many ways--socially, geographically, temporally, and emotionally. This thesis describes the intricate relationships between food, ritual, and cultural identity in a rural German-Catholic community in Missouri. By drawing on the anthropological, cultural geographical and folkloric literature surrounding rural Missouri, a portrait of foodways emerges, which in turn illuminates valuable, often understated regional cultural traditions. Religion and ritual are understood as crucial to the continuity of regional identity--it is reinforced and made resilient through shared social action. The dispersal of ritual feasts and fasts throughout the calendar year regulates collective behavior, interactions, conversations, and the pace of "everyday life" in this little-studied region. These community behaviors and rhythms are most apparent when studied ethnobiologically, as customary bonds forged between humans and their natural environments and resources. Foodways studies examine carefully the production, preservation, distribution, and
consumption patterns of regional foods. These studies have a rich history of ethnographic description that bridges the gulf between eating as a mere mechanism of survival and eating as a culturally constructed event. Specific recipes and knowledge of food preservation are displayed focally during family reunions and meals, highlighting the unspoken, powerful link between region-specific subsistence practices and the Social values and identities shared and sustained within this German-Catholic community. Given the recent decline of rural farming communities throughout the United States, this thesis seeks to convey how cultural continuity in a rural community is preserved through eating together, and how food, family, and kin-based rituals collectively reinforce the Social fabric in this uniquely Midwestern cultural landscape by addressing questions of how cultural memory is preserved through foodways, the role that community institutions play, and the manner in which these Social institution's articulations of shared values, mutual support, and self-sufficiency are made visible. Ultimately, this thesis serves to illustrate, on a broader level, how foodways studies can inform ethnographic understandings, the histories, beliefs, and behaviors that foster continuity in cultural life.

Recommended Citation

Community, Culture and Conservation and brought together noted writers, scholars, performers, public officials, and community members to facilitate discussion, make connections, and find solutions to economic and conservation challenges faced by communities in Maine, New England, the country, and the world. Visit the conference webpage for more information: Community, Culture and Conservation: Sustaining Landscapes and Livelihoods conference. Guiding questions for this year and the conference include the following: By listening to community, and building on culture, can we integrate commerce a Cultural identity is essential for the peaceful cooperation of civilizations. If people have a strong sense of self-identity through culture, they are more likely to interact peacefully with other cultures, with respect for the diversity of value systems and religious beliefs as well as the tangible aspects of culture. As different cultures become more intertwined, these cultural identities may change. development and protecting cultural sites and artifacts, as well as intellectual property rights for culturally specific language and art.