



houston**food**bank 

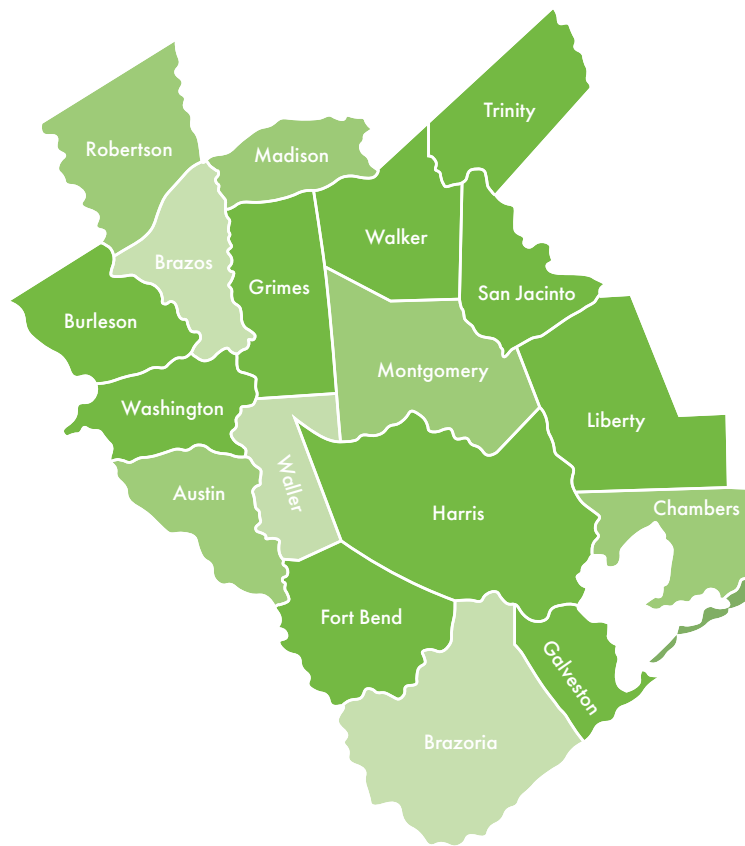
**FOOD**  
**AND**  
**CULTURE**  
**GUIDE**

**Filling pantries. Filling lives.**

# THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE HELPED AND CONTRIBUTED TO THIS GUIDE AND INITIATIVE:

- **Houston Food Bank Staff**
- **Houston Food Bank Partner Advisory Committee**
  - \* ABBA's Pantry/Abiding Faith United Methodist Church
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  - \* Huffman ISD: Huffman Middle School
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- **Olive Branch - Muslim Family Services**
- **Plant It Forward**
- **UTHealth Houston School of Public Health**
- **YMCA International Services**

**The goal of the Houston Food Bank's Culturally Responsive (CR) Strategic Initiative is:  
To enhance Houston Food Bank services by aligning cultural food preferences with existing services and programs that amplify the ability to provide service with dignity, reduce barriers and build trust.**



Founded in 1982, The Houston Food Bank is one of the largest food banks in the United States. Serving 18 counties alongside a network of more than 1,600 community partners means being inclusive of various cultures and backgrounds. We identified the top cultures in the Southeast Texas area and narrowed them down to the top 12 represented cultures. Each food and culture list includes cultural background information, most commonly used ingredients, traditional food practices and holidays observed. While the Houston Food Bank may not provide every product listed, we hope that this guide will increase awareness of cultural nuances and preferences to better serve our neighbors.

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<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1j0Vhr5KzAw6hKOLpT0e5X-T7I4reTPIAt?usp=sharing>

## DISCLAIMER

Food preferences and cultural practices can widely vary depending on social factors (language, religion, ethnic group, age, geography, etc.). This guide serves to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity about specific culture groups. Not all food, practices and holidays are necessarily adopted by everyone who identifies within that cultural group.

**Last updated: January 2023**

# AFGHAN FOOD & CULTURE

Afghanistan is commonly mistaken as being part of the Middle East, but it is identified as part of South Central Asia. The three most commonly spoken languages are Pashto, Dari and Farsi. The average household size is 8 people. Houston is home to multiple resettlement agencies, which welcomed Afghan arrivals through the Special Immigrant Visa program after the Taliban takeover in 2021. As of February 2022, Houston has welcomed over 10,500 Afghan evacuees.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN (HALAL PREFERRED)

- Beef
- Lamb/Mutton
- Chicken
- Fish
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, red, green/scallions)
- Tomatoes
- Eggplant
- Potatoes (white & sweet)
- Spinach
- Carrots
- Peas
- Lettuce
- Cucumbers
- Cilantro/coriander
- Fruits (melons, grapes, oranges, pomegranates)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Basmati rice
- Yellow split peas
- Beans (kidney & garbanzo/chickpeas)
- Flour (all-purpose & wheat)

### OTHER

- Yeast
- Dried fruits (dates, raisins, figs, apricots)
- Nuts (almonds, pistachios, walnuts, pine)
- Seeds (nigella, sesame, fenugreek)
- White sugar
- Oil (sunflower & vegetable)
- Ghee (clarified butter)
- Plain yogurt

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

**Haram** (“prohibited”) refers to the restriction of eating pork and its byproducts, products containing gelatin, and alcohol as defined by Islamic law.

- Bread is typically eaten at every meal and used as a spoon. Eating with hands and without cutlery is common.
- Rice and stews are staples.
- Hot tea is often prepared and served in Afghan households.
- **Halal** (“permitted”) refers to food adhering to Islamic law, including meat slaughtered under specific methods.
- **Dastarkhan** (“tablecloth”) refers to the sharing of meals, typically on the floor.
- The national dish of Afghanistan is *kabuli pulao*, which is made of a meat of choice (lamb is preferred), basmati rice, carrots, onions, raisins, nuts and spices.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Islam is the official religion of Afghanistan and is practiced by the majority of the population. There are very small communities of other faiths.
- **Nowruz** (“New Year’s Day,” usually around March 21) - Marked by the spring equinox, celebrations last around two weeks.
- **Eid al-Adha** (“Festival of the Sacrifice,” around June or July) - On the tenth day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, this commemorates Prophet Ibrahim’s loyalty to Allah and willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail.
- **Ramadan** (around March or April) - Observed during the ninth month of the lunar calendar, this celebration lasts 29 or 30 days and consists of fasting from sunrise to sunset.
- **Eid al-Fitr** (“Festival of the Breaking of the Fast”) - This marks the end of Ramadan and is usually celebrated by prayers, special foods and time with loved ones.

# AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOD & CULTURE

According to the U.S. Census, Black or African American refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. As one of the largest cultural groups in the United States, African Americans can trace their origins to West Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, and, more recently, East Africa. African American cuisine is associated with Southern food, which includes soul food, a term introduced during the Civil Rights Movement that means to use everything available and that nothing goes to waste. Food became smoked, pickled, canned or preserved to last longer.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Poultry (chicken, turkey, duck)
- Pork
- Beef
- Seafood (white fish & shellfish)
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white & yellow)
- Shallots
- Potatoes (white, yellow, red, sweet)
- Tomatoes
- Carrots
- Celery
- Corn
- String beans
- Cabbage (green)
- Squash & yams
- Leafy greens (collards, mustard, turnip, spinach)
- Bell peppers
- Okra
- Fruits (apples, bananas, oranges, melons, berries, grapes)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Rice (white & brown)
- Pasta
- Bread
- Grits & cornmeal
- Oatmeal
- Peas (black-eyed/cowpeas, chickpeas/garbanzo, pigeon)
- Beans (white, kidney, navy, butter/lima)
- Flour (all-purpose & wheat)

### OTHER

- Yeast
- Nuts (peanuts, pecans, walnuts)
- Vinegar (white & apple cider)
- Oil (canola, vegetable, peanut)
- Sugar (white, brown, cane, powdered)
- Molasses
- Cheese (cheddar & cottage)
- Milk (buttermilk, cow, evaporated)

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- African American food practices reflect foods available during slavery - utilizing inexpensive or undesirable cuts of meat, meals that required minimal preparation and food that could be prepared in large quantities.
- Each region and state has a unique blend of food culture, such as barbecue (originated as barbacoa from the West Indies) and Cajun and Creole cooking (originated from the French and Spanish and utilized Native American ingredients).
- Common cooking methods include stewing meats, deep frying foods and roasting foods over open fire.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Many African Americans are Protestant Christians. Other religious groups may have dietary restrictions or preferences such as Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims and Jehovah Witnesses.
- Depending on religion, certain holidays may be celebrated. Typical American holidays may be celebrated - New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day and Thanksgiving.
- **Juneteenth** (June 19) - This federal holiday marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston in 1865 to ensure the emancipation of slaves.
- **Kwanzaa** (December 26 - January 1) - Created in 1966, this weeklong cultural celebration meaning "first fruits" in Swahili is inspired by the start of harvest season in Africa.

# ASIAN INDIAN FOOD & CULTURE

India comprises of 28 states and 8 union territories. Each state has its own languages, dialects, customs, religions and food practices. Hindi is the most commonly spoken language. However, there are over 400 official languages. Cows are traditionally viewed as sacred, so beef is likely not consumed. 8 in 10 Indians limit meat in their diet, and 4 in 10 are vegetarian. Ayurveda, an ancient system of Indian medicine, includes categorization of foods based on their ability to create balance and to be healing agents.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Chicken
- Pork
- Lamb/Mutton
- Fish
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions
- Carrots
- Potatoes (white, yellow, sweet)
- Tomatoes
- Cabbage
- Eggplant
- Cauliflower
- Okra
- Squashes
- Green beans
- Peas
- Cucumber
- Fruits (citrus, mangos, bananas, papayas, apples)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Basmati rice
- Lentils (red, yellow, green, black)
- Beans (garbanzo/chickpeas, kidney, black-eyed)
- Peas (pigeon)
- Flour (all-purpose, chickpea, whole wheat, semolina)

### OTHER

- Yeast
- Vinegar
- Nuts (almonds, cashews, peanuts, walnuts, pistachios)
- Dried fruits (raisins & figs)
- Oil (canola, coconut, peanut, sunflower, vegetable, sesame)
- Ghee (clarified butter)
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Sugar (jaggery/cane, granulated, brown)
- Plain yogurt
- Paneer (cottage cheese)
- Milk (cow, coconut, condensed)

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- A vast variety of breads are consumed including *roti*, *chapatti*, *puri*, *paratha*, *dosa*, *bhatura* and *naan*.
- Spices are heavily used including coriander seed, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, turmeric, black peppercorn, mustard seed and fennel.
- Condiments like *raita* (yogurt-based sauce), *chutneys* (like a sauce, jam or relish) and *achaar* (spicy pickles) are used to balance and complement main dishes.
- Food is often eaten with fingers, and cutlery is rarely used except to serve food.
- *Chai* is tea (usually black) and can be boiled with spices, milk and sugar for different variations, such as masala chai.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Hindu is the predominant religion. Other religions such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism Buddhism and Jainism are also practiced.
- Depending on religion, other holidays may be celebrated.
- **Diwali** ("Festival of Lights," around October or November) - This Hindu festival is celebrated over 5 or 6 days has multiple spiritual meanings of victory of light over darkness.
- **Holi** ("Festival of Colors," late February or March depending on lunar calendar) - Also called the "festival of love," this ancient Hindu festival celebrates the arrival of spring and signifies the triumph of good over evil.

# CARIBBEAN FOOD & CULTURE

(CUBA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, HAITI, JAMAICA)

While the Caribbean includes multiple countries, this focuses on the cultures listed above, which are significantly represented in the Houston Food Bank's service area.

The Caribbean includes a mixture of English, French, Spanish, African, Indian and creole languages and cultures. Cuban Spanish varies from Mexican Spanish in accent and terms. Haitian Creole, one of the official languages of Haiti, originated from French settlers and African slaves. It is also spoken in regions outside of Haiti. Large-scale migration from the Caribbean to the United States began in the first half of the 20th century. More recently, natural disasters and worsening political and economic conditions have caused displacement and migration. Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are also considered to be a part of Latin America.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Chicken
- Pork
- Fish (cod, mackerel, sardines)
- Beef
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white & yellow)
- Tomatoes
- Bell peppers
- Potatoes (white & yellow)
- Squash & yams
- Carrots

- Cabbage (green & red)
- Lettuce
- Okra
- String beans
- Corn
- Broccoli
- Cucumber
- Yucca/cassava
- Green peas
- Fruits (plantains, citrus, bananas, watermelon, papaya, pineapple, mango, apples, coconut)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Rice (long-grain)
- Beans (black, red, kidney, pinto)
- Peas (pigeon & black-eyed)
- Cornmeal & oatmeal
- Flour (all-purpose & wheat)

### OTHER

- Oil (vegetable, olive, coconut)
- Nuts (almonds, peanuts, cashews)

- Seeds (pumpkin & sesame)
- Dried fruit (raisins, cherries, prunes, cranberries)
- Garlic
- Bouillon cubes
- Vinegar (apple cider, white, wine)
- Milk (cow, coconut, condensed, evaporated)
- Cheese (cheddar, gouda, queso blanco)
- Sugar (cane, brown, white)

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Rice, beans and plantains are staples.
- The national dish of Cuba is *ropa vieja* ("old clothes"), which is a stew of beef and vegetables.
- *La Bandera* ("The Flag") is a popular dish in the Dominican Republic that consists of white rice, stewed beans, stewed meat and a salad and maybe plantains and avocado.
- *Soupe joumou*, the national dish of Haiti, is eaten on New Year's Day, which is also their independence day. It is a soup typically made with winter squashes, beef and vegetables.
- Jamaica's national dish is *ackee*, a fruit that originates from Ghana, and saltfish - which are sautéed together.
- Coffee is grown and consumed throughout the islands.
- Scotch bonnets are a chili pepper commonly used in cooking.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Christianity is the most practiced religion. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Afro-Caribbean religions are also practiced.
- Certain holidays are observed depending on religion: **Diwali** and **Holi** in Hinduism (see *Asian Indian cultural pg.*), **Ramadan** and **Eids** in Islam (see *Afghan cultural pg.*), and Easter and Christmas in Christianity.
- **Haitian Independence Day** (January 1) In 1804, Haiti (formerly called Saint Domingue) became the first independent nation in Latin America after a 13-year revolution against France.
- **Jamaican Independence Day** (August 6) The country became independent from the United Kingdom in 1962.



# CENTRAL AMERICAN FOOD & CULTURE

## (EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, HONDURAS)

While Central America includes multiple countries, this focuses on the cultures listed above, which are significantly represented in the Houston Food Bank's service area.

Central America consists of 7 countries: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Central Americans can be of diverse ancestry, including indigenous, mestizo, African and European and Caribbean roots. Many have migrated to the United States in the last 40 years due to political and economic instability. A variety of immigration statuses and programs apply to Central American populations, including but not limited to: Central American Minor program, Deferred Action for Child Arrivals, Temporary Protected Status, visas (H-1B, H-2B, student, temporary, U), Lawful Permanent Resident, naturalized and native born citizens.

### COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

#### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Pork
- Chicken
- Fish
- Eggs

#### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, red)
- Tomatoes & tomatillos
- Potatoes (white & yellow)
- Cabbage (green & red)
- Bell peppers
- Lettuce
- Celery
- Radishes
- Cucumbers
- Avocados
- Chayote
- Squash
- Corn
- Yuca/cassava
- Banana/plantain leaves
- Fruit (citrus, plantains, mangos, papaya, coconut, melons, apples, pineapples)

#### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Tortillas (corn, flour, wheat)
- Bread
- Rice (white & yellow)
- Pasta
- Beans (black, red, pinto) - dry preferred
- Masa harina/corn flour
- Flour (all-purpose & wheat)

#### OTHER

- Seeds (sesame & pumpkin)
- Cheese (queso fresco, queso crema, queso duro, Oaxacan, mozzarella)
- Sour cream
- Milk (cow, condensed, evaporated, coconut)
- Oil (canola, corn, vegetable)
- Vinegar (white & cider)
- Bouillon cubes (chicken)
- Sugar (cane & white)
- Cocoa

### TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- El Salvador is most popular for *pupusas*, thick corn tortillas filled with meat, cheese, etc.
- Guatemala is known for *pepián*, a spicy tomato-based stew usually made with chicken, potatoes and seeds. It is served with rice or tortillas.
- A popular Honduran dish is *plato típico*, an assorted plate of grilled meat and sausages, beans, fried plantains, rice, cheese, avocado and *chismol* (salsa).
- Coffee is widely produced and consumed.

### RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Catholic/Christian holidays are widely observed - **La Cuaresma**/Lent, **La Pascua**/Easter and **La Navidad**/Christmas (see Mexican cultural pg.).
- **Día de la Independencia** (September 15) - In 1821, Central American countries collectively signed the Declaration of Independence to end Spanish rule.
- **Día de Todos los Santos** (All Saints' Day, November 1) - Similar to Day of the Dead, this is a national holiday in Guatemala that honors the dead.
- **Día de los Fieles Difuntos** (All Souls' Day, November 2) - Similar to Day of the Dead and All Saints' Day, this is a national day of remembrance in El Salvador.

# CHINESE FOOD & CULTURE

As one of the world's most populous countries, China includes 34 distinct regions and municipalities. Standard Chinese, commonly referred to as Mandarin, is spoken by the majority. In total, there are over 300 languages and dialects spoken. Chinese immigration to the United States has a long and complicated history. Recent migration is due to higher education, employment and relatives who are U.S. citizens.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Pork
- Chicken
- Fish (white)
- Eggs
- Tofu/bean curd

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, green/scallions)
- Chinese eggplant
- Bok choy
- Gailan/Chinese broccoli
- Choy sum/yo choy
- Cabbage (napa & Taiwanese)
- Spinach (Taiwanese, water, Malabar)
- Cucumbers
- Mung bean sprouts
- Mushrooms
- Bamboo shoots
- Cilantro
- Fruit (apples, grapes, oranges/mandarins, watermelon)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Rice (long- or medium-grain white, jasmine, brown, sticky/glutinous)
- Noodles (wheat, rice/vermicelli, egg, mung bean/glass)
- Millet
- Barley
- Peas (black-eyed/cowpeas)
- Beans (mung, adzuki/red, soy, fava/broad)
- Flour (all-purpose, rice, glutinous rice)
- Starch (wheat, tapioca, corn, mung bean)

### OTHER

- Garlic
- Ginger
- Sauces (light soy, dark soy, hoisin, oyster, fish)
- Vinegar (Chinkiang/black & rice)
- Shaoxing cooking wine
- Sugar (white, brown, rock)
- Soybean milk
- Oil (vegetable, sesame, soybean, peanut, chili)

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Each region of China is known for certain flavors, ingredients and cooking methods. Central China is known for spicy dishes, Southern China eats more rice, and Northern China eats more flour-based foods like noodles, dumplings and buns.
- A typical Chinese meal includes grains, lots of fresh vegetables, soy products and a small portion of meat/poultry/seafood.
- Dairy has not been historically consumed but has been increasing. Many are lactose intolerant.
- Tea is widely grown and consumed throughout China.
- Must-have cooking utensils include woks, rice cookers, steamers and chopsticks.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- The majority of China is not religiously affiliated, though some are affiliated with Buddhism or Islam. Chinese Americans are also majority nonreligious, though some are affiliated with Christianity or Buddhism.
- **Lunar New Year** (January or February) - Also referred to as Spring Festival and Chinese New Year, this is one of the most important festivals in Chinese culture and lasts 15 days.
- **Tomb Sweeping Day** (Qingming Festival, early April) - Families visit tombs of ancestors to clean the gravesites, pray and make ritual offerings.
- **Dragon Boat Festival** (late May or June) - Also called the Double Fifth festival because of its celebration on the 5th day of the 5th month of the Chinese lunar calendar, this celebration includes dragon boat races and traditional foods.
- **Mid-Autumn Festival** - Depending on the lunar calendar, this celebration is either in September or October.

# FILIPINO FOOD & CULTURE

The Philippines consists of over 7,000 islands in southeast Asia. “Pinoy” is an informal term to refer to Filipinos and their culture. Filipino and English are the national languages. Filipino is the standardized form of Tagalog, a Malayo-Polynesian language that is the most commonly spoken languages. In total, over 120 languages are spoken. Indigenous Filipino culture has been influenced by proximity and trade with China and colonization by Spain, the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States. Migration from the Philippines to the United States began in the late 19th century and has been driven by political, military and educational ties.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Pork
- Chicken
- Seafood - fresh & dried
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, red, green/scallions)
- Shallots
- Cabbage (green & napa)
- Carrots
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Green beans
- Okra
- Spinach (Malabar & water)
- Pechay/bok choy
- Eggplant (Chinese &

### Japanese)

- Ube/purple yam (powdered, frozen or extract)
- Tamarind (powdered okay)
- Cassava/yuca
- Banana/plantain leaves
- Fruits (calamansi, banana, coconut, mango, oranges, pineapple, watermelon)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Rice (jasmine, white & sticky/glutinous)
- Pancit/noodles (rice/vermicelli, mung bean, egg, wheat)
- Beans (mung, kidney, garbanzo/chickpeas)
- Flour (all purpose & rice)

### OTHER

- Sugar (brown & cane)
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Nuts (peanuts & cashews)
- Peanut butter
- Banana ketchup
- Sauces (soy/toyo & fish/patis)
- Vinegar (cane, coconut, palm)
- Oil (canola, coconut, peanut, vegetable, olive, sesame)
- Milk (coconut, condensed, evaporated)
- Dried coconut
- Calamansi (bottled or frozen)

## PRACTICES

- As an archipelago, the Philippines consume a lot of seafood.
- Most dishes are named for cooking techniques and not ingredients - *adobo* (a vinegar & garlic stew), *sinigang* (a tamarind stew/soup), *kare-kare* (a peanut stew).
- Rice is a staple and is consumed daily.
- Dairy is not widely consumed as a much of the population is lactose intolerant.
- Meals are commonly eaten with a fork in the left hand and a spoon in the right hand. Eating with hands is also common.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Roman Catholicism is the most practiced religion in the Philippines. A significant minority practice Protestant Christianity and Islam.
- Depending on religious affiliation, traditional Catholic/Christian (see *Mexican cultural pg.*) and Muslim (see *Afghan cultural pg.*) holidays may be celebrated.
- **Lunar New Year** - Due to a significant population of those of Chinese descent, this holiday is celebrated in January or February.
- **Araw ng Kalayaan** (Independence Day, June 12) - This commemorates independence from Spain.

# MEXICAN FOOD & CULTURE

Mexico currently consists of 32 states with distinct geography, history and characteristics. Mexico has 7 regional cuisines: Norteño (The North), Baja, Oaxaqueño (Oaxaca), Chiapas, Jaliscense, Yucateco (Yucatán) and Veracruzano (Veracruz). Food and culture have been influenced by various groups - Indigenous peoples of Central and South America and various European colonists. Mexico used to include parts of what is now Texas, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and California. There has been an influx of Mexican migration into the United States over the past 35 years due to violence, economic opportunities and proximity.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Pork & chorizo (pork sausage)
- Chicken
- Fish
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white & yellow)
- Tomatoes (red & tomatillos)
- Avocados
- Nopales (cactus)
- Potatoes (white & sweet)

- Peppers (poblanos, jalapeños, serranos)
- Corn
- Jicama
- Cabbage
- Cucumber
- Calabaza (squash)
- Lettuce
- Cilantro
- Fruits (citrus, apples, bananas, pineapples, mangos, papayas, plantains)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Tortillas (corn, flour, wheat)
- Rice (white & yellow)
- Hominy
- Lentils (brown, yellow, green, black)
- Pasta
- Oats (old-fashioned)
- Beans (pinto, black, red, kidney, fava) - dry preferred
- All-purpose flour
- Corn (flour/*masa harina*, starch, husks)

### OTHER

- Pepitas (pumpkin seeds)
- Dried fruit (raisins & prunes)
- Bouillon cubes
- Vinegar (white, apple cider, cane)
- Oil (canola & vegetable)
- Milk (cow & condensed)
- Cheese (cotija & queso fresco)
- Coffee
- Sugar (cane, white, brown)
- Mexican cinnamon
- Vanilla
- Chocolate

## PRACTICES

- Fresh and dried chilies are essential to cooking and have different names and flavors depending on if they are fresh or dried. For example: jalapeño/chipotle and poblano/ancho.
- *Pan dulce* ("sweet bread") is a variety of breads and pastries that are accompanied with coffee, milk or hot chocolate for breakfast or dinner.
- *Molcajetes* ("mortar & pestle") are used to grind spices and to prepare salsas and guacamole.
- *Mole*, considered the national dish of Mexico, is a sauce that contains chilies and spices and may include nuts, chocolate, fruits. There are over a dozen varieties of mole.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Catholicism is the dominant religion.
- **La Cuaresma** (Lent) - Observed by Catholics and Christians, some will fast and have meatless meals on Ash Wednesday and Fridays during the 40-day period.
- **Semana Santa** (Holy Week) is a week of events, religious gatherings and family leading up to La Pascua (Easter).
- **Mexican Independence Day** (September 16)
- **Dia de Los Muertos** ("Day of the Dead," November 1) - Families honor loved ones who have passed away by building *ofrendas* ("altars") with photos, foods, candles, decorations and marigolds.
- **Las Posadas** ("The Inns," December 16-24) - Leading up to Christmas, this commemorates Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Reenactments, singing and special food are part of the celebration.

# MIDDLE EASTERN FOOD & CULTURE

(IRAN, IRAQ, EGYPT, LEBANON, JORDAN, TURKEY, SAUDI ARABIA)

While the Middle East includes multiple countries, this focuses on the cultures listed above, which are significantly represented in the Houston Food Bank's service area.

Arabic is the most commonly spoken language in the Middle East and has over 25 dialects. Other commonly spoken languages are Persian/Farsi, Hebrew, Turkish and Kurdish. The first wave of migration from the Middle East and North Africa dates back to the late 1800s. Various political instabilities, uprisings and civil wars have led to widespread migration across the world. A variety of immigration statuses and programs apply to Middle Eastern populations. The census currently doesn't include an option for people to identify as Middle Eastern or North American (MENA).

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN (HALAL PREFERRED)

- Chicken
- Beef
- Lamb
- Fish
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, red)
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Carrots
- Potatoes (white & yellow)
- Eggplant
- Zucchini
- Cauliflower
- Green beans
- Bell peppers
- Cabbage
- Beets
- Lettuce
- Okra
- Peas
- Fruits (citrus, apples, bananas, grapes, mangos, melons, pomegranates)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Rice (short, long-grain, basmati)
- Bulgur
- Bread
- Beans (garbanzo/chickpeas, fava, kidney, white) - dry preferred
- Lentils (green, orange, brown)
- Flour (all-purpose, corn, semolina, wheat)

### OTHER

- Yeast
- Dried fruits (figs, apricots, cherries, dates, raisins)
- Nuts (pistachios, almonds, pine, walnuts)
- Cheese (feta & halloumi)
- Olives
- Vinegar (white & apple cider)
- Oil (olive, grapeseed, canola)
- Ghee (clarified butter)
- Sesame seeds
- Garlic
- Milk (cow, goat, sheep)
- Plain yogurt
- Honey

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Because Islam is the predominant faith, meat should be certified *halal*. Pork, animal byproducts and alcohol are *haram*, or to be avoided. Some countries ban the consumption of these items.
- It is typical to serve bread at each meal and rice at lunch and dinner. Bread is used to pick up food (typically with the right hand), and utensils are often not used.
- Tea and coffee are often consumed at the end of meals.
- Spices and spice blends are important to cooking - including za'atar, baharat, sumac, saffron, cardamom, cumin cinnamon, fenugreek, allspice and caraway.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Islam is the most prominent religion, and Christianity, Judaism and other religions are practiced.
- Because Islam is the dominant religion, religious holidays are widely celebrated such as **Ramadan**, **Eid al-Fitr** and **Eid al-Adha** (see *Afghan cultural pg.*).
- **Al-Hijra** (Islamic New Year, usually July) - Marking the end of Mohammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, this marks the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar.
- **Nowruz** ("New Year's Day," March 20 or 21) - Marked by the spring equinox, celebrations last around two weeks. This is also referred to as Persian New Year.

# SOUTH AMERICAN FOOD & CULTURE

## (COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA)

While South America includes multiple countries, this focuses on Colombian and Venezuelan cultures, which are significantly represented in the Houston Food Bank's service area.

From 1819 to 1831, Gran Colombia was a state that included northern South America and part of southern Central America - including present-day Colombia and Venezuela. Both countries comprise of a fusion of indigenous, Spanish and African cultures. Each country has distinct geographic and cultural differences across Caribbean, Amazonian, Andean and Pacific regions. A record number of 188,000 Venezuelans sought to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in fiscal year 2022. Migrants from South America have to pass through the Darién Gap, the border between Colombia and Panama that includes 60 miles of jungle, lack of clean water and violence.

### COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

#### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Pork
- Fish
- Chicken
- Eggs

#### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white & yellow)
- Carrots
- Tomatoes
- Cucumber
- Celery
- Spinach
- Cabbage
- Bell peppers
- Potatoes (white, yellow, red, sweet)
- Squashes & pumpkin
- Corn
- Peas
- Yuca/cassava
- Avocados
- Fruits (citrus, plantains, guava, papaya, mango, coconut, bananas, melons, grapes)
- Banana/plantain leaves

#### GRAINS & LEGUMES (DRY PREFERRED)

- Rice (white & yellow)
- Lentils (brown)
- Beans (red, black, garbanzo/chickpeas, fava)
- Peas (pigeon, yellow, green)
- Corn (flour/masarepa & starch)
- Cassava flour

#### OTHER

- Cheese (queso blanco & fresco)
- Garlic
- Bouillon cubes (chicken & beef)
- Milk (cow, condensed, coconut)
- Sugar (panela/cane, white, brown)
- Vinegar (white & cider)
- Oil (canola, corn, vegetable, soybean, olive)
- Cinnamon
- Cocoa

### TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Both countries have their own version of *arepas*, a type of corn bread that can be filled with eggs, cheese or meat.
- Rice is eaten every day and during most meals.
- Each country has many distinct types of cheeses: Venezuelans use queso guayanés, queso de mano, etc. Colombians use quesito colombiano, cuajada, etc.
- Coffee is widely grown and consumed in Venezuela.
- Fruit is served at each meal either in a bowl, juiced or in desserts.

### RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Because Catholicism is the dominant religion, religious holidays are widely celebrated such as **La Cuaresma** (Lent), **Semana Santa** (Holy Week/Easter) and **La Navidad** (Christmas). (See Mexican cultural pg.).
- **Carnaval** (3 days before Ash Wednesday) - Commonly celebrated in South America, the festival consists of parades, music and festivities.
- **Venezuelan Independence Day** (July 5) - In 1811 the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence was enacted and made the country the first Spanish colony to declare independence.
- **Colombian Independence Day** (July 20) - In 1810, protests against Spanish rule began which led to independence movements across Latin America.

# SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN FOOD & CULTURE

(NIGERIA, ETHIOPIA, CAMEROON, KENYA, ERITREA)

While Sub-Saharan Africa includes multiple countries, this focuses on the cultures listed above, which are significantly represented in the Houston Food Bank's service area.

Sub-Saharan Africa includes 49 countries and contains more than 1,500 languages. In addition to European influence, African cuisine has incorporated Asian ingredients. Many countries have English as an official language. Other languages spoken include Yoruba (Nigeria), Amharic, French, Swahili and Tigrinya (Eritrea). Each country comprises of unique ethnic groups and indigenous languages. The Refugee Act of 1980 and the Immigration Act of 1990 increased migration from Africa to the United States. The number of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in the U.S. has increased 16-fold since 1980.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Beef
- Chicken
- Pork
- Lamb
- Fish - fresh, canned, dried
- Eggs

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, red)
- Bell peppers
- Carrots
- Tomatoes
- Cassava/yuca

- Potatoes (white & sweet)
- Squash & yams
- String beans
- Cabbage
- Leafy greens (collard, spinach, amaranth, kale, mustard)
- Corn
- Okra
- Roselle/hibiscus
- Fruits (plantains, bananas, pineapple, mangoes, coconut, citrus, melons)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Rice (long-grain white)
- Lentils (red & green)
- Peas (yellow split, pigeon, black-eyed/cowpea)
- Broad/fava beans
- Millet
- Sorghum
- Peanuts/groundnuts
- Flour (teff, chickpea, cassava, millet, cornmeal)

### OTHER

- Yeast
- Oil (red palm, peanut, coconut, sesame, soybean, vegetable, olive)

- Bouillon cubes
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Dried fruit (dates, coconut, prunes)
- Seeds (sesame, annatto, melon)
- Milk (coconut, evaporated, condensed, powdered)
- Peanut butter
- Sugar (white & cane)
- Honey

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Cassava/yucca is a versatile root vegetable that is widely consumed. It can be fried, mashed, fermented or made into flour. *Fufu*, a common dough variation in West Africa, is eaten with a variety of stews and soups.
- In West Africa, chili peppers are referred to as peppers. A variety of fresh and dry chili peppers are used such as scotch bonnets, habaneros and bird's eye/Thai.
- Many countries grow coffee, with Ethiopia as one of the world's top producers. Ethiopia has a distinct coffee ceremony.
- It is common to eat with hands, using starches (injera, fufu, etc.) to scoop up soups or stews.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

- Christianity and Islam are the top practiced religions. Various indigenous ethnic religions are also practiced.
- **Christmas** (January 7) - Following the Orthodox Church calendar, many in Ethiopia and Eritrea take part in an Advent fast abstaining from animal products.
- **Cameroon National Day** (May 20) – Also known as Unity Day, this celebrates when the country voted to become a unitary state.
- **Nigerian Independence Day** (October 1) - In 1960, Nigeria proclaimed independence from British rule.
- **Jamhuri Day** (December 12) - This marks when Kenya became a republic.

# VIETNAMESE FOOD & CULTURE

Houston is home to the third largest Vietnamese American community. Vietnamese is the official language with three major dialects: Hanoi (Northern Vietnamese), Hue (Central Vietnamese) and Saigon (Southern Vietnamese). The end of the Vietnam war in 1975 brought a large wave of Vietnamese refugees to the United States. Many resettled in California, Texas and Louisiana due to climate preference and proximity to the ocean. Vietnam was previously colonized by China and France, which has influenced culinary practices.

## COMMONLY USED INGREDIENTS

### MEAT/PROTEIN

- Pork
- Beef
- Chicken
- Eggs
- Shrimp
- Fish
- Tofu

### PRODUCE (FRESH PREFERRED)

- Onions (white, yellow, green/scallions)
- Shallots
- Carrots
- Tomatoes
- Lettuce
- Cucumbers
- Cabbage (green & purple)
- Broccoli
- Mung bean sprouts
- Cilantro
- Lemongrass
- Bamboo shoots (dry & canned okay)
- Tamarind
- Fruits (limes, nectarines, oranges, pineapple, green papaya)

### GRAINS & LEGUMES

- Rice (jasmine & glutinous/sticky)
- Rice paper
- Noodles (rice/vermicelli & egg)
- Pasta
- Beans (black-eyed peas/cowpeas, mung, adzuki/red)
- Flour (rice & tapioca)
- Baguettes

### OTHER

- Milk (coconut & condensed)
- Oil (vegetable, canola, olive, sesame)
- Vinegar (white, rice, cane)
- Sauces (fish, soy, hoisin, oyster)
- Peanuts
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Sugar (white, palm, rock)
- Bouillon cubes
- Broth (chicken & vegetable)
- Vietnamese cinnamon

## TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES

- Use of fresh vegetables and herbs - such as cilantro, mint and Thai basil - are emphasized due to strong vegetarian tradition rooted in Buddhism.
- Vietnamese generally don't consume dairy due to lactose intolerance.
- Like other Asian cultures, rice is a staple - from which rice flour is produced to make noodles and many other dishes.
- Food is mostly consumed with chopsticks and spoons.
- The national dish of Vietnam is considered to be *pho*, which is made of broth (beef, typically), rice noodles and fresh vegetables and herbs.

## RELIGION & HOLIDAYS

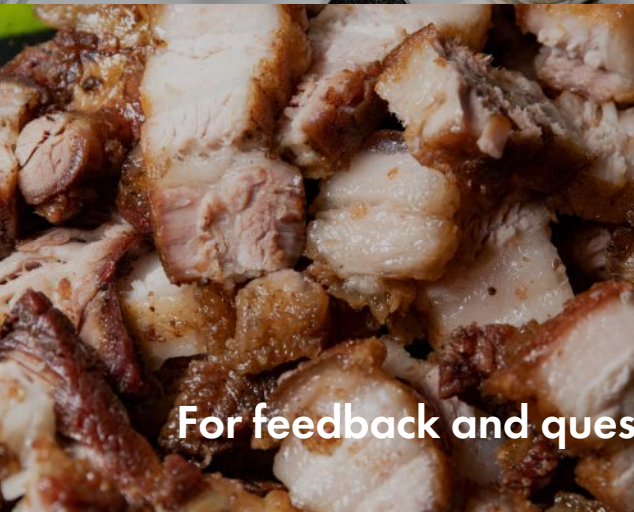
- A significant portion of Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans are Buddhist. Some Vietnamese Americans identify as Catholics.
- Depending on religious affiliation, traditional Catholic/Christian and Buddhist holidays may be celebrated.
- **Tết** (Lunar New Year) - Depending on the lunar calendar, this festival is celebrated over multiple days in January and/or February.
- **Hội An Lantern Festival** - Celebrating the full moon, the biggest celebration is during Lunar New Year, which is typically in February.
- **Tết Trung Thu** (Mid-Autumn Festival) - Depending on the lunar calendar, this celebration is either in September or October.





# PARTNER OF FEEDING AMERICA

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