



## **Food Sleuth: First family and guests are eating green at White House**

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Some days you shouldn't count calories or worry about grams of fat. Like on your birthday or the day you're one of 200 people invited to share an inaugural lunch with the president.

Nevertheless, some national food columnists and bloggers chose to criticize the inaugural meal because it violated national daily dietary recommendations. "There isn't even a salad," whined one critic.

Hardly a measure of daily healthy eating, an inaugural luncheon happens once every four years. Calories and fat be damned; let's give the revelers a break. Besides, lettuce isn't in season in D.C. now, and on bone-chilling afternoons most people prefer a hot meal.

I wanted to know less about fat and more about where the inaugural event's food came from, how it was produced and if the menu supported American family farmers. I also wondered what happened to the leftovers - were they thrown away or delivered to a soup kitchen? So I called the Inaugural Committee's office and got the number for the event's caterer, Design Cuisine, based in Arlington, Va.

CEO Kathy Valentine cheerfully explained that she tries to purchase "local and sustainable food" as often as possible. Design Cuisine's Web site promotes the company's "greener palate," emphasizing their recycling program, attempts to reduce their carbon footprint and choice of eco-friendly sources to "protect the Earth's resources." I was impressed with their rejection of disposables and commitment to using local seasonal produce to reduce "transportation-related energy consumption."

Valentine admits that "local" sourcing is easiest for smaller scale events. But she estimated that "about 90 to 95 percent of the presidential menu came from American farms," including 224 pheasant breasts from MacFarlane farm in Janesville, Wis., and 100 pounds of Maple Leaf duck breasts from Milford, Ind. Unfortunately, neither farm is certified organic, but the former received the Rock County Soil and Conservation Award for land preservation, and both claim they do not feed their birds sub-therapeutic antibiotics.

The inaugural menu, which celebrated the bicentennial of the birth of President Abraham Lincoln, highlighted some of his favorites: game meats, roasted root vegetables and an apple cinnamon sponge cake with "sweet cream glaze" - think fancy vanilla ice cream.



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As for leftovers, there weren't many. By serving a plate lunch, Valentine explained, the amounts prepared closely matched the number fed. But typically Design Cuisine works with the D.C. Central Kitchen, which recycles more than 1 ton of surplus food each day, turning it into 4,500 meals for the hungry that would otherwise go to waste.

In the days to come, you can expect fashionistas to critique the first lady's wardrobe and foodies to feature and pick at first family meals.

Gourmet magazine editor Ruth Reichl understands the importance of the president's food choices. She says: "If you have wholesome food being served at the most visible address in the United States, it means something to the rest of us."

Former White House Executive Chef Walter Scheib, who worked for Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, recently spilled the beans on his experience. He reports that local, organic produce and dairy, grass-fed beef and sustainable seafood were the preferred choice of both families. There was also a small produce garden on the roof of the White House, but who knew?

First lady Michelle Obama announced that she would be keeping the most recent Bush White House chef, Cristeta Comerford, who is used to serving organic meals. Scheib said that Laura Bush, "to her credit," was "adamant that in all cases if an organic product was available it was to be used in place of a non-organic product." That's good news for the environment, for the first family's health and for setting a national example.

Didn't receive an invitation to the president's first luncheon? No worries. Get a taste of the menu and recipes from the Inaugural Committee's Web site: <http://inaugural.senate.gov/documents/doc-2009-recipes.pdf>.

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