THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BACON
It’s meat candy; the gateway meat for vegetarians, everything tastes better with it. In short, it’s the perfect food. Bacon was sadly once confined to breakfast but now is a mainstay for all meals and snacks and has inspired legions of fans to create everything from bacon infused cocktails to desserts, to personal care products to film festivals. We are truly a Bacon Nation.
Preserving and salting pork dates back to China in 1500 BC. The Romans also enjoyed bacon where according to food historians, they ate a type of bacon which they called petaso, which was essentially domesticated pig meat boiled with figs, then browned and seasoned with pepper sauce. The word bacon originates from term meaning “the back of an animal” and appears to come from a prehistoric Germanic base *bak-, which was also the source of English back. Germanic bakkon passed into Frankish bako, which French borrowed as bacon. English acquired the word in the twelfth century, when it was originally bacoun and referred to all pork. By the fourteenth century, however, we find it being applied to the cured meat itself...”

Bacon, in the modern sense, is a product of the British Isles, or is produced to British methods...Preserved pork, including sides salted to make bacon, held a place of primary importance in the British diet in past centuries. The first large-scale bacon curing business was set up in the 1770s by John Harris in Wiltshire and Wiltshire remains the main bacon-producing area of Britain...”

The phrase “bring home the bacon” comes from the 12th century when a church in Dunmow, England offered a side of bacon to any man who could swear before God and the congregation that he had not fought or quarreled with his wife for a year and a day. Any man that could “bring home the bacon” was highly respected in his community.
How Is Bacon Made?

In short, bacon is cured pork belly. After a pig is harvested, the carcass is cut into various sections. The pork belly is removed from the carcass by the mid-section from the ham and shoulder. Next, the loin is separated from other meat, followed by the ribs and finally the skin.

What remains is a rectangular shaped belly that will become bacon. The belly is carefully “squared” or trimmed to the right size to make sure high quality and uniform bacon are created. The next part of the process is curing. In making bacon, a curing mixture is prepared by mixing all the important ingredients, including sodium nitrite in water. This brine is then injected into the pork belly and the bellies are left to sit anywhere from 30 minutes to 7 days to let the curing and that great bacon flavor develop. The cured bellies are then sent off to the smoker where they will be smoked for a specific amount of time set by the company. This smoking process not only continues the bacon flavor development on the inside, but also adds smoky flavors on the outside. After smoking comes cooling. Once the product is cooled, it is considered smoked and cured bacon.

The entire bacon “slab” is then pressed into an even rectangular, sliceable shape and sent off to the slicer before being packaged and sent to stores, restaurants and just about anywhere food is sold.

What is Curing?

Curing is a tried and true way to preserve meat products using salt, sugar, sodium erythorbate, and sodium nitrite. Curing originated long before the discovery of refrigeration – it was a way to prevent spoilage. While we all have refrigerators now, we’ve come to appreciate the unique cured and smoky flavor that cured meats deliver. Without curing, bacon would just be – pork! And while we all love pork, it just doesn’t sizzle like bacon and who ever heard of a pork wrapped scallop or a PLT sandwich?

When companies cure meat, they may use sodium nitrite made using scientific processes directly or they may use an ingredient like celery powder that is a naturally rich source of nitrite.
The Top Ten U.S. Markets for Bacon

1. New York City
2. Los Angeles
3. Philadelphia
4. Atlanta
5. Washington, D.C.
6. Boston
7. Chicago
8. Detroit
9. Pittsburgh
10. San Francisco

“I’d be a vegetarian if bacon grew on trees.”
-Homer Simpson

The Top Ten Bacon Brands

1. Private Label
2. Oscar Mayer
3. Hormel
4. Wright
5. Farmland
6. Smithfield
7. Gwaltney
8. Bar S
9. John Morrell
10. Butterball

Source: The Nielsen Company
Bacon Nutrition

One medium slice of bacon has 43 calories and 195 mg of sodium. Like other pork products, bacon is a unique source of Vitamin B₁₂, which is an essential nutrient for normal metabolism and mental clarity. As a complete protein source, bacon is a “one-stop-shop” for essential amino acids needed for optimal health. It is also high in nutrients like choline, niacin, and thiamin. Iron and zinc are also more bioavailable in meat products meaning they are more easily absorbed and utilized by the body than these minerals from grains or vegetables.

While meat and poultry processing often uses salt for flavoring and to enhance food safety, meat and poultry processors have been actively engaged in efforts to reduce sodium and offer a wide array of choices with different sodium content, including reduced sodium, in which a product features 75 percent reduction from the original formulation, and low sodium, which contains 140 milligrams or less per serving.

- Low fat choices contain three grams or less per serving.
- Reduced fat choices contain at least 25 percent less fat than a serving of a regular product.
- Fat free is defined as less than 0.5 grams of fat per labeled serving size.
- Though recent research has shown that saturated fats do not contribute to adverse health outcomes¹.

Meat and poultry processors are committed to offering convenient, delicious and nutritious processed meat products in nutrition formulations that suit all nutrition needs and personal preferences.

“Bacon, The source of all happiness”

-Samuel Victor David Evans

¹http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24723079
About Sodium Nitrite

In the 20th century, meat processors have used sodium nitrite to cure bacon because it was more reliable in its effects. Since sodium nitrite has been commonly used in commercially prepared bacon, no cases of botulism have been linked to these products in the U.S.

Bacon contributes very little nitrite to the total diet – less than five percent. The major source of human nitrite exposure is vegetables, especially root vegetables like beets and leafy greens. These foods contain nitrate and when nitrate reacts with your saliva in the mouth, it becomes nitrite.

In the 1970s, a single study that was later discounted cast a dark cloud over nitrite, alleging that its use in cured meats could cause cancer. In response, the U.S. National Toxicology Program (NTP) began a multi-year rat and mouse feeding study to determine if nitrite posed a health risk. In May 2000, a panel of experts reviewed NTP’s findings and concluded that nitrite was safe at the levels used and did not belong on the national list of carcinogens.
“The question that women casually shopping for perfume ask more than any other is this: "What scent drives men wild?" After years of intense research, we know the definitive answer. It is bacon.

-Tania Sanchez, Perfumes: The Guide
Unusual Bacon Items

Everything is truly better with bacon and in recent years manufacturers have developed a wide array of products to prove it!
“Bacon always makes it better.”

- Anne Burrell, Chef
DO YOU WANT MY LEFTOVER BACON?

...SAID NO ONE EVER.

NORTH AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE