



# FOOD & CULTURE GUIDE

A Quick Reference for Food & Food Customs  
of Cultures in the North Texas Region



# INTRODUCTION

## Cultural Awareness Initiative (CAI)

The purpose of Tarrant Area Food Bank's Cultural Awareness Initiative is to increase awareness of cultural preferences through culturally responsive food policy. The policy aims to increase access to cultural food items and ensure the food that we source and distribute represents preferences of our local communities. The policy aligns with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, as cultural considerations will help to change attitudes towards healthful eating. It is our aim that through greater cultural awareness, we can empower our community to alleviate hunger and improve health.

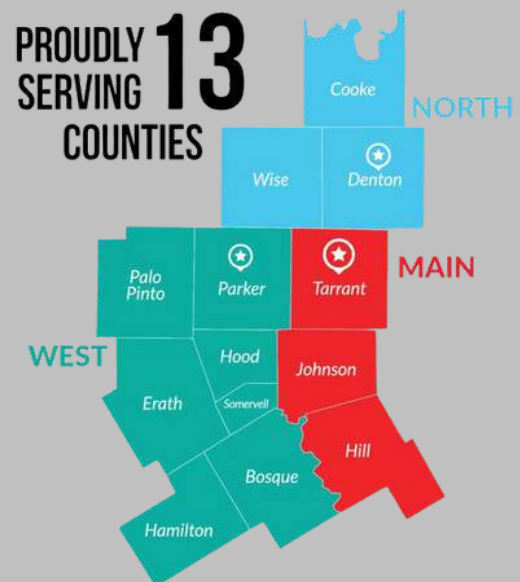
## History of Food Bank

Tarrant Area Food Bank was founded in 1982 by a group of Fort Worth residents concerned about hunger in their community. Three months after opening in October 1982, the organization had distributed donated food to 50 charities in Fort Worth, thanks to commercial donors and a holiday food drive by the Fort Worth community.

**We value and embrace** diversity, fairness, and inclusion as fundamental to our vision of empowering communities where no one has to go hungry.

**We believe** that access to healthy food is a basic human right and not a privilege. All people deserve regular, nutritious meals.

**We are committed to** conducting honest dialogue with all community partners. Through this dialogue, we will strive to continuously improve.



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## DISCLAIMER

Food and culinary traditions, practices, and preferences are linked to our cultural identity and cannot be expressed in fullness in a policy or guide. The traditions, practices, and preferences can vary widely within cultures depending on social factors. This guide is not to stereotype cultures but to provide awareness, sensitivity, and inclusiveness of our communities. Not all traditions, practices, and preferences are necessarily adopted by everyone who identifies within that cultural group.

The geographic regions, countries, and foods listed in this guide directly represent the unique demographic fabric of our ever-changing service area. Results from the Client Culture Survey conducted in our DFW service area, promotora Guest Chefs, and peer-reviewed literature were used to elaborate on the cultural food traditions of each country/region listed. This is not a comprehensive reflection of cultures in our community; we are diligently working to expand this guide to include more cultures in our thirteen-county service area.

# MEXICO



The size of Mexico accounts for the incredibly diverse geography from arid mountains to tropical jungles, and regional cuisines reflect the different landscapes. Spanish is the predominant language, though many Indigenous languages are recognized and spoken by over one million people. Colonization from Spain took place in the 16th century, and evidence of pre-Spanish civilizations, such as the Olmec, Aztec, and Maya exist today within urban and rural archeological sites. Mexican American food available in the U.S. does not always resemble traditional Mexican cuisine, but Tex-Mex food is evolving as a regional cuisine. Mexicans are the largest ethnic group in Texas, representing 83% (9.5 million) of the ethnic population.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- Tortillas, corn & flour
- Rice, long grain white
- Beans, pinto, black, fava, chickpeas, lentils
- Hominy (canned or dried)
- Pasta (fideo, conchitas, spaghetti)
- Nuts (almonds, pine nuts, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and walnuts)
- Masa Flour
- Oats
- Tomato sauce (canned)
- Cooking oil (olive oil, lard)
- Spices: Allspice, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, peppercorns, bouillon (consomé)

## PRODUCE

- Avocados
- Corn
- Hot Chilies (serrano, poblano, jalapeno, ancho, pasillas, guajillo, chipotle, chilacas, manzanos)
- Tomatoes
- Tomatillos
- Squash (calabaza, chayote, zucchini, pumpkins)
- Onions (white & purple)
- Nopales (cactus leaves)
- Swiss chard
- Yuca
- Jicama
- Potatoes (white & sweet)
- Carrots
- Herbs: Garlic, cilantro, oregano, bay leaves, marjoram, thyme
- Limes
- Oranges
- Figs (higos)
- Papaya
- Tuna (prickly pear cactus fruit)
- Guavas
- Pineapple
- Mango
- Bananas
- Dried Fruit: Prunes, Raisins, Apricots

## PROTEIN/DAIRY

- Pork (organs, feet, fat, blood)
- Ground meats
- Chorizo
- Chicken
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Eggs
- Cheese (ricotta, fresco, queso panela, queso anejo)
- Cream

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

A blend of Catholicism and Indigenous religions influence Mexico's many celebrations. Though these dishes are used in everyday meal rotations, higher quality ingredients are used for special celebrations.

- *Capirotada*, a bread pudding, *chile relleno* (egg battered poblano peppers filled with white cheese) *tamales* filled with non-meat ingredients such as cheese and peppers, *tortas de papa* or *tortas de camaron*, (mini potato or shrimp croquettes), and *nopales*-based dishes are popular during Lent and Holy Week.
- *Tamales* with meat, chocolate tablets, *pozole* (red pork or green chicken and hominy soup), *hojarascas/polvorones/yemitas* (egg-shaped cookies dusted with cinnamon sugar), enchiladas, and chicken with *mole* are enjoyed during Baptism, First Communion, Christmas, and wedding celebrations.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Staples of pre-colonial Mexican and Central American cuisine are corn, beans, chilies, chocolate, avocado, tomatoes, and squash. These foods are still used in traditional cuisines today.
- The Spanish brought foods such as lentils, chickpeas, citrus, onions, garlic, rice, sugar, bananas, eggplants, meats, cheeses, and lard from the European, African, and Asian continents.

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# HONDURAS



Indigenous people, notably the Maya and Lenca civilizations, inhabited the area in what is now the Republic of Honduras. Honduras' unique food culture blends indigenous knowledge and Spanish European colonial influences. Spanish is the official language, and Catholicism is the predominant religion. Honduran citizens face socio economic struggles resulting from natural disasters, crime, and political corruption as the country works toward economic development. In 2019, over 100,000 people identifying as Honduran reside in Texas.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- Corn flour
- White rice
- Dried beans, kidney
- Tortillas (corn and wheat)
- Coconut milk
- Spices: cumin, curry, allspice, and achiote

## PRODUCE

- Plantains, all stages of ripeness
- White potatoes
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Avocados
- Yuca
- Chilis, sweet
- Limes
- Coconuts
- Cilantro
- Parsley
- Spearmint
- Garlic
- Green onion

## PROTEIN

- Fish
- Chicken
- Beef
- Pork
- Tripe (lining of beef, hog, or sheep stomach)
- Chorizo
- White cheese
- Milk
- Eggs

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

Christmas and the Easter season observances (Lent and Holy Week) are important events in countries where Catholicism is the predominant religion.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- While many foods of Central America utilize peppers, they tend to be less spicy than foods found in Mexico. Many South Americans eat a milder pepper sauce called *Ají Verde*.
- Along the coasts of Honduras, *sopa de caracol* is a popular dish. This soup features conch (a mollusk with tough muscle fibers) simmered in coconut milk with plantain, chilies, and yuca root.

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# VENEZUELA



Several countries have influenced different regions of Venezuela's cuisine. Spain, France, India, and the Dutch Caribbean have shaped the eastern portion of the country's cuisine. The northwestern region shares food preferences with Colombia, the area closer to the Andes mountains with a cooler climate relies on rich soups, and the southern portion incorporates lots of fish into dishes. As the country faces political, social, and economic unrest, Venezuelans are practicing creativity, blending available ingredients with traditional techniques for dishes that both nourish and preserve heritage. Spanish is the predominant language, and Catholicism is the primary religion.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- White corn flour- Harina P.A.N. brand
- Maize
- White rice
- Dried beans, black

## PRODUCE

- Plantains, all stages of ripeness
- Calabaza (hard winter squash)
- Chili peppers, sweet
- Tomatoes
- Avocados
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Green onions
- Limes
- Coconuts
- Garlic
- Parsley
- Cilantro
- Spearmint

## PROTEIN

- Fish
- Beef
- Chicken
- Eggs
- Milk
- Cheese

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

- Christmas is celebrated with a traditional time-consuming dish called *Hallaca*, corn-based dough stuffed with meat, raisins, or olives, encapsulated in smoked plantain leaves, and boiled.
- During the Lenten period leading up to Easter, observers may avoid meats and sweets.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Traditional Venezuelan dishes do not contain dark, leafy green vegetables.
- A hallmark food in Venezuela are arepas, corn cakes that can be stuffed with a variety of ingredients but traditionally contain shredded meat, beans, and avocados.

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# CUBA



Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean Sea. Low lying plains were used for agriculture, notably sugar cane and tobacco, for hundreds of years. Cuban culture and cuisine are a blend of Indigenous, Spanish European, African, and Chinese influence. Spanish is the primary language, and predominant religions are Catholicism and Santoria. Historically, Cubans placed great emphasis on family, as people relied on each other to survive. Cuban culture and pride continues to thrive today, despite citizens facing severe food and amenity shortages.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- White rice, short, medium, and long grain
- Dried beans, black, red, garbanzo
- Olive oil
- Cooking wine
- Vinegar, white or red
- Tomato sauce
- Green olives
- Raisins
- Deviled Ham Spread
- Spices: Saffron, bay leaves, cumin

## PRODUCE

- Calabaza squash
- Onions
- Garlic
- Peppers, green and Cubanella
- Plantain
- Lime
- Carambola (starfruit)
- Yuca
- Malanga
- Jicama
- Lime
- Carambola (starfruit)
- Oregano

## PROTEIN

- Pork, ham
- Ground meats
- Chicken
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Eggs
- Queso blanco

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

*Buena Noche* is December 24th, and people traditionally celebrate by roasting an entire pig in the ground. A rice and beans dish called *Congri* is served alongside *yuca con mojo*, boiled yuca chunks bathed in garlic, olive oil, and bitter orange. Nougat dessert bars originating from Spain, called *turrone*s, are enjoyed for dessert.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Cuban food typically lacks spiciness and sauces are not as common as they are in other Hispanic cuisines.
- Spaniards introduced tomatoes, potatoes, cacao, annatto, and vanilla from Central and South American regions, and sugar cane, coffee, coconuts, bananas, mango, tamarind, and dried codfish from Africa and Asian countries. These foods are staples in traditional Caribbean cuisine.
- *Arroz con pollo* is a very popular dish with individual variation, but is usually a fragrant and soupy blend of chicken, rice and vegetables stewed in liquids (beer, cooking wine, broth, or even water from canned vegetables). Saffron gives the dish a pleasing, golden color.

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# VIETNAM



Vietnamese cuisine carries Chinese and French influences residual from previous colonization. Food culture, like dialects within the Vietnamese language, varies among the north, central, and southern regions. The majority of Vietnamese people living in Vietnam follow folk or tribal religions, but those who adhere to organized religion practice Buddhism and Catholicism. Seeking blessings or council, and honoring the deceased with altars is a common practice in nearly all Vietnamese households. Filial piety, or showing respect for parents, grandparents, and elderly people is highly valued. In 1975, the northern government reunified the southern portion of the country under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, prompting hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees to settle in the U.S. Many families settled in coastal areas of the U.S. that have similar industries in Vietnam, such as shrimping and fishing. Approximately 290,000 people who identify as Vietnamese reside in Texas.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- White rice, “sticky” (glutinous), long-grain, and Jasmine
- Rice flour
- Vegetable oil
- Coconut milk
- Fish sauce
- Shrimp sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Soy sauce
- Tamarind liquid
- Rice wine
- Caramel sauce
- Rice vinegar
- Chinese five-spice powder
- Curry powder
- Dried chili flakes
- Ground turmeric
- Star anise
- Peanuts, raw
- Soy beans
- Mung beans
- Water spinach
- Mustard greens
- Chinese and Japanese Eggplants
- Cucumbers
- Jicama
- Chinese celery
- Daikon radish
- Cabbage
- Bok choy
- Tomatoes
- Chili peppers, Bird's Eye, Thai chilis
- Shallots
- Squash
- Spring onions
- Unripe papaya

## PRODUCE

- Bananas
- Banana flower blossoms
- Citrus
- Jackfruit
- Durian fruit
- Pineapples
- Cilantro
- Mint
- Thai basil
- Vietnamese coriander

## PROTEIN

- Saltwater and freshwater fish
- Shellfish
- Chicken
- Pork
- Beef
- Tofu

## FOODS USED LESS

- White potatoes
- Brussel sprouts
- Cheese
- Cow milk
- Sweet potatoes (connotations with poverty)

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS & MEALS

- *Tết* is the Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration falling between January 19 and February 20, marking the lunar calendar's beginning. People gather with family and friends, participate in symbolic celebrations, and feast for days leading up to and following the traditional three-day celebration. Popular dishes around this time include *bánh tét*, rice loaves filled with green beans, pork, or beef, wrapped in bamboo leaves and boiled; *mứt*, dried candied fruits; and *chè*, a sweet dessert.
- *Đám Giỗ* are death anniversaries; loved ones make food and offer it to the deceased. A celebration then commences with tasty meals and cold beer.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Herbs are very important to Vietnamese cuisine and are often eaten fresh in considerable amounts alongside the main dish.
- Meals are often served family style; each guest usually has their individual bowl of rice and dipping sauce but shares from a communal spread of dishes. There is usually always a broth-based soup.

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# THAILAND



Thailand is a beautiful country with ornate architecture and lush landscapes. The country successfully avoided colonization by European countries in the 19th century. Over the last several decades, political control vacillated between military and civilian rule but today, the government follows a monarchy model. Theravada Buddhism is the primary religion, and Thai is the main language, though there are several regional dialects. Through previous invasions and trade agreements, Thai cuisine carries influences from Burma and India. Today, it is widely popular and beloved by many Western countries for its spiciness.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- White rice “Sticky” (glutinous), jasmine (fragrant)
- Vermicelli noodles
- Cellophane noodles
- Rice-flour noodles
- Coconut milk
- Coconut cream
- Palm sugar
- Tamarind paste
- Oyster sauce
- Golden Mountain sauce
- Fish sauce
- Shrimp paste
- Dried shrimp
- Dried red chilies
- Peppercorns
- Cardamom

## PRODUCE

- Bamboo shoots
- Bean sprouts
- Thai chilis, green, red, yellow
- Bird’s Eye chilis, red, green, and yellow-orange
- Eggplant
- Mushrooms
- Spring onions (scallions)
- Water spinach
- Napa cabbage
- Bitter melon
- Mango, ripe and unripe
- Papaya, unripe
- Pineapple
- Rambuta
- Basil, Thai and lemon
- Cilantro
- Mint
- Lemongrass
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Galangal
- Jicama
- Kaffir lime leaves

## PROTEIN

- Fish
- Shellfish
- Pork
- Chicken

## FOODS USED LESS

- Dairy products

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS & MEALS

- *Songkran* is Thailand’s three-day New Year festival, beginning on April 13. Water is very important in this festival as people wash statues of Buddha and pour water on the hands of elders to show respect and ask for blessings in the New Year.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Chilis are actually native to Central America but were introduced to Thailand by Spanish and Portuguese traders around the 16th century.
- Like many Asian cuisines, rice is a staple rather than a side dish in the meal, so larger portions are not uncommon.
- Great emphasis is placed on the beauty of food, and chefs will garnish their dishes with delicate carvings of cucumber, green onion, carrots, radishes, and chilies that resemble different varieties of flowers.

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# CAMBODIA



Cambodia's history dates back to 7000 BCE with civilizations forming near bodies of water which encouraged agriculture (primarily rice) and trade. After becoming independent of French rule in 1953, the Khmer Rouge gained control in 1975. The country suffered immensely from genocide, hunger, and disease under the regime's brief history. The aftermath of these events have physiological effects that reach generations born since. The majority practice Theravada Buddhism and a small population in the northern region practice Islam; the primary language is Khmer. Cambodian food draws inspiration from Indian, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, and French cuisines.

## SHELF-STABLE FOODS

- White rice
- Rice flour
- Black rice- used for desserts only
- Olive oil for cooking
- "Prahok"- fermented fish sauce
- Soy sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Golden Mountain sauce
- Palm sugar

## PRODUCE

- Cabbage
- Chinese broccoli
- Watercress
- Pumpkin leaves
- Yard-long beans
- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Corn
- Eggplant
- Thai okra
- Cucumber
- Bitter melon
- Winter squash
- Summer squash
- Luffa
- Taro
- Cassava
- Sweet potato
- Unripe papaya, mango,
- Bananas (eaten as vegetables)
- Spring onions
- Water spinach
- Bitter melon
- Banana
- Durian
- Guava
- Jackfruit
- Longan
- Lychee
- Mango
- Mangosteen
- Papaya
- Pineapple
- Tamarind
- Watermelon
- Sweet basil
- Cilantro
- Vietnamese coriander
- Turmeric
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Galangal
- Kaffir lemon leaves
- sdao leaves
- Peppermint
- Lemongrass
- Chives

## PROTEIN

- Fish
- Eggs
- Chicken
- Pork, all cuts, organs included
- Beef all cuts, organs included

## FOODS USED LESS

- Dairy products
- Brown rice, this can be associated with the Pol Pot regime

## CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS & MEALS

- Cambodian New Year, celebrated April 13-15, signifies the end of the harvest season and the beginning of a new year. The three-day event takes place at Buddhist temples, where families gather together, enjoy food, and partake in symbolic ritual celebrations.

## FUN FOOD FACTS

- Meals often have three components: soup, stir-fry, and rice, which are eaten simultaneously.
- Herbs are eaten fresh in large quantities with meals.
- Spices and herbs are often ground into a paste using a mortar and pestle, which are then added to enhance the flavor of salads, stews, and meats.

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# TOP 15 CROSS-CULTURAL FOODS

The foods in this list have appeared consistently in Client Culture Survey responses from participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds in our service area. These items are whole foods that can be used to assemble culture-specific meals that are also nutrient dense. For those involved in food procurement that are unsure which foods to obtain or donate for pantries, this list offers staple foods that can help build nutritious and versatile meals.

## Shelf Stable

- White rice (long or medium grain)
- Dried beans (black, pinto, or kidney)
- Olive or Avocado oil

## Produce

- Cucumber
- Tomatoes
- Cabbage
- Onion
- Garlic
- Citrus (lemons, limes, oranges)
- Mango
- Watermelon

## Protein

- Fish
- Chicken
- Pork
- Eggs



# CONTRIBUTIONS

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