

Home cooking, eating and surviving a health crisis (part 1)

by: Vic Thor A. Palarca



Binahon Agroforestry Farm (BAFF) purveys organic produce bags which are available for door-to-door delivery. A commendable initiative in light of the recent Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) to help make food available for patrons in Malaybalay City. (photo appears courtesy of BAFF)

The community quarantine prompted some of us to avail the work from home scheme. Aside from sticking with the targets and sending accomplishment reports, most of us must have been cooking regularly and are already a self-confessed cook by now. We make the most of whatever resources available since the majority of us have limited exposure outside and are discouraged from leaving home.

Like my family and everyone else, we are not prepared for a coronavirus lockdown. Some of our gardens were already empty from last month's harvest. Our kitchen not well stocked. We do some grocery often but buying only what we need. And because of the onslaught of covid-19, staying home is our best bet to safety and wellness.

For years, the country's farmers, food producers, and the agriculture sector at large have been urging us to join their cause. To make us food sufficient and secure by planting altogether. Now more than ever, we

cherish the value of a well-planted garden and a well-stock pantry or kitchen. This global health crisis prompted us to plant, cook and eat together.

How do we come up with three decent meals a day for weeks at a time with limited access to the outside world? And given our appetite and saturation point---is it possible to keep our meals interesting?

Here, I have enlisted the help of friends here and abroad from chefs, home cooks, food bloggers, farmers, food lovers, nutritionists and dietician for tips and some gastronomic inspiration:

Phoebe Galeon

Studied Food Science at UP-Diliman

Faculty Member, USTsP

My conversation with Ms. Galeon online was probably the most succinct since she gave direct answers every time I ask her a question. “I would recommend on stocking food items that can be used as either viand or snack, but shelf life extension is necessary if we’re talking here about stocking up.” She went to disclose further that value-adding of farm goods in season is also commendable to avert oversupply and it gives consumers more product options.

“One can start to focus on local and available raw materials. If it is of kitchen scale, then it would be more of bottling in the likes of jams, jellies and pickles but focus on abundant raw resources and materials because what is abundant is cheap.”

For vegetables, one can introduce the concept of vacuum packaging, a great technique that remains unexplored for potential value adding.

“Like, if I have abundant harvest of carrots what do I do with it so that I don’t flood the market and cheapen the cost of my produce? I can do minimal processing of my carrots, vacuum-packed it and keep it frozen for future use or future selling. For other sources of carbohydrates like tubers, it can be converted into dried powders for future use.”

For Ms. Galeon, value-adding is integral in prolonging and diversifying our food resources.

June Rey Tunog

Head Chef and in-charge of developing new products and food items for Roy’s Bistro

Chef June Rey was in the middle of making a batch of cakes ready for Mother’s Day in the commissary when he decided to give me a call.

“Dili ko ga-palit ug processed foods sa gawas like sausages or chorizos kay wala ko kabalo sa amount of preservatives and chemicals nga naa ana. If ever I feel like having some, I make them at home. I don’t shy from storing up on noodle-based products or canned goods since admittedly, they are available in the market. But I always make sure I mix or pair them with whatever leafy green vegetables are available at home.”

I also suggest cooking meals which can be stored in the ref and can be reheated during meal time. I cook adobo or humba. If fish is available like bangus, you can also marinate them and cook it for the next meal. The trick is to prepare the dish and have them packed in portion of recommended serving size. If your kids are picky eaters and are not into vegetables, try to incorporate them with other dishes or make a vegetable patty, if say, squash is abundant or are in season. Lumpia and embutido are some of the easy-to-do dishes also which can be stored up for a while.

Paolo Andaya Lumbres

Chef and owner of Butuan City's popular food joint Food Coma

With a working experience of eight years in the food industry, chef Paolo was quick to point out in identifying pantry size and how big it can stock up. "If you have a small freezer (or refrigerator), essentially you need to stock up more on canned goods. Yes, it's not that healthy but it is essential for surviving. Now if you have a big freezer space, don't worry on stocking up meats. As long as it is frozen you don't need to worry about wasting it."

He also shared proper ways of storing meats to prevent cross contamination. "Put at the lower level poultry meat like chicken, up a level next will be whole meats like pork or beef. The third layer higher is cut or portioned meats then seafood and on top of them all would be the cooked food items."

He also shared to plan your meal ahead. Come up with a list so that when you do your grocery mostly that will be your essential ingredients to use from day 1 up until the end of the week. Planning your meal is one way also to save money.

"Speaking of saving money, keep leftover foods refrigerated. Reheat only the portions your family will have during meal time. Always cook the food in the best way possible so that when reheating comes or should you want to transform it into another dish or as fillers, it won't become soggy or overcooked by then."

Recarte Bacus

Farm owner, Candiisan Diversified Farm

"Grow your own food. Start with leafy greens as they are fast growers or replant vegetables bought from the market like alugbati and kangkong. Cook dishes good for 3 to 4 meals and place in containers then fridge and reheat in serving size during meal time." Cart shared over a Facebook messenger conversation as he took a break from farming in the middle of a noonday heat.

"We make our own marinades, dippings, dressings, and sauces as well as teas and juices. Don't be afraid to try things out and experiment what's good for your own taste."

Carte also shared that their leftover rice is turned into fried rice or champorado. He always adds some vegetables to canned goods like carrots and potatoes or leafy greens such as malunggay or saluyot.

Jeff Ayento

Apprentice Chef, Culinary Institute of Cagayan de Oro (CIC) alumnus

Juggling schedules between work and as a recipe developer for Winosity at the same time maintaining his blog FoodBuds, Jeff was generous enough to share the following tips for the home cook in all of us:

- Pickling is another way of preserving fruits and vegetables. And can be a great snack or a great appetizer for different purposes such as for grilled meats and fish, or even fried dishes. The basic pickling brine solution is vinegar, sugar, salt and whole black peppers. Adding additional spices would be a great idea.
- Use vinegar or citrus juice as wonderful flavor enhancers but add them at the last moment. Vinegar is great on vegetables, such as greens; and citrus works well on fruits, such as melons. They enhance the flavor notes of the vegetables and fruits and protecting them from oxidation or browning.
- Canned sardines can be a great ingredient to your stir-fried vegetables instead of using chicken or meat. This would create a variation to an ordinary and boring canned sardine.

Beda Shane Abundo

Food Vlogger of "Ramon Sy's Kitchen" on YouTube

As Alveo-Ayalaland's Property Specialist providing quality homes and modern-day living conveniences, a busy family man like Beda Shane still takes the time to cook and personally man the kitchen.

In his video blogs, his kitchen essentials include poultry products such as chicken and eggs, fish and other seafood, pork, herbs and spices, as well as noodle-based food items. He even caters food in serving-sized containers like Bicol express and Laing and patrons can just message him online.

"Aside from doing video conferences with my team and colleagues all over the Philippines, I keep myself busy in the kitchen and cater some of my home cooking since I like hearing feedbacks from customers that they liked the food and that it's also an opportunity to earn while being quarantined at home."

Melinda Petalcorin

Home cook, Food lover extraordinaire

"This got me thinking and I'm imagining what I have in my kitchen stash right now." My ambush conversation via Facebook messenger with Mel made her want to dash home and do a quick look over.

"Come to think of it, I'm into Korean cuisine at the moment since I have more of their ingredients like sesame oil, gochujang, sesame seeds, kimchi (the biggest jar I could find in the grocery) and samjang. I don't think those are everyone's kitchen essentials." she shared replete with a chuckling emoji.

"But my must-haves would have to be flour and cornstarch because you can use them for meat and veggies, then herbs and legumes such as mung beans because I can also grow them as bean sprouts. Smart move di ba?"

I totally agree with Mel and the rest of my contributor friends above.

The kitchen has always been the heart of the home, but as the coronavirus pandemic rages on, we need to transform our stress to strength. Besides the three meals a day needed during home quarantines and closures, it's also where our meals are being shared, food for our frontliners being packed, conversations being exchanged, and snacks constantly being cobbled together. That's where our strength comes from aside from the soul food we whip up.

Home cooking, eating and surviving a health crisis (part 2)



For most Filipino homes during the community quarantine, one of the easy-to-prepare dish is this sauteed medley of vegetables consisting of potato, string beans, and pechay with slabs of pork. (image appears courtesy from the photo archives of Chef Jeff Ayento)

A few weeks ago, I was thinking if food can be a medium in transmitting the coronavirus. In addition to worrying about having an ample supply of food in the house and feeling anxious over shopping in crowded supermarkets, I can't help but be concerned about the invisible threat brought to us by covid-19.

Thanks to Google, I took a dive in finding out from frontliners in the medical field if my fuss about our recent health crisis warrants my anxiety. Here's the good news: "The science around coronavirus continues to unfold, but there is currently no evidence that the disease is transmitted by food," says

Donald Schaffner, Ph.D., a distinguished professor in the department of food science at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J.

That's because it's a respiratory virus, passed primarily from person to person in droplets when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. Though it's possible to pick up the virus by touching a surface where the droplets have landed and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, that's not the primary way it is thought to spread, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization (WHO) also declared that food is not known to be a route of transmission of the virus and the information available from outbreaks of SARS and MERS, caused by coronaviruses similar to the one that causes covid-19, is reassuring. According to the WHO, the evidence showed that those illnesses were not transmitted by food.

That said, it always makes sense to practice good food safety habits.

Chief among them: Wash your hands before and after preparing food—and during if you are handling raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs—as well as before you eat. Wash fruits and vegetables. In addition, be sure to prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meat separate from other foods, using separate cutting boards for meat and vegetables. You should also refrigerate perishable foods and leftovers promptly.

The downside of the coronavirus, at least temporarily, is that we stock up and limit our trips to the grocery store and to the market, stop going to restaurants and summon food delivery drivers instead. No one knows where the virus might thrive next, or how long restrictions might last. What is clear is that this will be different from the usual health crisis.

As to food availability, it's a good thing that government efforts were rolled out in Metro Manila as well as other regions to make food accessible to the public via the Department of Agriculture's "Kadiwa on Wheels" along with the Kadiwa Market in partnership with the Agricultural Training Institute. The Kadiwa on Wheels bring vegetables, fruits, eggs, and other farm produce closer to residents which are sold at relatively cheap prices. This mobile palengke initiative makes food accessible to communities and also helps local farmers earn from their harvests despite the difficulty of selling and transporting their produce from farm to market.

Still, to comply with the community quarantine protocols, buyers must wear masks and bring their own eco-bags and observe social distancing.

My first blog contributors consisting of chefs, home cooks, food bloggers, farmers, food lovers, nutritionists and dieticians here and abroad were candid about how they cope up with the pandemic by sharing practical ways to cook food, store up essential kitchen items and commodities and share other "wais" tips---all by keeping and maintaining a healthy diet. The next batch of contributors below were no different since most of them desire to become well-fed and nourished and come up with solutions for the food security problem by engaging in family farming to augment food production at home.

Gigi Morris

School Farm Director of MoCa Family Farm RLearning Center
Padre Garcia, Batangas City

“For family farmers, learning to grow food is not enough, it should go hand in hand with learning how to preserve your own produce. This pandemic situation highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency for the family and their community. Come to think of it, back then, people find ways to store and preserve food until their next harvest season!

With most of the rural families in quarantine, everybody turns to their available local food. We bartered and exchange farm produce in our communities. When the quarantine started, I knew that the first thing we have to do was reduce our livestock. We cannot have our livestock “competing” with us for food. Armed with skills on food preservation, we processed our meat and preserved them. For meat, popular meat preservation techniques are curing, drying, salting and smoking.

When I first moved in the farm, I find it disturbing to see produce go to waste. As farmers, we sometimes let go of some comforts in life just so we can farm, grow and produce food; therefore, it is ironic to see that what we traded for little comforts just go to waste. So if you are one of those families who started their vegetable gardening during this time of quarantine, you will soon realize that if you have a bounty harvest, it is important to learn how to prolong their viability as food.

There are many traditional ways of preserving our food, other than the ones I earlier mentioned, you can also do sun drying, pickling, fermenting, freezing and canning. Let’s expand on one easy and popular method that you can try, that is pickling. This time-honored method of food preservation will not only help you preserve the flavor of your harvest, it may even start an extra livelihood for you!”

Jerico “Jec” Chua

Professional Chef, Nutrition and Dietetics-UST graduate
Center for Culinary Arts (CCA) Manila alumnus

With limited resources we tend to eat junk food and other unhealthy food items that has high sodium content, processed food and food that contains large amount unhealthy fats such as saturated and trans fat.

- We need to plan our daily menu to avoid over spending and avoid food waste.
- Choose vegetable that has high fiber content, fiber has a high satiety value that leaves us feeling full. It can also improve our blood sugar and cholesterol level.
- Pick dark green leafy vegetables. Store beans and legumes (peas, chick peas, nuts) since they have low fat and no cholesterol but high in fiber and potassium as well as high in iron. Legumes can be stored for a long time affordable and a lot of ways to cook.
- Choose lean meat, but limit meat intake and it should only take 25% of the plate.

- Eat several varieties of fishes. Lean fish such as sea bass (apahap) grouper (lapu –lapu), snapper (maya-maya), flounder, sole, halibut (isdang dapa) and tilapia . Eat also fatty fish that are rich in Omega 3 like fresh tuna (tambakol, bariles), mackerel (tanigue, tulingan) sardines (tawilis, tamban), anchovies (dilis) and of course salmon.
- Eat a variety of whole grain food like brown rice.
- Cooking in bulk saves time and money.

Theresa Aurora Cosico

Registered Nutritionist-Dietitian

“During this crisis, especially when ECQ is in place wherein we can only go out twice or thrice a week, we have to plan food items that we can store for a week or two. Make a list of menu for one week or so depending on your budget and of course your refrigerator capacity. A list of menu will help you make a food list on what to buy and an estimate of its quantity.”

Make sure that you will still achieve a balance diet, despite this scenario. While making your menu list, make a mental visualization of the viands just to see if it has the Go (energy giving), Grow (body building) and Glow (immune system booster) foods.

For Go foods

- Rice (of course)
- Store some malagkit (glutinous rice) – for champorado, arroz caldo or native kakanin
- Bread – you can put this in the refrigerator for added shelf life
- Pasta - you have time to cook so don't go for the instant noodles
- Some root crops like kamote, gabi, and potatoes

Grow foods

Basic pork parts that I buy which can be of general use (when I say general use, I mean you can make several viands using this part/cut) which are:

- Liempo (BBQ, fried, lechon kawali, sisig, dinakdakan, adobo, menudo, bicol express, sahog for vegetable dishes)
- Spare ribs (nilaga, sinigang, caldereta, sweet and sour)
- Lomo (pork bistek, pork tapa, morcon)
- Ground pork (shanghai, meatballs, patty, somai, skinless longganisa, embotido)
- Chicken for your fried chicken, tinola, roast chicken, chicken inasal, adobo
- Beef
- Fish and dried fish/pusit – You can also make your own fish sardines

- Legumes – but munggo will do because you can also make your favorite toge (sprouts) just by soaking it for several days
- Eggs

Glow food

- Fruits in season or your fruit preference. I usually buy unripe saba so it can be stored for several days before it can be used (eaten raw, turon, maruya, fried, boiled, inihaw and sweetened)
- Vegetables. Depending on your list, don't forget to include green leafy vegetables which can be boiled (ensalada) or turn to bulanglang (boiled with ginger)

John Loren Ocampo

Head Chef, Five Stags Pirongia
New Zealand

“When cooking, make sure to cook in bulk or in batches and if possible have some vinegar in your cooking to make your dishes last longer. You may pre-cook your pork and beef until tender by cooking them with salt, pepper, garlic and onion. These are the basic spices I cook with my meat, but you may add other spices if you want.

In this pandemic, we should be cautious on what to eat and cook, always plan ahead before you go to the grocery stores and wash all your grocery items before storing.

Also, we need to limit ourselves to be outside with everyone, like here in New Zealand, they already have eliminated the virus but not eradicated it, and we are still vigilant not to go out as possible.

We only go out to buy what is essential to our needs. Right now in my bubble (house) we only eat twice during brunch and dinner only, and we cook only one dish with vegetable on it, simple and easy cooking.

Since winter is coming, we normally just have hot honey lemon drink rather than coffee to give us an immune boost.”

Nick Jay Arr Engallado

Food joint owner and Manager, Rescuers Stop
Co-owner, Engallado's Nature Farm & Natural Food Products

“Staying home is the essential response to avoid the viral infection thereby limiting movement of people to purchasing essential household supplies especially food.

Since all are seemingly at a pause, not everyone has access to their sources of funds - work or business. This situation led us to identify a rapid response to adjust with the developing set-up.

For me, it narrows down into the essential goods we needed most in the kitchen so we can cook our food. Since the announcement of limiting people's movement, we made sure that we have oil, soy sauce,

vinegar, salt, sugar, and spices that will last for at least two weeks since we can access most of our supply from our garden.

Our rice supply is sufficient since we control the milling of palay in stock. This way, we are able to keep the good quality of rice for our daily consumption and main ingredients for our delicacies.”

Jessie Marco S. Cabrera

Mechanical Engineer

Project Manager for Salam Industries, Qatar

“My cooking background started out during my younger years when I was helping my mother in the kitchen after I did the pamamalengke. I learned so much from her because her cooking and ways in the kitchen can be both traditional and non-traditional.

Personally, I rely more on spices and herbs and less on commercial condiments when cooking and I prefer to cook up things from scratch. There is joy in cooking when you work whatever ingredients is available on hand and come up later with something delicious. I love working with my hands and not rely everything with kitchen amenities and gadgetries.

Later in life, more cooking experience came when I resigned from my former job then I started catering to a nearby school canteen from home. Although it’s a small set-up, I came up with fan favorites such as pares, ramen, asado and other usual snack items. My involvement also in the cooking ministry in our church prompts me to learn other dishes from my churchmates.

Some of the ingredients I can’t live without:

- Dahon ng sibuyas
- Sesame oil
- Butter

Kitchen essentials include:

- Wok
- Oven
- A sharp knife
- Chinese Chopper
- A good cooking stove

Here in Qatar, I managed to attend culinary school in my spare time and enroll in culinary courses such as Cakes and Pastry, International Bread and Local Bread, as well as Sushi and Tempura. I intend to learn more about international cuisine and learn different cooking styles since that is my passion---level up cooking which is a bar higher than usual.

My future plan when I come home and retire young (hopefully) is to establish a family restaurant with a choice of specialty foods and high quality fusion cuisine. God willing!"

Perhaps, the most critical step in achieving food security during a pandemic is by helping out our food producers. The initial effort of the agriculture sector in providing key support to smallholder farmers can safely continue their food production. Supporting food producers, specially our local farmers, is more important now more than ever.

Our creativity, ingenuity and resilience can also help mitigate the disastrous effects of covid-19.

May your kitchen cook up fond memories as we cope with this pandemic altogether and here's to our collective plate that everyone stays healthy and that no one will go hungry. ###