

## **How American is that All American Thanksgiving Meal?**

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It doesn't seem possible that next Thursday is Thanksgiving already! Many of us will sit down at a huge meal sometime on Thanksgiving Day and enjoy what has often been called the "all American meal". Many feel that our current Thanksgiving meal closely reflects what the Pilgrims would have eaten on that first celebration of thanks. But how "American" is that traditional Thanksgiving meal we eat today.

Now, just to set things straight from the start, the original Thanksgiving meal likely included: waterfowl, venison, ham, lobster, clams, berries, fruit, pumpkin, and squash. That menu sounds pretty good to me - especially the ham and lobster part. Now days there are many new traditions that people have but, most Thanksgiving meals will likely include at least many of the following: turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes, green beans, carrots, squash, cranberries, cornbread and pumpkin pie. And that menu sounds pretty good to me as well.

While turkey may not be a good substitute for lobster, it is a very American dish. The domestic turkey most of us use for Thanksgiving today was bred from the Wild Turkey that is only found in North America from Mexico into Canada. So score one for All American.

The stuffing that we like so well has many components frequently including bread, onion, and celery. Most of our bread is made from hard red winter wheat, which we grow in Kansas, although it was originally from the Caucasus region of southeastern Asia. We'll have to give that one a split vote. Onions also likely originated from Asia, probably Iran and West Pakistan region (along with garlic). Celery? Back across the pond. It is probably from the Mediterranean region. Not doing so well here. If we include cornbread we do score a little better. Corn originated from a tropical grass growing in southern Mexico known as maize and may have involved wild crosses with teosinte and gama grass. Another score for the Americas!

Okay, how about mashed potatoes? While everyone refers to them as Irish potatoes, their actual origin is from the Andes Mountains in Bolivia or Peru. English explorers in the mid 1500's brought potatoes from Columbia back to England. So their origin is South American, but that's probably close enough to be called All American!

Green beans, carrots and squash are often on that Thanksgiving table. Green beans are in the genus *Phaseolus* which is very broad and includes most of the beans that we enjoy either fresh as string, snap or wax, or dried as kidney, pinto and great northern, amongst other names. These were tropical species widely grown through North and South America. Squash and pumpkin (afterall, pumpkin is just a type of squash) are both native to North America also. Carrots, however, probably originated from Afghanistan.

Finally, my personal favorite, cranberry. Cranberries are considered one of only three native fruits of North America (the other two being blueberries and Concord grapes). Cranberries are related to blueberries and grow on vines preferring boggy areas of northern regions. They are in many ways grown and harvested today like they were in colonial times. So, like the turkey, cranberries are about as American as you can get!

So, as we total it up, it isn't a clean sweep. The wheat is probably going to have to be given a half point each way. If we include South America as part of this then we wind up with 7.5 points for the Americas and 3.5 points for non-Americans. It's not a purely American meal, but it comes pretty close! Regardless, enjoy your Thanksgiving day meal!