Harvest of the Month provides resources for the cafeteria, classroom, and community to promote the use of local, seasonal foods.

**Mini-activities**

**Determining Doneness of Steak**

Many cooks often learn how to determine the doneness of their steak by comparing the firmness of their meat to the firmness of their palm.

Begin by sticking out your hand and using your other finger to press on the part of the palm below the thumb; this firmness represents a raw steak.

Now take that same hand and touch your index finger to your thumb, touch the same part of your palm with your other finger again and this compares to a rare steak.

Continue touching each finger to your thumb and compare the firmness until you reach your desired doneness.

Open hand = Raw
Index to thumb = Rare
Middle finger to thumb = Medium Rare
Ring finger to thumb = Medium
Pinky to thumb = Well

**Kid-friendly eating tips**

- Hiding vegetables like mushrooms or spinach in hamburgers or meatballs is a great way to give kids an extra serving of vegetables without any fuss.

**Storage Tip**

- Beef freezes very well and will last up to 4 months, make sure to cut them into smaller portions for quicker thawing and store in a vacuum seal bag, plastic bag with most of the air taken out or freezer safe containers.

- A good way to vacuum seal your meat at home is by putting the portion(s) in the bag and dipping the bag in a bowl of water just below the seal.

- The best method of thawing meat is in the fridge, but if you choose to defrost your meat in the microwave cook it immediately following.

**Cooking Tips**

- Cooking your beef at a lower temperature for a longer time will give you juicy meat with lots of flavor.

- Resting your beef after cooking allows the tasty juices to redistribute throughout the piece of meat preventing it from losing juices and flavor.

- It is best to fully cook ground beef and hamburgers to kill all the bacteria that may be on the meat.

All beef products come from different parts of a cow. Cows are native to India but spread to China, Africa, and Europe where they were then brought to America by European explorers in 1493. Now cows can be found all over the globe in many different types of cuisine. The United States produce about 20% of the world’s beef making them the largest producer in the world followed by Brazil, Europe and China.
Easy Sheppard’s Pie
Prep time: 15 minutes | Cook time: 50 minutes

Ingredients:
- 1 1/2 to 2 pounds potatoes (about 3 large potatoes), peeled and quartered
- 8 Tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 1/2 cups)
- 1-2 cups vegetables—diced carrots, corn, peas
- 1 1/2 lbs ground round beef
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Salt, pepper, other seasonings of choice

Directions:
1. Boil the potatoes: Place the peeled and quartered potatoes in a medium sized pot. Cover with at least an inch of cold water. Add a teaspoon of salt. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook until tender (about 20 minutes).

2. Sauté vegetables: While the potatoes are cooking, melt 4 tablespoons of the butter in a large sauté pan on medium heat. Add the chopped onions and cook until tender, about 6 to 10 minutes.

   If you are including vegetables, add them according to their cooking time. Carrots should be cooked with the onions, because they take as long to cook as the onions do.

   If you are including peas or corn, add them toward the end of the cooking of the onions, or after the meat starts to cook, as they take very little cooking time.

3. Add the ground beef, then Worcestershire sauce and broth: Add ground beef to the pan with the onions and vegetables. Cook until no longer pink. Season with salt and pepper. Add the Worcestershire sauce and beef broth. Bring the broth to a simmer and reduce heat to low. Cook uncovered for 10 minutes, adding more beef broth if necessary to keep the meat from drying out.

4. Mash the cooked potatoes: When the potatoes are done cooking (a fork can easily pierce), remove them from the pot and place them in a bowl with the remaining 4 Tbsp of butter. Mash with a fork or potato masher; and season with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Layer the meat mixture and mashed potatoes in a casserole dish: Preheat oven to 400°F. Spread the beef, onions, and vegetables (if using) in an even layer in a large baking dish (8x13 casserole). Spread the mashed potatoes over the top of the ground beef. Rough up the surface of the mashed potatoes with a fork so there are peaks that will get well browned. You can even use a fork to make creative designs in the mashed potatoes.

6. Bake in oven: Place in a 400°F oven and cook until browned and bubbling, about 30 minutes. If necessary, broil for the last few minutes to help the surface of the mashed potatoes brown.

Taco Salad

Ingredients:
- 1 Pound ground beef
- ½ cup refried beans
- 2 tablespoons taco seasoning
- Pinch of salt and pepper
- 1-2 tomatoes, diced
- 1 head of lettuce, chopped
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 Green onions, sliced
- 1 cup tortilla chips, lightly crushed

Optional
- Salsa
- Sour cream
- Jalapeno

Directions:
1. Place beef in a large skillet, over medium heat until fully cooked and no pink is visible; drain fat.

2. Add salt, pepper, taco seasoning and refried beans, stir until fully incorporated. Remove from heat.

3. In a large bowl combine the tomatoes, lettuce, cheese, and onions. Add beef mixture and toss.

4. Top with crushed chips and topping of choice. Serve immediately.

Benefits
- Beef is an excellent source of 10 essential nutrients: Protein, zinc, vitamin B12, selenium, phosphorus, choline, niacin, vitamin B16, iron and riboflavin.

- Red meats like beef are excellent sources of iron that help increase your hemoglobin and give you healthy blood.

Varieties
There are many different cuts of beef each used for different cooking methods and dishes. Many popular cuts are ground beef, flank steaks, t-bone steaks, brisket, short ribs and rump roast.