

The Oinkster Festival Revived

By Dan Gill

The Oinkster Festival is a celebration of local foods and barbecue traditionally held on the first weekend in August, when corn and crabs are at their best. Barbecue enthusiasts come for the weekend from all over the country to learn and share. We cook "Artisanal" barbecue with a different specialty each year. In 1999 we cooked cabrito (young goat) both in a pit and on a spit and smoked bluefish on a barbacoa as done by Native Americans for thousands of years. The festivities and activities were filmed by PBS and broadcast on *Virginia Currents*. That was eight years ago and we have not been able to face putting on another full-blown gathering until now.

We recently decided to hold another Oinkster Festival this summer at the store and charge admission for the party. We leased a couple of acres for parking, planted plenty of sweet corn and lined up some outstanding entertainment. We cook "Something Different" each year and I am thinking of beef shoulders and pork spare ribs for this one (have to have some pork at an Oinkster Festival). Maybe some hoe cakes and cold cucumber soup to go along with the steamed crabs and sweet corn. I don't believe in over-organizing so we will all just have to wait and see what develops.

Another tradition is an unusual appetizer. Four hundred years ago, Captain John Smith and his party of explorers landed on the eastern tip of what is now Middlesex County. He waded around in the shallows skewering fish with his sword until he speared a stingray, which in turn speared Smith. He almost expired on the spot but recovered enough to eat the culprit for supper. It is fitting that we feature John Smith's nemesis, the Cow-nosed or "Chesapeake" Ray for our part of the Jamestown Celebration. Rays are decimating fragile oyster beds in the Chesapeake Bay system so the Virginia Marine Products Board is trying to develop market demand for the meat and, subsequently, an economically viable fishery. The Board has distributed ray meat to chefs for recipe development and asked me to work on barbecue and smoking techniques. We will attempt to recreate Smith's most famous meal. He didn't leave us his recipe, but it undoubtedly involved a wood-burning

fire. I have some folks coming in who will enjoy the challenge and we may even have an informal cook-off. One thing is for certain: We'll have fun and that is the whole point.