

The Feasts of Farmington Hunt

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For an historic hunt like Virginia's Farmington Hunt Club, a hearty spread at the end of a long chase is as much a part of the sport as the "Tally ho!"

Setting hunt standards since the 1950s, Farmington's tailgate feasts are both legendary and laid back.

Often unfurled in an open field before a glorious view of the gently sloping Blue Ridge Mountains, the hunt breakfasts are as varied as the hunt's members — from classic to cavalier.

"It's a real moment of camaraderie," says Patrick Butterfield, MFH, a veteran of the hunt. "We usually have awfully good food."

It's also a time when everybody gathers together and tells tales about what occurred during the hunt, he says — a tradition especially prized by those who didn't get a chance to view.

"It caps off the day," he adds.

Butterfield is set to debut the newest addition to the stable of fine recipes frequently enjoyed by members — the "French Kiss." The coffee and cognac concoction presents the ideal way to warm one's toes when the crisp Virginia morning air has given off a mighty nip.

"Depending on the weather, we may do a stew or soup," says Shelley Thompson, who organizes the potluck tailgates. Typically, members are assigned to a fixture and are responsible for bringing certain dishes to feed the hungry field.

Officially reorganized as the Farmington Hunt Club in 1929, the hunt has, over the years, collected an extensive cast of cooks. These days, members can always be counted on to produce delicious results.

One member is famous for her quiches; another specializes in Scottish eggs.

"We have one member in particular, Debbie Wright, who is the most fabulous dessert maker," says Thompson.

The legendary Wright rises before dawn to assemble her rustic apple tarts and her most popular contribution: her cookies. The cookies come in a variety of appropriate shapes and sizes, says Thompson. For Valentine's Day, there are hearts and cupids, for example, and on normal hunting days it's no surprise to find a basket of delectable fox and horse replicas.

It's to be expected that a hunt that has stayed together for more than 80 years knows how to have fun together and keep the tradition alive. The club celebrated its 80th anniversary last year and this year was awarded the 2011 MFHA Habitat Conservation Award at the MFHA's annual meeting in New York.

Long-time hunt member John "J.B." Birdsall has been the driving force in securing the Farmington Hunt's remarkable land conservation and habitat preservation efforts. The club enjoys more than 63,000 acres of land, and a reported 23 of its 30 fixtures are protected by conservation easements.

The territory is the stuff of hunt lore — vast acres reaching across some of the state's most picturesque counties, including Albemarle County, which the hunt calls home.

The hunt breakfasts were once held in the stately homes tucked within the various territories, but necessity shifted the locations to more convenient ones, where the mud is casually knocked off boots as the repast begins and the aroma of great food drifts through enthusiastic chatter.

Thompson, who has been with the Farmington Hunt for seven years, and hunting for 20, enjoys a passion for the cooking that completes the experience. One of her favorite recipes is her meatball and hot sausage sliders.

"We are blessed to have great tailgates," says Thompson. "They also give us a chance to be with the staff and thank them. They work hard." 🍌

Pumpkin Roll

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 2/3 cup pumpkin purée, fresh or canned
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 3/4 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. grated nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 10 x 15 jellyroll pan and set aside. In a stand mixer or using a hand mixer, beat the eggs for about five minutes. Add the sugar, pumpkin purée and lemon juice, and continue mixing until combined. In a separate bowl, sift together the next five ingredients (flour through salt). Fold the flour mixture into the egg mixture and then pour the batter into the greased jellyroll pan and bake for 10 – 20 minutes or until the cake springs back when touched. Remove from oven and allow to cool in the pan.

Cream Cheese Filling

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 6 oz. cream cheese – room temperature
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- Pinch of salt

Beat all ingredients together until smooth. When the cake is cool, spread filling over cake and roll up jellyroll style. If desired, top with chopped nuts.

