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Eating Where You Live: The Potential for a Local, Seasonal Diet in Knox County, Ohio

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Eating Where You Live: The Potential for a Local, Seasonal Diet in Knox County, Ohio

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Introduction

A locally based food stream minimizes transportation costs, encourages regional cuisine, fosters community interaction and growth, and supports sustainable farming practices (Amilien 2005; Stagl 2002; Wilkins 1995). While there are many advantages to the local food stream, geographic regions can present challenges to a diet based therein. The types of foods able to be produced and the time of year during which they can be grown are limited by the climate. The height of the growing season for Knox County comprises the months of August and September. This research presents what foods and nutrients are available in Knox County, the depth of consumer knowledge and interest in value-added foods, and the requirements for a locally and seasonally-based diet. The goal of this project is to demonstrate that while climate is a limiting factor it can be overcome and a nutritionally balanced, locally and seasonally-based diet are possible. This project is ongoing in order to encompass the entirety of the growing season in Knox County. As a result, this poster reflects data gathered up to September 16, 2006.

Methods

This study was conducted in Knox County, Ohio. Data was collected through a survey developed by the Department of Anthropology at Kenyon College based on work done by Andreatta and Wickliffe (2002) and Brown (2003). Surveys were administered at the Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market; local grocers, farmstands and festivals; and the Knox County Fair. Follow-up interviews were conducted with self-selected respondents and supplemented by weekly observation at the Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market.

Data for the chart of Seasonal Availability in Knox County (Figure 1) was compiled from a weekly record of produce available at the Mt. Vernon Farmer's Market. The nutrient breakdown of these foods was provided by the USDA My Pyramid Tracker website (USDA 2005). "Local" is defined as Knox and adjacent counties by 75% of survey respondents and that definition will be used by this project.



Habanero peppers from the Garden of Don at the Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market.

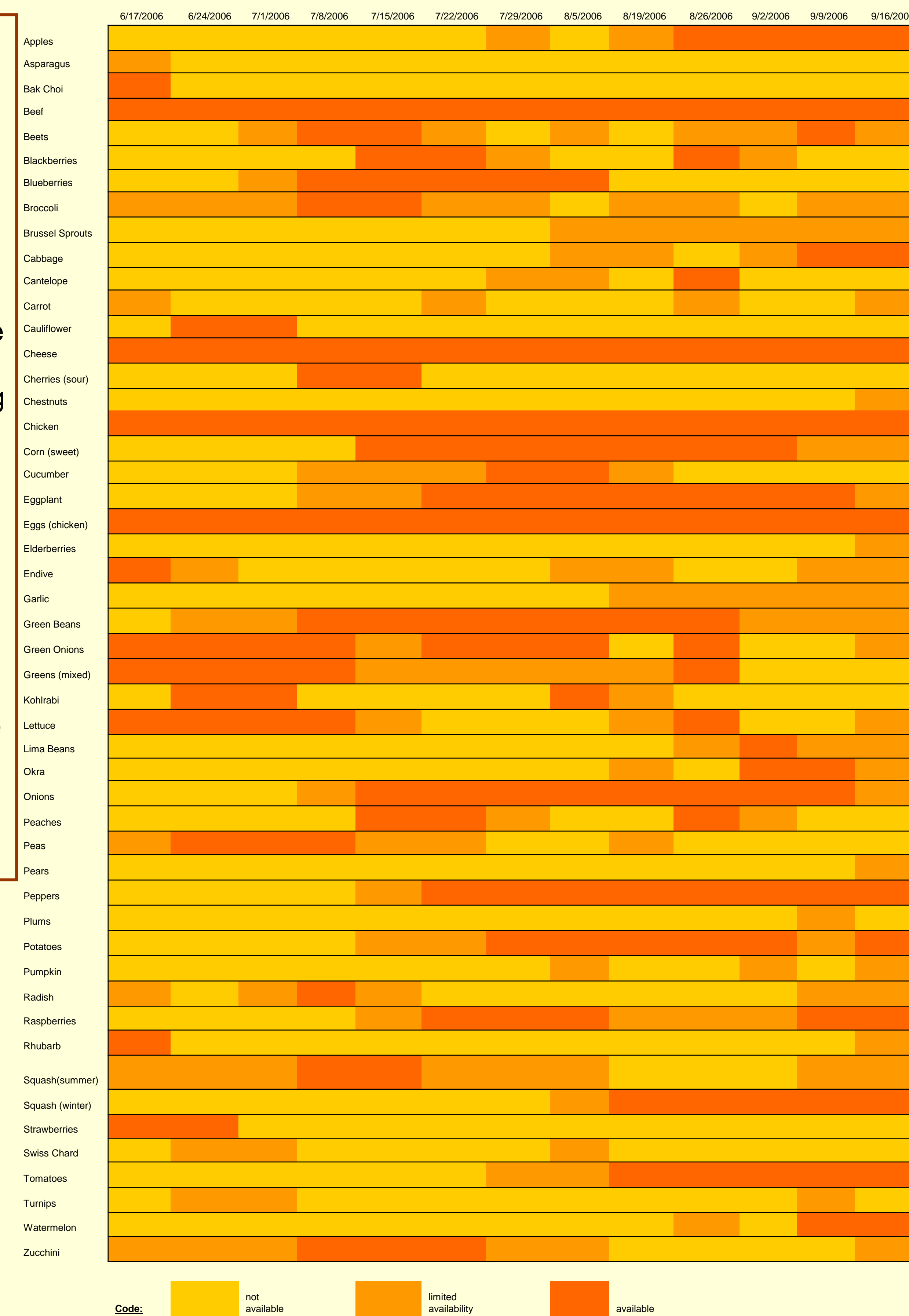


Figure 1: Seasonal Availability in Knox County, Ohio. Data collected from Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market.

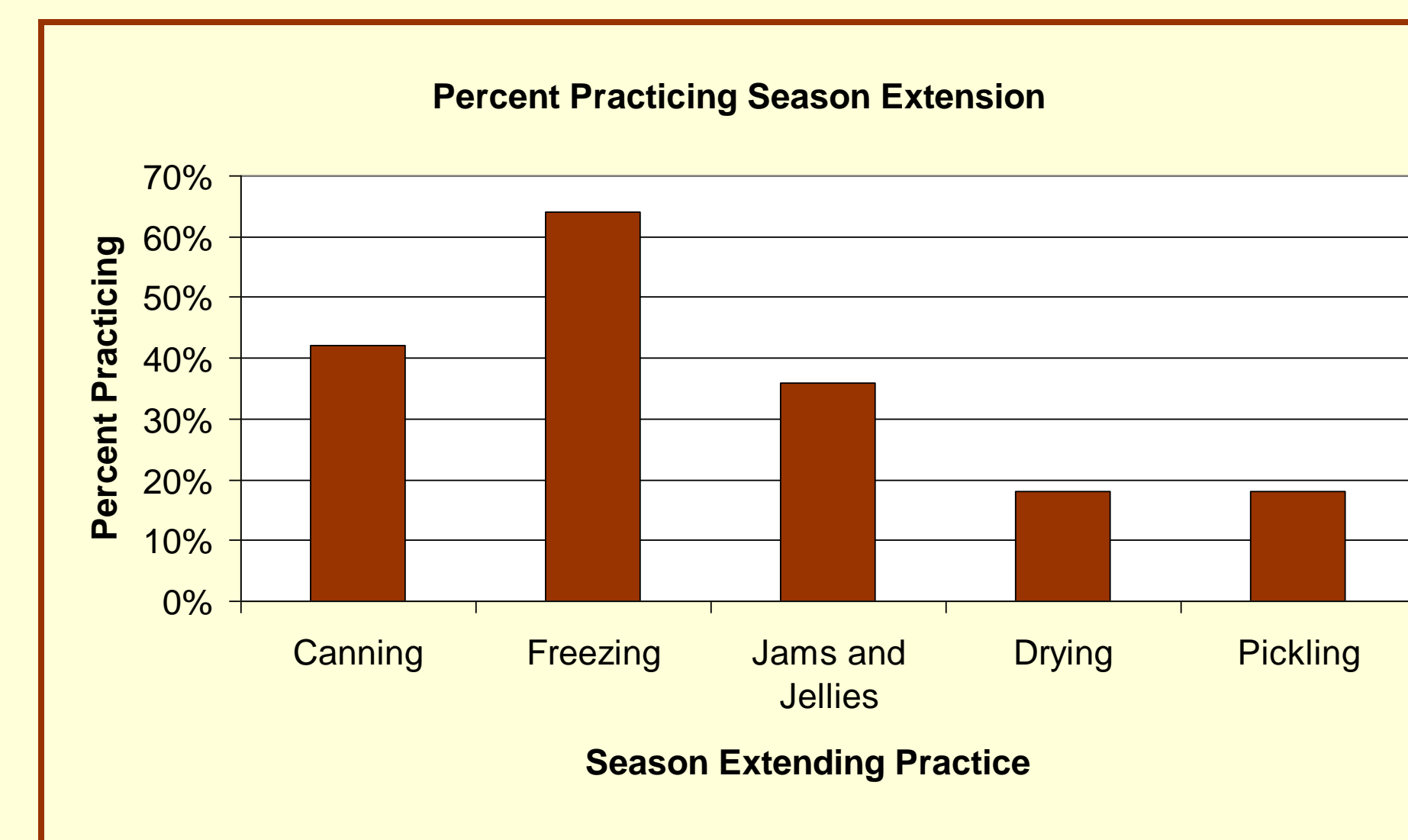


Figure 2: Percent of survey respondents practicing season extending methods. This figure represents the combined market and non-market samples. However, it should be noted that there were differences between the two samples.



Apples from Valley Fruit Farm at the Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market.

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, trends reported here reflect the combined market and non-market sample.

- Survey sample (N) = 115; 67 market, 48 non-market.
- The most frequent age group was 45-54 (30%).
- Females were the most common respondents (65%).
- The most common level of education for the market sample was post-graduate (43%) as opposed to some college (35%) for the non-market sample.
- Over 75% cared where there food was grown and who grew it.
- Over 80% would be interested in buying local products beyond the traditional growing season.
- Follow-up interviews reinforced the demand for year-round availability.
- 37% practiced methods of season extension (Figure 2).

Discussion

At the height of the growing season, nutrients are adequately available. These nutrients can continue to be utilized throughout the year if proper food storage techniques are employed. Figure 3 provides an example of what a meal made from preserved local foods would look like, as well as the availability of three essential nutrients within the meal (Figures 4, 5, 6). Of these three nutrients, only one, protein, meets the Recommended Daily Allotment (RDA). However, this is just one meal of a typical three per day. If similarly balanced meals were eaten, the RDAs can be met.

Maintaining such a nutritionally balanced and locally based diet throughout the year requires knowledge both of seasonal availability and practice of food storage methods. Given that time, knowledge, and material resources are limiting factors for such behaviors, and that there is strong public interest in a year-round local market, it is suggested that such a market be established.

Changes must go beyond availability. Food and the act of eating need to be reconceptualized. Interviewees stated that while they believed a year-round local diet was possible, they saw it as a daunting task. Public education on the benefits of a local and seasonal diet is necessary. People need to be encouraged to think of their diets not in terms of convenience, but as an act which ties them to the region in which they live (Wilkins 1996; Gussow and Clancy 1986).

Local, Seasonal Sample Meal for Knox County, Ohio

- Pumpkin Soup
Local: Pumpkin, Milk
- Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic
Local: Green Beans, Garlic
- Potatoes Au Gratin
Local: Potatoes, Cheese, Milk
- Roast Beef with Herb Rub
Local: Beef, Herbs
- Apple Pie
Local: Apples

Figure 3: Sample Menu utilizing foods which are available in Knox County and can be preserved through the winter.



Beets and Turnips from "the Dollar Man" at the Mt. Vernon Farmers' Market

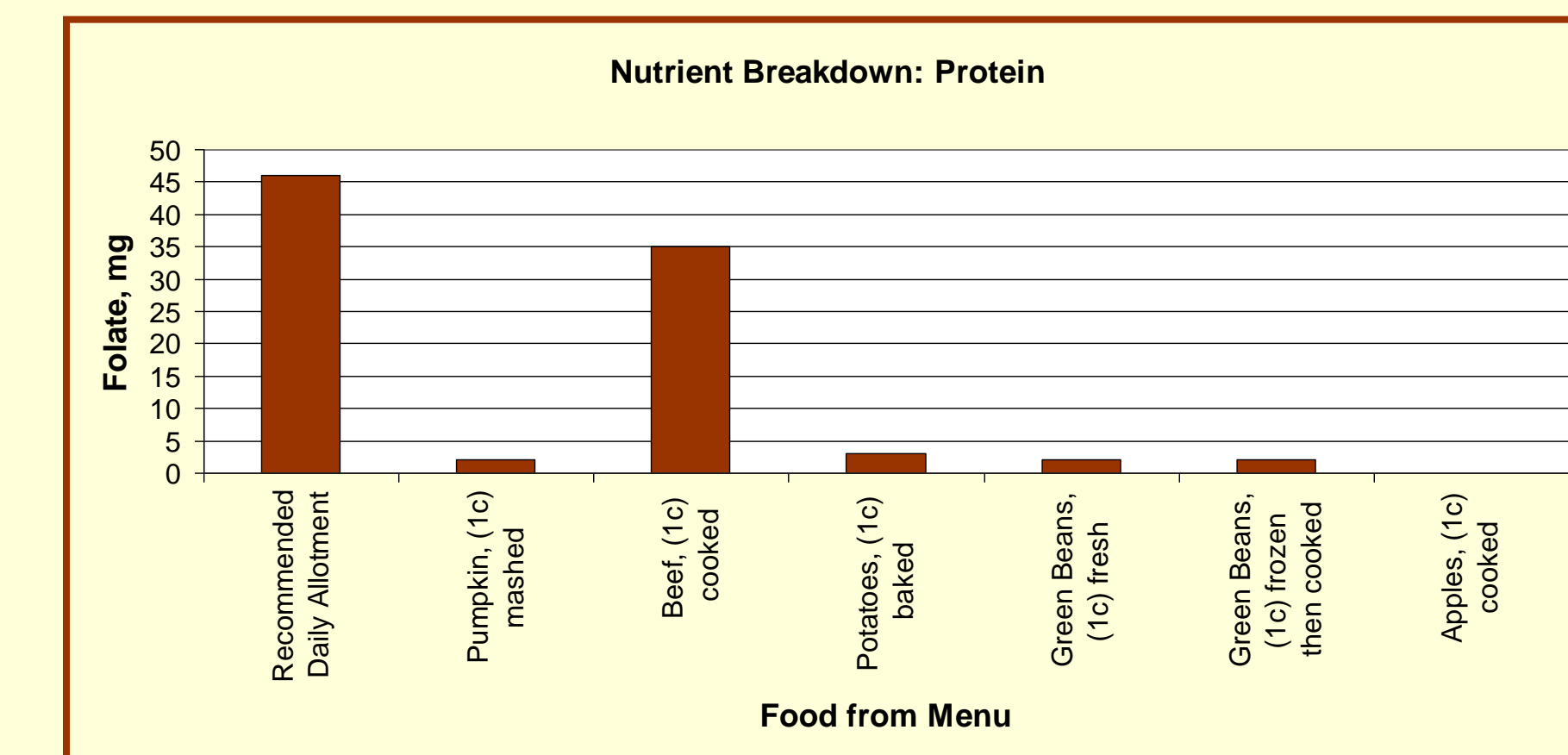


Figure 4: Protein content by food item in sample meal (USDA 2005).

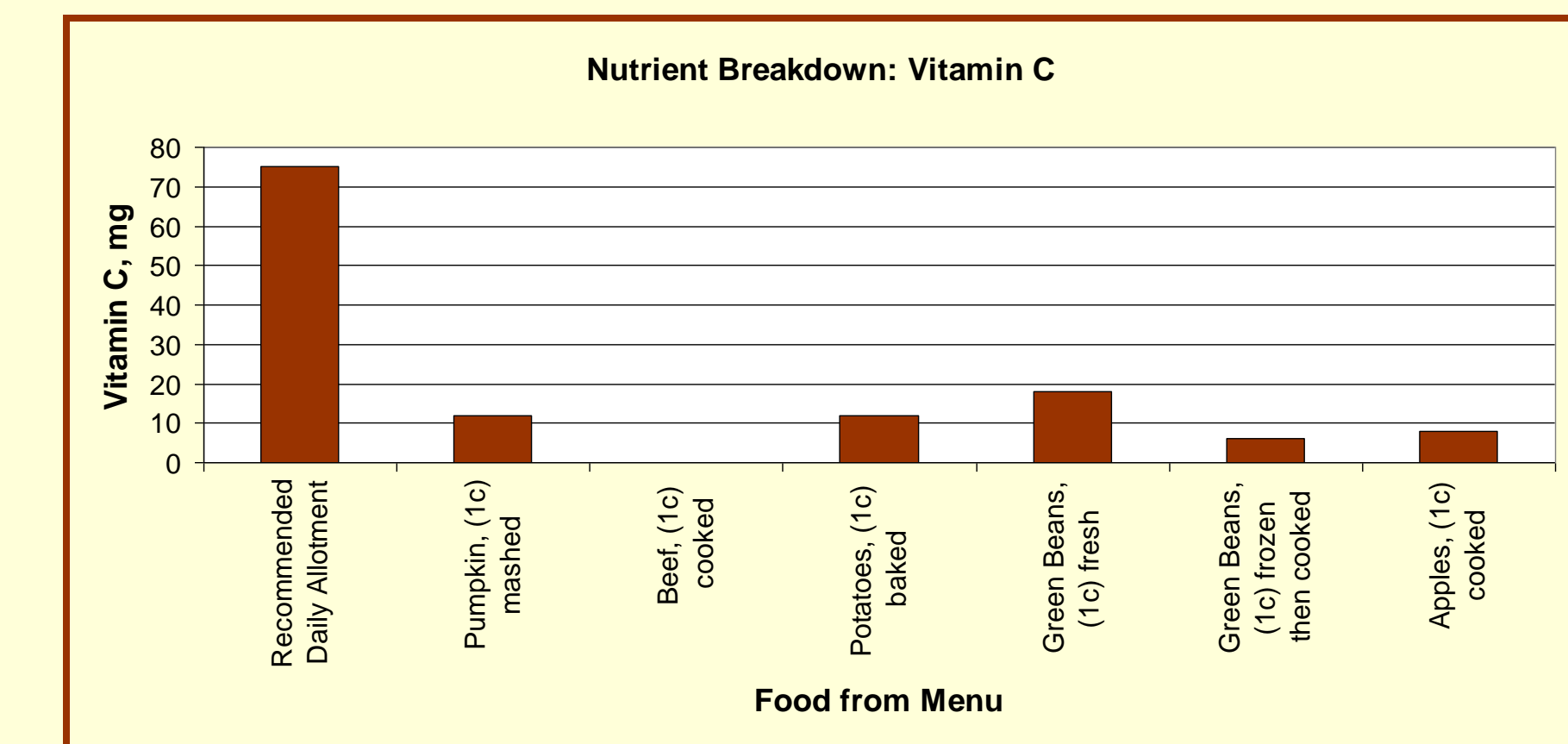


Figure 5: Vitamin C content by food item in sample meal (USDA 2005).

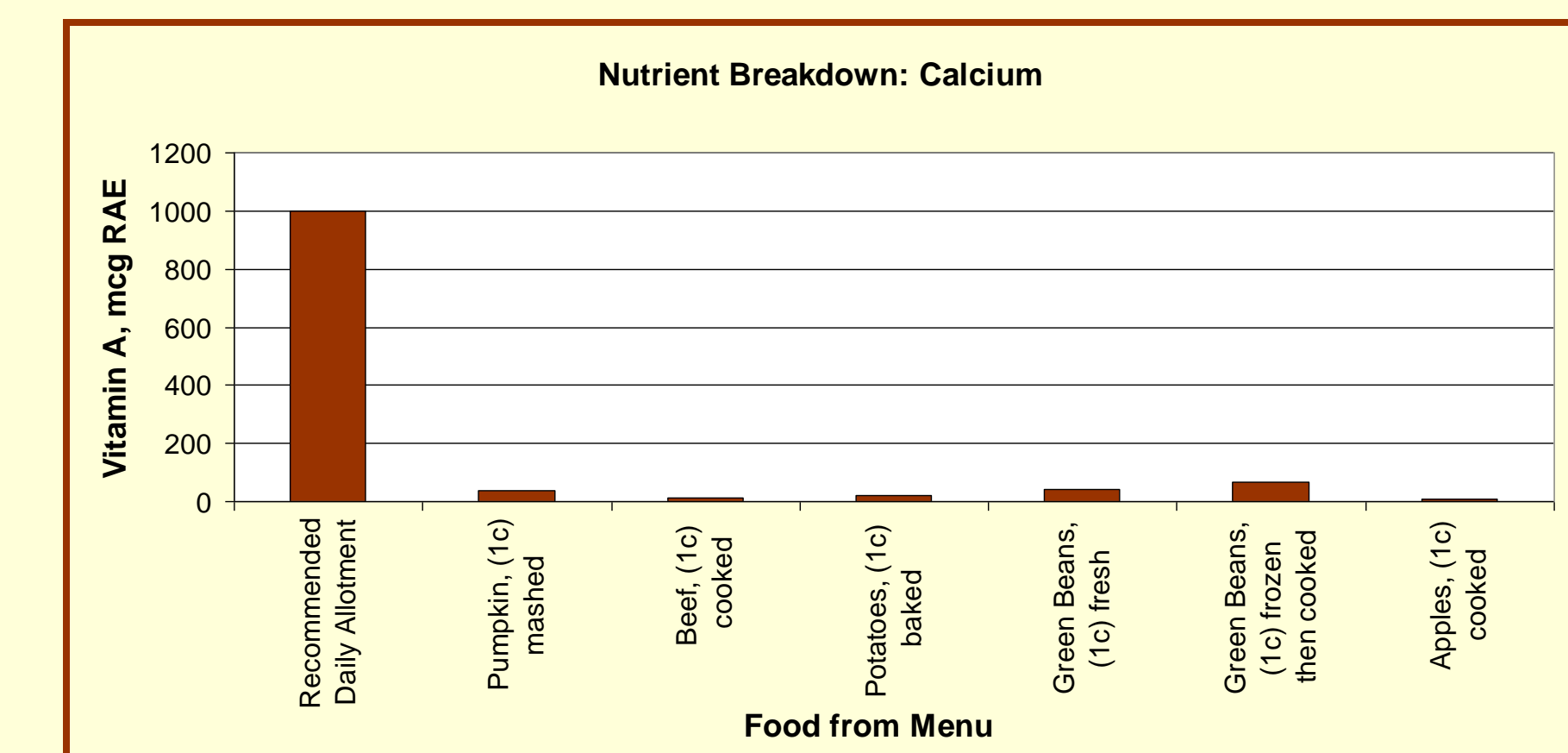


Figure 6: Calcium content by food item in sample meal (USDA 2005).

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