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## South Carolina Hash

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### **Hash, South Carolina**

In South Carolina, hash ("barbecue hash" in some places) takes the place of honor held by Brunswick stew in Georgia and Virginia and burgoo in Kentucky. Like both Brunswick stew and burgoo, South Carolina hash is widely regarded as an accompaniment to barbecue. Like other stews, hash has a long history and holds an important place as a food of congregation. By the colonial period, hash was a stew made from small pieces of roasted meat of any kind, cooked down with onions, herbs, and vinegar water.

Served over rice (or sometimes grits), hash varies in terms of specific ingredients from one cook to the

next. Broadly speaking, there are three major hash types in South Carolina, corresponding to the state's primary geographic regions. Hash from the Lowcountry consists of several deboned hogsheds, supplemented with organ meats like pork liver, cooked in a stock that favors tomato and ketchup. Vegetables can include onions, corn, and potatoes. Hash from the midlands consists primarily of higher-quality cuts of pork, onions, and a mustard-based stock. Finally, Upcountry hash is largely beef-based, with no dominant ketchup, vinegar, or mustard-based stock. This hash most resembles the camp stews or hunter's stews of the early 19th century. Its ingredients are normally limited to beef, onions, butter, and a variety of seasonings.

Any mention of stew ingredients yields opportunities to discuss issues of socioeconomic class, since most stew recipes ultimately come from rural folk traditions. The transformation of very common ingredients into exceptional stews is a theme integral to the story of hash making.

Hash makers from communities throughout South Carolina—much like the burgoo makers of Owensboro and other Kentucky towns—have developed recipes that are a source of immense local pride. Hash consumers tend to be loyal to a certain hash maker or at least develop preferences for certain types of hash. In general, folks who prefer mustard-based hash do not consider ketchup- or vinegar-based hash to their liking and vice versa. In addition, the consistency of the hash is a defining characteristic. In this regard, hash can

be separated into two basic categories: hash with meat that has been processed in a grinder and hash with meat that has been "pulled." The latter results in hash with a stringy, more irregular consistency—much different from hash cooked with ground meat.

While many hash makers still cook in the large, cast-iron pots that have been a part of the cooking tradition for generations, some have opted to go with similarly sized stainless steel or aluminum pots. The quality of the hash produced in such pots is at issue for many hash makers. Some feel that hash produced in cast-iron pots over a wood-fed fire is of the best quality. Similar sentiment is found among many who make burgoo, Brunswick stew, bogs, and muddles.

While many rural fire departments, agricultural clubs, and other civic organizations cook hash several times a year for community fund-raisers, the most prolific producers of South Carolina hash are locally owned barbecue restaurants, many of which developed from family "shade tree" cooking traditions. These families traditionally cooked barbecue and hash for reunions or celebratory occasions like the Fourth of July, but found that demand was high enough to warrant a full-time venture.

Whether through restaurants, clubs, or churches, groups of all sizes—from families to whole communities—are involved in the hash making process. Over time, people maintain, adapt, and reform these local traditions. Hash masters, like their stewmaster contemporaries in neighboring states, typically go to great lengths to retain the uniqueness

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of both their recipes and their cooking techniques.

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