

GRILLED SAUSAGE AND SUMMER SQUASH

Adapted from kalynskitchen.com

4 medium zucchini/summer squash	¼ c finely chopped fresh parsley
4 Tbsp olive oil, divided	2 Tbsp capers
salt and pepper	3 Tbsp lemon juice
5 links Italian sausage (mild or hot)	½ tsp garlic powder
¼ c finely chopped fresh mint	½ tsp onion powder

1. Preheat grill to medium-high heat.
2. Cut each squash into six pieces lengthwise. Toss with 2 Tbsp olive oil, salt, and pepper.
3. Put sausage and squash on the grill. Grill about 18 minutes, turning several times with tongs, until sausage feels firm and is lightly browned, and squash is tender and starting to brown.
4. Combine herbs, capers, lemon juice, remaining olive oil, garlic powder, and onion powder.
5. When sausage and squash are cooked through, remove from grill and slice into 1-inch slices. Toss with lemon and herb mixture.
6. Serve hot with extra lemon if desired.

BOK CHOY SLAW

Adapted from sinfulnutrition.com

1 bunch baby bok choy	1 Tbsp lime juice
1 large carrot, grated	1 Tbsp olive oil
1 clove garlic, minced	½ Tbsp honey
1 Tbsp tamari	¼ tsp crushed red pepper
2 Tbsp rice wine vinegar	¼ c crushed almonds

1. Rinse and chop bok choy into thin strips. Add to large bowl.
2. Grate carrot and add to bok choy.
3. In a small bowl, add remaining ingredients except almonds, and whisk to combine.
4. Pour dressing mixture over vegetables and stir until thoroughly mixed.
5. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes.
6. Transfer mixture to a serving bowl, and top with crushed almonds.



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Squash: It's the first summer squash of the season! All summer squash and zucchini can be used interchangeably. Store unwashed in a perforated plastic bag in the vegetable bin of your fridge. They should keep for more than a week.

Cucumber: You can eat both pickling and slicing cucumbers fresh, but pickling ones are (of course) better for pickle-making. Refrigerate in a sealed plastic bag in the crisper for up to a week. Keep them away from tomatoes, apples and citrus, which accelerate their ripening.

Cabbage: They have remarkable storage capacity. Keep dry and unwashed in the veggie bin of your fridge. If the outer leaves lose firmness, remove and discard. Once cut, wrap in sealed plastic bag and continue to refrigerate; it should keep for several weeks more.

Candy Onions: These fresh onions are not yet cured, so you can store on the counter or put in the fridge like we do! Sweet and crunchy, they can be used similar to a Vidalia or Walla Walla variety.

Basil: Basil is very sensitive to cold and will blacken if exposed to refrigerator temperatures. Keep basil in a glass of water on the kitchen counter. Or, place your basil bunch in a plastic bag with air in it (like a balloon) and refrigerate. The air buffers the chilled temps.

Is Bigger Better?

When I think of my travels to the Midwest of the US, I remember images of the vast, open crop fields and grain elevators. This large-scale, industrial agriculture is considered the norm to food production, but was what I was seeing considered agriculture at its best? Sure, the efficiencies and scale of these operations were unimaginable a few decades ago, but is it better? What have we gained, and lost, in the industrialization of our food supply?

First, to be clear, I do not have firsthand knowledge about how our country's conventional food machine works, but in my work with the National Organic Standards Board and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, I was exposed to the generalities of how various agricultural commodities are raised and marketed. Corn is corn, soybeans are soybeans, with miniscule variations in production practices. Each protein commodity (beef, chicken, eggs, milk, pork, turkey) that utilizes these feed grains has scientifically-based protocols with respect to nutrition, animal housing/welfare, herd health, etc. that must be followed for the products to be accepted by the processors. To their credit, the industry does wean more pigs per litter, get more milk per cow, and collect more eggs per pound of grain fed every year. The science and technology is verified, if not developed by, federally- and state-supported research funds. Yes, it may be better for the bottom line, but is it always better for our societal and individual health?

The farmers that are caught up in the industrialization of the global food supply may feel they have no choice but to participate in the big machine that feeds the world. They are not bad people with no regard for the environment or their animals—quite the opposite. These farm families care for the land and animals, day in and day out, and pass this reverence to the next generation. They are highly leveraged small business owners, highly skilled individuals operating self-driving tractors with GPS positioning guidance systems, with monitors and meters to use just the right amount of inputs. They know the value of hard work and how to change a flat tire in the rain or mud—whatever is needed to get the job done. But on a trip to Wisconsin, I drove for hours through great expanse where huge tractors looked like Matchbox toys in the distance, with the ground brown and bare from chemical denuding of the soil. I witnessed many abandoned homesteads, while the land surrounding them is being farmed by fewer individuals that can afford to stay in the game. The consolidation of the supply of seeds and other “necessary” inputs, market consolidation, and America's cheap-food policy has left countless farm families abandoned. Is this better?

Those few farmers who remain have very few marketing options, and are compelled to take whatever price the buyers are paying. The pay price has little to

do with the cost of production—the 99-cent value meal restaurants and low-low-price retailers determine the farmer's pay. Farmers' livelihoods are therefore at the mercy of the weather in Brazil, futures trading, hedge fund managers, and international currency markets. The farmers have risked millions, and are willing to wait for their paycheck, because they want to stay on the land. It seems dangerous when retail policy drives farm policy. Is it really better for national security to have our food supply subject to the caprices of a few multinational corporations?

The US Department of Agriculture helps stabilize this market by purchasing huge volumes of these commodities, then uses the food to address hunger problems, as with the free and reduced school lunch program. It's true that cheap food allows people to spend more on their other needs, but somewhere along the way, we forgot to evaluate the quality of these foods, not just boast of the quantity.

Chicken, turkey and most pork is vertically integrated, meaning the whole production system is divvied out to contractors by one entity. This one entity controls the breeding, feeding, housing, animal-welfare standards, processing, and marketing, to deliver the products to the retailers and food service providers. In poultry, for example, the farmer invests their own money to build the buildings to the specifications of the company, which supplies the birds and feed. The finished birds turn out quite similar from one farm to the next, so the processing equipment can efficiently break them down into the various parts, without being touched by human hands. Production and processing protocols are proprietary info, so the consumer can't help but be ignorant of how the chicken ended up on their plate. Is this better for the customer?

Is it better for the animals? Commercial dairy cows produce milk for 2-3 years; organic cows produce less milk per day, but give milk for 7-10 years. Commercial dairy cows may get milked three times per day by a robotic milker, consuming a high grain ration with little roughage, while organic dairy cows get their nutrition by feeding themselves on pasture, and they are handled with care during milking. Out west, you can smell hog or poultry facilities from afar, without ever seeing an animal, but when the critters are outside, nature ameliorates the odors. You have to scrub in and scrub out to spend time in a commercial hog barn— that's eerie.

Here in the verdant hills of Kentucky, our cattle get everything they need to provide us with certified-organic, grass-fed beef using no sophisticated inputs. Our soil supports vegetables feeding off the natural nutrients made available to them. These days, anyone who eats is inevitably connected to the industrialized food machine. Yet, each person holds the power of their food choices, and collectively, that power can make change. When you purchase organic corn chips to go with your guacamole, the retailer will order more organic. Know that your dollars have the power to redefine “better” in the food industry. —Mac Stone