JaMeSToWn SeTTleRS traded for food with the Virginia tribes. Still, many did not survive “the starving years.” Today, Virginia abounds with farms and fruit orchards, and the state is famous for products such as dry-cured ham, peanuts, and apples.

Enslaved Virginians and, later, African Americans farmers grew common West African crops, such as black-eyed peas, yams, and peanuts, to supplement their diets. They are still grown, prepared, and enjoyed today.

The circumstances of the new country led to the creation of new dishes. Many Virginians claim that their ancestors invented Brunswick stew, a rich combination of meats, corn, and other vegetables. Wild foods, such as dandelion greens and mushrooms, once gathered by settlers out of necessity, have gained favor with gourmets.

English culinary traditions are different from those of Virginia. They include “afternoon tea”—often a whole meal in itself. The cuisine of Kent, England, like that of Virginia, has been influenced by more recent immigrants. Virginia restaurants now serve authentic dishes from Mexico, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. Indian and Pakistani curry houses are common in Kent.

(Right center) Preserving food by canning has been a tradition in rural Virginia households for generations.  Photo courtesy DLA/Virginia Tech

(Right) Kentish cherries, such as these prizewinners at the 2006 Kent County Show, are just one of the fruits for which the English county is famous.  Photo by Betty J. Belanus, Smithsonian Institution

(Left) The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries yield many types of seafood, such as these blue crabs at a “picking house” in Poquoson, Virginia.  Photo by Harold Anderson

(Below) The origins of Brunswick stew are hotly contested by Brunswick County, Virginia, and Brunswick County, Georgia. Virginia “stewmasters” have no doubt that the commonwealth invented the dish.  Photo by Morgan Miller