



Calculating Holiday Meal Yields

by Rocky Dunnam, CEC, CDM, CFPP

PURCHASING AND
PREPARING THE
RIGHT AMOUNT OF
HOLIDAY FOODS

This time of year comes with many stresses that seem to be inevitable. Questions like, *How many people are we feeding?* and *What if unexpected guests show up?* creep into our heads. The holiday meal that you surely nailed last year won't work the same this year. As we consider how many people will be attending our get-together, or the number of coworkers at the holiday luncheon, we want to tackle one of the biggest fears and possibly the most-asked questions of many kitchen masters. Of course I'm talking about the thought of running out of food, or ending up with way too many leftovers that you have to throw out (which is just as bad).

How do we accurately calculate servings when there are so many variables? Who's eating—are they adults, kids, light eaters, or NFL athletes? What if some unexpected guests

show up right when the food is being served? At that point, it's entirely too late to roast another turkey or bake another sweet potato casserole. As the preparer of the meal, you are responsible for ensuring that each guest is served enough food to force an early afternoon nap. This





kind of pressure can really stress you out! I'll break down some numbers so you can take the guesswork out of your holiday meal planning and prepare just the right amount of fare.

TURKEY

The turkey draws the most questions simply because not everyone makes turkey very often. Typically this bird is roasted for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, and then not cooked again until next year. So by lack of familiarity, it's really a guessing game in terms of what to purchase for many people. On top of that, we all know that we roast a whole bird, but eat only the meat (leaving a large carcass that weighs something).

Over the last five to six years of cooking anywhere from 20-40 turkeys each holiday season, I've become very familiar with the process. Let's simplify things a bit using the experience of trial and error so you can crush it the first time.

First, keep this number in mind: *one*. Rest easy knowing that you can serve one guest per pound of whole turkey and possibly have some leftovers, but not too much. How many people will a 15 lb. turkey feed? Well, with this rule of thumb, you'll easily feed 15 people. If you want to get real technical though, you can do some math yourself. A good yield for turkey is 53 percent, assuming that you know what you're doing when you debone the bird. You'll get about 8.48 ounces of edible turkey per pound of whole

AS THE PREPARER of a meal, you're responsible for ensuring each guest is served enough food...I've done the calculating so you can take the guesswork out of your holiday meal planning.

bird. But who wants to do that entire math formula? Let's just go with the 1:1 ratio of 1 serving per 1 pound of raw whole turkey.

HAM

Ham is different to figure than turkey. First you need to decide whether you'll serve bone-in or boneless ham on your menu. Now you've got a little work to figure out yields. For boneless, it's much easier to determine because the entire ham is edible. Estimating that each person will eat 6-8 ounces of protein, you'll feed two guests per pound of ham. Calculating bone-in ham yields is a little

Continued on page 18



more intricate. Depending on the size of the ham, the size of the bone within will vary. Then, the shape of the bone itself is tricky to cut around, leaving a differing yield even from one cook to another. You can (nearly every time) determine your yield at about 1-1.5 servings/pound. Typically I use the same rule of thumb for bone-in ham as I do for turkey, which gets me really close.

MASHED POTATOES

How many potatoes do I need to serve 10 people? You're asking the wrong question. Because there are more than 4,000 varieties of potatoes worldwide, many of which vary drastically in size, you need to ask how many pounds instead. Obviously there are other ingredients to factor in, too. Many people add dairy like cream, milk, and



cheese. Some mix in bacon, ham, herbs, etc. as well. All of these add volume to the finished mash. But there is a great rule of thumb to consider when you go to purchase raw potatoes (which are conveniently sold by the pound, so you'll easily determine proper amounts). Remember that you will serve two to three people per pound. With minimal additional ingredients, you'll be closer to the two people per pound mark. When you add a multitude of other ingredients, you will serve closer to three people per pound. It's awesome to note that this same philosophy works when you're making sweet potato casserole.

GRAVY

Why is there *always* too much gravy? Gravy is one of those items that is going to be, at best, an educated guess most times. I say 'educated' because you still need to use a rational train of thought to avoid running out or preparing way too much. We cannot think of gravy in the same

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terms that we think about proteins and sides. You can't just assume that each guest will have X amount of gravy, because each person adjusts to preference (or the lack of moisture in your overcooked turkey). I typically plan for one-third cup of gravy per person. Luckily for us, basic gravy is simply stock, flour, and butter that can be prepared on the fly or quickly used to increase the overall volume of your gravy if you anticipate that you'll run out.

Continued on page 20

VEGETABLES

Some serve carrots, others like green beans, and yet others serve entirely different vegetable choices that most would consider non-traditional. Regardless of the vegetable though, the serving size is pretty consistent. You'll want to aim towards four servings per pound of vegetables. And because most vegetables are sold by the pound, you'll easily recognize that a one-pound bag of carrots will serve four people. Simple, right?

SUMMING IT UP

Once you have a firm grasp on the yields or number of servings you get from various food types, you'll begin to use this knowledge to your advantage. The other line of thought is to simply purchase more than enough and anticipate leftovers. However, if you can safely and accurately determine a proper yield—or close to it—then you prevent an abundance of leftovers, saving time and money. **E**



Cheat Sheet

to help you in planning your holiday meal.

	SERVING	WEIGHT
Whole Turkey	1 serving	1 lb; raw
Boneless Ham	2 servings	1 lb; cured
Bone-in Ham	1 to 1.5 servings	1 lb; raw
Mashed Potatoes	2-3 servings	1 lb; raw potato
Vegetables	4 servings	1 lb
Gravy	1 serving	1/3 cup; stock
Pumpkin Pie	8 servings	1, 9-in pie



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Risky Business: CDC Risk Factor Alert

Webinar Presenter:
Colleen Zenk, MS, CDM, CFPP, CFP



The CDC identifies five common factors that contribute to foodborne illness. These categories are termed by the FDA as "foodborne illness risk factors," and most foodborne illness can be attributed to at least one of them. Health department officials focus on these risk factors when conducting inspections or surveys, so it's important that the foodservice practices in your operation are designed to minimize or eliminate these risks.



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Review Questions

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- How many people will a 15 lbs. raw, whole turkey feed?
 - 30
 - 10
 - 15
- Why does it matter if you use bone-in or boneless ham?
 - Yield is different for each
 - Not everyone eats the bone
 - It's harder to cook boneless ham
- How many servings of mashed potatoes come from one pound of potatoes?
 - 5-10
 - 2-3
 - 12
- What's a good serving size for gravy?
 - 1/2 cup
 - 1/3 cup
 - 1 cup
- One pound of what vegetable serves four people?
 - Carrots
 - Green beans
 - Both A and B
- On average, how much protein will a person eat at a meal?
 - 6-8 ounces
 - Three steaks
 - Two cups
- What are the ingredients in basic gravy?
 - Giblets, butter, bacon
 - Stock, flour, butter
 - Jus, salt, pepper

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If you're looking for great new recipes to make your seasonal meals extra festive, you'll find them in the Holiday Recipe Box. Spice up your table with Halloween Pumpkin Stew, Cranberry Salad, Chocolate Peppermint Dessert, Grandma's Gingerbread Cookies, Polar Star Cookies, Amazing Holiday Punch, and much more.



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