

# WHAT'S COOKING, UNCLE SAM?

THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFECT ON THE AMERICAN DIET



A TRAVELING  
EXHIBITION OF  
RECORDS FROM THE  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES



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# INTRODUCTION

"What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?" is a traveling exhibition of eclectic records from the National Archives of the United States with one thing in common: they were produced in the course of Federal Government efforts to ensure that Americans enjoy an ample, safe, and nutritious diet. Spanning the Revolutionary War to the late 1900s, these letters, photographs, pamphlets, posters, films, and radio programs echo many of our current concerns about government's role in the health and safety of our food supply.



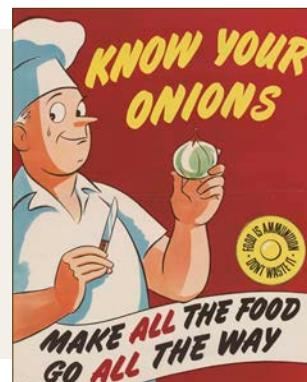
"What's Cooking" explores four areas of government activities: Farm, Factory, Kitchen, and Table. Farm introduces the vital links between changing agricultural processes and our diet. Factory shows that the U.S. Government began protecting us from unsafe foods in the Industrial Age of the late 1800s. Kitchen reveals the importance of Government-sponsored research, how our knowledge of nutrition has expanded, and how our eating habits have been influenced by world events. Table investigates the effects of military food, school lunches, and Presidential preferences on daily dinner tables.



Farm family relaxing in field, undated  
National Archives, Records of the United States Information Agency

Visitors to this exhibition will

- Learn about the battles against tainted ketchup, inferior tea, and imitation butter
- Gain insight into Americans' complex and conflicted relationship with food
- Appreciate the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the Government has affected what Americans eat



(left) "Know Your Onions" poster, ca. 1943  
National Archives, Records of the Office of Government Reports

(right) Nutrition guide, ca. 1945  
National Archives, Records of the Office of Government Report

## Highlights

- Four audio/video kiosks displaying lively compilations of archival footage with optional closed captioning
- Upton Sinclair's letter to President Theodore Roosevelt about the meatpacking industry
- Queen Elizabeth II's letter to President Dwight Eisenhower and enclosed recipe for scones
- A Bureau of Fisheries poster explaining why Americans should "Eat the Carp"

# SPECIFICATIONS

Size: Approximately 3,000 square feet

Rental Fee: \$45,000 for 3 months

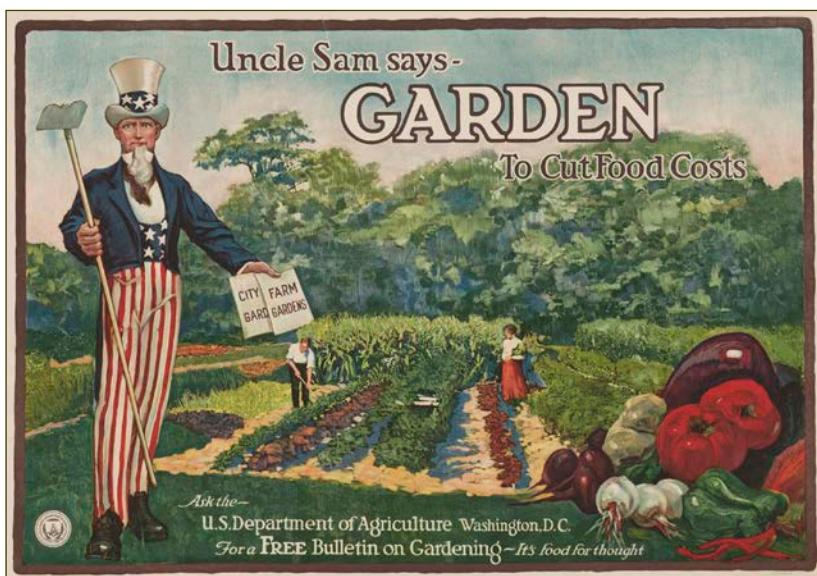
## Support:

- National Archives professional staff lead onsite installation and de-installation
- Print-ready press and marketing materials including logos, rights-free images, brochure and rack card, and press releases
- Invitation to link to [www.archives.gov/exhibits/whats-cooking](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/whats-cooking). Catalog, cookbook and a variety of wholesale products designed for “What’s Cooking, Uncle Sam?” available for resale
- Sample programs, marketing, and social media

## Requirements

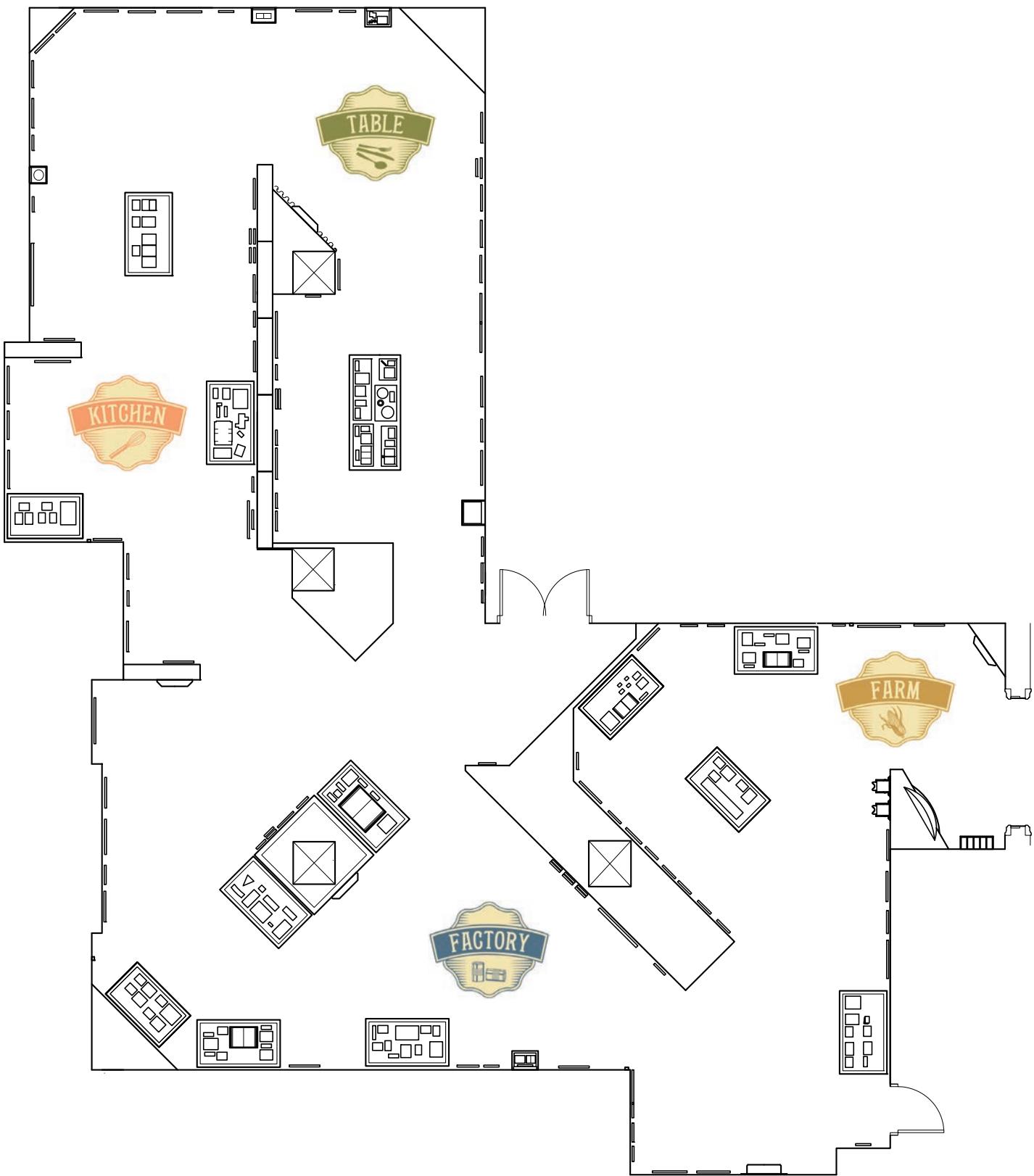
- The highest environmental and security standards, including 24-hour guards  
(Please see <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/borrowing-materials.html> for additional information)
- Insurance for all loan items under an all-risk, wall-to-wall fine arts policy

Because of preservation protocols, alternative original documents and artifacts will be offered for each venue.

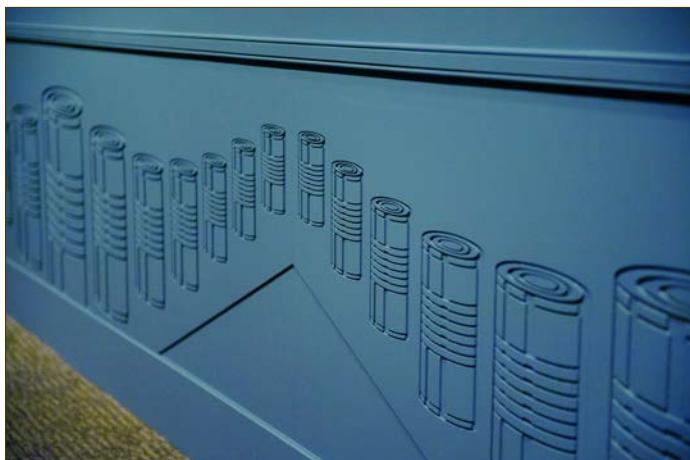


World War I poster,  
ca. 1917  
National Archives,  
Publications of the  
U.S. Government

# FLOOR PLAN AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



# EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGH



Views of "What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?" as installed at the National Archives Building in Washington DC



## SECTION 1: FARM

From local 4-H programs to omnibus farm bills, a wide variety of government activities influence what American farmers grow, how they grow it, and how much they earn selling it. As a major industry in the United States, agriculture has naturally been closely monitored by the Government. The number of Americans living on farms has declined from 90 percent in 1810 to between 2 and 3 percent today; the importance of agriculture, and the attendant government involvement in it, has not diminished. Foreign seed and plant introduction, seed distribution, agricultural experiment stations, farmer outreach programs, and crop and market controls are some of the topics covered in this section.

Display elements include:

- Exquisite watercolor illustrations of fruit varieties from the early 1900s
- Seed packets, photographs, and records of the seed distribution program
- Facsimile stereographs of an Apache Indian farm with viewers at two heights
- A model refrigerated railroad car
- Petitions, mug shots, and prison records related to the "Oleo Margarine Gang"
- Full-color original World War II-era farming posters
- Audio recording of Pete Seeger singing, "We've Gotta Save the OPA"
- A large color lenticular mural depicting the transformation of agriculture



(above) "The Pig Cafeteria", undated, *National Archives, Records of the Secretary of Agriculture*

(left) A view of the Farm section as installed at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC



## SECTION 2: FACTORY

The Industrial Revolution transformed life for many 19th-century Americans. Factories brought jobs, urban living, and a new relationship with food. City-dwellers became increasingly removed from the source of their food, leaving them more vulnerable to mishandled and adulterated products. The Bureau of Chemistry—predecessor to the Food and Drug Administration—examined foods that endangered the health and lives of Americans in the mid- to late-1800s. After passing the Pure Food and Drugs Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906, the Government had adopted a new role: protecting consumers.

Display elements include:

- Food adulteration investigator's notebook
- Harvey Wiley's "Poison Squad" records
- Upton Sinclair's 1906 Letter to President Theodore Roosevelt
- Satirical English postcards mocking the American meatpacking industry
- Food label lithographs from the 1880s to 1906
- Documents and photos related to tea inspection
- A receipt for "portable soup" from the Lewis and Clark Expedition
- Clarence Birdseye's patent for a frozen food processing machine



(above) British postcard, circa 1906, *National Archives, General Records of The Department of State*

(left) View of the Factory section as installed at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC



## SECTION 3: KITCHEN

In his crusade to improve the nutritional quality of meals produced in American kitchens, Uncle Sam has funded groundbreaking research, deployed an army of home economists into kitchens and classrooms, and plastered public spaces with pie charts and pyramids. In the 1890s, pioneering researcher Wilbur Atwater concluded that Americans ate too much fat and didn't get enough exercise. His research launched what would become a long progression of nutrition guides and Government efforts to improve the nutrition of Americans. But pitted against cultural traditions, advertising, and socioeconomic forces, the quest to change American eating habits has been an uphill battle.

Display elements include:

- Documentary photographs of Dr. Atwater's studies
- Nutrition guides and posters from 1916 to 1942
- Bureau of Fisheries posters advising Americans to "Eat the Carp" and other fish
- Beautiful food conservation posters from World Wars I and II
- World War II ration tickets and tokens
- Doughnut Corporation brochure, labels, correspondence, and poster
- Food safety and canning posters
- Food labels and packaging from the 1930s



(above) 4-H Presentation, undated, *National Archives, Records of the Extension Service*

(left) View of the Kitchen section as installed at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC

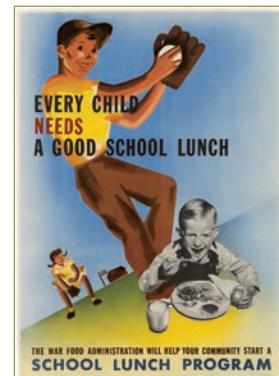


## SECTION 4: TABLE

The most direct way the Government affects what Americans eat is by cooking for them. There are two groups of Americans routinely called to Uncle Sam's table: soldiers and school children. For numerous first-generation Americans, Uncle Sam's cooking was foreign—for example, white bread was a revelation for many children of immigrants. Some came to prefer this "American" food and began to ask for it at home. Uncle Sam sets his most elegant and idiosyncratic table for an elite group: the Presidents of the United States and their guests. Over the years, Americans who wanted to eat in Presidential style—be it highbrow or low—have requested their recipes.

Display elements include:

- A Revolutionary War-era broadside promoting military rations
- Photos and correspondence regarding Civil War rations
- World War II posters encouraging military cooks to keep soldiers healthy
- A Depression-era school lunch poster and photographs
- National School Lunch program recipe cards
- Citizen's letters to various Presidents requesting recipes
- Presidents' favorite recipes
- State Dinner menus
- Queen Elizabeth's letter to President Eisenhower and enclosed recipe for scones
- Reproduction Presidential china



(above) School Lunch Poster, 1944, *National Archives, Records of the Office of Government Reports*

(left) View of the Table section as installed at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC

# SAMPLE PRESS AND MEDIA COVERAGE

"Life Liberty and Carp," *New York Times*, Wednesday, June 1, 2011

"What's Cooking Uncle Sam?: National Archives Reveals How our Government Influences the Way We Eat," *Huffington Post*, July 7, 2011

"New Archives Exhibit Puts Focus on Food," *Wall Street Journal*

"Washington Wire Blog," June 7, 2011

"The Real Founder of Today's Gardening Trend: Uncle Sam?" *the Atlantic*, June 2011

"Our Government's Terrifying Food Ads," *Salon.com*, June 1, 2011

"How Uncle Sam Helps Define America's Diet," *NPR*, Morning Edition, June 7, 2011

"What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?: A Must-See Show at the National Archives," *smithsonianmag.com*, July 27, 2011

"Archives' Exhibit asks 'What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?'" *USA Today*, September 9, 2011



## EXHIBITION CATALOG REVIEW

"This is the terrific catalog of the terrific exhibit now playing at the National Archives." Marion Nestle, *foodpolitics.com*, September 22, 2011



# EXHIBITION CONTACTS

For more information about the exhibit, please contact:

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Website: [www.archives.gov/exhibits/whats-cooking](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/whats-cooking)

## AVAILABLE DATES

February, March, April	2014
June, July, August	2014
October, November, December	2014
February, March, April	2015
June, July, August	2015
October, November, December	2015



# THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WASHINGTON, DC

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the nation's record keeper. It serves American democracy by safeguarding and preserving the records of our Government, ensuring that the people can discover, use, and learn from this documentary heritage. We ensure continuing access to the essential documentation of the rights of American citizens and the actions of their Government.

We support democracy, promote civic education, and facilitate historical understanding of our national experience.



Each year, approximately one million visitors come to the **National Archives Experience**—the public exhibition, learning, and program spaces of the National Archives. The National Archives Experience enables personal interaction with the original records of our democracy through exciting exhibitions and learning opportunities.

