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Xi's 'Taste of Iowa' Dinner Serves Porkfest With Side of Dietary Nightmare

By Stephanie Armour and Jeff Wilson - Feb 15, 2012

The "Taste of Iowa" menu for Chinese Vice President [Xi Jinping](#)'s dinner in [Des Moines](#) tonight isn't going down well with nutritionists. They say bacon- lettuce-and-tomato bites and potatoes stuffed with white cheddar are dietary perils high in calories, sodium and saturated fat.

"It's a celebration of Iowa foods, but this menu is over the top in terms of calories and the amount of food," Margo Wootan, nutrition policy director at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer advocacy group, said in an interview. "There's very little chance you're going to walk out without eating all your day's calories in one meal."

The menu features two meat entrees -- bacon-wrapped pork tenderloin with cider and green peppercorns, and Angus beef tenderloin with a demi glaze and onion ring. Xi and his fellow guests will get a choice of three desserts, including crème apple pie cupcake topped with [Iowa](#) maple syrup frosting, blue cheese drizzled with Iowa honey, and mini Iowa sweet corn cheesecake.

At least there are a few vegetables, Wootan said. The edamame and corn salad pairs the Asian-prepared soybean with the largest U.S. crop. Xi stayed in 1985 with an Iowa family as part of a delegation to study corn technology.

Pork tenderloin is a wise choice because it's the leanest cut, she said.

"But why are they wrapping it in bacon?" Wootan said. "Wrapping it in bacon is counterproductive. Bacon and other processed meat are the fifth-leading source of saturated fats."

Pork Queen Reigns

The meal features staples familiar to the 3 million residents of Iowa, where young women compete in January to wear the [Iowa Pork Queen](#) crown. The runner-up becomes the Iowa Pork Princess. At any one time, there are 19 million hogs in Iowa, according to the [state Pork Producers Association](#).

The Iowa menu for Xi also is notable for the sheer quantity of food, said Wootan.

"It's a lot to have appetizers, two courses, dessert, soda, wine and beer," she said. "Even if you have small portions, it's a lot of food."

The diners will be able to wash down their meal with a local beverage imported from [China](#). Des Moines-based Gong Fu Tea was started in 2004 by Mike Feller and Rusty Bishop, who were roommates at [Iowa State University](#).

They import mostly from China and [India](#) and sell in all 50 states from their website. Their sales have increased every year, Feller said. He said Xi's return to Iowa should be good for his company's nationwide sales.

Tea for Xi

"The vice president's visit will also help to improve the image of the state and should help to increase business opportunities," Feller said.

The dinner reflects food grown and raised in a state where residents are more likely than most Americans to be obese and overweight -- and to eat fewer fruits and vegetables, according to the [website](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

More than one in four deaths in Iowa are caused by [heart disease](#). Eighty percent of Iowans ate fruit and vegetables less than five times a day, more than the U.S. average of 76 percent, according to the CDC. And about 65 percent of residents are overweight or obese, compared to the U.S. average of 63 percent.

The percentage of Iowans with diabetes and high [blood pressure](#), however, is below the nationwide percentage, according to the CDC.

The pork on tonight's menu got a robust defense from Jim Thompson, director of producer relations at Eden Pork in Des Moines. The company produces about 14,500 pigs a year, with each taken to a local slaughter plant in Des Moines and hand inspected.

"This is an opportunity for us to open up new markets," Thompson said. "It's great to get our name out as the supplier of pork for this occasion. We produce a high-quality product."

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