All the baking and cooking required during the holiday season, usually gives people the need to have a simple, homemade meal plan.
Enter - the slow cooker!
This week, we will feature some great family-friendly slow cooker meals and side dishes!

Crock-Pot Breakfast Casserole

Prep Time: 15 min.
Total Time: 8 hrs. 30 min.
Servings: 8-10

1 30-oz. pkg. of frozen, shredded hash browns
1-1/2 lb. chorizo sausage
12 eggs
1 C. half and half
1/2 C. sour cream
1-1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. black pepper
1/2 C. chopped red onion
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 jalapeño pepper, chopped
2 C. shredded Mexican four cheese blend
Butter or nonstick spray
Salsa or pico de gallo
Sliced avocado

Let the hash browns sit at room temperature for 30 min. to partially thaw.

Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Add the sausage and break up into small pieces with a wooden spoon. Cook the meat until no pink pieces remain, 6 to 8 min. Transfer to a paper towel lined plate to drain and cool slightly.

In a large bowl, whisk to combine the eggs, half and half, sour cream, salt and pepper. Fold in the red onion, red bell pepper, jalapeño, shredded cheese and cooked chorizo. With your hands, or by tapping the bag on the counter, break apart any clumps remaining in the hash brown bag. Fold into the egg mixture until fully combined. (This mixture can be covered and refrigerated for up to 12 hrs. before cooking.)

Spray the insert of a 6-qtslow cooker with nonstick spray. Transfer the egg mixture to the insert and spread into an even layer. Cover and cook for 8 to 9 hrs. on low heat. Hold on warm for up to 1 hr.

Serve scoops topped with salsa or pico del gallo and sliced avocado, if you like.

Slow Cooker Green Beans

Prep Time: 20 min.
Total Time: 4 hrs. 20 min.
Servings: 8-10

8 slices thick-cut bacon, sliced 1/2-inch thick
1 med. yellow onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1/4 C. chicken broth
1 (15-oz.) can diced tomatoes
1 (8-oz.) can tomato sauce
2-1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1-1/2 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. dried oregano
1 tsp. ground black pepper
1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
2 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed
1-1/2 T. red wine vinegar

In a medium skillet over med-high heat, cook the bacon until crispy, 7 to 9 min. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate, reserving the drippings in the skillet. Add the onion to the skillet and reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onion is softened and lightly golden, about 3 min. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, 30 seconds. Add the broth and scrape up any browned bits. Add the mixture to a 6-qt. slow cooker.

To the slow cooker, add the tomatoes, tomato sauce, salt, paprika, oregano, black pepper, red pepper flakes, and half of the bacon, stirring well to combine. Stir in the green beans.

Cover and cook on low for 6 hrs. or on high for 3 hrs.

Stir the vinegar into the green beans and taste for salt. Cover and cook for 1 hr. until the beans are tender.

Hold on warm for up to 4 hrs. Serve with remaining crispy bacon.

Crock-Pot Scalloped Potatoes

Prep Time: 25 min.
Total Time: 6 hrs. 45 min.
Servings: 10-12

5 T. unsalted butter, divided
1 sm. yellow onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1-1/2 T. all-purpose flour
2-1/2 C. heavy cream
4 tsp. kosher salt

2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme, plus more for garnish
1 -/2 tsp. black pepper
1-1/2 C. sharp white Cheddar cheese, shredded
1-1/2 C. Gruyere cheese, shredded
4 lb. russet potatoes (about 4 lg. potatoes), peeled
Nonstick cooking spray

In a large skillet, heat 2 T. of the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 4 to 6 min. Add the garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 1 min.

Add the remaining 3 T. of the butter to the skillet over medium low heat. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until smooth and very lightly browned, about 1 min. Gradually whisk in the cream until smooth and well combined. Whisk in the salt, thyme, and pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer, whisking constantly, over medium heat. Remove from heat and whisk in the Cheddar and Gruyere.

Using a mandoline or slicer, slice the potatoes into 1/8-inch slices (very thin).

Lightly grease a 6-qt. slow cooker with nonstick cooking spray. Layer about 1/3 of the potato slices in the slow cooker and top with 1/3 of the cheese mixture. Repeat the layers twice.

Cover and cook on LOW until the potatoes are tender, about 6 to 7 hrs. (Insert a paring knife into the center of potatoes. If it goes in and comes out easily, they are finished.) Turn off the slow cooker and uncover. Let the potatoes cool and thicken for 20 min. before serving. Garnish with black pepper and more thyme.

Slow Cooker Taco Meatloaf

Prep Time: 10 min.
Cook Time: 6 hrs.
Total Time: 6 hrs.10 min.

2 lbs. lean ground beef
1/2 sm. onion chopped
4 oz. can chopped green chiles
1 oz. taco seasoning envelope
1 C. crushed nacho cheese chips (Doritos®)
1 C. shredded Monterey Jack cheese
2 eggs
1/2 C. milk
1/2 C. taco sauce
1 C. shredded Colby Jack cheese
Scallions or tomatoes, sour cream, black olives, avocado, and jalapeno

In a lg. bowl, combine the ground beef, diced onion, drained green chiles, taco seasoning, crushed tortilla chips, shredded Monterey Jack cheese, eggs, and milk. Mix thoroughly.

Transfer the mixture to the lined slow cooker and press it evenly into the shape of the cooker.

Spread the taco sauce over the top and cover with the lid.

Cook on high for 3 hrs. or on low for 6 hrs.

Just before serving, top with shredded Colby Jack cheese and let it melt.

Garnish with your favorite taco toppings, such as shredded lettuce, diced tomatoes, sliced avocado, sour cream, or salsa.

Crockpot Chicken and Rice

Prep:10 min.
Cook: 2 hrs. 30 min.
Total: 2 hrs. 40 min.

1 C. long-grain brown rice *
4-1/2 to 5-1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1-1/2 C. diced carrots
1 sm. (1/4 C.) shallot finely chopped
1 T. Dijon mustard
1-1/2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1-1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. dried thyme
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. ground black pepper
1 C. frozen peas
1/2 C. nonfat plain Greek yogurt
1/2 C. freshly grated sharp cheddar cheese divided
Chopped fresh parsley optional for serving

Rinse the rice several times to remove excess starch (this is key to the dish cooking properly). Bring 2 C. of the broth to a boil, then add the rice. Cook for 10 min., then drain.

Lightly coat a 5-qt. or larger slow cooker with nonstick spray. Add the rice, carrots, shallot, and Dijon mustard, and stir to combine. Arrange the chicken breasts on top, then sprinkle with the garlic powder, thyme, salt, and pepper. Pour in 2-1/2 C. chicken broth. Cover and cook on HIGH for 1-1/2 to 2 hours, until the chicken is cooked through.

Remove the chicken to a plate and cover to keep warm. Stir the rice, vegetables, and broth, then re-cover and continue cooking on high until the rice is tender, about 1 to 1-1/2 additional hours. If the rice seems dry, splash in some of the remaining 1 C. broth.

Uncover and stir in the peas and Greek yogurt. Dice the chicken and stir it in with 1/4 C. cheddar cheese. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top, then re-cover and cook for a few additional minutes on high until the cheese is melted. Serve warm, sprinkled with fresh parsley as desired.

***NOTE:** Do not substitute any other kind of rice, including short grain, instant, or white, as the cooking time and liquid ratios will not be the same

German-Style Pork Roast with Sauerkraut and Potatoes

Prep Time: 20 min.
Cook Time: 8 hrs.
Total Time: 8 hrs. 20 min.
Servings: 8

6 white potatoes, peeled and quartered
1 T. minced garlic
salt and pepper to taste
1 (3 lb.) boneless pork loin roast
1 (32 oz.) jar sauerkraut with liquid
2 tsp. caraway seeds

Place potatoes, garlic, salt, and pepper in a slow cooker; stir to coat. Season pork roast with salt and pepper; lay over potatoes. Pour sauerkraut over roast and sprinkle with caraway seeds.
Cook on Low for 8 to 10 hrs.

Creamy Crockpot Tortellini

Prep Time: 10 min.
Cook Time: 2 hrs. 40 min.
Total Time: 2 hrs. 50 min.
Servings: 8

1 lb. mild Italian sausage
1 C. yellow onion (diced)
6 oz. frozen spinach
1 (28 oz.) can diced tomatoes (Do not drain)
2 T. tomato paste
8 oz. cream cheese (cubed)
1 tsp. Italian seasoning
1/2 tsp dried thyme
3 tsp. garlic (minced)
16 oz. frozen tortellini
3 C. chicken broth
1/2 C. mozzarella cheese

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, brown the sausage and onion. Cook until no pink remains. Drain excess fat and add to a 6-qt. Crock Pot.
Add spinach, diced tomatoes, tomato paste, cream cheese, Italian seasoning, thyme, garlic, tortellini, and chicken broth. Mix until well combined.
Cover and cook on low for 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 hours. Add parmesan cheese and gently. Cover and continue to cook for 10 min.

Quote of the Week:

"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.