

A steaming bowl of chili is a delicious way to combat a frigid Kansas winter, along with a warm-from-the-oven cinnamon roll.

Wait, what? A cinnamon roll?

I first noticed this unique culinary pairing soon after I moved to Kansas in 2010. Every school lunch menu or nonprofit fundraiser chili feed included the enticement of cinnamon rolls.

How did this happen?

The pairing doesn't seem unusual to Kansas Assistant Attorney General Sarah Fertig—who knows something about the subject as her mother, Judith Fertig, is the author of the *I Love Cinnamon Rolls!* cookbook. Sarah says cinnamon rolls and chili were served together in the cafeteria all through her elementary and middle school years.

"It never seemed odd. I knew people who would tear up the roll and eat the chili with a piece of cinnamon roll. Or they would wipe the bowl with it," she says.

Mark and Peggy Murnahan, owners of Mad Eliza's Cakes & Confections in Topeka, were also introduced to the pairing in elementary school. Today, their shop prepares for a rush of cinnamon roll sales in the evening any time the temperature drops.

"Like any soup, you want a bread to go with it," Mark Murnahan says. "Cinnamon rolls are just natural with chili. It's comfort food." Then he adds, with a grin, "I'm not sure, but in school I think I heard it may be in the Constitution."

Why did schools start serving cinnamon rolls with chili? Bridget McNabb is the purchasing coordinator for the department of Hospitality Management and Culinary Education at Johnson County Community College, and she has worked in food service for Piper USD 203 and Blue Valley USD 202 for 17 years now.

"Kansas was once a commodity state," McNabb explains. More than 30 years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture managed a program to buy surplus commodities to keep farmers and food producers in business, and then sent those commodities to the state's school lunch programs. "Schools had all of these commodities to use. Beans were a commodity, so they made chili. To get the kids to eat the chili, they paired it with cinnamon rolls."

Do the new school nutrition guidelines mean an end to cinnamon rolls on the menu?

Cheryl Johnson, director of Child Nutrition and Wellness for the Kansas State Department of Education, says, "The good news is that schools can still serve chili and cinnamon rolls together." She adds that starting this school year, the cinnamon roll would need to be whole grain rich (containing 50 percent or more whole grains).

I picture this culinary trend sweeping the nation, with restaurants such as Tavern on the Green in New York or Spago in Los Angeles adding the combo to their menus with great fanfare. Many chefs will claim they were the ones to first conceive of this delicious food union.

We'll know better. **KS**

Cinnamon Rolls

Serves 12

INGREDIENTS

For dough:

1 cup whole milk
4 tablespoons
unsalted butter,
softened
1 teaspoon kosher salt
¼ cup sugar
2¼ to 4 cups all-
purpose flour
1 package instant
(rapid-rise) yeast
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla

For filling:

4 tablespoons unsalted butter,
softened
¼ cup sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon

For glaze:

2 cups confectioners' sugar
1 tablespoon unsalted butter,
softened
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon lemon juice
2 to 3 tablespoons whole milk

Microwave milk and butter until almost melted. Whisk in sugar and salt. Set aside.

Using a mixer and dough hook, combine 2½ cups of flour and yeast on low. Slowly add milk mixture, then eggs, one at a time, followed by vanilla. Add more flour, ½ cup at a time. Mix until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, about 2 minutes. Continue 2 more minutes or until you can knead by hand.

Shaping dough into a ball, place in an oiled bowl, turning it over to oil the top. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Let the dough rise for 1 hour.

Roll dough into a 20- by 16-inch rectangle on a floured surface. Spread softened butter over the surface of the dough. In a small dish, mix cinnamon and sugar and sprinkle on top of the butter.

Roll dough into tube. Cut the tube into 12 pieces and place each piece spiral-side up in a 9- by 13-inch baking dish coated with non-stick cooking spray. Cover and let the rolls rise for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the rolls for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown. Whisk together glaze ingredients, using just enough milk for the desired consistency. Spread glaze over the top while the rolls are still warm. Serve.