

# Resolution for 2012 menu plans: streamline your dinnertime system

You can have all the glorious kitchen tools and gourmet ingredients in the world but that's not what gets dinner on the table in a timely fashion, is it? Just like finances and football, it's all about the strategy and a system.

I have one single New Year's resolution. It's the same one I've had for years: implementing a sure-fire dinner system that works with my family's busy schedule. It sounds simple enough, but thus far my efforts have not produced the complete success I've always longed for.

Could it be that my expectations have been set too high? Probably so, and I think it's time for a good dose of reality: just like any other system that's put into place, a dinner system can't work perfectly, every single night, every single meal – that's just life, so let me get over it and move on, please.

But because there are a couple of other realities that must be faced when it comes to dinner, I'm willing to keep pursuing the implementation of this dinner system thing, year after year. First of all, dinner is a very important event for my family, and secondly, dinner never goes away.

My sons may skate out the door in the morning with just a pop tart in hand, but when dinner rolls around each and every evening (and it always does), I want them around the table, eating all their tasty and nourishing food groups, giving us a few precious minutes of face time together.

So here's my simple, basic plan for this year.

**1. Set a Nightly Theme.** Realistically, we eat dinner at home consistently about five nights a week. Therefore, I've decided to assign five themes to each weeknight this year:

- Monday: Soup/Sandwich/Salad Night.
  - Tuesday: Crockpot Night.
  - Wednesday: Skillet Supper/Casserole Night.
- My sons are in charge of these meals – learning to cook is an essential skill.



## Chef Alli Winter

### • Who's Cookin'

Thursday: Leftovers Night – usually from the hunk of meat cooked in the crockpot meal on Tuesday night.

Friday: Pasta/Pizza Night.

Weekends are important too. I use Saturday for testing out new recipes that sound appealing and Sunday is my indispensable day: planning, shopping, and prep work for the upcoming week. Please note: there is no plan or system that successfully works without the work you do on your indispensable day.

**2. Ask for Input.** Next, I implored my family to name 10 favorite meals, helping them come up with two for each category or theme above. This means that these 10 meals are rotated twice through, so essentially I've got the 20 weeknight meals I need for my family each month. No, my family does not mind the repeats, and, yes, I do change these 10 meals seasonally and as I come up with new recipes that are approved by my family. For instance, on Mondays in the summer, soup/sandwich/salad night becomes sandwich/salad night, so most soup recipes are set aside for awhile.

**3. Devise the necessary details: the grocery list and inventory sheet.**

Based on the 10 recipes chosen by my family, I come up with a detailed grocery list that I keep in my purse at all times. Yes, I am working towards using one of those cool new apps on my android for this.

I may not always have an updated grocery inventory sheet with me, but at least I know what ingredients (roughly) I'll need at home when I'm shopping. So what if I've got six cans of Rotel in my pantry already and I

purchase one more because I can't remember that – it's not like I won't use it at some point.

Below is one of the recipes my sons made recently on Skillet Supper night. It's fast, tasty and healthy – enjoy!

Chef Alli's Penne Pasta Skillet with Sausage, Bell Pepper and Parmesan	
1 pound	Johnsonville smoked turkey sausage (these are fully cooked), cut into 1-inch pieces
1 tablespoon	extra virgin olive oil
3/4 pound	penne pasta, cooked in chicken broth, according to package directions, drained,
1	1 cup pasta water reserved
1/2 teaspoon	red sweet bell pepper, sliced
8 ounces	red pepper flakes
	baby spinach, stems removed
1/3 cup	freshly grated parmesan cheese

In a large saute pan, heat oil over medium high heat. When oil is shimmering, add sausage pieces and cook until browned on both sides; remove from pan. Add bell peppers and red pepper flakes to pan drippings and cook until softened, approximately 1-2 minutes. Add spinach by handfuls, stirring until each batch is wilted before adding more. Add cooked pasta to pan, along with some of the reserved pasta water; tossing to combine all ingredients in pan. Divide among 4-5 serving bowls and garnish with parmesan cheese to serve.

*Alli Winter was raised in Topeka and began cooking at age 4, though it was much later when she attended the Personal Chef Institute in Rio Rancho, N.M., where she acquired her certification. Her website is at [www.ChefAllis.com](http://www.ChefAllis.com).*

# Ag tech meet offers latest information

Information about everything from yield monitors to variable rate application to auto-steer and beyond will be available at the 15th Annual Kansas Agricultural Technologies Conference Thursday and Friday, Jan. 19 and 20, at the Ramada Conference Center in Salina.

The conference, sponsored by the Kansas Agricultural Research and Technology Association, is an applied workshop that consolidates information about new and old technologies focused on supporting scientifically-based on-farm research and increasing farm business profitability.

The conference begins at 8 a.m. Jan. 19 with registration. The program starts at 8:45.

Presentations by university scientists and industry representatives will include:

- The economics of travel logistics.
- New communications in ag/

social media.

- Techniques for site-specific crop management.
- Precision ag and ag machinery.
- Land values, rents and other ag investments.
- Precision seed metering and placement.
- Approaching crop nutrition systematically.
- Doing on-farm research.

Members of the association will give presentations about research conducted on their farms and discuss the financial support available for such projects.

The conference will give producers, crop consultants and others interested in agricultural technologies the chance to learn from each other, as well as industry and university scientists.

Information, including printable registration forms, is available at [www.KARTAonline.org](http://www.KARTAonline.org).

## On the Beat

### COLBY POLICE

#### Tuesday

1:17 a.m. – Caller reported a possible drunk driver northbound on Range.

8:40 a.m. – Accident at Franklin and Eighth. No damage, no report.

11:39 a.m. – Walk-through at Colby Grade School.

1:23 p.m. – Assisted Sheriff's Office.

2:51 p.m. – Caller reported two dogs at large at Range and Sum-

mit.  
9:38 p.m. – Caller reported possible drunk driver. Not found.

### THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

#### Tuesday

11:28 a.m. – Caller reported two cows out at U.S. 83 and County Rd. O. Attempts made to contact owner; unable to locate.

1:23 p.m. – Vehicle impound: report filed on traffic stop at Franklin and Davis.

# Cow rescued from ice

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) – A pet cow stuck for more than five hours in a partially frozen lake in northern Colorado is expected to recover after an elaborate rescue by firefighters.

The cow named T-Bone walked down a steep bank of the partially frozen lake south of Fort Collins and slipped. The Coloradoan newspaper reports that the owner of the 14-year-old cow spent hours trying to rescue her before calling

911 Friday (<http://goo.gl/RbTR7>).

Firefighters from several departments used rope, slings and a pulley system Friday evening to haul T-Bone up the steep, muddy bank and onto a nearby road, where she was attended to by veterinarians. They fed T-Bone intravenously while firefighters swaddled her in a blue tarpaulin and pumped in hot air from a portable heater. Veterinarians say T-Bone will be fine.

Please Recycle



# College seeks Kansas high school entrepreneurs

All Kansas high school students have the opportunity to receive a grant from McPherson College to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. But these young entrepreneurs will need to hurry; submissions are due Wednesday, Jan. 25. "We're putting our money where our heart is," said Kori Gregg, executive director of entrepreneurship at McPherson College. "Encouraging the develop-

ment of young entrepreneurs in Kansas – both in the commercial and social arenas."

The first-ever Jump Start Kansas competition will award two grand-prize grants of \$5,000 to a Kansas high school student or team of students who present the best entrepreneurial idea, one in the area of commercial entrepreneurship and one for social entrepreneurship. What's more, the grants come

with no stipulation that the high school students attend McPherson College. Students can enter with their ideas by visiting <http://blogs.mcpherson.edu/entrepreneurship/jump-start-kansas>.

An independent panel will judge the entries and select five in both categories as finalists.

Those finalists will attend a pitch competition on Feb. 15 for their shot at the top prize of a \$5,000

grant to develop their idea, as well as a \$20,000, four-year scholarship to attend McPherson College. The other eight finalists will also receive a \$4,000 scholarship to McPherson College. All told, the college's financial commitments total more than \$100,000.

For information contact Adam Pracht, coordinator of development communications, (620) 242-0425, [prachta@mcpherson.edu](mailto:prachta@mcpherson.edu)

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