

Grain Meat Through the Ages

Grain meat has a rich heritage that spans 13 centuries and multiple countries. Its history begins in 7th century China.

On a quest to find a vegetarian protein firmer than tofu, Buddhist monks made an interesting discovery: while crafting dough from wheat flour in cold water, they noticed that the starches began to dissipate. The more they kneaded, the more starch dissolved until they were left with pure protein. They flavored the dough with broth, simmering it for hours. They had created Mien Ching or “Buddha’s Food” – the precursor to what we know today as grain meat.

Eventually, Mien Ching made its way to Japan, where cooks simmered it in soy sauce, sea vegetables and ginger. They called their new version of grain meat Seitan.

Fast forward to 15th century France, where the culinary art known as charcuterie – the craft of salting, smoking and curing meats – was growing in popularity. Charcuterie, which includes sausage, pate, salami and terrine, soon spread throughout Europe. Regionally, bold and subtle flavors also emerged: mustards, garlic, malts and balsamic vinegars. The stage was set for culinary fusion...

Hundreds of years later, Chinese and Japanese immigrants seeking a better life boarded ships to the New World across the Pacific Ocean. They brought their customs and traditional foods with them to America, including Mien Ching and Seitan. These grain meats remained relatively unknown outside of their own cultures until the birth of the natural food movement in the 1970’s. In the late 1990’s, Chef David Lee was struggling to make a vegetarian teriyaki wrap when he learned of Mien Ching and Seitan. By adding European seasonings, he created the third version of grain meat: Field Roast, a blend of these Asian culinary and European charcuterie traditions.