

A Teaspoonful of Sugar: Standardized measures as the teaspoon, tablespoon, cup, etc. were first introduced by Fannie Farmer in her 1896 *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*. Farmer's precise measures were innovative and along with her serious scientific approach to nutrition she revolutionized cooking.

Previously, American recipe amounts suggested sizes such as "a piece of butter the size of an egg" or "a teacup of milk" and a dash of salt, that she measured as 1/8 teaspoon. Farmer's systematic precise measurements that a cupful is measured level, a tablespoonful is measured level, and teaspoonful is measured level, earned her to be called, the mother of level measurements.

In her book Farmer also provided scientific explanations (previously not explained) of nutrition, diet, and the chemical processes that occur in food during cooking. She introduced America, mostly women, to the science of nutrition, and suggested women think seriously about what their families should eat and how best to achieve a balanced diet. Farmer wrote about the chemical composition of the human body and the nutritional value of different food groups and discussed diet in terms of chemistry and physiology.

Farmer's work would lay the foundation for home economics courses that soon became standard high school fare. It included 1,849 recipes, nutritional information, as well as essays on the cleaning, canning, and drying of fruits and vegetables. Her book treated meal preparation as serious and scientific. In her Preface, Farmer writes: "It is my wish that [the cookbook] may not only be looked upon as a compilation of tried and tested recipes, but that it may awaken an interest through its condensed scientific knowledge which will lead to deeper thought and broader study of what to eat."

Her publisher, Little, Brown and Co., skeptical of her progressive ideas and doubtful anyone would buy such a radical book, required Farmer pay for the first edition publication, which proved to be an instant and everlasting success. It sold out but has never been out of print since. It became known as the *Fannie Farmer Cookbook*, has sold more than 4 million copies, and is still selling.

Fannie Merritt Farmer was born in 1857 Boston, the oldest of four daughters in a family that highly valued education and expected all four girls to attend college. However, at age sixteen Fannie became paralyzed and was unable to walk. She could not complete high school nor attend college. Home in her parents' care for several years she took to cooking and eventually turned her mother's home into a boarding house with a reputation for its quality meals.

When age twenty-eight, now able to walk but with a serious limp that never left her, Farmer, to help ease family's financial burdens, took a job as a 'mother's helper' for the prominent Mrs. Charles Shaw, a family friend. Shaw encouraged Farmer to enroll in the Boston Cooking School to train to become a cooking teacher. The school had been established in 1879 by the Woman's Education Association of Boston to give women who needed to work, a means of entry into professional life. It was a time when few to no career opportunities existed for women, when women and their employment outside the home were perceived with disdain, albeit many women needed to work to earn a wage.

The school emphasized the science of domesticity, fostered an intellectual, scientific approach to food preparation and diet and elevated the role of women not just as cooks but as educated cooking teachers and authorities on proper diets for the healthy

and sick. It also provided women with what would be perceived as a “respectable” career in which to support themselves.

Farmer enrolled in the school’s two-year course at the height of the domestic science movement and began to understand the association between good eating and good health. As one of the top students, she was kept on as an assistant director to train other women and in 1891 became the director for the next eleven years. It was during these years Farmer authored her cookbook.

In 1902 she resigned and established her own school, Miss Farmer's School of Cookery. It was decidedly creative and inventive. She continued further studies including a summer course at Harvard Medical School, enriching her special interest in diet for the sick and infirm. Farmer became a highly respected authority in her field, and was invited to deliver lectures to women's clubs, and to nurses at the Harvard Medical School.

Farmer developed a complete work of diet and nutrition for the ill titled *Food and Cookery for the Sick and Convalescent*. She understood perhaps better than anyone else at the time the value of appearance, taste, and presentation of sickroom food to ill and wasted people with poor appetites. Her school also developed cooking equipment for the sick and the physically disabled. She felt so strongly about the significance of proper food for the sick that she believed she would be remembered chiefly by her work in that field, as opposed to her work in cookery.

In addition to her lectures at Harvard Medical School she began teaching convalescent diet and dietary nutrition to doctors, nurses and dietitians. Her work there brought her into contact with Dr. Elliot P. Joslin (1869 - 1962), the medical pioneer in diabetes research and treatment, who cited Farmer in a letter (dated just days before his death) as "the stimulus which started me in writing about diabetes."

Her lectures were widely reported by the press, republished by the Boston Evening Transcript, and picked up by newspapers nationwide. She wrote a popular cooking column for nearly ten years in the *Woman's Home Companion*, a national magazine, as well as many other cookbooks and pamphlets. She also traveled the country lecturing to women's clubs and other groups of non-professionals. Before an audience, her shy and reserved personality gave way to vivaciousness.

During the last seven years of her life Farmer suffered two strokes and though confined to a wheelchair, she continued to lecture, write, and invent recipes. She gave her last lecture ten days before her death in 1915 in Boston at age fifty-seven knowing her book was still selling well. The twenty-one editions printed before her death made Farmer a wealthy woman for since the publisher insisted that Farmer pay the initial printing costs, she retained the copyright and profits.

The *Fannie Farmer Cookbook* has remained a standard work and in 1997 was completely updated to celebrate the 100th anniversary of her American classic which still is being eaten up by Foodies everywhere, level teaspoonful by level teaspoonful.

Sources: <http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=11>,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fannie_Farmer, <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Du-Fi/Farmer-Fannie.html>