A traditional method of outdoor cooking in Louisiana is the Cochin de Lait or pig roast, during which a suckling pig is hung beside a wood fire and slow-cooked for up to 24 hours, depending on its size. Ned Fowler of the Lafayette Police Department and his team of 'Cajun Cookers' are familiar with the procedure—they are known as the grand champions of the Louisiana State Barbeque Championship at USL's 1990 Spring Fest, and placed sixth in the 1990 World Championship Barbecue Contest, "Memphis in May," in Memphis, Tenn.

By Mary Swann
Food Editor

Legend has it that the term "barbecue" dates back to the early 1500s when explorers settled the Caribbean Islands. They observed the Caribbe Indians and their method for smoking meat, which involved laying it on a wooden grill, or grille de bois, and cooking it over a slow fire. The Indians called the smoked meat "barbecue."

Another explanation is that when the French cooked a goat, they cooked all of it, from barbe to queue (beard to the tail), hence the word "barbecue." Regardless of its etymology, centuries later, barbecue cooking, or cooking over wood outdoors, remains traditional for the Fourth of July holiday.

Whether it's a holiday, competition, or any other occasion, Ned Fowler of the Lafayette Police Department goes "whole hog" when it comes to cooking out. As head chef of the "Cajun Cookers," he leads a prize-winning group who specialize in Cochin de Lait, or
roast pig, injected with a sweet Tabasco/Dr. Pepper sauce.

Fowler enjoys combining home-town ingredients in his recipes and representing Louisiana's reputation for great food.

When he and his group began, it was just for fun. "I never thought it would branch out like this... We started out having fun and ended up winning it," he says of the state championship.

He and the "Cajun Cookers" made their first pit from a packing crate and the lining from a printing press. They began competing in 1989.

The pigs they roast are usually about 80 pounds, but they've cooked one that tipped the scales at 322.

With an "LV." of Tabasco, the animal is seasoned with an "injection sauce", made with Dr. Pepper, Tabasco and "other" ingredients, says Fowler, careful not to give away his secret. His team members, including Gurvis Dupuis, Nolan Morvant, Mike Rabalais, Bill Delahoussaye and Casey Fowler, take turns through the night monitoring the temperature and progress of the cochon.

"The temperature is controlled by moving the pig closer to or farther away from the fire," he explains. "And the more you cook, the more you learn."

Fowler and his crew also cook "true" pork skins, which are cracklins without the fat, he says. They prepared and sold them from a cooking booth at the Festival International. They also cook jambalaya and all the fixins' for a good Cajun meal.

The following is his basic recipe for Cochon de Lait, but each cook must add his own seasoning to taste.

**Cochon de Lait**

1 hog

**Injection sauce:**
3 liter Dr. Pepper
Tabasco
(other seasoning to taste)

**Stuffing:**
garlic
bell pepper
onions

Make "injection sauce" by boiling Dr. Pepper and seasonings, adding Tabasco. Inject hog with liquid seasoning mixture. Make stuffing with garlic, bell pepper and onion mixture, and stuff pig. Hang pig on rack and cook slowly by rotating, about 4 rotations per minute, beside a wooden fire, usually pecan or oak. Swivel pig so that its head is down for two hours and up for two hours. Move pig closer or further from fire as necessary to maintain slow cooking process. Cooking time: Up to 24 hours. Note: no seasoning used on the outside of the pig. You can tell the hog is done by inserting a meat thermometer. If it registers 160 degrees all over, it is cooked. Also test for doneness by slicing at the shoulder, as this is the last part of the hog to cook.