

CURTIS AIKENS

A native Georgian, Curtis' attraction to produce began as a small boy, as he followed his Grandfather Curtis through the garden. His interest grew during high school, when he worked at the Conyers, Georgia A&P Market. "I was supposed to be in the grocery department," he recalls, "but I hung out in produce because that's where all the action was." His enthusiasm soon became a career.

After attending Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Curtis vacationed in California, and was drawn to relocate, quickly finding work at an Alpha Beta grocery store in the San Francisco Bay Area. During this seven-year stint in California, Curtis opened his first produce company, called Peaches. Next, Aikens moved to New York, to head the produce departments at Dom's Wholesale Market and at Balducci's. He was responsible for such clients as the United Nations Cafeteria, the Plaza Hotel and the US Open Tennis Tournament. Curtis' television career began as a consultant and food stylist on commercials for Pizza Hut, Pillsbury and McDonalds.

In 1988, Curtis returned to Georgia to begin Aiken's Family Produce, Inc., a wholesale and retail supplier of produce for clients which ranged from the Rockdale County School System to the TV series *In the Heat of the Night* and the feature film *Glory*.

Curtis' career as a television personality and author began in 1988. Currently, He resides in Novato, California and Conyers, Georgia and is the father of two young sons, Curtis, Jr. and Cole.

He has been with the Food Network since its inception, previously as the host of *Pick of the day*, *From My Garden*, *Meals Without Meat*, and *Food IN A Flash*. Curtis is Quick to point out that his expertise with produce does not mean that he is "anti-meat." "I just love fruits and vegetables," he says.

Curtis is also a regular cast member of ABC's *Good Morning America*, where he dispenses both food-related advice and creative, healthful recipes. Then at ABC in 1991, as part of the popular morning show, *Home*, hosted by Gary Collins and Sara Purcell, who dubbed Curtis "The Home Grocer". Curtis is (to our knowledge) the only African-American culinary personality featured regularly on network television.

A natural for television, due to his good-natured charisma and unaffected charm, Curtis has appeared before the worldwide audience of CNN (where he fielded cooking questions "live" via international telephone). His other television credits include the *Oprah* show, *Entertainment Tonight*, *The NBC Nightly News*, *ABC World News Tonight*, as well as dozens of other local network affiliates.

NBC Nightly News did a feature story about Curtis' own remarkable struggle with illiteracy, and his devotion to helping the thirty million American adults who are unable to read. *ABC's World News* tonight featured Curtis' participation in the First Annual Literacy Festival in Cairo, Georgia. As a literacy advocate, Curtis is a popular speaker at festivals and conferences throughout the country. He has been an invited guest at the White House, visiting President George Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush, and has met with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Curtis is the author of *Curtis Cooks With Heart and Soul*, published by Hearst Books, as well as *Garden Grocer's Guide to the Harvest* and *Curtis Aikens' Guide to the Harvest*, both published by Peachtree Publishers. These popular books combine delicious down-home cooking with Curtis' unique philosophy. He donates a portion of the royalties from these books to literacy programs across the country.

Curtis' latest book, to be titled *Recipes to Weight Loss and Its Control*, was inspired by the fact that he has recently shed over fifty pounds, and will be available in the fall.

As a food consultant, Curtis has worked with The United States Open Tennis Tournament, The New York City Plaza Hotel, and The United Nations Cafeteria. Curtis supplied produce for the TV series *In the Heat of the Night*, and for the feature film *Glory*. He has been consultant and food stylist on commercials for Pizza Hut, Pillsbury and McDonalds.

As a chef, Curtis is in much demand as a celebrity guest of fine restaurants. his cooking, which blends his Southern upbringing with his subsequent California influence, also incorporate nuances gleaned from extensive travels in the US and Europe. His current fascination is with the cuisine of the Pacific rim.

A partial list of the TV stations which feature Curtis' produce and cooking segments include: KABC and KTTV, Los Angeles; KGO, San Francisco; WGN, and the ABC and NBC affiliates, Chicago; WVEU and WXIA, Atlanta; WALB, Albany, GA.; WSAV, Savannah, GA; WCSC, Charleston, SC; WYFF, Greenville, SC; WRDW, North Augusta, SC; WRCB, Chattanooga, TN; WTSP, Tampa, FL and WTCV, Tallahassee, FL. Curtis is featured regularly on some of the most popular radio stations in the country, including KNBR San Francisco, WOAI San Antonio, KDKA Pittsburgh, KMOX St. Louis, KTAR Phoenix, KNOX Denver, KNST Tucson and KWNK Los Angeles.

The subject of numerous newspaper and magazine articles, Curtis has appeared on the cover of *USA Today*. *Curtis Aikens' Video Cookbook*, a home video cassette featuring recipes and produce tips, is now available.