MY VIEW FROM THE THIRD ACT

Why Can't Our Food Just Taste Good?



By Darren Somsen, Founder & CEO · Third Act USA, Inc.

I grew up in a generation that was raised by a generation that had been warned about food safety. If you didn't cook a pork chop till it was nearly black, you might get trichinosis. If your beef wasn't cooked till it was gray, it wasn't safe.

God bless my grandmother. She was raised in a rural Idaho farming community where every Sunday meal included potatoes, and the roast had to be cooked for a minimum of five hours. But God bless her, she used salt and pepper because in her home, that was spice. She took the drippings from that now-desiccated pot roast and made about a gallon of gravy with lots of salt and pepper that was entirely necessary to pour back over the meat just to reintroduce the moisture that had been cooked out of it.

Now, her spice cabinet contained four or five jars. My kitchen has at least 35. Spices she would have considered exotic are just a staple to my cooking, something I expect to be there. I own a kitchen thermometer that allows me to test the internal temperature of the meat so it's cooked but still juicy and delicious, not dry and barely edible. I use butter because I can afford it. I don't have the tub of Golden Soft margarine that was a staple of my grandmother's household. (But of course, that tub became ad hoc Tupperware when each one was finished. "Don't throw that away, I'm going to wash it and save it," I'd hear her say.) I even own a sous vide stick so that my cooking can be low, slow, juicy, tender, and delicious, because I cook for pleasure, not just to feed a family and get them out the door.

But I also came from the generation of food fads.

We went from low-fat, to high-fat, to high-fiber. Oatmeal is good for you. Eat Cheerios, it's good for your heart; it says so right on the box. We were the generation introduced to rice cakes because they were a "healthy alternative" when you were dieting and avoiding fat. We saw the Scarsdale diet, the high-protein, no-carb diet, and those foul little coasters we were convinced we should eat. If you didn't smear peanut butter and jelly on a rice cake, it wasn't pleasant. So they started adding flavor to them: salt, cheese flakes, cinnamon, anything to make us grab it off the shelf and pretend we loved it.

We were warned about our cholesterol. We were warned that all cholesterol is bad. Then there was good cholesterol. Then we were told we should monitor it. Then we were told that your body produces the cholesterol you have and it doesn't matter what you eat.

We were told salt was bad for us. We were told we need salt, but not too much. We're told salt's bad for our heart, good for our heart, good for our cells. It has been a constant moving target on what we are supposed to put into our bodies.

> *"Heritage recipes" are amazing, but we just called it grandma's cooking.*

© 2026 Third Act USA, Inc.

And yet, all we expect is for our food to taste good.

Our palates have broadened so much since my childhood in the early ’70s. Back then, the closest most people would get to Mexican food was a Taco Bell with its simulated Spanish architecture, rounded windows, and terracotta tiles. The thought of Chinese food was exotic until the first one opened in your town, and you had to decide if you liked it. Forty years later, you love it. That expanded to Thai, Vietnamese, Korean. The old German restaurants in the old neighborhoods have given way to fusion restaurants that try to cleverly combine Asian and Mexican (and never seem to quite turn out right, but your neighbor screams up and down that it’s amazing and you’ve got to eat there).

It’s all about taste, flavor, and excitement. We’re the generation that got to watch food evolve. We went from dry pot roast at a Sunday family dinner to eating prime rib for the first time and absolutely losing our minds, or getting a French dip sandwich and thinking we were in heaven.

We’re also the generation that watched restaurant staples like chicken cordon bleu get removed from menus because they were considered old or no longer in fashion. But they tasted good. Cheese and ham stuffed into a wonderful chicken breast, breaded, baked for an hour till the cheese was gooey and the outside was delicious.

And what was a part of all of it? Salt. The savor. Those small little white crystals that made everything we put in our mouth just a little better. I had an aunt who thought salt didn’t belong in anything. It made her oatmeal difficult, to say the least. When you’re cooking your oatmeal, you use a little salt, and it’s wonderful. You can never add enough salt after the fact to make oatmeal palatable; it just tastes salty, not savory.

All our generation asks is this: stop demonizing every meal, every food, everything we’ve ever put in our mouth. “Heritage recipes” are amazing, but we just called it grandma’s cooking. It’s this new generation that uses a term like “heritage recipe” to describe something we grew up on. Yeah, it’s from our heritage, it’s from our childhood, and it’s something we liked putting in our mouth.

So all I ask is, stop trying to change our diet, because we just want our food to taste good.

And that’s my view from the Third Act.

◆



MY VIEW FROM THE THIRD ACT · THE FIRST SIX ESSAYS

Part One
A Senior’s Manifesto

Part Two
Giving the Finger to the Senior’s Angie’s List

Part Three
Deadhead Sticker on a Cadillac

Part Four
Nuking Your Food

Part Five
Grab the Stick

Part Six · you are here
Why Can’t Our Food Just Taste Good?

Darren Somsen is Founder & CEO of Third Act USA, Inc., in Melbourne, Florida.

© 2026 Third Act USA, Inc. All rights reserved. Written by Darren Somsen. Reprints or redistribution require written permission. Please credit Third Act USA and the author when quoting.

Read the column at thirdactusa.com/view
Founder portrait is AI-generated from current reference photographs.