

365 meals

- or -

What to do with all that dehydrated food.

It all started while reading Survivalblog, in an article about providing charity during a pandemic and not getting sick, Jim had talked about putting food out where others could get it and then retreating to keep a safe distance between you and others to keep your family from getting infected. While reading this article, I had an epiphany.

Instead of handing out some rice, wheat, oats or a can of spam, I could concoct a “meal”, a homemade Meal Ready almost ready to eat (HMMARE?). My first HMMARE Idea was to take a Ziploc sandwich bag add 1 cup of rice, a chicken bouillon cube, ¼ cup of chicken TVP and a ¼ cup of dehydrated peas. It would be easy, just add three cups of water and boil, viola, a decent meal!

I joyously told my wife about my great Idea, and she responded very negatively. “Yuk, we could do better than that!” She told me, and sent me back to the drawing board. I then began to scower the internet for ideas. I then came across a website where a woman had had thoughts along similar lines and had made what she called “365 meals” She had taken the reserves that she already had and combined them with a project that her church group had done in years past. What they had done was made “Soups in a Jar” meals to give as gifts during the holiday season. She adapted this idea and thought that if she could make 365 meals then she would KNOW that she had at least one decent meal a day for her family for an entire year.

This idea set my mind racing. My wife and I sat down and worked out a plan. We had several criteria that we wanted our meals to meet.

- They had to be in a sturdy container (We live in earthquake country, so no glass containers for us.)
- They need to be complete. You could add to them, but the recipe didn't require any extra ingredients.
- They needed to be simple – so that our children could make them, in case the adults were incapacitated.
- They needed to be good tasting, hearty and notorious.
- They needed to be capable of long term storage.
- And, if possible they needed to use the supplies of food stuffs we already had on hand.

We quickly worked out what we could do to make this a better option for our family. As suggested on the 365 meals Web Page (No longer in existence) the host had used the recipe book "Gifts in a jar". I turned to Amazon.com and discovered there were several books in that genre, and we purchased the ones that looked most applicable (Soups and Chili's, For the Slow Cooker, and One Dish Meals). We wanted to start simply with items we already had on hand, and make a few meals in our kitchen. The First recipe we made was Chicken Soup. The recipe called for making a soup "stock" and adding fresh carrots, celery and chicken pieces. We adapted it with dehydrated carrots, celery and Chicken TVP and more water to be added to rehydrate the vegetables. TVP is Textured Vegetable Protein, it is a cheap and long term solution, you can also use real dehydrated chicken but at 5 times the cost....Like bacon bits in your salad? That's TVP!

Now how to store these meals? We had a "Food Saver" vacuum sealer and that seemed like a good solution. Take out all the air, and the meal should last a good long time. So we gathered all the ingredients, had our children help with the assembly and made our first batch. The recipe said that the meal would feed 4 to 6 people and we had a family of six growing children so we decided to double the recipe. Each meal was about the size of a 3lb. chub of hamburger (10" long x 8" in circumference). We made the meals till we ran out of the ingredient about 15 meals. After they were vacu-sealed we then set about to find another meal to make, we were on a roll! Our next meal (Untested by our professional taste

testing children) was Ham Hock Stew, it sounded wonderful to us, but our children disagreed. As before, we altered the recipe to fit our storage needs and made a few. When we were sealing the bags we noticed that the dehydrated carrots that were called for in the recipe were poking through the sealer bags! When we discovered this we were crestfallen. Just then we remembered that we had recently been gifted with an [impulse sealer](#) and [250 Mylar bags](#) (A member of our church said he bought it, never used it and no one in his family wanted it, so he thought I would put it to good use). It didn't draw a vacuum but we could overcome that by using oxygen absorbers, and the Mylar bags were much thicker than the Food Saver Bags (7 mils instead of 4). I'd read that food stored in opaque storage containers kept food longer due to light having a deleterious effect. Another advantage to using Mylar bags is that because they are lined with aluminum, they could also survive an EMP! (Sorry had to throw that in).

We decided that the bags were too large (11" x 13") so we cut them in half lengthwise and that was a perfect fit. We then transferred all the Food Saver pouches to the new Mylar bags. After making 30 or so meals we decided to try one out. The Kids wanted the Chicken Soup but we wanted to know if they would like the Ham Hock Stew.....They didn't like.....THEY LOVED IT!

Since we had doubled the recipe we expected to be a little left over...Boy were we wrong. There was enough to feed Sherman's Army! We all had our fill, and there was enough left over for me to have lunch the next day, and freeze enough for dinner for our family again! (Guess we really didn't need to double those recipes after all).

With this success under our belt we expanded, we ended up making 12 different recipes and a total of 175 or so meals (since we doubled most of them we didn't need as many). We took this idea to our friends and family and boy was it a success! After a few Youtube videos on the subject ([365 Meals](#) or [Making 365 Meals](#) and others) we have demonstrated this method of food storage for over two years now, to several Church groups and have made upwards of 8,000 meals! (I guess we put that gifted impulse sealer to good use, Huh!?) And I have had at

least 50 other inquiries from individuals and groups wanting recipes and advice on how to make this work for them.

After having personally been at these 8000 meal making groups we have learned a few things to make this process fun and inexpensive. Here are the FAQ's

- The cost of each meal varies due to the ingredients but they average about \$4.00 each
- An impulse sealer isn't required but makes it a lot easier. (We still have some Chicken Soup in a Food Saver bags and they are doing well)
- You will need to do some conversions to make sure you have the items you will need in bulk. [This is the one I used](#). But a good way to do it was to see what the FDA label said were in a package (Unit size vs. number in container)
- The more hands you have to process the meals the better. It's easier to make five hundred meals for sixteen families than fifteen meals for one family.
- An assembly line makes it all work very easily.
- It's hard to tell exactly how long they will store, but most of the dehydrated items purchased say they will store for up to twenty years, so that sounds good to me!
- You can tailor your meals for your dietary needs and personal tastes (No/low salt, gluten free, etc.)
- With all your items at hand and with enough helpers you can make about five hundred meals in two hours.
- Because of their light weight, they ship quite well. GREAT for gifts.
- A 16oz cup with its bottom cut out makes a great funnel/opener for the Mylar bags.
- Go to the dollar store and buy a few sets of measuring spoons and cups, you'll need them.
- All of our now 200ish meals store under our sons twin bed.

- Meals we've successfully made: Split Pea, Chicken Soup, Ham Hock Stew, White rice and Chili, Mac-n-cheese, Black Bean Chili, Pasta Fagioli, Chicken and Rice.

Our food stores are varied and deep but our 365 meal plan is to have a simple breakfast, of oats or grains, a hearty lunch/supper of our bagged meal, and a dinner of breads and snacks.

I know that having one meal a day does not a full food plan make, but to know for sure that you have at least one meal a day for an entire year takes the guess work out of your planning as well as, a great deal of peace of mind.

I run an emergency preparedness company and would love to be able to make a few \$\$\$ on this idea, but as of yet, no such luck. So I share it with all of you and hope to inspire you to move ahead and get your meals in order.