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Third-generation sausage-maker Tom Schwai of Schwai's Meat & Sausage Market says he makes about 100 pounds of mustripen two to three times a month. Schwai says demand is growing for the blood-and-cabbage sausage.

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**SAUSAGE**

## Some diners must have mustripen

"I can't get it at home — my wife won't make it — so I have to go out for it," Pat Birenbaum said with a sigh.

Diners who can get past the doggie doo-doo appearance may sample the casing-clad sausage today from the \$7.75 all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet at Hobo's Korner Kitchen on Main St. in Belgium. The buffet (\$4.50 for kids) also includes less controversial sausage links, fried potatoes, eggs, bacon and fruit.

Hobo's serves its mustripen breakfast buffet the first Sunday of every month from September through May, and typically goes through 80 to 100 pounds of the stuff between 7 and 10:30 a.m., though business is slower on Green Bay Packers game days, assistant manager Jim Pollack noted. (Today's Super Bowl isn't expected to detract from business.)

Mustripen lovers come from as far as Minnesota and Illinois, Pollack said.

"You either love it or you hate it; there's nothing in between."

Five Pillars Supper Club, just east of Random Lake, also serves mustripen on its brunch buffet the third Sunday of the month from September through May.

Like Norwegian lutefisk or Southern chitlins, mustripen is considered culturally important, but with opposing sides on its edibility. Mustripen started as a fall and spring hog-butcherer tradition to use up undesirable pig parts.

Today, mustripen divides families such as the Birenbaums of Belgium into factions, pitting those who love it, even crave it, against those who won't allow it in the house. Opinion usually breaks along generational lines, with a strong elderly following, though adventurous 20-somethings have been known to try mustripen and like it.

Briana Birenbaum, who tasted five bites chased with pancake, conceded, "It tastes



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Catholic Order of Foresters member Clem Bichler tries to persuade a woman to try mustripen at a school fund-raising breakfast after Mass last weekend at St. Mary Parish School in Lake Church.

better than I thought it would. It even melted in my mouth."

Pat Birenbaum said he goes to either his parents' house or to Hobo's Korner Kitchen to satisfy his mustripen cravings.

Both Hobo's and Five Pillars get their mustripen from Schwai's Meat & Sausage Market in Fredonia and Jackson. Schwai's might be the only mustripen source in Wisconsin, though it's difficult to confirm.

Tom Schwai, a third-generation sausage-maker, said he has grown accustomed to the distinctive smell of mustripen, which he attributes to the summer savory herb that gives it flavor, and possibly the cooked cabbage and beef blood.

"The blood isn't gonna hurt you, and you can't taste it," he added. "It's iron. It's good for you."

The sausages begin with fatty pig jowls and picnic ham, cabbage, onion, spices and bread, Schwai said. Those ingredients are cooked together, then the mixture is fed through a grinder, then a mixer to get a smooth texture. He adds a quart of beef blood near the end for moisture. (Pork blood isn't allowed because of the potential for disease.)

That mixture is stuffed into natural pork casings, cooked to a safe 160 degrees, and plunged into ice water to prevent spoilage. Links are hung in a cooler for storage.

Schwai got the recipe from Alex Noster, a beloved sausage-maker who died three years ago this month when his Ford Escort broke through the ice on Random Lake. Noster had been ice fishing earlier with friends, and was on his way to Hobo's to check on ingredients for his next batch of mustripen

when the accident occurred.

Many area residents feared the recipe would be lost with Noster, as mustripen-making no longer is common practice on farms. But Noster had shared the recipe with Schwai before he died, Schwai said.

Schwai figures he makes about 100 pounds of mustripen two to three times a month.

"Demand is growing," he said. "Believe it or not."

The recipe has changed since it was a farm breakfast staple of older generations; it used to be made with the head of the pig and pig's blood.

Vern Arendt, 87, of Port Washington fondly recalls the savory smell of mustripen from his childhood on a farm near Belgium. "It was a wonderful smell coming up from the barn after chores. And by the time you sat down at the table, you were hungry."

He also remembers when his mother would serve the last of the mustripen in springtime. "It was like a funeral. Everyone would leave the table with a sad face."

Members of the Catholic Order of Foresters — many of them mustripen aficionados — served nearly 90 pounds of the brown sausage at the recent St. Mary Parish School pancake breakfast.

"Mustripen is a big draw for the breakfast," said Clem Bichler of Belgium, a Luxembourger who eagerly doled out mustripen to those who wanted it, and encouraged those who didn't to at least taste it. "Some of the people crave it and say 'load the boat,'" Bichler said, smiling. "Others say, 'I'll try just one piece.'"

"To those who don't try it, I say, 'Maybe next year because you'll wish you had.'"



Briana Birenbaum caves in and tries mustripen at the St. Mary Parish School's annual mustripen and pancake breakfast last weekend.

### ABOUT THIS SERIES

This story is part of "Vanishing Wisconsin," an occasional series that takes a closer look at traditions, occupations, cultures and icons that make up the fabric of Wisconsin life but are on the verge of disappearing. If you have an idea, please contact Mark Hoffman at mhoffman@journal-sentinel.com.

# Faithful await winter return of Luxembourgian dish

## A link to the past

By KAREN HERZOG  
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**L**ake Church — Picky eaters don't line up for mustripen. But those who grew up eating the blood-and-cabbage sausage of Luxembourgian origin eagerly anticipate winter, when mustripen (pronounced moose-try-pin) occasionally appears on restaurant and church breakfast menus in rural Ozaukee and Sheboygan county towns where Luxembourger roots run deep. "It's hard to get past the smell and the unappetizing appearance," said Briana Birenbaum, a 21-year-old accounting major at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, who finally

caved in to family heritage pressure and tried mustripen at the St. Mary Parish School's annual mustripen and pancake breakfast last weekend.

"I mean, look at it!" Birenbaum exclaimed, wrinkling her nose and curling her upper lip as she poked a brown hunk on her plate with a fork. "It's cabbage and blood and other gross things from a pig. How appetizing is that?"

Birenbaum's Luxembourger dad, Pat, begs to differ, though mom Jean — not of Luxembourgian descent — has refused to taste mustripen through 26 years of marriage.

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*"You either love it or you hate it; there's nothing in between."*

Jim Pollack, assistant manager at Hobo's Korner Kitchen in Belgium