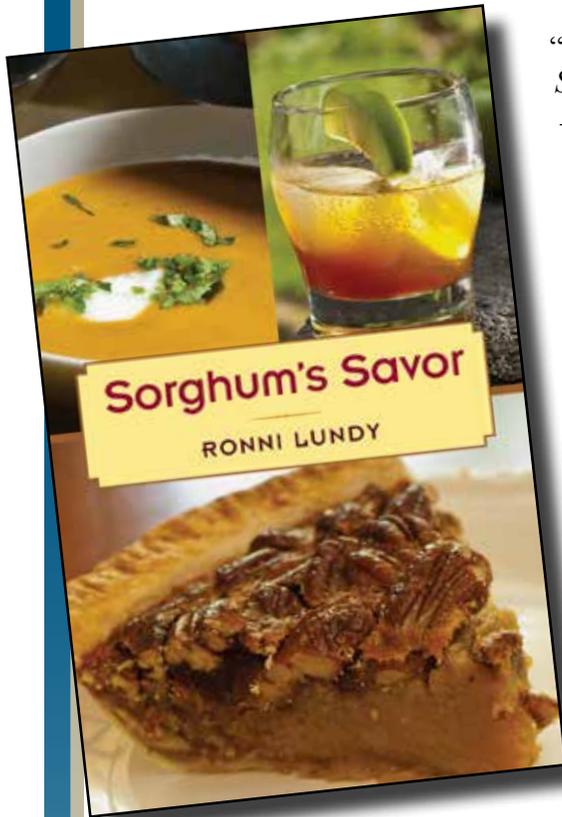


# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING



“In a world of rapid loss of rural food staples, *Sorghum's Savor* eloquently implores us to pay attention.”

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“Lundy gives sorghum its long delayed due in this smart and lyrical book.”—**JOHN T. EDGE**, coeditor of *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South*

“One of the most lucid and lovely voices in all of southern food writing.”—**DAMON LEE FOWLER**, author of *Essentials of Southern Cooking*

“A brilliant blend of science and soul. This is a book that the food world has needed for a long time.”

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“Lundy invites you to sit at the table with a good hot biscuit and some buttery sorghum syrup and meet the people who grow it, make it, and even the chefs who have discovered it. For me and other people who grew up in the Appalachians, the stories offer a taste of home.”—**BELINDA ELLIS**, author of *Biscuits*

“Infuses the sorghum artisan’s pride into each recipe, providing a taste of cooking with heritage.”—**JAMES BAIER**, executive secretary, National Sweet Sorghum Producers & Processors Association

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—**SHERI CASTLE**, author of *The Southern Living Community Cookbook*

“Whether offering authentic hill country classics or twenty-first-century novelties, Lundy’s recipes and meditations explore the full range of sorghum’s flavorsome possibilities. She reveals the affinities of sorghum with New Mexico’s red chiles and West Indian ginger, citrus, and cardamom, as well as its long-cherished harmony with cornbread, buttermilk, sweet potatoes, and bacon.”—**DAVID S. SHIELDS**, author of *Southern Provisions*

“Lundy not only showcases the rich history of sorghum, she goes deeper, showing how much southern chefs truly value the history and traditions of where we come from.”

—**TRAVIS MILTON**, chef de cuisine, Comfort Restaurant (Richmond, VA)



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**SORGHUM'S SAVOR**  
RONNI LUNDY

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Credit: Martha Wilson Vozos



**RONNI LUNDY** has been a frequent contributor to *Food & Wine*, *Gourmet*, and *Esquire*. She is the author of eight books, including *Shuck Beans*, *Stack Cakes*, and *Honest Fried Chicken* and *Cornbread Nation 3: Foods of the Mountain South*. A seasoned writer, speaker, and founder of the Southern Foodways Alliance, author Ronni Lundy is widely considered one of the few experts on southern Appalachian foods.

## RONNI LUNDY

is available for interviews and appearances.



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# Q & A with

**RONNI LUNDY**

author of

## **Sorghum's Savor**



Credit: Martha Wilson Vozos

*“The foodways of the Appalachian South are indicative not only of the human race’s earliest experiences in North America, through its still existing Native American influences, but they also tell the story of settling the frontier and of the industrialization of the country.”*

### **How would you describe the taste of sorghum?**

Sorghum syrup is both sweet and buttery with what my momma would have called “a whang to it.” There is a sharp tang in its taste, and then an undercurrent of mineral with just barely the least whisper or bitter in the background for shadowing. It’s the most complex sweetener, more rounded tasting than honey, cane or maple syrup, not medicinal and abrasive like molasses. It has a quality of umami that other syrups lack.

### **When were you first introduced to sorghum?**

My first memory is tasting it mixed with butter on a biscuit as a toddler at the family table in Corbin, Kentucky.

### **What’s one thing readers might be surprised to learn about sorghum?**

It’s not really molasses. It’s often called that, or sorghum molasses, but molasses is actually a by-product of the sugar making process—the liquid run-off when crystallized sugar is produced. Sorghum syrup is purely the juice from sweet sorghum cane that is carefully rendered to a pourable consistency and resonant taste. Nothing else.

### **Why do you think sorghum is becoming a popular ingredient in progressive cuisine?**

Its umami quality gives sorghum more range than other, less complicated sweeteners. It adds a buttery richness, a slight mineral tang that allows it to be used in savory foods across a broad range of cuisines. It’s an impeccable harmonizer. I like to call it “the Emmylou Harris of sweeteners.”

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**You've received a lifetime achievement award from the Southern Foodways Alliance for your previous cookbooks, food journalism, and involvement in the Appalachian foodways community. Why do you think it's important to write and learn about Southern mountain food?**

Well, let's see. It's the best tasting food in the country, for one. And the foodways of the Appalachian South are indicative not only of the human race's earliest experiences in North America, through its still existing Native American influences, but they also tell the story of settling the frontier and of the industrialization of the country. The region's elevation, topography and climate have dictated that farming be kept relatively small and sustainable, so there is much to be learned from the living traditions of the region. And those elements plus the never-abandoned tradition of seed saving through generations mean that the Appalachian South is the most bio-diverse foodshed in North America. Foodways are also the perfect tool for understanding that this is a culture of innovation, intelligence, diligence, hard work and, most of all, of deep-rooted community.

**Before you started writing about food, you were a longtime music critic for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. How does your work in music journalism influence your food writing?**

I used to say that I used up all of my food analogies writing about music, so I had to switch to using music analogies when writing about food. Both music and cooking are performance arts that interact intimately and immediately with their audiences. There's a conversation in each, and I like listening to and participating in it. I gravitated to writing about music that was deeply embedded in specific cultures or came from distinct regions—bluegrass, zydeco, Nigerian pop, East L.A. rock and roll. That allowed me a window into the soul of a people. Food is about both body and soul.

**What is your favorite cooking memory?**

Impossible to answer, there are so many. But I will tell you that all the memories that matter involve cooking with or for someone I love.

**What chefs or farmers do you admire, and how have they influenced your own work?**

Bill Best, the Kentucky seed saver and existential philosopher is my guru. He's originally from western North Carolina, and his deep understanding of place and the culture/community he comes from and is in inform everything he does. I reach for that in my own work. I have been blessed with an abundance of great chefs who are not only brilliant at what they do in the kitchen, but have enormous hearts. I could not begin to name them all. And I will say that any farmer who is trying to keep the land alive, to sustain a family, to feed the rest of us earns my deepest respect and awe.

**What project are you working on next?**

I'm a member of the Appalachian Food Summit, a just-beginning group of growers, chefs, scholars, writers, producers and eager eaters who are looking for ways to create sustainable food economies and to truthfully record and spread the food-related stories and voices of the region.

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## Monkey Wrench Skillet Fried Chicken

Here's what Louisville, Kentucky, restaurant reviewer Marty Rosen has to say about the fried chicken at Dennie Humphrey's artful eatery and performance space, the Monkey Wrench: "It's a plate that stays true to its southern origins but blends the tradition with keenly imaginative touches: the rich dark sweetness of local sorghum, hints of smoke, a dash of heat supplied by a fire-roasted banana pepper aioli."

Here's how Executive Chef Dustin Staggers pulls it off, adapted for the home cook. The first trick he uses is to soak the chicken overnight in brine made of the combined juice from pickled banana peppers and dill pickles. You do not need to be exact in making this brine at home. You want about a cup, and if you don't have quite enough, you can add salted water to extend (1 teaspoon salt to ¼ cup water). You will use some of the banana peppers for the aioli and can use others to garnish.

### CHICKEN

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- 4 large chicken breasts with skin and bone
  - ½ cup juice from jar of pickled banana peppers, plus more if needed
  - ½ cup juice from jar of dill pickles, plus more if needed
  - ½ cup flour
  - ½ teaspoon salt
  - ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
  - 4 tablespoons melted butter (optional)
  - Lard or vegetable shortening to fry
  - 2 tablespoons sorghum syrup
  - Banana Pepper Aioli (see below)
- 

Marinate the chicken for 24 hours in brine made from combining the juice from pickled banana peppers and juice from dill pickles in a large, sealable, plastic food-storage bag.

When you are ready to fry, in a separate plastic bag, combine the flour, salt, and pepper. Remove chicken and discard brine. (At the Monkey Wrench, cooks pat the chicken dry and dredge in melted

butter, but you may skip this step if you wish.) Place chicken, one piece at a time, in the flour mixture, close bag, and shake and turn gently until chicken is evenly coated in the flour. As you remove the piece from the bag, shake gently to discard any loose breading. Do the same for each piece of chicken.

In a large skillet, preferably cast iron, melt enough lard or shortening to fill the skillet ½-inch deep. Turn the heat to high and adjust as necessary so that the grease is hot enough that a fleck of flour dances but not hot enough to smoke, about 350°F.

Lay the chicken in the hot oil, skin side down, then turn the heat to medium and fry until the skin side gets golden and crispy, 12 to 15 minutes. Turn chicken over, and fry until that side is golden as well and chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165°F. Remove to drain briefly on rack. Serve warm, crisscrossed with drizzles of sorghum and aioli. Serves 4.

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#### BANANA PEPPER AIOLI

2 tablespoons minced pickled banana pepper  
 2 teaspoons juice from jar of pickled banana peppers  
 ¼ cup mayonnaise  
 1 tablespoon sour cream, buttermilk, or plain Greek yogurt  
 Salt and black pepper

---

Combine all the ingredients, adding salt and pepper to taste.

## Seared Steak and Lentil Salad

This savory but nourishing salad has become a favorite entrée served with a hearty bread.

---

1 cup dried green lentils  
 2 cups water  
 ¾ teaspoon salt  
 1 tablespoon sorghum syrup

- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
  - 3 tablespoons Orange Sorghum Vinegar (page 000), divided
  - 1 pound skirt, Denver, or sirloin steak, about 1-inch thick, visible fat removed
  - 1 head fennel sliced fine in 1-inch lengths
  - ½ cup mayonnaise
  - 2 tablespoons minced fresh fennel fronds
  - Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 

Pick over lentils, discarding any wrinkled ones or debris, then rinse and place in saucepan. Add water and bring to a lively simmer on high, then turn heat down to create a gentle simmer. Cook for 20 to 30 minutes uncovered, until lentils are just tender but still whole (*al dente*). Drain and place in large bowl, then add salt and toss.

While lentils are cooking, make the marinade by combining sorghum, soy sauce, and 1 tablespoon of the vinegar, stirring until sorghum is dissolved. Soak the steak in marinade at room temperature for 20 minutes, turning 3 or 4 times to equally dredge both sides.

Remove steak from marinade and let drain on rack while you heat the pan, but do not pat the steak dry. Choose a cast-iron or heavy steel skillet that will allow the steak to cover most of the surface. Spray the skillet lightly with cooking oil and heat on medium high until a few drops of water splashed on the surface skitter and dance. Lay steak on hot surface and leave for about two minutes to sear, then turn and brown the other side as well. Remove from pan to deglaze, using the marinade for liquid. Return steak to pan and simmer on medium for 3 to 5 minutes, turning once, until steak is cooked medium rare.

Remove pan from heat and steak from pan, and using a minimum of water (1 to 2 tablespoons), deglaze pan again and set aside. Slice meat in thin strips, then cut strips in bite-size pieces, about 1-inch wide. Pour warm marinade over the steak and toss to coat. Mix steak and marinade with the lentils. Add sliced fennel and toss.

In a small bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, 2 tablespoons of the vinegar, and minced fennel fronds. Pour over lentil and steak mixture and toss thoroughly to coat. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serves 6 as main course salad.