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A look at the historical context of two select food idioms.

This paper will investigate the historical context meaning and derivation of two selected food idioms to illustrate foods’ importance to culture. The two idioms I have selected to analyze are “The Salt of the Earth” (used as a description of a person or group of people), and “Half-Baked” (as a description of a plan or idea). For each, we will trace the origins and derive how the food concept related to the idiomatic meaning.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

When we describe someone as The Salt of the Earth we are saying this person is “a very good and honest person or group of people”(Merriam). These people are in a sense honest true or in a word pure. The prominent citing of the phrase was given to us from a translation of the Bible in the passage (Mathew 5.13) Jesus refers to his followers as our idiom. Salt of this time was a highly valued commodity, rarely found in its pure form (Nissenbaum). Salt of the Earth would be a reference to the high value and necessary purity and a great compliment to those who Jesus spoke of. Thus ultimately giving us the modern understanding of the idiom as a valuable honest person.

HALF BAKED

To call something half-baked say a plan, idea, or process, is to call it foolish, underthought, or poorly done. The etymological origins are traced directly in old English, and can be found in colloquial idiomatic as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Harper) To then called something half-baked would imply that it’s only partially completed. Depending on the dictionary referenced we find subtle variations in being a reference to poorly thought out (Cambridge) or lacking in execution or follow through (Merriam).

Works Cited

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