

**GONZO**  
**GOURMET**

The logo for 'GONZO GOURMET' is a stylized, hand-drawn illustration. The word 'GONZO' is written in a bold, black, blocky font. The letter 'O' is replaced by a green circle with a white outline. A silver knife with a brown handle is positioned horizontally across the top of the 'O' and 'N'. The word 'GOURMET' is written in a similar bold, black, blocky font. The letter 'O' is replaced by a green circle with a white outline and a sunburst pattern. A silver fork is positioned vertically inside the 'O'. The word 'meT' is written in a smaller, green, lowercase font. A wooden spoon is positioned horizontally across the bottom of the 'O' and 'U'.

**TALKS AND TASTES FROM  
A FARMER AND HIS  
FOOD TRUCK**

**B.A. WILSON**

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Gonzo Gourmet

Tales and Tastes from a Farmer and His Food Truck

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GONZO FARM

PRODUCE - MEAT - EGGS

TURN HERE ↑  
PEBBLEBROOK DRIVE

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72

# INTRODUCTION

March 2020

It is finally spring. As with the rebirth of the farm, so usually does the food truck business begin to blossom. Last year in March I was back to serving hundreds of customers per week while lining up more and more gigs for summer. But not this year. COVID-19 has planted its seed throughout the world, and we are all sheltered in place waiting to see what will emerge.

All of our jobs for the next few months have been canceled. Like many folks across the globe, we are not working, and thus not making money. COVID-19 has put the brakes on my rolling restaurant and confined me to my farm. That is OK. While I am frustrated about the lack of income, I am content here. The pandemic has given me more time to focus on my gardens and my family—and I do not need to socially distance myself from my furry and feathered friends.

The pandemic has also freed me up to finally write this cookbook. I've been thinking about it for years but have been too busy living it to tell the tale. Now I've got some time and I want to share my story as a chef, farmer, and family man, accompanied by the recipes that have kept my loved ones

happy and my business rolling for the last six years.

Being at home all this time hasn't changed the food I make or why I make it, so I've started to think of the farm and my kitchen as a stationary food truck, serving my favorite recipes at the kitchen table instead of from the truck window. This time at home has made most of us reflect on the importance of family and the basic needs of home and hearth. It has made me reflect on how fortunate I am to have learned the skills of farming and cooking. Thankfully, we have a walk-in freezer filled with meat that we have raised on our own property. And it looks like it will be a bountiful spring, in spite of the pandemic. The folks at *Farmers' Almanac* predict a much earlier thaw this spring in our area of Georgia. Thus, the seedlings that we started indoors are ready to move out into the gardens and flourish. As it warms up, the chickens are already ramping up their egg laying.

All of this is important because lots of grocery shelves are currently vacant. This global crisis has reminded us of our necessities. Now, more than ever, I can hammer home the importance of self-reliance to my 9-year-old



daughter. Perhaps now she can better understand her dad’s “wacky” philosophy on life. She is coming along. I realized this the other day when I was reiterating how we don’t have to deal with the scarcity issues at the grocery store and she replied, “Yeah, but you should’ve learned how to make toilet paper.”

“Good point,” I said. “At least we have plenty of leaves on the property if our supply runs out.”

“Gross,” she said.

I do not come from an agricultural family. We never stayed anywhere long enough to establish a homestead. The closest I got to farming was witnessing cows graze on a field across the road during our stint in rural Wisconsin. That was preceded by a few years in New Jersey and some time in midtown

Memphis, Tennessee. Dairyland was followed by a year in Knoxville and six years in suburban Atlanta, where I finished high school.

Throughout my childhood, my father worked hard at the office so my mom could buy food at the grocery store and prepare meals for the family. Mom never had access to fresh ingredients from an established garden, but she created masterpieces from what was available—which often included canned produce and boxed meal “helpers.” She also did not have the time to teach my sister and me how to cook, because she was too busy running us little rascals to basketball practices and gymnastics competitions. My sister and I were far more interested in those activities than in learning to prepare meals or plan ahead for life’s various necessities.

When I was 15 years old, my most important requirement was a car. So, I began my restaurant career working as a busboy at the International House of Pancakes in Atlanta. Mom and Dad told me they would match whatever I made that year to purchase a vehicle when I turned 16. They kicked in a lot more than half so I could get a Honda Civic I reverently called the “Green Machine.”

Funding my way through high school and college with various jobs in restaurants and bars, I went on to get a degree in journalism and spent a decade as a reporter in Arizona and Georgia. I was proud of the reports I filed about local government and won a few awards along the way. But no matter what I was doing, I would always check out vacant “for lease” buildings on the way to city hall or



the supermarket and daydream about returning to the kitchen in a restaurant of my own.

As my passion for journalism was coming to an end, so too was my marriage. As with many things in life, sometimes they just don't work out. So, I packed my bags and moved

to Knoxville, where my parents live, to start fresh. I went back to school and earned a culinary certificate from the University of Tennessee. I returned to restaurants at the ripe old age of 32, running a fast-paced kitchen in Knoxville and saving money in the hopes of starting a culinary enterprise.

That dream came true two years later, when Gonzo Gourmet food truck hit the streets. I chose the name because it referenced my literary idol, the late Hunter S. Thompson, and the ideals of gonzo journalism he created. Thompson's highly personal style of writing included immersing himself in his reports. I wanted to immerse myself and my customers in my food in the same way. I did not want to just bang out mass amounts of conventional dishes—I wanted to be involved in every step of a wildly creative process, from farm to fork. It was also a good way to combine my past and present careers. And I liked the alliteration.

Along the way, I met an amazing woman, Kim, who shared my passions for food, farming, and family. She became my loving partner and now accompanies me on this journey.

From the inception of Gonzo Gourmet, I concentrated on using fresh, local ingredients. However, I couldn't grow or raise my own food for the business on my quarter-acre property in downtown Knoxville. More importantly, I could not properly raise my daughter, Isla Rose, who was living with her mother four hours south of me in Georgia. So, Kim and I relocated to the small town of Dahlonega, Georgia, where I could be



close to my daughter and purchase five acres of Southern farmland. I wanted my truck to serve the best possible homegrown ingredients, and I wanted my child to know why local, sustainable agriculture is so important.

So here we are now, four years later in Dahlonega: me, Kim, Isla Rose, and our dog Duke, living amongst—at any given time—about 30 chickens, 10 pigs, 15 sheep, fruit trees, and an ever-changing cycle of vegetable crops. In these past few years I have put up a lot of fencing to contain the menagerie. Kim and I have wallowed in various kinds of feces while chasing loose pigs around. We have nurtured hundreds of chicks and gathered countless eggs from our coops. We

have happily raised and humanely processed numerous livestock, and we have harvested a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables. All of this has been used to create fabulous food for the truck, and for our family's table.

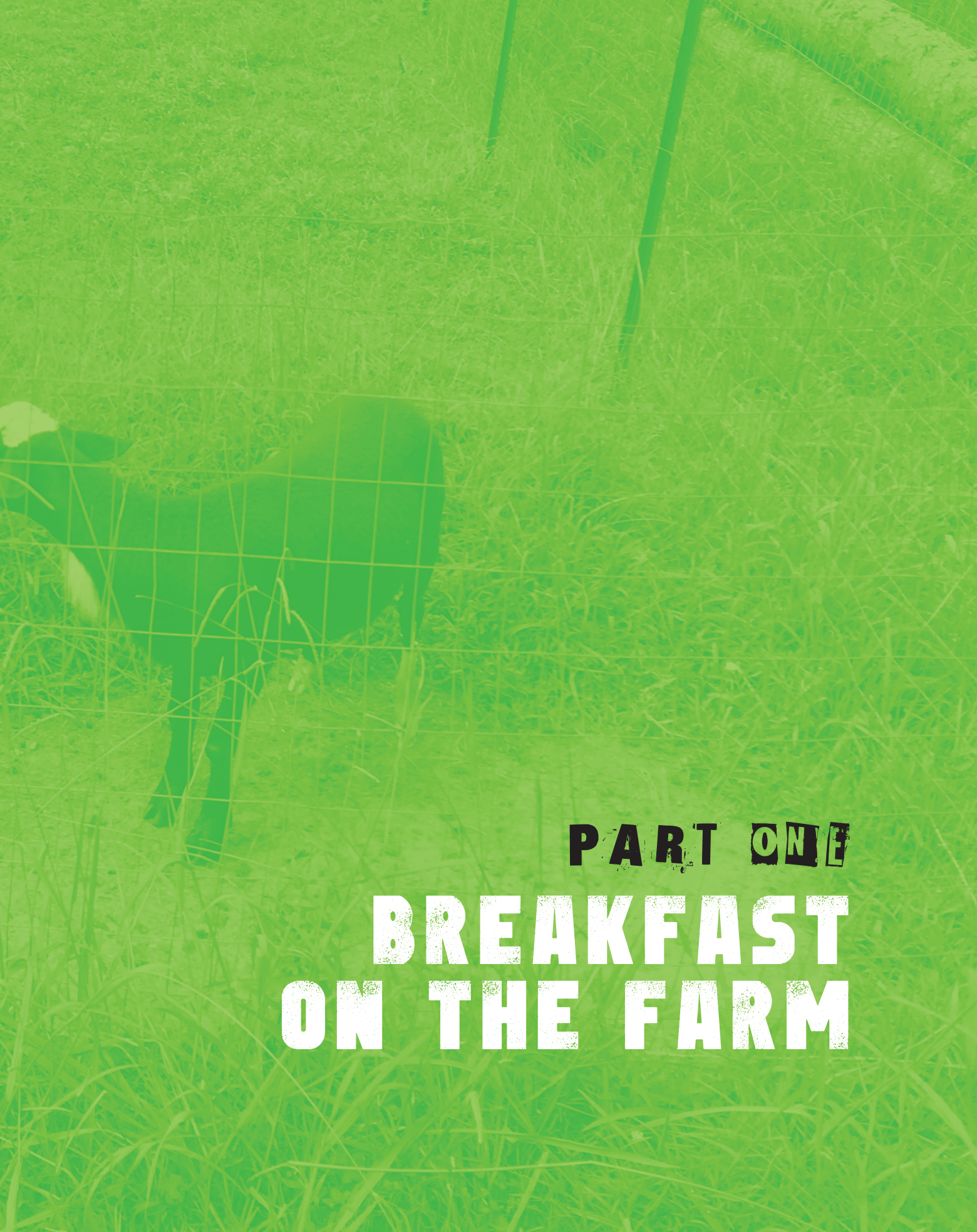
Whether my truck is on the road or not, I want to share my food and my stories. Since we have decided to take a break from serving here in Georgia during the pandemic, I now give you the opportunity to try my recipes for yourself and read the stories of how many came to fruition. When COVID-19 is hopefully a thing of the past, you can also use this book when you *voluntarily* shelter in place—maybe even just for a long cozy weekend.

Happy cooking from me and my family!









**PART ONE**

**BREAKFAST  
ON THE FARM**

GO FARM

CAKES



# BREAKFAST ON THE FARM

**W**e are up early. I rise at around 5:00. Kim barely wakes to give me a kiss, but generally stays in bed for another hour. I try to keep quiet to let her rest.

The roosters, however, are not so courteous. They begin their days at around the same time as I do and immediately start shouting at all the hens—and the neighbors, and Duke, our 90-pound boxer who is often the first out the door to go check on things.

The sheep start yelling at the humans at around the time Kim walks into the living room. The sheep in the front pasture have a direct view of the house and just stare at our windows for the first signs of activity. If you bend the blinds to peek out at them, they will see you—and they will yell louder. Although they have plenty of grass in the summer and hay in the winter, they want the good stuff—the small scoop of 12 percent protein feed we mix with their mineral supplement each morning.

The pigs are the quietest of our creatures in the morning. They stay asleep until their food is merely steps away from being delivered. They rouse themselves for Kim, who tops off their dry feed with various leftovers

from the previous day's food truck service. They get a taste of the high life on days after wedding gigs, when they are served dishes like fettuccini Alfredo, carrot bisque, and chicken roulades with feta cheese. They also annihilate any over-ripened garden produce we forget to harvest in time.

At around 6:30 we go out to start feeding. Kim does the bulk of the morning chores on the days we have lunchtime food truck jobs, which is about four times a week. I have to





break free from chores at around 7:45 to start getting the Gonzo Gourmet trailer hitched up and ready to roll. I finish any food prep work that needs to be done and triple-check that we have everything on the rig that we may need for the day. I am generally done

by 9:00, as Kim is walking back to the house from collecting eggs out of the chicken coops.

In the height of the laying season, we get about 18 eggs per day from 30 chickens. Our chickens range free on half an acre that is separated into four sections with welded-wire fencing. They have a fenced walkway that connects to all four quadrants so we can rotate where they range. We close off a couple of sections at a time to allow the grass and weeds to grow in the fallow area. When the chickens have annihilated one quadrant, we turn them loose in a grown-up area. We supplement their free ranging with about four ounces of non-GMO feed per bird. During



the months when there is ample fresh forage, they eat less feed.

We have two coops in this sectioned area. The main coop, which houses about 20 birds, was the first thing Kim and I built when we moved to Georgia. Those were exciting times for us, as we were new to farming and anxious to get the first shelter up. We worked under sunlight in the morning and truck headlights at night for three days straight. I built the second coop about a year later. My daughter helped me paint it.





In the early days of the farm, I also built two chicken tractors, which are mobile coops with no floors. We put four chickens in each narrow, rolling coop and they scratch, eat, and weed in between the rows of vegetables in our gardens. One tractor I built out of wrought-iron fence panels that my friend gave me, and the other I made out of scrap wood with chicken wire. They are light and easy for one person to move. Both tractors have wheels I yanked off old lawnmowers. They work just fine; chickens aren't too picky. Each has a roof to shade the birds and a couple of nesting boxes on a raised platform to lay eggs in. Both tractors have hanging watering cans that Kim fills each morning.

The chickens in the tractors scratch and fertilize a 4 x 8-foot rectangle. When they are done munching and pooping in that area, I roll them eight feet down the garden row to start all over again. It's a daily process, but it keeps the grass short and the chickens fed.

The return on all this work, of course, is a nicely trimmed garden, and the farm-fresh eggs we collect each day. You'll never enjoy a tastier egg than one picked straight from a nesting box and cracked into the frying pan. Even if you purchase free-range eggs from the store, they might still be 14 days away from the chicken that laid them. Your homegrown equivalents will be far fresher and better. In my case, I believe it is also because I can taste the hard work and love Kim put in to making those birds happy.





# JUST EGGS AND BACON

**W**e sell our chicken eggs. In most municipalities, all you need to do is obtain a candling permit from the state's department of agriculture. Most of these departments have year-round class schedules on their websites. You take a one-day class,

pay a fee, and learn how to examine eggs with a light source for quality and then grade the eggs. Whether you are supplying a restaurant or a roadside stand or anything in between, you will be required to examine your eggs and keep solid records of your sales.

## PASTEURIZATION

With any raw or undercooked egg recipe, such as poached eggs, it is advised you use fresh, pasteurized eggs to reduce the risk of salmonella. Most store-bought eggs in the United States are already pasteurized. This is done with specialized equipment and processes approved by the Food and Drug Administration. However, you can pasteurize farm-fresh eggs at home for personal use if you have a good thermometer. To do so, put room-temperature eggs in a pot of 140-degree water for a full three minutes. Carefully monitor your water temperature to be sure it remains constant at 140 degrees, which is just hot enough to kill any harmful bacteria, but not enough to cook the eggs. *Be advised that the United States Department of Agriculture discourages pasteurizing eggs yourself, claiming that the process is difficult to do successfully. Therefore, like all other food-safety-related measures in this book, you should consult with your own local officials on the subject. I have done extensive research on food safety. I am ServSafe certified. I obtain all the necessary permits and variances to handle food correctly for the public. Even so, I only pasteurize our farm-fresh eggs when cooking for myself. When I use recipes for my business that call for undercooked eggs, I purchase free-range, store-bought, commercially pasteurized eggs.*

## POACHED EGG

*Tip: Use a cold egg, as the whites hold together much better this way.*

- 🌿 1 cold pasteurized egg
- 🌿 2 Tbsp. white vinegar

Fill a small pot with water to about three inches deep and bring to a gentle simmer, then stir in vinegar. Crack egg into a ladle, gently lower it into the hot water, then let the egg float free of the ladle. Cook for about 4 minutes, or until desired doneness, then scoop it out of the water with a slotted spoon. Whites should be firm, wrapped around yolks that are soft and runny.

### CATERING TIP:

#### MAKING POACHED EGGS FOR LARGER GATHERINGS

Poached eggs can be made an hour or two in advance of large services. Use the method above and drop each poached egg immediately into an ice bath to stop the cooking. When you are ready to serve, remove them from the ice bath and reheat them for about 45 seconds in a pot of simmering water.

## PERFECT SIMMERED EGG

- 🌿 Use 1 pasteurized egg

Put the egg in a pot with enough *warm* water to cover it. Turn on the heat and bring the water to a slow simmer *with the egg in it*. You do not want to bring the water to a boil, as this can overcook the egg and give it that icky green color around the yolk. The term “hard-boiled eggs” is technically incorrect—you are really going for simmered eggs.

Once the water is at a steady simmer, continue cooking the egg for 12 minutes. In the meantime, prepare an ice-water bath in a bowl. Remove the egg from the water with a

slotted spoon or tongs and drop it into the ice bath. When egg is cool enough to handle, roll it under pressure to crack the shell evenly, then peel it under slowly running water.

## PEELING HARD-COOKED EGGS

Peeling a farm-fresh egg is a lot more difficult than peeling the supermarket version. This is because store-bought eggs are not nearly as fresh as those collected in your backyard. Essentially, as an egg ages, it begins to pull away from its shell, thus making it easier to peel. To avoid having your hard-cooked eggs look like asteroids when you are done peeling them, wait to simmer those eggs for a week or more after they are collected.

## ▶ YOUTUBE EXTRA



Check out my YouTube channel, Gonzo Gourmet Food Truck, for more on these recipes. I demonstrate how to prepare these egg basics in my Outlaw Eggs Benedict show.

## FLUFFIER SCRAMBLED EGGS

- 🌿 4 eggs
- 🌿 4 Tbsp. water or heavy cream
- 🌿 2 Tbsp. clarified unsalted butter (see page 20 for how to clarify butter)
- 🌿 Kosher salt and pepper to taste

Crack eggs into a bowl and whisk gently. Whisking introduces air into the eggs, which makes them fluffier. Season with salt and pepper. Gently stir water into the whisked egg mixture.

Heat clarified butter in a nonstick sauté pan. Pour in the eggs and cook, gently moving around the egg mixture with a rubber spatula or wooden spoon for about two minutes or until they are set. For fluffier eggs, leave them in 30 seconds longer. For even creamier eggs, use 4 Tbsp. of heavy cream instead of water.

## HOW TO CLARIFY BUTTER

Clarifying butter is the process of removing milk solids and water so you are left with pure butterfat. The end product is ideal for cooking and sautéing (due to its higher smoke point) and creating sauces like hollandaise.

First, start with at least one pound of butter (four sticks or more). It is very difficult to clarify a couple tablespoons of butter. Also, doing it in large batches keeps a constant supply on hand for future recipes that call for it.

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat for about three to five minutes. Do not stir. This is important. You do not want to disrupt the process of the milk solids sinking to the bottom and the water evaporating.

A foam of impurities will form on top of the butter. Turn off the heat. Carefully skim the foam off the butter with a spoon. Carefully strain the butterfat into a jar through cheesecloth over a metal sieve to capture the milk solids that rested on the bottom of the pan. Let the butter cool to room temperature. Put a lid on the jar and refrigerate.

