



General Mills

history of innovation

the history of Betty Crocker



Betty Crocker's current portrait

Since 1921, the Betty Crocker name has symbolized General Mills' continuing tradition of service to consumers. Although Betty was never a real person, her name and identity have become synonymous with helpfulness, trustworthiness and quality. It all began when a promotion for Gold Medal flour offered consumers a pin cushion resembling a flour sack if they correctly completed a jigsaw puzzle of a milling scene. The Washburn Crosby Company, a forerunner of General Mills, received thousands of responses and a flood of questions about baking.

"Betty Crocker" was created as a signature to personalize the responses to those inquiries. The surname Crocker was chosen to honor a popular, recently retired director of the company, William G. Crocker. Betty was chosen simply as a friendly sounding name. Female employees were invited to submit sample Betty Crocker signatures; the one judged most distinctive

is the basis for the one still in use today.

During this same period, the company expanded its commitment to consumer service and product quality by sponsoring cooking schools across the country. In fact, the "Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air" began on the radio in 1924. The growth of consumer demand for information necessitated the hiring of 21 home economists. They were employed to carefully test and demonstrate the company's gold medal-winning flour. This was the beginning of the Betty Crocker Kitchens.



Ad for Betty Crocker radio show

The Betty Crocker Kitchens

Betty Crocker really does have her own kitchens. In fact, she has seven! Each represents a different area of the United States: Arizona Desert, California, Cape Cod, Chinatown, Hawaiian, Pennsylvania Dutch and Williamsburg. There are also three camera kitchens, where the beautiful food photography for packaging, recipes and cookbooks takes place.

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The Kitchens offered tours shortly after General Mills moved into its headquarters in Golden Valley, Minn., in 1958. The guided tours ran through January 1985. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million people toured the facilities during that time.



General Mills test kitchens from the 1950s

Betty Crocker Cookbooks



1950s edition of "Big Red"

In the 1950s, America's growing families were flocking to their new suburban kitchens. The convergence of new appliances with convenience foods created a need for new recipes. Betty met that need with the first of more than 200 cookbook titles. First issued in 1950, "Big Red" (as the big picture cookbooks have been dubbed in honor of the original) is now in its ninth edition, released in 2000. Millions of copies have been sold over the years, making it one of the all-time best-selling books in the world. Since 1980, Betty Crocker has also published recipe magazines featuring recipes, preparation tips and presentation ideas for easy everyday cooking. The magazines are available at supermarkets nationwide.

Betty Crocker Portraits

Although Betty Crocker was created in 1921, she did not have a real physical identity. In the 1920s, a drawing of a woman was featured in Gold Medal flour advertisements as well as in ads for the "Cooking School of the Air," Betty's own radio show. When Betty Crocker became so well-known, it was felt there was a need to depict her. A prominent New York artist, Neysa McMein, was commissioned to create a likeness, and Betty Crocker's first portrait was created in 1936. The portrait made its first package appearance in 1937 on Softasilk cake flour.

Betty's portrait has been updated seven times over the past eight decades, with new portraits being painted in 1955, 1965, 1968, 1972, 1980, 1986 and 1996. In all eight portraits, Betty wears a red dress, jacket or sweater, with white at her neck. Her latest rendition was created in honor of her 75th birthday, although she has hardly aged a day. Her hairstyles and clothes have changed to reflect the changing fashions of American women.



Betty Crocker's first official portrait, 1936

Through the years, Americans have come to trust Betty Crocker for quality, good taste and value.

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Betty Crocker's official portraits



1936



1955



1965



1968



1972



1980



1986



1996