

# delectable delacata

*Catfish, the most Southern fish, gets a little finer.*

by miriam taylor



Former *New York Times* food critic and Mississippi native Craig Claiborne once said, “I am persuaded that catfish is the most Southern of all fish.” You would be hard pressed to find someone who disagrees. Just the mention of the word brings memories of summer fish fries under overhanging branches on Wolf Lake or by the Pearl.

What if there was a finer cut of that same bottom-feeder? Picture the Delacata. Say it, slowly. Sounds delicious, right? It sounds like something flaky that melts in your mouth. Dela-ca-ta. Would it surprise you to know that this is the latest trend in the catfish world?

Developed five years ago by the Catfish Institute, the Delacata is a nicer cut of catfish—not a different species, just the center cut. Think of it as the filet mignon of the fish world—hand-trimmed with all of the fat removed.

Sounds wonderful, and Simmons Farm Raised Catfish in Yazoo City has got you covered.

“We started making it two years ago,” says Katy Simmons Prosser, the third generation of the family to work under the red-roofed buildings that quietly surprises you on your drive through the Delta. “My dad’s main focus has always been quality, classic American quality; we raise, process, sell, market, and distribute our fish. There are not many processors that are as involved as we are.”

With the addition of the Delacata to their ordering options, they’ve continued that legacy of quality and involvement.

Multiple chefs around the Southeast are ordering it for their restaurants. The Fairview on North State Street has it on its dinner menu, and the trend is picking up around the country. The fish market in Los Angeles, California, sends a truck twice a week to the Yazoo City plant. In Jackson, the fish is available for purchase from McDade’s in Maywood Mart, and it’s also always available from the Simmons’ website.

Prosser, who went to the French Culinary Institute in New York, says the Delacata is comparable to halibut; it’s fish to be grilled, not fried. She also notes how much healthier this cut is. “It’s so healthy,” says Prosser, “loaded with omega-3, low in fat, and full of protein.”

Simmons Farm Raised Catfish is doing much more than just bringing Delacata to Mississippi. The processing plant, which has been in business for more than 30 years, has partnered with Eat Jackson and the Southern Foodways Alliance to promote interest in the culinary culture of the state. Simmons also provides the catfish for “Mississippi on the Mall” and “Mississippi in the Park” in Washington, D.C. and Manhattan, the two biggest Mississippi reunions serving fried catfish and McAlister’s sweet tea.

Craig Claiborne featured this recipe in his *New York Times* column in 1981. Mrs. Sybil Arant and Craig Claiborne hail from the same Delta hometown of Sunflower.

Claiborne finishes his thoughts on catfish by saying that “catfish—if it is the basis of whatever preparation—transforms a dish into something Southern.” Prosser agrees, “Catfish is still Southern, whether cooked in Yazoo City, D.C., New York, or even farther afield.” M

## MRS. SYBIL’S CATFISH BAKED WITH CHEESE

*This recipe is a favorite for special occasions in the Simmons’ home.*

6 Simmons’ Delacata Style Catfish or	1 teaspoon paprika
6 (7-ounce) catfish filets	1 egg, lightly beaten
1 cup Parmesan cheese	1 tablespoon milk
½ cup all-purpose flour	½ cup melted butter
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste	¼ cup sliced almonds

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Wipe catfish dry. Blend cheese, flour, salt, pepper, and paprika; set aside. Combine egg and milk in a flat dish. Dip filets in egg mixture, then coat with cheese mixture. Arrange filets in one layer in a lightly buttered baking dish and pour butter over fish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake for 25-30 minutes.

Yield: 6 servings

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Simmons Catfish  
Yazoo City | 662.746.5687 | [simmons-catfish.com](http://simmons-catfish.com)