

Modern mountain meals: Eastern Kentucky native reimagines Appalachian recipes



After nearly 40 years as a practicing pharmacist, Jan Brandenburg has published “The Modern Mountain Cookbook: A Plant-Based Celebration of Appalachia.”

LEXINGTON, Ky. — It all started with a classic childhood toy.

“I’ve been cooking since I was really young,” said Jan Brandenburg, a University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy alumna. “I received one of those Easy-Bake Ovens as a child and was hooked.”

That spark of childhood wonder led Brandenburg down two parallel paths: one in science and medicine, another in the kitchen. Today, after nearly 40 years as a practicing pharmacist, Brandenburg has published “The Modern Mountain Cookbook: A Plant-Based Celebration of Appalachia,” a tribute to her Eastern Kentucky roots and a vibrant exploration of how food — like medicine — can nourish, heal and connect.

A native of Irvine, Kentucky, Brandenburg grew up surrounded by family recipes, handwritten notes and the scent of Appalachian staples simmering on the stove. Her paternal grandmother helped run two small restaurants in Somerset, where Brandenburg worked weekends during high school and throughout pharmacy school. Those early kitchen memories laid the groundwork for what would later become a deep passion for cooking — and reimagining — traditional regional dishes.

But it wasn’t until the mid-1990s, after becoming vegetarian for health and ethical reasons, that Brandenburg began experimenting with the recipes she’d grown up on.

“After pharmacy school, I brought my mortar and pestle home to grind herbs and seasonings,” she wrote in her cookbook’s introduction. “The more I cooked and learned, the more reasons I found to continue the journey.”

By 2006, she had embraced a fully vegan lifestyle, transforming her Appalachian family’s meals into comforting, plant-based creations without sacrificing flavor or heart.

Brandenburg sees clear similarities between her career in pharmacy and her evolution as a cook. Both, she says, are grounded in care.

“The biggest parallel between pharmacy and my love of cooking is that they both serve people,” she said. “People feel special at the pharmacy counter when you take the time to talk with them. And people also feel special when you cook for them.”

There’s also a kind of alchemy that connects her two worlds — the precise compounding of pharmacy and the improvisational mixing of ingredients in a kitchen.

“In pharmacy, your ingredients must be exact,” she said. “In cooking, you have more latitude. You don’t always have to follow a strict formula. The important thing is to get in there and do it.”

Still, her scientific background never leaves the table. Brandenburg now works as a clinical pharmacist at CHI St. Joseph Hospital in Berea, Kentucky, where she continues to blend her knowledge of pharmaceuticals and food. Her patients often benefit from both.

Brandenburg often finds herself offering guidance to patients with diabetes or high cholesterol, not just on medications, but on food choices, too.

“So many people don’t realize the strength of the connection between diet and health,” she said. “I’m always willing to share information if someone is ready to receive it.”

And she’s just as happy to share recipes.

“In the summer, I love making peach crisp,” she says. “Or a fresh corn salad with cucumbers and white vinegar dressing. And all the summer pasta salads, those are big-time favorites.”

Brandenburg’s approach to food is rooted in what’s growing, what’s colorful, what’s flavorful and what brings people together. Her recipes reflect the land and seasons of Appalachia, not as relics of the past, but as living traditions infused with compassion and creativity.

“You know, we like comfort foods in Eastern Kentucky,” she said. “That didn’t change just because I adopted a plant-based diet.”

Her cookbook includes more than 130 recipes — from soups and stews to jams and gravies — alongside

personal anecdotes, family stories, and tips on vegan kitchen tools and ingredients. It’s as much a love letter to her heritage as it is a guide for home cooks curious about plant-based living.

In the foreword, Brandenburg’s friend and neighbor, Beth Feagan, calls her “a one-woman campaign to get people to eat more vegetables and love every bite.”

“My maternal grandmother wouldn’t have known the word ‘vegan,’” she wrote in her book, “but she could conjure incredible meals from the simplest vegetable ingredients harvested as she walked the rows of her backyard garden.”

That legacy of Appalachian resilience, care and flavor is what Brandenburg hopes to pass on. In a world where wellness often feels overcomplicated, her message is refreshingly simple: healing can begin in the kitchen.

The Modern Mountain Cookbook is available from the University Press of Kentucky. UK faculty and staff may use the promo code FA20 to receive a 20% discount on online purchases. The cookbook is also available at major bookstores and online retailers. Visit the publisher’s website for Brandenburg’s upcoming cookbook signings and events. For more recipes, follow the author on Instagram at @appalachian-vegan.

As the state’s flagship, land-grant institution, the University of Kentucky exists to advance the Commonwealth. We do that by preparing the next generation of leaders — placing students at the heart of everything we do — and transforming the lives of Kentuckians through education, research and creative work, service and health care. We pride ourselves on being a catalyst for breakthroughs and a force for healing, a place where ingenuity unfolds. It’s all made possible by our people — visionaries, disruptors and pioneers — who make up 200 academic programs, a \$476.5 million research and development enterprise and a world-class medical center, all on one campus.

Congress must act to help the new postmaster general pull USPS back from the brink



The United States Postal Service is on the brink of a self-induced collapse. The failed policies of the Delivering for America Plan have driven away customers through a combination of sky-high rate increases and degraded service. David Steiner, who will take over as Postmaster General on July 14, 2025, has a tough job to do and little time to do it with some estimates indicating the USPS could be insolvent as soon as 2028.

Congress has a key role to play in helping him right the ship but must get off the sidelines and act. A useful step occurred earlier this week with a hearing before the House Oversight Subcommittee on Government Operations. The National Newspaper Association (NNA) provided a statement for the hearing that lays out key actions Congress can take to help restore the USPS.

We emphasized that NNA members serve their communities, providing news on local events and civic matters that are not covered anywhere else, and that they depend on the USPS to get their papers to subscribers. The USPS — and by extension the small businesses in the communities they serve — faces an immediate and existential crisis. We urge Congress to act swiftly and compel meaningful reform at the USPS.

Here are three actions Congress can take right now to get the USPS back on track and keep commerce in America moving:

Demand the USPS Board halt the Delivering for America Plan including the large rate increase planned for July 13, 2025. This increase, far above the rate of inflation will only deepen the hole and ties the hands of incoming Postmaster General David Steiner, who should have the opportunity to assess the situation. The same holds true for the network consolidations and service cuts. Every customer that is lost through these increases and service reductions is one less Steiner can rely on in the future.

Modernize and empower the USPS regulator. Effective checks and balances are needed to keep the USPS on track. Congress needs to update and modernize the postal regulatory process to better safeguard against excessive rates and poor service by passing H.R. 3004, The USPS SERVES US Act.

Measure newspaper costs accurately. Congress should compel accurate measurement of newspaper service and hold the USPS accountable for maintaining and improving service quality by enacting H.R. 2098/S.1002, the Deliver for Democracy Act.

These are all commonsense steps Congress can take to address what has been clearly a failed approach by USPS management. Steiner has a huge job ahead of him and will need all the help he can get.

Congress must act now to make sure the nation’s next Postmaster General is not the last one.

By
Martha Diaz Aszkenazy,
Chair, National
Newspaper Association

LCHS Class of 1967 Reunion

LCHS Class of 1967 Reunion will be held at the Natural Bridge State Resort Hemlock Lodge in the Trillium Room on September 6, 2025 4pm-9pm.

FREE BALLOON ANIMALS

AT DANIEL BOONE DAYS SATURDAY, JULY 5, 25

DOWNTOWN BOONEVILLE, KY 6:00 PM-10 PM

Come enjoy amazing, fun, and FREE balloon creations for kids and families – twisted live by Corney Twists

- Sponsored by the **DANIEL BOONE COMMITTEE**
- Don’t miss the fun – one night only!
- Look for our balloon artists in event area!

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4Th of July Celebration

Lee County Little League Baseball Game 5:00 pm

Cake Walk : Under the Pavilion 6:00 P.M

Want to DONATE A CAKE Message:

Jolene Coomer, Kim Smallwood, Josh Smallwood

LCMHS “Pride of the Mountains” Marching Band

Car Wash and Bake Sale

Dollar General Store Parking Lot Next to Auto Zone on Hwy 11 in Beattyville

Saturday, July 5, 2025

CAR WASH

Come out and support Lee County's talented youth!

Help the band as they earn their own funds for competitions!