



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 company launched a radio show in 1924. Later named “The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air,” the broadcast became one of the longest running shows in radio history. 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. They’ve changed quite a bit over the years, but they’ve always been state of the art. The newest Betty Crocker Kitchens, opened in 2003,

the history of Betty Crocker

consist of 19 fully equipped kitchens. Boasting 13,595 square feet, the workspace makes it easier for home economists to perform more than 50,000 recipe tests each year for a whole new generation of cooks.

This ergonomic facility had its beginnings as the test kitchens inside the Washburn Crosby A mill. Created before the birth of Betty Crocker, they were full of modern conveniences such as running water and gas stoves. The kitchens formally changed their name to the “Betty Crocker Kitchens” in 1946.



General Mills test kitchens of the 1950s

When General Mills moved its headquarters to Golden Valley, Minn., in 1958, seven new kitchens were built, each one representing a different area of the United States: Arizona Desert, California, Cape Cod, Chinatown, Hawaiian, Pennsylvania Dutch and Williamsburg. The Kitchens offered public tours until January 1985, when they were closed, in part, to preserve the confidentiality of General Mills’ new product research. During the years the Kitchens were open, it’s estimated that more than 1.5 million people had visited to catch a glimpse of where Betty Crocker created her famous recipes.

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 tenth edition, released in 2005. 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 also has published recipe magazines featuring recipes, preparation tips and presentation ideas for easy everyday cooking. The magazines are available at supermarkets across America.

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. After Betty Crocker became so well-known, the company wanted to depict her. A prominent New York artist, Neysa McMein, was commissioned to create a likeness, and Betty Crocker’s first



Betty Crocker’s first official portrait, 1936

the history of Betty Crocker

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 painted in 1955, 1965, 1969, 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, clothes and demeanor have evolved to reflect the changing faces of American women.

Through the years, cooks everywhere have come to trust Betty Crocker – America's first lady of food – for quality, good taste and value.

Betty Crocker's official portraits



1936



1955



1965



1969



1972



1980



1986



1996