

A Yam's Journey from the Farm to Your Family

A couple of weeks ago I got to thinking. I had been to Mr. French's sweet potato farm last year and learned all about how they grow those yummy yams. Then my mom took me to the grocery store and I saw all kinds of sweet potatoes in cans on the shelves ... but there was something missing. How in the world did they get from the farm to the store and in those cans?



When I can't figure stuff out I ask my mom or dad, so I talked to them about it. They said that when the sweet potatoes leave the farm they go to great big places called "canning plants." They even said that if I ate all of my dinner, we could go visit TWO canning plants. We were having scrumptious sweet potatoes that night so you can bet I finished every bite!

The first canning plant we went to was called Bruce Foods. A really nice man met my family and we got to take a tour of the whole place. It was so cool! The first thing I learned is that when the sweet potatoes come in on the big trucks, they are still dirty from the fields, so they get washed off with hot water. Then they get peeled — but not with a potato peeler like mom uses. They get peeled with really hot steam, even hotter than the shower at home. The steam just blows the peelings right off! Without their peelings, the yams are very bright orange, and it was neat to see pounds and pounds of them going down the big belt. People called "inspectors" check to make sure that all the sweet potatoes are clean and good enough for us to eat. Then the yams get sorted into different sizes, because the big ones are put into cans either whole or in slices or chunks. The smallest pieces get made into mashed sweet potatoes and yam pie filling.

The other canning plant we visited that day was the Allen Canning Company. My favorite part of that plant was the big machine that cuts up the sweet potatoes and puts them into different sized cans. Some of the yams in cans go swimming in sugary syrup and others are drenched in tasty sauces like orange-pineapple. After the yam cans are filled up, lids are put on the cans and they go off to get cooked in large pressure cookers. That's right — they cook those yummy yams right in the cans! After the cans cool down, the machines put labels on them, just like you see in the store. Then all the cans get packed into big boxes and carried out to the loading dock. The day we were there, we saw at least five big trucks loading up with boxes and boxes of my favorite food in the whole world!

It was really great to see what happens to all those yams when they leave the farms. Later that day when we were driving home, we passed by my mom's favorite grocery store. Sure as shooting, I saw one of those big trucks delivering sweet potatoes right to the store — and I was very happy because I learned EXACTLY how they got there!