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## *Kicked Up Sausage Macaroni and Cheese*

Serves 4-6

- 9 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/2 pound elbow macaroni
- 1 pound spicy pork sausage, removed from casings and crumbled
- 1 cup chopped yellow onions
- 1/2 cup chopped green bell peppers
- 1 tablespoon Essence, recipe follows
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon anise seeds
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 3 cups whole milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne
- 3 cups grated sharp cheddar cheese (8 ounces)
- 1/2 cup fine dry bread crumbs

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Butter a large casserole dish with 1 tablespoon of the butter and set aside. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the macaroni and cook until al dente, about 10 minutes. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold running water. Drain well.

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the sausage, stirring, until browned and the fat is rendered. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of fat from the pan. Add the onions, bell peppers, and 1 teaspoon of the Essence, and cook, stirring, over medium-high heat until soft, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and anise seeds, and cook, stirring,

for 1 minute. Remove from the heat.

Melt the remaining stick of butter in a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour, and stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, cook over medium heat until thick, 3 to 4 minutes, being careful not to let the flour brown. Using a whisk, add the milk in a steady stream and cook, whisking constantly, until thick and smooth, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Add the salt, pepper, cayenne, and 2 cups of the cheese, and stir well. Add the noodles, cooked sausage and vegetables, and stir well to combine.

Pour into the prepared baking dish.

In a mixing bowl, combine the remaining 1 cup of cheese with the breadcrumbs and remaining 2 teaspoons of Essence. Sprinkle over the macaroni and bake until golden brown and bubbly, about 25 minutes.

Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

*Essence (Emeril's Creole Seasoning):*

- 2 1/2 tablespoons paprika
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon dried leaf oregano
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme

Combine all ingredients thoroughly and store in an airtight jar or container. Yield: about 2/3 cup

*Sweetnicks Note: Very good. Recipe courtesy of Emeril.*