

# Pea, Cauliflower and Country Ham Casserole



## The Chef

John Sinclair

## His Restaurants

Longway Tavern  
and Barrel Proof, in  
New Orleans

## What he's known for

Raising the bar  
for bar food in a  
city that loves its  
cocktails. Swapping  
out the stodgy  
fried fare in favor  
of fresh, produce-  
packed alternatives.

**COMFORT FOOD** has its limits. Assuredly (and deliciously), butter and cream temper the sting of winter's most biting weeks, but it's easy to overdo it, too. "So let's make something you don't regret at all afterwards," said chef John Sinclair. At Longway Tavern in New Orleans, he naps sweet peas and country ham in a pureed-cauliflower "cream." In his second Slow Food Fast recipe, adapted for home cooks, the whole thing bakes in the oven until the buttery breadcrumb topping goes all crunchy and golden. It amounts to something very much like a vegetable pot pie, minus the fussy pastry and gut-bomb

sauce. "You can eat a whole bowl and not feel bad," said Mr. Sinclair.

Simmered in milk and quickly blitzed in a blender, the cauliflower makes a puree with just enough body to hold the other elements together, without any added starch or cream. And while the ham and the butter in the recipe lend satisfying richness, they act as supporting players to the hearty helping of vegetables waiting under the crisp breadcrumb crust. It's a nourishing meal that feels like a treat. "I like it when you don't expect what's hidden underneath," said Mr. Sinclair. "And then it surprises you." —*Kirby Greenwald*

**Total Time** 35 minutes

**Serves** 4-6

**3 tablespoons butter**  
**½ cup breadcrumbs or panko**  
**Kosher salt**  
**1 medium head cauliflower**  
**4 cups milk**  
**7 ounces country ham or prosciutto, finely diced**  
**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**10 ounces frozen English peas, thawed**  
**½ lemon**

**1.** Preheat oven to 450 degrees. In a small pot, melt half the butter. Off heat, toss in breadcrumbs and a pinch of salt. Set breadcrumbs aside.

**2.** Roughly chop cauliflower into 1-inch pieces. Transfer to a medium pot and add enough milk to cover cauliflower. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Continue simmering, adjusting heat as needed to avoid bubbling over, until cauliflower is very tender, about 10 minutes. Strain cauliflower and return to pot, reserving cooking liquid. Set aside.

**3.** While cauliflower cooks, heat olive oil in a medium sauté pan over medium-low heat. Add ham and sauté until browned, about 3 minutes.  
**4.** Transfer half the cooked cauliflower to a food proces-

sor or blender and season with salt. Add remaining butter and 1½ cups reserved cooking liquid. Puree until totally smooth, with the consistency of a béchamel (thick but pourable). If needed, blend in more cooking liquid.

**5.** Stir peas and ham into remaining cooked cauliflower in pot. Toss in enough puree to generously coat and bind ingredients. Season with salt and lemon juice. Transfer to a 10-inch baking dish and top with a thick layer of buttered breadcrumbs. Bake on middle rack until filling sets and top is golden brown, about 10 minutes.



**POD HELP US** Frozen peas bring a welcome pop of green to winter dishes. Here their sweetness plays nicely off the salty ham.