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## SOUTHERN EXPERT PUTS LATEST HEALTH SURVEY IN PERSPECTIVE

Imagine my surprise to read recent news reports that Georgia is among the least healthy states in the nation because of, among other things, our "poor diet." Obviously, the experts who put the report together have never heard of sweet tea, Vidalia onions, barbecue sandwiches or grits with butter. That doesn't sound like a poor diet to me.

Of course, we were joined at the bottom of the survey by the usual suspects: Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Oklahoma was also down there with us. I'm not quite sure why but I am glad to have the company.

The survey is done annually by the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention. This year Vermont is cited as the nation's healthiest state.

I called my friends at Round or Square Polls, Inc, a subsidiary of The Yarbrough Multinational Media and Pest Control Company, and one of the nation's leading opinion research firms located in a pool hall in Greater Garfield, Ga., to see what they knew about the survey.

"As far as we have been able to tell," Junior E. Lee informed me, "it was done by a bunch of Yankees. Otherwise, why would Vermont be the healthiest state in the union? Our polls show there's nothing in Vermont but syrup and loony politicians."

Junior, a nationally-recognized expert on the Southern way of life, wasn't impressed that places like Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire were at the top of the list and the Southeastern states were at the bottom. "If you have ever been to any of those states you know they don't have anything worth eating. They wouldn't recognize fried okra if it rained on them. Also, those folks are frozen in ice for ten months a year so it preserves their organs."

I asked Junior about the survey showing that the nation has an obesity problem and Georgia is the 33rd fattest state. The good news is that last year we were 40th. Does that mean we are doing something right? Junior scoffed. "All that says is that a bunch of Yankees have moved to Atlanta to thaw out their organs and they are eating at sushi bars. That crowd has never seen a lard bucket, let alone know what to do with it. My mama used to fry everything in lard, even jelly sandwiches. And salt. She put salt on all our food. That was to preserve our organs so that we didn't have to go sit in the snow for ten months."

When I inquired why Georgia is 47th out of 50 states in terms of air pollution, I could tell Junior was getting impatient with me. "Listen, I just told you that everything we eat is cooked in lard. If you don't understand how that causes air pollution, I'm not about to explain it to you in a family newspaper."

One of the bright spots in the survey was that Georgia is rated 15th in physical activity, even ahead of California. "That doesn't surprise me," he said. "We get our exercise moving around to get away from the air pollution caused by folks eating fried catfish and pinto beans. In California, people don't eat fried catfish and pinto beans so they can sit and drink chardonnay all day. Chardonnay doesn't cause air pollution, but it can give you a bad case of the hiccups. Did the survey tell you how Georgia did in hiccups?"

I told Junior that I could not find a category on hiccups but we would probably score low there, too.

Why does Georgia rank 42nd in high blood pressure, I wondered.

"That is because we worry too dang much about what other people think of us," Junior opined. "People in Vermont don't care about that stuff. They just sit in the snow and suck syrup all day."

I am glad I called Junior E. Lee. He put the survey in perspective for me. I no longer feel guilty about scarfing down a plate of mashed potatoes and redeye gravy. It may not be healthy fare, but at least my organs aren't frozen. And I don't have the hiccups.