

FEATURED

Kids learn the joy of cooking for a healthy lifestyle

by Betty Miller
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(L-R) Yarele Jaramillo, Nathan Ramos, Audrey Dueñas, and Nicholas Ramos watch as Nathaniel learns to flip a slice of zucchini on a hot grill.

HOLTVILLE –Six-year-old Nathan Ramos bit his lower lip in deep concentration as he took the mechanical tool known to most as a can opener and tried fitting it on the can of corn just handed to him.



Many hands help Nathan use a can opener for the first time.

"I've never opened a can before," he said as he attempted finding the right combination to unlock the marvel of the kitchen device. With the help of his two teen aides, Audrey Dueñas and Yareli Jaramillo, he opened his first can.

Stacy Amparano, Farm Smart Manager and Rigo Ponce of Cal Fresh teamed up to present a collaborative Cooking Academy for youth 7-12 years old assisted by teens 13-18 years old. To their surprise and delight so many youth signed up, another day had to be added to the six week course. The classes started Tuesday,

July 11 at the University of California Desert Research and Extension Center outside Holtville and will run six weeks.

Now 25 children will come each Tuesday and another 25 will learn about cooking on Thursdays. The volunteer teens will work with each group and receive a certification at the end of the session.

"This is the first time Farm Smart has had a cooking academy. Rigo and Cal Fresh have an outreach program and have been through this before. We took recipes from the 4-H cooking program and are implementing the lessons here."

A mixed range of children filled the tables that carried colanders, plastic serrated knives, measuring cups plus the ingredients for a zucchini, black bean, corn, and cheddar quesadilla.

Before starting, Ponce encouraged the children to make the "arrangements" for behavior at their stations. One of them focused on cleanliness another on corporation. All agreed to the rules. One that Ponce added was, "Don't yuk on my yum!"

The students understood that they were not to criticize what another was enjoying gastronomically.

Some unlike Nathan had used a can opener before, others learned that and how to properly grate cheese, measure, and chop with the knife and cutting board. The teens had already been schooled on the recipe and the proper ways to handle each instrument. They helped the kids along each step.



Rigo Ponce of Cal Fresh asks the young chefs to create rules for the kitchen.

Yarele Jaramillo, the teen supervising Nathan and his seven-year-old brother Nicolas, known to their peers as Nate and Nicky, showed them how to properly put the hand not using the cutting knife down on the zucchini.

"Make your hand like a claw," Yarele said demonstrating the technic, "then you won't cut your fingers with the knife."

The young students also learned how to work with a hot griddle, first cooking the sliced zucchini and eventually combining all the ingredients to fill the quesadilla and cooking it over the griddle until the cheese melted.

Besides learning the recipe, Ponce and Amparano taught safety, cleanliness, and nutrition. They explained the food groups they were eating were based on "My Plate" which can be fuller explained at the website, choosemyplate.gov

At the end of the first day they were able to feast on their healthy quesadilla and the trail mix they concocted next.

Check Farm Smart's Facebook page for the various activities they have planned to educate and entertain youth through the summer.

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