

Education

Colorado Proud School Meal Day held, San Luis Valley style

By LIZA MARRON VALLEY — With harvest in full steam, San Luis Valley school food service directors took advantage of the Department of Agriculture's Colorado Proud School Meal Day to celebrate the taste of local agriculture in their lunchrooms.

Colorado Proud School Meal Day is a day to celebrate Colorado agriculture and to educate schoolchildren about healthy eating. The San Luis Valley is one of Colorado's most important agricultural regions with an abundance and diversity of production here. Local pride in our agriculture was especially evident in San Luis Valley school cafeterias last week.

Favorites like Olathe sweet corn and western slope peaches showed up in abundance alongside potatoes, beets, tomatoes and zucchinis from the San Luis Valley. Lunchroom staff dressed up in vegetable splendor to delight students with the stories of the farmers and to teach

about Colorado agriculture.

At Mountain Valley School in Saguache, school garden coordinator Alex DiCarli showed up to share purple potatoes, tomatillos, collard greens, beans, squash and beautiful flowers with the students. Pickled beets made from scratch were a hit. "It was something different for the students to try," said veteran food service director Cindy Archuleta who put on an exemplary Colorado Proud Day event despite her added challenge of trucking meals from the Saguache Community Building while new school construction is in progress.

Amber Martinez in North Conejos said, "Colorado Proud Day was a hit at all four schools. Our high school students loved the fact that we brought in peaches from local Colorado farmers as well as our Colorado Proud carrot and pea mascots!"

She took advantage of the Colorado Proud School Meal toolkits put together

by the San Luis Valley Farm to School Task Force. The toolkits were the brainchild of Harvest of the Month Coordinator Mandy Wilner. "The idea was to give every kitchen in the San Luis Valley the tools and props they need to put on quality farm to school events tailored to fit the needs of their district. The concept was embraced with simultaneous yet individualized events across the San Luis Valley."

In Alamosa Joni Bilderbeck was thankful for the kits. "We will be putting on a great farm to school with all your wonderful boxes. All schools will be displaying carrots, beets and corn on a display table, wearing costumes and decorating with balloons. We are excited for Colorado Proud day! We will be serving Olathe corn on the cob at all schools," she said.

In Creede Nutrition Director, Malcolm Snead put together shish-kabobs skewered with local mushrooms, squash and peppers. He

featured carrots beets and zucchinis on his lunchline. He even dressed like a carrot along with his staff to infuse a fun and educational atmosphere for the day.

Antoinette "Tony" Ortiz at Sanford featured good ol' San Luis Valley potatoes and used her voting jars to get the students' feedback on her local dish. She featured a magnetic map of the state with magnets indicating the location of the source of the potatoes.

Barb Grandell at Sangre de Cristo School District is an old hand at farm to school. In a Valley-wide meeting of food service directors in preparation for Colorado Proud School Meal day, Grandell shared tips with new food service directors like Donna Maestas in Monte Vista and Virginia Drake of Moffat. "I invite the Future Farmers of America (FFA) to make posters and invite a farmer

in for the day." At Sangre, Beth Jones of Jones Organics in Mosca entertained the students with educational materials and a few live farm chickens.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) which markets the purple mountain and yellow sun Colorado Proud brand believe that, "in order to encourage eating habits that will promote a lifetime of optimal health, it is essential to teach children about the importance of eating foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products. Proper nutrition is critical if our educational programs and our students are going to continue to excel." Colorado farmers and ranchers produce food items that provide the nutrients children and adults need to thrive.

"Colorado Proud School Meal Day was another suc-

cess this year with more than 200 schools across Colorado participating," said Wendy White, marketing specialist for the Colorado Department of Agriculture. "It was exciting to see so many San Luis Valley schools celebrating local agriculture in their cafeterias and classrooms."

CDA's website shares that Colorado agribusinesses contribute more than \$40 billion to the state economy annually and provide more than 170,000 jobs. With more than 37,000 farms and ranches encompassing 31 million acres, it is easy to understand the value this industry adds to Colorado.

For more information on San Luis Valley Farm to School or to get involved call the San Luis Valley Farm to School Task Force at 719-937-2319. For more information on the Colorado Proud program please contact Wendy White at (303) 869-9174.



Courtesy photos

Jana DeHerrera displays a fresh salad bar for students at Mountain Valley in Saguache.



Dressed up for fun as a colorful carrot, Veronica Salazar helps youngsters understand more about local fresh vegetables on the menu at Alamosa Elementary.



Creede Nutrition Director Malcolm Snead puts together shish-kabobs skewered with local mushrooms, squash and peppers.

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