



Cornell University

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Monroe County

2449 Saint Paul Blvd
Rochester, NY 14617
p.585.753.2550 f.585.753.2560
monroe@cornell.edu
monroe.cce.cornell.edu

For Immediate Release:

6/10/22

For more information, contact:

Megan Kelly
AmeriCorps VISTA
585.753.2568
mtk63@cornell.edu

Mindful Cooking Class

Families learn how to combine eating healthy and mindfulness

Monroe County 4-H worked together with Cornell Cooperative Extension's SNAP-Ed Program, Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School (EMHCS), and Cornell University's Program for Research on Youth Development and Engagement ([PRYDE](#)) to present a mindful cooking class. The class occurred virtually with families cooking along with bilingual nutrition educator, Iluminada Vilca.

The class, Mindful Cooking, had four sessions. In each session, families learned a new healthy recipe chosen by Cornell student Abby Morales in collaboration with Damaris Ortega, Parent Community Educator at EMHCS and Nutrition Educator, Iluminada Vilca. A student of Cornell University and a PRYDE Scholar, Morales led participants through mindfulness activities to begin each cooking class. The class was supported by Damaris Ortega, the Parent Community Educator at EMHCS, and Megan Kelly, 4-H AmeriCorps VISTA. Kelly shopped for the ingredients for each recipe and Ortega ensured that each family received their ingredients in time to cook along with the group.

In 2021, the program was created by PRYDE Scholar Isabella Lombardo to help families stay connected during physical distancing requirements of Covid-19. In sharing about her motivation to form the class experience, Lombardo shared, "As a vegan and aspiring adult, I knew I wanted to integrate more cooking into my life. I also wanted to be part of something larger than myself, something that would celebrate and empower the lives of Latino families."

Upon hearing about the class that had occurred in 2021, Abby Morales was inspired to reestablish the program in the Spring of 2022. "Adding heart to a recipe to make the dish come alive is a concept I learned growing up watching my family cook. I felt mindfulness connected to cooking because just as food nourishes the mind, the process of creating dishes for loved ones can nourish the soul," said Abby Morales. Morales continued, "[Studies](#) have established that practicing gratitude and mindfulness reduces anxiety and emotional reactivity, while increasing concentration and positive affect. Combining these practices into the cooking process that families across the U.S., including mine, perform on a daily basis seemed beneficial in promoting psychological well-being."

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.

Throughout the sessions, Vilca taught participants and their children new facts about nutrition, including how to keep watch over calorie intake, how to balance food groups using My Plate guidelines, and the importance of each food group. Vilca emphasized the intake of more fruits and vegetables in each of the lessons, as well as discussed food groups and what the dietary guidelines for Americans say about the requirements from each of them daily.

Alongside new recipes and new mindfulness activities, participants gained new cooking skills and used new ingredients. In one of the sessions, many participants cooked with tofu for the first time as an alternative source of protein.

One parent, Kesi Stallworth said that one of the most helpful aspects of the series was when she learned that “mindfulness and cooking work together.” She said she had heard it before but never truly grasped the concept until the lessons.

“Though the virtual cooking classes are difficult to facilitate, here at EMHCS the parents involved were committed and held themselves accountable to joining weekly,” said Damaris Ortega. “[Parents] applied all that was learned; they really enjoyed it despite not being present for in-person cooking.”

This is the second year in a row that family cook along classes have been offered to parents at EMHCS. The program has been successful and all parties look forward to continued collaboration in the future and continuing connecting families to research-based information from Cornell University.

CCE-Monroe offers programs including agriculture, nutrition, gardening, and more. To explore these programs, please visit our website at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/> or our social media channels, such as our Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/CCEMonroe>) or Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/monroeccextension/>) If you are interested in SNAP-Ed, please contact Sandi Bastedo, the Senior Nutritionist at sb932@cornell.edu.

The Monroe County 4-H Program is offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension to the youth of Monroe County. 4-H is a worldwide youth development program open to all youth ages 5 to 19, who want to have fun, learn new skills, and explore the world. In return, youth who participate in 4-H find a supportive environment and opportunities for hands-on or "experiential" learning about things that interest them. Learn more at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-developmen>

