



Food Is a Part of Our Culture, LA Plaza Wants to Make it Healthier

By EGP & EFE News Service

LA Plaza de Culturas y Artes, located in the historic center of Los Angeles, received a \$1 million dollar commitment from the PepsiCo Foundation on Tuesday to establish an Edible Teaching Garden and Culinary Arts Program for Hispanic youth in the local community.

LA Plaza, the premier center for Mexican/Mexican American culture, opened last spring just across the street from the Historic El Pueblo de Los Angeles Monument, which includes the Olvera Street marketplace and museums.

LA Plaza, with its focus on Mexican culture and the early history of Los Angeles, will use the PepsiCo three-year grant to advance a healthier food culture by creating sustainable gardens of all kinds of fruits and vegetables where they will teach young people the importance of eating healthy and exercise.



4th Grade Students from Para Los Ninos School were given a healthy eating demonstration at LA Plaza's new Edible Teaching Garden on Tuesday. (Courtesy of the County of Los Angeles)

"LA Plaza's approach to child education is unique, in that it aims to empower youth while raising awareness of nutrition, exercise, agriculture and cultural heritage all of which are important to PepsiCo," said Jacqueline Millan, senior director of corporate contributions at PepsiCo. "This program will benefit children by sharing the rich cultural history and significance of Mexican and Mexican-American cuisine, while at the same time encouraging them to lead healthier lifestyles."

"The basis of food in America was a vegetarian diet rich in fruits and vegetables," Ximena Martin, curator of the vegetable garden at LA Plaza told Efe News Service.

In Latin America they eat many more vegetables than we eat in America, said County Supervisor Gloria Molina, who spearheaded the effort to open LA Plaza and is a member of the Board.

“Eating plenty of vegetables helps lower cholesterol and fight obesity, which is why we want people to start eating lots of vegetables again, to make us more healthy,” she said.

Molina said the nutritional virtues of a balanced diet of foods from traditional Hispanic cuisine are a “part of the contributions of Hispanics to America.”

The supervisor said that there are some Hispanic dishes, however, where there is a need to reduce calories. She called on chefs to modify the recipes with excess fat and to add more salads.

At LA Plaza, we hope to start teaching children early how to do that, so they can also teach their parents and family, she said.

“Hispanic foods and flavors are impacting Latin American cuisine,” said Stephen Kalil, executive chef of PepsiCo’s Culinary Innovation Center.

And the way to reduce obesity is to use natural products that are the root of the dishes, said Kalil. Lupe De la Cruz, director of government affairs for PepsiCo, told Efe that his company is aware of the problem of obesity and high cholesterol in the U.S. which fast foods contribute to.

To reduce obesity, our company recommends that people read the packaging of the products they buy to see what they are eating, said De la Cruz.

“LA Plaza is about experiencing history and culture, and our Edible Teaching Garden and Culinary Arts Program provides a unique hands-on experience in a distinctive learning environment where youth will gain knowledge about the history and nutritional value of fruits and vegetables, while discovering the Mexican-American history and culture — one of the greatest which is our food,” said Molina.