

## De la milpa a la mesa – Education Resource for Teachers

### About this resource:

From 3 March to 14 April there will be an exhibition about Mexican food and agriculture at the Te Auaha Gallery, 65 Dixon Street, Te Aro. The exhibition provides great learning opportunities for levels 4 - 8 social studies and covers a range of themes such as cultural, culinary and agricultural diversity, historical adaptation and innovation in the face of environmental and cultural challenges, and the impacts of globalisation upon Mexican diversity and uniqueness.

This resource includes an exhibition overview, exhibition map, as well as suggested activities and discussion topics.

**Target audience:** Years 7 – 13, Levels 4 – 8.

**Curriculum:** Social studies

**Setting:** Mexico

**Visit duration:** Approximately 50 minutes

### Exhibition overview

“De la Milpa a la Mesa: a Mexican food journey” explores the richness of Mexican cuisine, from farm to table. The content will highlight farmers, scientists, vendors and cooks who describe the innovative ways they have adapted time-honoured practices to a changing world.

#### MILPA

This segment showcases the milpa, an important agricultural system in Mexico which involves planting a variety of crops in the same plot. It focuses on several farmers, scientists, academics and organisations across Mexico who are innovatively adapting farming practices in the face of challenges such as climate change, pollution, pests, food sovereignty, globalisation, and natural disasters.

#### MERCADO

This segment explores how food is distributed from milpas to kitchens, examining the unique vibrance and diversity of markets and market products in Mexico and their daily importance to Mexican people. Additionally, it looks at the environmental, social and economic impacts of products produced and sold locally.

#### MESA

This segment showcases the diverse ways in which the products of the milpa are prepared and consumed in Mexico. It tells the stories of several innovative chefs who champion the use of historical ingredients and cooking methods in their respective kitchens – both home cooks and professional chefs.

## Exhibition Map



## Storyline summary and suggested activities

### 1: COOKING WITH CHAPULINES

This section tells the story of medical researcher René Cerritos Flores and Chef Mario Melgarejo who believe that harvesting and eating grasshoppers provides a sustainable solution to both pest control and food shortages in the region. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How eating insects has nutritional and environmental benefits.
- The importance of researchers, farmers and chefs working together to solve social and environmental problems.
- Links with New Zealand: climate impact of meat, edible huhu grubs.

#### Suggested activities:

- Find three nutritional and three environmental benefits that come from harvesting and consuming grasshoppers.
- What insects do we eat in New Zealand? Where and how are they eaten?

## 2: COMMUNITY SEEDBANKS AND MAIZE DIVERSITY

This section tells the story of community run seedbanks, (Bancos comunitarios de semillas) and their role in preserving indigenous maize varieties. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How some indigenous maize varieties in Mexico are under threat.
- The role of seedbanks in ensuring the survival of crops in the face of natural disasters, and of genetic diversity in the face of genetic modification.
- Link to New Zealand: Collaboration between scientists and community to solve ecological and agricultural issue.

### Suggested activities:

- What are some of the reasons for having community seedbanks in Mexico? Investigate the threats to indigenous maize in Mexico. Discuss which you think is the most serious.
- Compare seedbanks in Mexico with seedbanks in New Zealand – do they contain the same kinds of seeds?
- Design a poster about a vegetable, including where and how it was originally cultivated and where it is grown today, different varieties, history, common dishes its used in and fun facts.

## 3: CHINAMPAS

Chinampas are a type of milpa, where crops are grown on man-made islands in the wetlands of Mexico. This section tells the story of organisations, researchers and scientists who are working with chinampa farmers to ensure the survival of this historic agricultural practice. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How local farmers are partnering with universities to solve environmental issues.
- The role UNESCO and the United Nations play in ensuring the preservation of this unique agricultural system.
- Link to New Zealand: questions of climate and habitat preservation, adaption and resilience after earthquakes, buying local, poor water quality, partnerships between universities and farms.

### Suggested activities:

- Play the interactive game. What solutions stopped you getting to market?
- Investigate what environmental challenges the CINESTAV solve. How do they solve them? Discuss what issues you think are the most challenging to overcome. Do we face similar challenges in New Zealand?
- Investigate which native animal species are under threat in the chinampas. Choose an urban wetland area in New Zealand and compare the level of threat native species are facing there. What are they? How many are there? What is endangering them? What action is being taken to prevent loss of habitat?

## 4. MOOJK KAAKY

This section tells the story of a group of Ayuujk women who have started a business to promote native varieties of corn and indigenous farming knowledge. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How maize is integral to the cultural identity of the Ayuujk people in Mexico.
- The importance of food sovereignty for many indigenous farmers like the Ayuujk in Mexico.
- Links with New Zealand: recover ancestral cosmovision to deal with climate change, work in community.

**Suggested activities:**

- What is food sovereignty? Why is it important?
- Investigate the threats to food sovereignty and consequence of losing it.

**5: MILPA IN TIJUANA**

This section tells the story of Dr Delgado who created the program La Milpa en la ciudad de Tijuana to teach primary students how to grow and cultivate milpas. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How the milpa is a system that can transform stony terrain to fertile soil.
- How students are inspired to be proud of their own culture.
- Link to New Zealand: how ancestral knowledge is passed down, kohanga reo.

**Suggested activities:**

- Investigate examples of companion planting in New Zealand
- Plant a milpa at your school or a local community garden <https://www.veggiegardener.com/companion-planting-three-sisters>

**6: MERCADO EL 100**

This section tells the story of Mercado el 100, an association of 50 ecological producers all within 100 miles of Mexico City. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- Some of the vendors in the market and the variety of products they sell.
- How markets function as places to exchange ideas, knowledge and build community between consumers and producers.
- Link to New Zealand: food mile, climate change, social and economic impacts of local farming.

**Suggested activities:**

- Before the visit: Brainstorm in groups all the different products you expect to see being sold in the Mercado el 100. During your visit: check your list and make note of new and surprising products that you see. Back in the classroom: Give a presentation to your class about one of the products in the Mercado el 100 that interested you the most, discuss how it met the ethical guidelines of the market.
- What are the ethical guidelines for the vendors in the Mercado el 100? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a market with these ethical guidelines.
- Visit a local farmers market, find out if the products are sourced from within a 100-mile (160 kilometres) radius of your city.
- Create your own smell box with your favourite herb or spice. In class, students have to guess what the smell is. Afterwards, discuss dishes you like to eat with those flavours, where you think the herb or spice originally came from (what cuisine is it most commonly used in) and what memories they evoke.

**7: DOÑA ÁNGELA - YOUTUBE SUPERSTAR**

This section tells the story of Doña Ángela – a You Tube superstar – who cooks farm-style meals using products from her family's farm. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- The nutritional value of the milpa diet.
- How technology can be used to share time-honoured knowledge.
- Link to New Zealand: people use YouTube and might be inspired to make some of her dishes, family cooking knowledge.

**Suggested activities:**

- Interview a parent or grandparent about a dish they learned to cook from an older family member. Find out what the ingredients are, how to make it, who taught them, if they still make it, if they have changed anything from the original recipe, who else have they taught this recipe to, what memories are associated with this dish.
- Design a recipe book with your class, each contributing a recipe you have learnt from a family member. Include the ingredients, method, who taught you and what memories are associated with it.

**8: CHEF EDUARDO GARCÍA**

This section tells the story of Eduardo García, one of the most well-known and well-regarded chefs in Mexico City. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How traditional recipes and ingredients are elevated to create high-end cuisine
- The diversity of cuisine in Mexico.
- Link to New Zealand: people interested in high cuisine, fusion of historical and modern ingredients and techniques, Hiakai.

**Suggested activities:**

- Look at the meals represented on the wall behind the table. Choose the meal that you think is the most interesting. Who is the person who contributed this recipe, where are they from in Mexico? What do they say about it? Share with your classmates.
- Which food items do you recognise? Which foods are unfamiliar?
- Design your own fusion dish by combining elements and ingredients from a popular dish in New Zealand with a popular dish in Mexico.

**9: CHEF ROSALÍA CHAY**

This section tells the story of Chef Rosalía, a Mayan woman cooking in the style that was taught to her by her grandparents, using products from her family's milpa. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How cooking is a community activity in Rosalía's village.
- How indigenous cooking methods and ingredients are inspiring international chefs.
- Link to New Zealand: Indigenous cooking using an earth oven (pibil) is similar to a hangi.

**Suggested activities:**

- Compare her earth oven (pibil) with a hangi. What is the same? What is different?
- Find one current chef, using native ingredients and food processes. What native ingredients and food processes do they use? What are the benefits and drawbacks?

**10: FONDA COCINA CRISTY**

This section tells the story of María Guadalupe Catalina Bautista Lagunas, who is the owner of a fonda (a small economical restaurant that cooks homestyle recipes) in a market in the west of México City called Cocina Cristy. Students will gain a greater understanding of:

- How fondas preserve family cooking by providing affordable, tasty alternatives to fast food.
- The cultural importance of having a large, cooked, main meal in the middle of the day.
- Link to New Zealand: Pressures of working life constricting time to cook.

**Suggested activities:**

- Brainstorm in groups all the different ingredients, spices and dishes you will see in the exhibition. During the exhibition, check your list and make note of new and surprising ingredients and dishes that you saw. Give a presentation to your class about one of the dishes in the exhibition that interested you the most.
- In groups brainstorm important times of the year that you celebrate with your family. What food or foods do you associate with this celebration?
- Compare how everyday eating is different in New Zealand and Mexico (eg. big cooked meal eaten in the middle of the day with multiple courses). Why do we not have similar fondas for lunch here?