

# Budding broccoli habits

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For AP Special Features

**SAN ANTONIO** — A second-grader now prefers broccoli to candy, and youngsters are asking parents for whole grains and low-fat, ethnic foods.

Such healthful eating habits resulted from an outgrowth of children studying cooking and food history in the classroom, according to Cornell University's Antonia Demas.

Ms. Demas, who designed the culinary course, said the project was very effective in influencing family eating habits. "The kids were proud of what they cooked and would share it with their families," she said at a conference of food professionals held here recently.

In a year-long study for her doctoral research in agricultural and nutritional education, Ms. Demas said she set out to learn if a food-based classroom experience would affect food acceptance and eating habits and teach multiculturalism and social studies.

Ms. Demas taught cooking along with food and cultural history to a group of kindergarten through fourth-grade students at the Trumansburg Elementary School in upstate New York.

Their cafeteria-lunch eating habits were then tracked and compared with those of students without food training when the classroom foods were introduced on the lunch line.

"The kids who did not have the class experience basically didn't touch the foods," Ms. Demas said. By contrast, the culinary students ate the new foods up to 20 times as much as their untrained classmates, she said.

Parents, who participated as

classroom volunteers and reported changes at home, told Ms. Demas their children were requesting whole grains, low-fat milk and ethnic foods.

"Children need to learn that their eating habits now can really affect them later," Ms. Demas said. "You can get children to eat low-fat foods. Food has got to be part of public education."

Ms. Demas went into 12 classrooms for one hour, every other week, during the 1993-94 school year. Studies were integrated with geography or cultural lessons and calendar events, such as Halloween and Thanksgiving, when children learned the agricultural roots of these holidays.

Youngsters kept food journals, entering recipes they developed, reactions to foods and facts about projects, such as creating a compost heap.

Ms. Demas, who continued to track students' food choices during the current academic year, said the study showed how one could change eating habits and school curriculum. In the fall, the classes will be reintroduced at Trumansburg and another upstate New York school, she said.

The curriculum received the Society for Nutrition Education Excellence in Nutrition Education award and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Most Creative Implementation of the Dietary Guidelines award.

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