

Farmer's Cookbook offers first-hand advice, recipes

BY DEBBIE KOONTZ

LANCASTER — It seems like everyone is writing a cookbook these days. Take a look in your local bookstore and try to make one trip through without tripping over at least one copy of a "the best recipes ever" book, or "this is the only way to cook" book.

Perhaps the influx of cookbooks is due to the fact that cooking is taking an upward swing on the positive scale.

And perhaps this is because cooking, once looked on as "woman's work," has been rediscovered after many liberated and frustrated housewives ignored it and 'refused to do it' for a time.

Suddenly, the art of cooking is considered just that — an "art." And for the many cooks who made it through the 'refuse to do it' period, your skills in the kitchen now make you a trend setter, a person swinging with the times, a person in the know, a hobbyist and 'amateur chef,' and just a 'plain ol' good cook.'

But one person — and yes, another cookbook writer — who seems to be displaying a unique approach to the cookbook scene is Mitzi Ayala, a rice grower, farm columnist, and hostess and producer of a farm television show in California.

Ayala recognized that the people who grow a crop are the most qualified to tell what to look for when buying it, and how to cook it. Doesn't that seem to make sense? To her it did. So, with this in mind, she interviewed farmers all across the country to get the most nutritious and tasty recipes for her **The Farmer's Cookbook**.

The result is a mouth-watering collection of recipes that reflects the remarkable diversity of American agriculture — from avocados to zucchini — and a proud tradition of home cooking, from clam chowder of the Northeast to tostadas of the Southwest.

A 15-second leaf through the 267 pages of this book, produces such recipes as California Rice Torta, Salinas Bean Bake, Strawberry Pie, Zucchini Walnut Bread, and Chicken Blossom Salad.

Sound tempting? It should. Ayala has taken a slightly different and intriguing approach to her compilation of recipes. While most books are divided into appetizers, soups, salads, entrees, desserts, etc., this rice farmer's book concerns herself with oranges in Chapter 1, Peaches in Chapter 5, milk in Chapter 19, and pork in Chapter 23.

Each chapter is devoted to a particular food and is introduced

with anecdotes, special tips, folklore, and a menu to highlight that particular commodity, for fast and easy finding.

Of course, Ayala keeps one chapter set aside for rice dishes — a commodity close to her heart as a rice producer. She poured through the 4,113 rice recipes she's collected over the years and includes 10 of them in her book.

Ayala herself, as well as her book, is of a slightly different style, and is therefore a very astounding farm wife personality.

With a list of credentials that would make you fall into your chair in exhaustion just reading them (and make you mumble "oh no, not another woman who can do everything — and well"), Ayala is

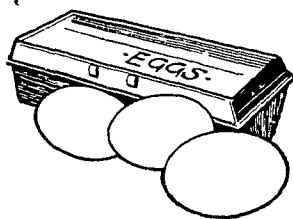
the perfect farm wife and farm woman to write a farmer's cookbook.

She is married to a man named Francisco, a native of Spain who teaches genetics at UCD. She manages a 1,400-acre farm in southern California, and writes a weekly farm column for 300 newspapers based on information gathered from her TV show "Focus on Farming." She has been vice president of Central California's Educational TV station, lay representative to the National Public Broadcasting Service, Director of Communications for California Women for Agriculture, and was hostess of the Coast-to-Coast Radio Network's "Tips from the Farmer to You."

Currently she is a director of the California Exposition and State Fair, and is a member of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters and the Agricultural Communicators in Education.

Whew. If, after reading this list of accomplishments, you still have energy to write a letter, you may want to send for **The Farmer's Cookbook**.

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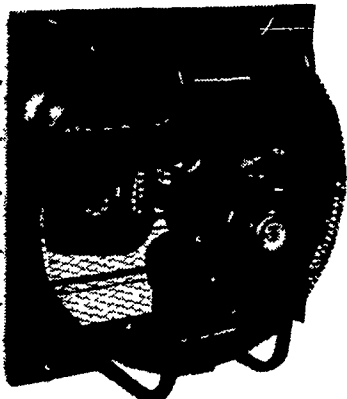
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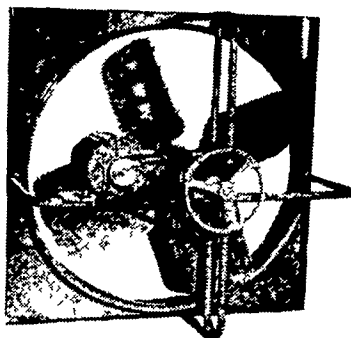
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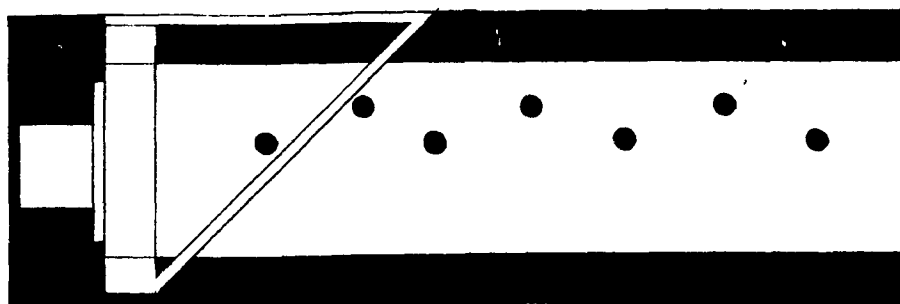
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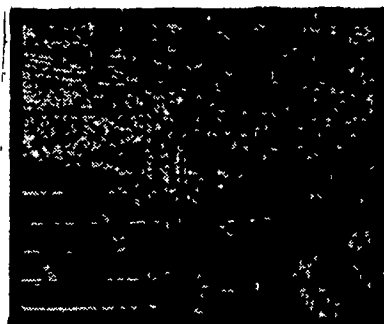
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