

Kids' KOrner

Seventh Graders Find Fun Way To Learn About Nutrition

BETH WHITMAN PITZER
Cumberland Co. Correspondent
MECHANICSBURG (Cumberland Co.) — Students at Mechanicsburg Area Intermediate School are finding a fun way to learn about nutrition. The youth are using a special scale—the Sentron Food Analysis Superscale—for a hands-on experience with the nutrient value of foods. They weight ingredients before adding them to a recipe and in the process learn how much fat, fiber, carbohydrate, and protein are in the food.

Tony Holtzman thinks that, "The machine is great. It makes you want to go to home economics class!"

Two recipes for muffins—Newfangled Whole-Wheat Corn Muffins and Traditional Corn Muffins were analyzed using the scale. Last semester, 90 seventh graders in Mrs. Rutherford's home economics classes used the scale.

The machine works by weighing ingredients for foods and then analyzing the grams of fat, fiber, calories, and other nutrients found in the recipe. It draws from a memory of 1,200 food items and then displays the calculations on the front of the scale.

Dana Lyons used the scale as

part of a display at the Capital City Mall in the fall. She showed people the composition of nutrients in both cantaloupe and apples. She thought it was interesting to compare the fiber in a medium apple with the fiber in applesauce. The apple won for fiber content.

Dana thinks that the scale is "good for people with dietary problems and would be easy for them to use." She likes it because, "you can see what's in everything."

Students liked learning about calorie differences and were surprised how the number of calories could vary within different recipes. Adam Maclay liked learning about the science behind nutrition. He even changed his mind about some things he thought were healthy after using the scale. He found it a fun way to find out about facts.

Mrs. Rutherford provides the learning experience for her students as part of a unit on The Dietary Guidelines. They learn about sugar and fiber in seventh grade. Making muffins and evaluating their nutritional value fits perfectly into the unit.

In general, using this activity "weighed" well with the students. They liked learning about the foods first hand without using a

chart. They also were using math and writing skills in the process. Here is a recipe for Newfangled Whole-Wheat Corn Muffins for you to try at home. Compare this with your favorite recipe at home for the fat and sugar content. Try it with your family!

Newfangled Whole-Wheat Corn Muffins 8 Muffins

- 2/3 cup Yellow cornmeal
- 2/3 cup Whole-wheat flour
- 1 Tablespoon Sugar
- 2 teaspoons Baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon Salt
- 2/3 cup Skim Milk
- 1 Egg, beaten
- 2 Tablespoons Corn Oil

Plus extra corn oil for greasing muffin tins.

1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. Grease 8-muffin tin with corn oil.
3. Mix dry ingredients thoroughly.
4. Mix milk, egg, and oil. Add to dry ingredients.
5. Stir until dry ingredients are just moistened. Batter will be lumpy.
6. Fill muffin tins 2/3 full.
7. Bake until lightly browned, about 20 minutes.



Adam Maclay weighs the bowls on the scale to get an accurate measurement. The instrument is very sensitive. Just blowing across the scale changes the numbers shown.



Dana Lyons cracks an egg to be measured by the scale.

Gardening With Vegetable Scrapes

As a child, you can learn quite a bit about wintertime gardening with vegetable scraps. Sweet potatoes, avocados, citrus, and carrot and pineapple tops all make interesting indoor plants.

Orange seeds are one of the most enjoyable to plant even though it takes a few weeks for them to sprout. Healthy plants have dark, shiny green leaves. Some citrus plants will have thorns. Choose plump seeds and don't let them dry out.

Carrot foliage is a favorite because it's so ferny and delicate. Start with the top half-inch of the carrot, with the leaf stalks removed. These slices will grow leaves sitting in a saucer of water or buried slightly in damp sand. Give them good light. Carrot tops will never root. Enjoy the foliage and then compost the whole deal.

Sweet potatoes are interesting because they know up from down. Place one in a glass of water wrong side up and nothing happens. You can't fool with Mother Nature. The "top" is the rounded part of the sweet potato, and the "bottom" is tapered, and usually scarred. This is the area from which new roots will develop when placed in water. By the way, some sweets are treated with a sprouting inhibitor, so it's best to experiment with ones that are already beginning to sprout. Keep the sweet potato in the dark until roots form. Then bring the plant into the light. When the root system is well developed, you'll be able to put the plant in soil if you want.

I think the best thing about an avocado is that you can get a house plant from it. The roots don't do well growing in containers, though, so it's a mistake to get emotionally attached. But for a few years, you'll have a bushy or even tall plant with big, lush, green leaves.

This year, I'm going to grow a miniature "hedge" of turf grass on corn cobs. Soak the cob in water and sprinkle with grass seed. Place

the cobs upright in a container with water in the bottom and stand back.

Help-A-Saurus is an educational program for parents provided by Rutgers Cooperative Extension. For more information about

Help-A-Saurus, contact Nancy R. Spinner, Extension Home Economist of Hunterdon County, 4 Gauntt Place, Flemington, NJ 08822 (908) 788-1342.

Mouse Trivia

The house mouse - *Mus musculus* - came to the western hemisphere with the early settlers. It is a world-wide pest, living in all climates and settings. Mus can survive outdoors year round, but, in the search for shelter, houses are often invaded. There the creatures may make a real nuisance of themselves foraging for food and nesting materials and creating a mess, causing destruction (not to mention mental trauma) in the process.

The typical house mouse problem is best solved with traps, the simple snap trap being the preferred weapon. Mice usually eat seeds and grain but are likely to choose foods high in fat, protein or sugar if available. So peanut butter, nutmeats, chocolate, bacon, marshmallows and dried fruit make good baits. The traps must be placed with the trigger end against a wall or stationary object. To increase chances of success, use two traps side by side at each location and space traps not more than 6 feet apart. Mice (unlike

rats) are usually not leery of new objects in their environment.

There are other types of effective traps on the market (e.g. "one way" box traps, glue boards). But they have the disadvantage that once the animals are caught they must be "dispatched" in a separate operation.

- weighs 2/5-4/5 oz. and eats about 1/10 oz. of food per day.
- needs little or no free water to survive.
- females may have 5-10 litters per year; average litter is 5-6 young.
- produces 36,000 droppings per year (no wonder they make such a mess).
- can climb electric wires and almost any rough vertical surface including weathered sheet metal.
- can gnaw through lead and aluminum sheeting, wood, rubber, vinyl and concrete block.
- can jump up to 18 inches and enter through openings as small as 1/4 inch — no wonder it's difficult to keep them out!

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