

The Changing Taste Of Food

Exploring cultural influences on world cuisine

The stimulus for the project was the 50th anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in Liverpool, bringing the first of the post-WWII African Caribbean immigrants to Britain in 1948. Black history came to the fore with events throughout Britain to mark the date and highlight the contribution of those immigrant communities.

Allotment gardeners of diverse nationalities are very proud of the crops from their countries of origin, which they have grown on their plots in Birmingham. The Allotment Liaison Officer realised that the gardeners' skills of growing and preparing traditional foods are an important aspect of cultural heritage and should be celebrated as part of Black History Month. This led to *Birmingham City Council's Parks and Nature Conservation Service (now Parks, Sport and Events)* launching The Changing Taste of Food Project in 1999, to explore the contribution of food and its influence to change in a multi-cultural society.

Making it happen

In collaboration with *Local Services Black Workers Group* and *Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies*, the project gathers information on community groups and examines how their history, religion and culture influence their cuisine. For example, Jamaica has a national dish based on food used during the colonial era to feed slaves. Meanwhile in the Chinese community, there are many stories surrounding the origins of lucky coins in New Year dumplings.

The Project provides cross-cultural education through cooking and taster sessions for people from all communities, aimed at reducing barriers and increasing mutual understanding. In some cases we discover that the food we hold dear to our own culture is also held in high esteem in other cultures.

Variety is the spice of life

Each year a different community is featured. The project has so far examined Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Chinese cuisine. In 2005 the focus will be on Pakistani food.

Participating groups provide three to six persons from the same cultural background to prepare and cook one authentic dish each. They research the historical, cultural and or religious relevance of the recipes and bring the raw ingredients for a display. They then demonstrate the authentic, traditional cooking methods to an assembled audience in venues such as the college or community centre kitchens. In 2001 and 2002 local schools also took part, enabling children to learn about the cultural range of food growing, preparation and cookery skills. Local businesses have been involved.





Presenters discuss interesting details such as the nutritional value of ingredients, the design and function of special equipment and so on. Links to health and the environment are also explored. For instance, the Chinese wok is very sustainable because its shape conserves energy from precious fuels as well as conserving the flavour and texture of foods. This helps to encourage diverse communities to enjoy healthy, environmentally friendly ways of living.

The Future

The newspapers and television give valuable publicity to the project, and resources have been developed including recipe booklets, with background information about each culture, plus a video of Caribbean cooking and a DVD of Chinese cooking.

The project is set to involve other community groups as it continues exploring the cultural influences on world cuisines. It is hoped that in the future it may attract sponsors for a documentary series on the evidence gathered.

FACTFILE

● Funders:

Local Services Black Workers Group; Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies; Birmingham City Council's Parks and Nature Conservation (Parks, Sport and Events from April 2004).

● Community groups:

Shades of Black community family project, Xaymaca Experience Jamaican Restaurant, Wing Yip Business Complex, Bangladeshi Women's Employment Resource Centre, CSV Environment Birmingham, Concrete to Coriander Project, Bangladeshi Women's Gardening Club, Handsworth Wood Girls' School.

● Target:

To engage community groups from a different cultural background each year to participate in the event.

Events are aimed at the whole community.

● Numbers:

60 - 70 people can attend each event.

● Resources:

Recipe booklets with background information: Caribbean, Chinese, Bangladeshi.

Changing Taste of Food Newsletter

Video of Caribbean cookery (45 minutes)

DVD of Chinese cookery (20 minutes)

● Key points:

- The Changing Taste of Food project provides a platform to highlight and celebrate the contributions of Black and Minority Ethnic communities to Birmingham through the influence of their food.
- The Changing Taste of Food has taken on the responsibility to ensure its promotion across all communities.



For further information please contact:

BEN UK Office: 60 High Street, Llanberis, Wales, LL55 4EU Tel/Fax: 01286 870715

Email: ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk Website: www.ben-network.org.uk