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Pauma Valley students learn about healthy eating

By: JESSICA MUSICAR - For the North County Times

PAUMA VALLEY ---- Dozens of Pauma School children and their families enjoyed a day of nutrition and healthy eating Saturday at the Tierra Miguel Foundation's first Thanksgiving festival.

Families watched their children perform in "The Acorn Maidens," a play based on an American Indian tale, visited health information booths, listened to music and ate an organic meal of kale and sausage soup, vegetable lasagna and coleslaw, all made from vegetables grown at the foundation's farm.

The event, which is part of the foundation's Healthy Life Program, also known as HELP, was designed to inform families about the dangers of diabetes, weight problems and inactivity while giving them the tools to battle these preventable health problems.

Pauma School worked with the foundation for a year ---- students visit the farms three times a year to see the different vegetables grown. They also get to sample vegetables soon after they are harvested, said Pauma School Principal Mary Gorsuch.

Gorsuch said that since the beginning of the partnership she has noticed a difference in student eating patterns at her kindergarten through eighth-grade campus. For example, vegetables like broccoli, which were previously ignored in the cafeteria salad bar, are now eaten regularly because they learned about the vegetable through the foundation.

"The kids are eating it, and they like it," Gorsuch said.

She added that her students are predominantly Latino and American Indian children, two groups of people that typically have issues with obesity and diabetes. She said that by introducing children to healthy eating, they are more likely to become healthy adults.

"We are really lucky (to have this program)," Gorsuch said. "Any group of children can benefit from this type of program."

While watching his daughter and son play four-square with an oversized blue ball, parent Jose Payan said the festival was fun and informative.

"They learn how to eat, (and) if you eat vegetables it's going to be good for you and your family," Payan said. "I think it's important (to do so) because there are a lot of diseases like diabetes."

Taking a break from her game, 12-year-old Selena Payan added that she liked coming to the farm for the day because she liked playing with her friends and eating healthy food.

Payan said he appreciates the foundation's effort to teach his children where food comes from and how to lead healthy lifestyles.

"Sometimes kids have no idea how much work it takes to get your food," Payan said.

Charlene Orszag, the vice president of the foundation, said the organization's mission is to teach about sustainable agriculture and health.

She said the effort to educate the community about better eating and the dangers of obesity and diabetes is supported by a \$50,000 grant, which was awarded by the California Endowment.

"It's all about teaching to eat healthily," Orszag said, adding that changing eating habits is a difficult task. "It's so important that the

children are exposed."

Orszag said she hopes to expand HELP to other schools in the future.