

Growing Pizza on the Farm

by Ray Patacca, INTERPRETATION & EDUCATION MANAGER

“FARMERS GROW PIZZA—SORT OF!” This statement leads off our description for The Pizza Farm program in the Lake Metroparks education guide. This program has been a staple of Farmpark’s education line-up since 1992. The basic premise is to illustrate the nutritional value of pizza and show where and how the ingredients for pizza are grown. While that idea has not changed since the early days, the presentation, goals and activities in the program have evolved. Pizza Farm’s growth provides a chronicle of Farmpark’s education programming philosophy. It mirrors the realignments in educational standards made in response to our society’s changing demands on our schools over the last two decades.

For the original program in 1992, classes were given a metal pizza pan in a bag. The class would visit the milking parlor, dairy processing room, Well Bred Shed, the newly built Plant Science Center, and an early version of the Grain Place. As they visited each area, the interpreter would demonstrate how pizza ingredients were grown or produced. At each area, the class was given pieces of felt representing a pizza crust, pepperoni, tomato sauce and cheese. At the end of the program, a pizza model was built as they discussed the nutritional value of each ingredient and the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. The program existed in this form until the Ohio fourth grade proficiency outcomes were mandated by the state department of education.

This proved to be a great asset to the department. Laura strengthened the nutrition component of the Pizza Farm program by creating a larger than life pizza slice, food guide pyramid models and teacher curriculum guides. These additions gave the youngsters the opportunity to make healthy choices and added more nutrition and interaction to the program. Attendance for Pizza Farm increased dramatically.

In 2002, the Ohio Department of Education introduced new Academic Content Standards for science. These new standards eliminated the nutrition topic found in earlier proficiency outcomes. Unfortunately, since nutrition was a major part of the Pizza Farm program, attendance dropped. The education staff readjusted the program and added bread making in the Grain Place to show where flour and bread come from to satisfy the new science standards. The program continued in the new format for several years before it was refined further.

In 2009, although the message of the Pizza Farm program was strong and relevant, its popularity was waning. Over the years, many teachers asked about making real pizza. This had not previously been practical, but when J&J Catering came to Farmpark, they were willing to supply the necessary ingredients. This allowed us to actually make pizza with our students. Once more, Pizza Farm adapted to changing attitudes in education by presenting an authentic experience for the students. Schools responded positively to this addition and attendance improved dramatically.

As I write this article, Pizza Farm and all science education in Ohio are about to take another step in development. Last June, the Ohio Department of Education rolled out new academic standards for science. Although they are similar to the current standards, we will revisit Pizza Farm and our other programs to fit the new guidelines. Throughout the revision process, we will maintain the unique hands-on involvement that has become the hallmark of Farmpark education programs. And yes, farmers do grow pizza—well, sort of.

In 1994, the new fourth grade science outcomes required that schools teach about nutrition and the new USDA Food Guide Pyramid. At the same time, Lake Metroparks hired Laura Tradowsky, a registered dietitian, for the education staff.

