

WITS Labs “Made With Amore”

This fall we launched Made With Amore WITS Labs. In a partnership with [AOP Agriform](#), we are bringing locally produced, farm-raised, “made with amore” cheese from Europe to thousands of students in Novato, California, Camden, NJ and New York City.

At the core of these labs are two new WITS Lab recipes: Amore Cheesy Pomodori Salad and Pesto Made With Amore. Both use Parmigiano Reggiano PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and other ingredients like basil, olive oil, salt and pepper, grape tomatoes (in the salad) and spinach and lemon juice (in the pesto). Using whole, fresh ingredients, students learn how to prepare a simple recipe that can be also made at home. The produce, seasoning, and hard cheese like Parmigiano Reggiano PDO combine for a nutritious and delicious snack. So delicious, in fact, that students asked for seconds and thirds. Chef Victoria Baluk shared from her New York City labs that “Eyes were wide with each bite, registering the kind of bliss that is exclusive to a taste of something delicious. I was met with chants of ‘More! More please!’ in every class, from both the children and adults.” And as one student comically exclaimed in our California labs, “I want to marry this it’s so good!”

Excitement pairs with Lab lessons rich in nutrition education and geography. Students learn about the nutrients in cheese – like protein, calcium, zinc, and many vitamins. Then, the classroom learns how to use these cheeses as ingredients in healthy recipes, just like the WITS Amore Cheesy Pomodori Salad and WITS Pesto Made With Amore. WITS Chefs teach safe knife skills and best practices in the kitchen when they are using cheese and other ingredients in recipes. AOP Agriform not only brings Parmigiano Reggiano PDO to our recipes, but in the WITS Labs students are also tasting Grana Padano PDO, Piave PDO, Asiago PDO Fresco, Asiago PDO Stagionato, and Montasio PDO cheeses. Students learn which regions different cheeses come from and that these cheeses are all made with milk from ethically treated animals.

Students are able to talk about the differences between the cheeses offered to them – for example, the “umami” flavors from the aged cheeses like Asiago PDO Stagionato and Parmigiano Reggiano PDO as compared to the fresh Asiago PDO. They also learn a little about what kinds of dishes might feature those cheeses. Also discussed are other foods that have “umami” flavors and why they might be featured in a dish.

Most interesting for students has been learning the concept of “terroir,” meaning that food is unique to the region and environment in which it is produced or grown. Chef Cait Olesky reflected, “I was happily surprised by how ‘terroir’ resonated with all of the students and sparked great discussions. They could put into context by naming foods (like grapes from Napa), while they tasted cheese from Europe. Our very diverse student population named foods that had terroir from places they call home, whether that be mangoes from Mexico, pupusas from Guatemala, or even strawberries that grow locally here in Novato.”

Learning, tasting, enjoying – students can feel the amore!

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