

Program for urban kids mixes ethnic salads, business lessons

[People & Places Doualy Xaykaothao](#) · Minneapolis · Mar 16, 2017



Alexus Kloetzke-Wilson, left, and Krystal Aviles are tasting salads created by other students in Twin Cities gardening programs.

Doualy Xaykaothao | MPR News

Next time you're at [a Twins game](#), maybe skip the Polish sausage and cheese curds.

Instead, try ethnic salads created by urban youth from neighborhood gardening programs.

On a recent Saturday, more than 20 young people gathered in a classroom, wearing green aprons with the logo "Roots for the Home Team." Most of these teenagers didn't know each other.

They're in different grades and schools across the Twin Cities. They're black, white, Asian, Hispanic and Native American youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

What they have in common is a commitment to food justice — the idea that all communities can have access to fresh, healthy foods.

Roots for the Home Team is a nonprofit founded by Susan Moores, a dietician. Her organization buys produce directly from local gardens, recruits young people from those programs to make unique salad recipes, then pays them to sell their product at sports venues or at grocery stores like Kowalski's.

Minneapolis' Chef Shack co-owners Carrie Summer (right, in black) and Lisa Carlson (right, in red apron) share culinary tips with teenagers who are creating ethnic salads to sell at Target Field and TCF Bank Stadium. Doualy Xaykaothao | MPR News

"The chefs here today are your guiding hands," Moores announced to the group, referring to executive chefs from popular Twin Cities restaurants and food trucks who waited in a kitchen attached to the classroom.



There, spread out on stainless steel counters, were purple kohlrabi, cherry tomatoes and greens of all kinds. Bottles of sriracha and olive oil sat next to tamarind sauces and smoked paprika. Fruits filled small baskets.

One student started washing kale as another measured peanut butter for a dressing. Others asked questions about seasonings, and whether to cook some vegetables or let consumers eat them raw.

Alexus Kloetzke-Wilson, 17, is part of the Urban Roots gardening program in St. Paul. "Foods from different cultures are so different," she said. "But once you bring them to one place, I feel like newer and better things come out of it."

Her salad is Southeast Asian-inspired, and is called East Side Pad-Thai. It has seared bok-choy, julienne carrots, diced cucumbers, and North Korean chili grown locally. Chef Yia Vang, who runs the pop-up Hmong restaurant Union Kitchen, said kids and adults often think it takes a lot of work to make a good meal.

"Starting with the concept of a salad, it's easy enough that it's not intimidating, so kids are like, 'Oh, you put a bunch of vegetables together,'" Vang said — adding that the use of vegetables "doesn't mean it has to be boring."



Zarea Mobley shows off her "Roots for the Home Team" salad. Doualy Xaykaothao | MPR News

Lisa Carlson and Carrie Summer own Chef Shack company in Minneapolis. The two are sometimes referred to as the "godmothers" of food trucking in Minnesota. They showed some of the youth how to shave carrots, toast pecans and pickle vegetables.

Matt Quist, a corporate chef with Taher Incorporated, helped his crew create the All Nations Lake Street Salad. It has black-eyed peas, roasted corn and shredded collard greens with a salsa verde dressing, a family recipe from one of the young chefs.

That's the word he uses for each of his students.

"Chef is just a term of respect," he said. "We're treating each other with respect. I respect them, and think highly of them."

Another chef showed John Washington, 15, how to make couscous. The young man is from the north Minneapolis garden program Appetite for Change. Last season he sold other gardening groups' salads.

"I was surprised how much people wanted to eat the salads," he recalled. "It sold out plenty of times, because people wanted a healthy alternative instead of the same type of food every time they go there."

This time, he's the chef. "I'm helping myself, because I learn future skills," he said. "I have to, just because the way the world is set up, I've got to just stay looking ahead."

He works closely with Darryl Lindsey, the director of operations for Appetite for Change.

Lindsey said many of the young chefs have limited exposure to the world beyond a 25-block radius. "So to be able to come to St. Paul, to be in this beautiful kitchen, working with other young people, and these executive chefs? It's great seeing them discover and learn, and find out things that they didn't know before," he said.

Salad-making is the fun part, said Susan Moores, director of Roots for the Home Team. The hard part is when these kids go out and sell their salads to complete strangers.

"That first game is the biggest leap of courage and risk for them," she said. "And every single one of them steps up."

Roots for the Home Team will have nearly 10 ethnic salads for sale at Twins games.

"Not only were we doing this wonderful thing with their food, but we're really having some wonderful experiences for these youth, where they walk out of there feeling like they've got a whole lot more opportunity in their lives," she said. "They're so many more possibilities, and there's such a greater audience that's so appreciative of who they are. That's the magic."

At Target Field, patrons can buy salads at Gate 34. When football season starts, fans at TCF Bank Stadium can find the kids' salad cart at the Plaza.