

CHANGE

creativ serious inspiring

GROWIN' HIS OWN

Catalyst of Change
FEDERICO MARQUES
on Food and the Next Great Thing

HOUSTON EDITION

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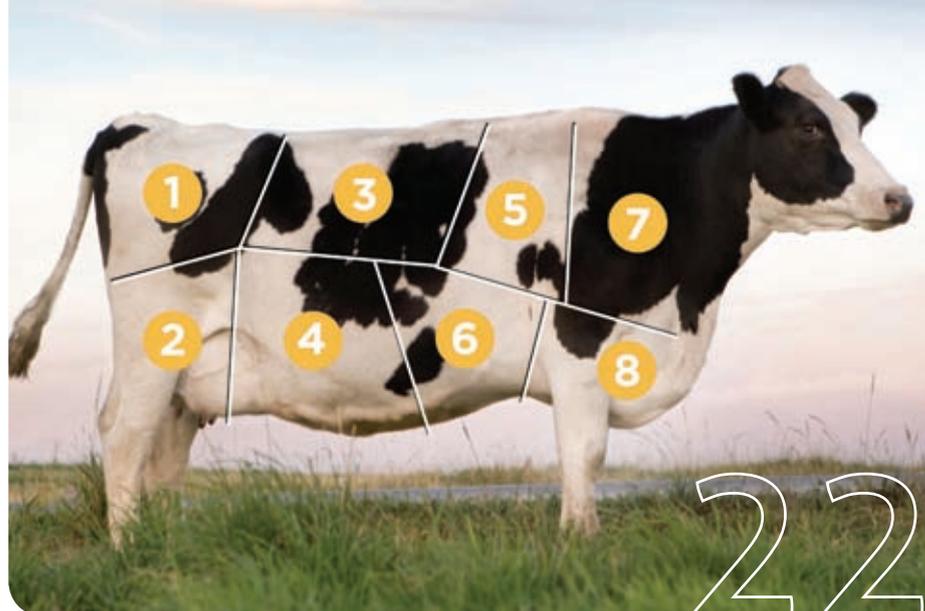
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About the Cover

Federico Marques is equally at home in the boardroom or the backyard garden. Thirsty for information and hungry for the next big thing, he's on the move and taking Houston dining to new heights. Story on page 42.

Photo by Debbie Porter www.debbieporterphotography.com
Clothing provided by LUCHO at Uptown Park
Styled by Kimberly DeLape
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Start a *(Kitchen)* COUNTER- REVOLUTION

ONE CHILD AT A TIME

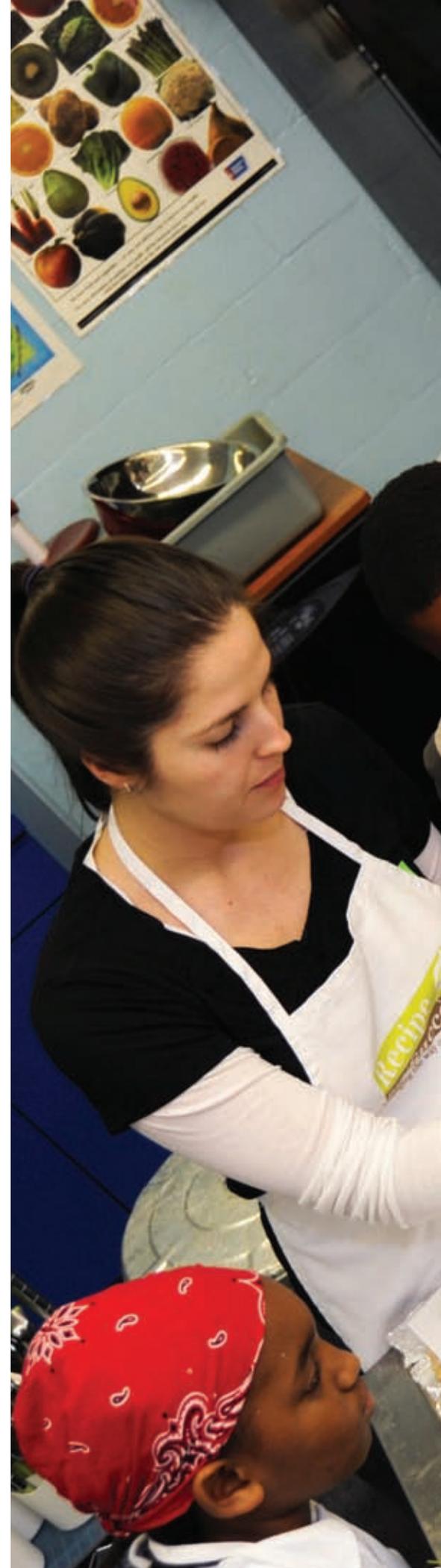
By Katherine Adams

Photography by Toman Photography

KIDS HATE VEGETABLES. It's just a fact of life. You can threaten to send your kids to Ethiopia, where any kid would be happy to eat what you've cooked, but who are we kidding? Kids don't burst into a happy dance when you put broccoli and zucchini on their plates. Too often, dinner time is a battle of wills between well-intentioned parents who want their children to eat healthy foods and kids who just will not put that in their mouths. Yet as parents, we know that good nutrition is the foundation for a lifetime of overall good health for your child. One out of three American children is obese, and we spend an annual \$150 billion in medical care for diseases related to this problem. What if we just educated our kids about the connection between health and good nutrition and empowered them to make good decisions about what they ate?

About half of Houston's youth are losing the battle of the bulge as obesity is fast becoming the nation's most acute health issue facing kids as young as fourth grade. We know that the national rate of diabetes and heart disease is reaching critical mass, but jumpstarting what amounts to a complete paradigm change is enough to overwhelm anyone...except Gracie Cavnar, founder of Recipe for Success Foundation. She and her husband decided to attack the problem of childhood obesity on a local level and in 2005 came up with a plan to change the way Houston children understand, appreciate and eat their food. They collaborated with city and county officials, HISD, UT Health Science Center and others to fine-tune a plan to translate research into action, using over 3,000 students in five diverse elementary schools in at-risk communities to pilot this program to empower kids to take control of their health through good eating habits. After training many volunteers and staff to help raise nutritional awareness among students, parents and lunch providers, Recipe for Success began to implement strategies to change

A recipe for success is in progress—take some adults passionate about cooking fresh, healthy food. Add some bright, interested children and a supportive school. Mix together and invest in a future filled with healthier adults who live longer, healthier lives.





A Recipe for Success

1-2-3 Salad with Chef Monica

SALAD

- 4 large handfuls of mixed lettuce
- 1/2 cup nuts – your choice of almonds, pecans, walnuts
- 1/2 cup fruit – your choice of dried raisins, cranberries, cherries or fresh raspberries, blueberries, strawberries
- 1/2 cup cooked grain – your choice of quinoa, wheat berries, whole wheat pasta, bulgar or cous cous; let cool before adding
- 1/2 cup cheese – try Parmesan, feta, or bleu cheese

Mix together and spoon onto a plate.

DRESSING

- 1/2 cup good quality olive oil or grape seed oil
- 1/4 cup balsamic, rice or red raspberry vinegar
- Salt & pepper to taste

Optional ingredients to add as desired: honey, mustard, lemon zest, garlic, soy sauce

Mix together, drizzle over salad.



The program's priority is to teach kids about food, from seed to table. The younger kids watch as their teacher explains how to put tomato plants into the ground; the older kids participate in food prep, recipe development, and cooking.

kids' perceptions about gardening, cooking and eating healthy. The Cavnars knew that this program could only succeed with plenty of community support. Because this counter-revolution is heating up in the kitchen, the appetizing assignment of volunteer-teaching kids about cooking is given to about 30 of Houston's finest local chefs. The results are nothing short of lip-smacking.

The seeds of the counter-revolution are planted in a garden outside MacGregor Elementary

The goal of Recipe for Success is to reconnect kids to fresh food. "We don't want kids to think they have to hold their nose to eat vegetables," says Sharon Stiehl, who has been Director for Recipe Gardens Agricultural Outreach for three years. Hired to start the gardening program at HISD's MacGregor Elementary, all students from pre-K to fifth grade enroll in Gardening class. Sharon teaches all the students to dig their fingers in the soil, brave through worm and insect encounters (eeeeeyewww!), dig holes for seeds and learn the finer points of using garden tools (keep them down by your belly button!) The older students participate in a cooking demonstration led by celebrated local five-star chef Monica Pope, whose award-winning restaurant T'Affia is committed to supporting local organic farmers, dairies and specialty ranchers. "We have so much fun. The chefs have a blast," says Sharon. With the help

and supervision of the adults, each student at MacGregor has had a hand in the sowing and harvesting of a huge variety of vegetables, including cauliflower, spinach, broccoli, arugula, fennel, bok choy, carrots, different varieties of lettuce, onions, radishes...and don't forget the herbs. Hundreds of little pairs of hands have cultivated dill, oregano, thyme, parsley, sage, and rosemary as well. Food has to be seasoned properly to taste good, right? And it's best when it's all fresh from your very own garden. Exactly.

The counter-revolution builds energy as Mrs. Gilder's second grade class arrives in the garden

Isabel Murphy, Community Outreach Coordinator for Recipe for Success, says that a lot of schools are in a so-called "food desert." "They have hardly any access to fresh food because some of these lower-income neighborhoods do not have grocery stores," she says. "There are fewer gardens around here and it's a very long distance to a grocery store, so kids eat at gas stations or fast food places. A lot of parents have no time for cooking so food is sort of an afterthought." She directs her attention to the group of kids crowded eagerly around Miss Sharon.

"Tell me, why do we loosen the soil when we plant something?" Miss Sharon asks the second graders, who have exited the classroom and met her outside at the garden and are crowded around a vegetable bed. "So the tomato plants can grow better!" chorus the

kids. "It looks like a grape tomato plant!" says one discerning child. "No, I think it looks like a little orange!" counters another. The kids begin to follow Miss Sharon's patient directives as they ready the soil to place tomato plants. "Dig! Lift! Flip!" she says. The kids dig, lift and flip.

Chef Molly Graham, Director of Culinary Education at Recipe for Success Foundation, says that one of her priorities is to dispel the myth that fresh food is expensive. "We are demonstrating that's not the case," she says. "We develop recipes that are about 75 cents a serving so they are very affordable." She and Isabel enjoy watching the kids digging in their own garden. "Today we're taking the kids out to the garden, and we're going to cook pasta primavera with all the vegetables we grew ourselves," Chef Molly says. "It's a full circle moment for the kids. They know exactly where their food came from and how they helped get it here."

"How do we take out the cauliflower?" Miss Sharon asks the kids. "You wiggle it out by the root!" they respond. "Shake, shake, shake off the soil and put it in your wheelbarrow," she says. "Put your fingers in there!"

Mrs. Mention's first grade class arrives in the garden and the counter-revolution gathers more steam

"This has been the most phenomenal experience for my kids," says Mrs. Mention. "My little girls have gotten into bugs and they're not



What do these pint-sized pot-stirrers have to say about this class? "I like to cook salad." "I love to pick my food, then eat it!" "I ask my parents if I can help cook."

afraid. What's really cool is that they actually see it – they know the roots are underground but I just love their reaction when they really get it." She says this as the kids are learning hands-on lessons about planting and harvesting vegetables. They learn math and science concepts about measurements, plotting and graphing lengths of the vegetables as well as lessons about weather, soil and insects. "We eat everything in class and the kids know they must taste everything," she continues. "And then they take it home and tell their parents all about it." She suddenly turns to her students. "Wait! Kids, you have to wash it before you eat it!" she says. "Well, I just couldn't wait," answers a little girl, munching on a lettuce leaf.

"We're going to harvest some lettuce today," says Miss Sharon to the first graders. "LETTUCE!" scream the kids joyfully. One little boy is so happy about lettuce, he jumps up and spins around in circles. "Lettuce is my favorite vegetable," he says. "I think it's going to make me healthy," says another. "I'm going to find some dressing and we're going to eat lettuce before reading time," says Mrs. Mention to the class. "YEAH!" they shout, as Miss Sharon helps them take turns watering the vegetable plants.

In the kitchen with the chef, where the counter-revolution reaches a boiling point

Chef Monica Pope believes that people should eat where their food lives. "What

grows together, goes together," she says.

"The most feasible way to go about helping kids understand the importance of good nutrition is to connect their families to their food through a garden." Chef Monica has been working with the school for four years and says that now it's moving forward like a dream. "We've honed the recipes and the lessons," she explains. "We teach them to use better ingredients like organic sugar, honey, whole wheat flour. For most of these kids, it's a big change. I've never seen a program that gave kids so much ownership in the process."

Mrs. Brown's fourth graders have entered the school's fully stocked kitchen classroom, which has every kid-friendly utensil and appliance they could need. "They put on their aprons and get into being a chef," says Mrs. Brown. "I see how much more connected they are to their food choices." Chef Molly begins a demonstration on how to make pesto pizza made with fresh vegetables from the school's garden and whole wheat pizza dough. "We're using herbs and greens we harvested from our garden," she tells the class. "Yummm!" they respond in unison. The recipe is on the board. The kids get busy chopping spinach and the other vegetables. Chef Monica helps add olive oil and instructs the kids to stop and taste. "Does it need salt?" she asks. The kids consider this question carefully and add a little sea salt, then continue making pesto in the food processor.

"I am known as the 'foodie' teacher," says Mrs. Brown. "I make the kids write about

sensory experiences, but it's hard to find ones that incorporate taste, so this is perfect." She says that this cooking class has been wonderful writing fodder for her students. "There are so many levels where this can be academically aligned," she continues. "We get to embrace the whole process, from seed to table. It's a huge opportunity for us." Meanwhile, the kids are making pesto while listening to Chef Molly give a lesson about the different kinds of fats. "What's a good fat?" she asks the fourth graders. "Olive oil!" say the kids. "Thumbs up for olive oil!" Chef Molly wants to know what is an example of a bad fat. "Trans-fats!" say the kids. "Like in Velveeta! THUMBS DOWN!" Chef Monica shows the kids how to press out the pizza dough and after the pizza has been topped with homegrown pesto, it's finished off with some goat cheese and baked for 10 minutes. The kids sit down and each has a slice. "Bon Appetit!" they say together. Every crumb disappears. The counter-revolution has been a complete victory.

For more information about Recipe for Success, go to www.recipe4success.org. 

Other HISD schools participating in the Recipe for Success program

Rodriguez Elementary
N.Q. Henderson Elementary
Briscoe Elementary
Gross Elementary