

# Little Books Little Cooks

## Chaves County Cooperative Extension Service



### THE SITUATION:

Childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States, putting children and adolescents at risk for poor health. Fast food has been associated with increased intake of calories, fat, and sodium. During 2015–2018, over one-third of U.S. children and adolescents aged 2–19 years consumed fast food. Children and adolescents consumed an average 13.8% of their calories from fast food on any given day. Obesity can result in lowered self-esteem, and perhaps depression. Some children who eat junk food are at risk of developing depression even without obesity. Depression in turn affects growth and development parameters, academic performance, and social relationships. It also results in a higher risk of suicide. Learning to cook can help young children learn and practice some basic math concepts and build language skills. Children who learn to cook are more likely to eat healthy, can explore their creativity, increase their math skills, and boost their self esteem.

### EXTENSION RESPONSE:

Healthy eating learning opportunities including nutrition education and other activities can give children knowledge and skills to help choose and consume healthy foods and beverages. Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Tamara Schubert, designed and led the Little Books Little Cooks Program that focuses not only on literacy development in early childhood but equipping our children (under 9) with basic cooking skills. The program which was brand new in 2023 provided 3 hours of instruction over the course of 3 Saturdays and hands on food preparation activities for youth participants. Each lesson was composed of a “Story time”, recipe reading, hands on cooking, and of course eating and clean up.

**IMPACTS:** Interest in the program is growing as many have asked for more classes next year.



Six youth participated in the program that was conducted at the Extension office.

Children increased their knowledge of nutrition, food safety, and health concepts along with literacy development. According to post-surveys the following positive changes occurred:



My child has an increased interest in cooking.

- (4 out of 4 commented)



My child made dinner for the family!

- (2 out of 4 commented)

When asked, What’s one reason you would encourage someone to join Little Books Little Cooks? Parents answered:

- It’s an interactive activity for the kids to enjoy
- It’s a fun and cute program
- Hands-on, just right for younger children
- Something their little is capable of doing and it’s fun to connect real food with stories about food.

**PUBLIC VALUE STATEMENT:**  
IMPROVING HEALTH BEHAVIORS CAN INCREASE  
QUALITY OF LIFE AND SAVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS  
IN COLLECTIVE HEALTHCARE COSTS FOR NEW  
MEXICANS THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFETIME



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.  
New Mexico State University