

# Veggie Love

**Veggiecation**—a nutrition education program—promotes the love of veggies to children.

A common belief among parents and caregivers alike is that children don't enjoy eating their veggies. When dinnertime approaches, it's a challenge to get kids to eat their broccoli and carrots. However, Lisa Suriano, founder of the nutrition education program Veggiecation, begs to differ on kids' aversion to veggies.

"My experience has shown me that this is simply not true. Just a little empowerment and education goes a very long way with kids!" says Suriano.

And she's proving it with the success of her Veggiecation. Founded in 2010, the Fair Lawn, NJ-based program aims to introduce young students to the

delicious and nutritious world of vegetables. Currently taught in elementary schools in 30 states and also in Canada, Veggiecation's nutrition education program utilizes existing school resources to minimize costs and seamlessly integrate the concept into classrooms, as well as school lunch programs.

Via the Veggiecation program, Suriano offers simple, affordable and innovative ways to prepare vegetables. Of course, most importantly, the vegetable dishes must be appealing to children, so they can be truly inspired to seek out

more nutritious options at snack time.

What Veggiecation does is incorporate kid-friendly vegetable preparations into each lesson. "Rather than develop another curriculum for teachers to work into their already overscheduled day, we created what we call a 'classroom companion' with short lesson suggestions and supporting academic materials that allow teachers to talk about broccoli and carrots while they're teaching math and literacy," Suriano explains.

Offering versatility, Veggiecation's program can easily be adapted into les-

son plans for science, literacy, art, social sciences, math and physical education, as well as school-wide assemblies and after-school programming.

After several years of working as a school food service nutritionist in the New York City metro area, Suriano—a foodie at heart—realized the value and significance of educating children on the myriad health benefits of incorporating vegetables into their daily diets.

"Processed foods and junk foods are so popular because they have the advantage of effective marketing plans and strategies to promote them," Suriano notes. "I felt it was time to start fighting fire with fire!"

## Healthy Relationships

Suriano works hard to foster strong partnerships that are designed to reach mass audiences. Currently, Veggiecation has a regional partnership with Whole Foods Market through which they jointly offer free healthy cooking classes targeted for kids. Held monthly, these classes feature two recipes taught in a manner geared to captivating an audience of curious kids. Currently implemented in 18 markets, the health-conscious program spans the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut areas.

In-store education is also provided for customers. For instance, to educate and promote the benefits of eating fresh produce, some of the Whole Foods stores utilize Veggiecation's informational posters. Others have incorporated Veggiecation's educational signs on store salad bars.

Other successful partnerships include a venture with the New York Coalition for Healthy School Food (NYCHSF) in partnership with the New York City Department of Education. In an effort to educate the entire school community, NYCHSF introduces plant-based foods and nutrition education in schools.

"New York Coalition for Healthy School Food, along with the school districts, businesses and organizations, develop, test and implement plant- and bean-based recipes in school cafeterias. The program seeks to introduce the recipes with promotional events and educational materials that are designed to make trying new foods and learning about their health benefits both fun and exciting," says Suriano. The partnership began in September 2011 and Suriano has since been elected to the board of directors of NYCHSF, where she now also serves as the board secretary.

Suriano's passion for food has always been a strong part of her family history. In 1985, Suriano's father, Joseph Civita, started JC Food—a private school food service company. "All my life I watched him strive to provide fresh, affordable and sustainable food to schools and this inspired me to

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## Jicama Sticks with Strawberry Dip

### Tools & Equipment

Vegetable peeler  
Knife  
Cutting board  
Measuring cups and spoons  
Blender

### Ingredients

2 medium Jicamas  
2 cups fresh or frozen unsweetened strawberries (thawed and drained)  
¼ cup honey  
2 tbsp. white vinegar

### Directions

Peel the Jicamas and cut into long, ¼-inch sticks. In a blender, combine the remaining ingredients and blend until smooth. Serve the Jicama sticks with the strawberry dip.

Yield: 5 Servings

For more recipes visit, [www.veggiecation.com](http://www.veggiecation.com)

For information on free classes at local Whole Foods Market stores, visit <http://www.veggiecation.com/in-action/events/whole-foods-classes> (Classes are generally offered from 4 to 5 p.m. Some stores require registration; others have open classes.)

To find out when Suriano's team will be in your area, visit <http://www.veggiecation.com/in-action/>

