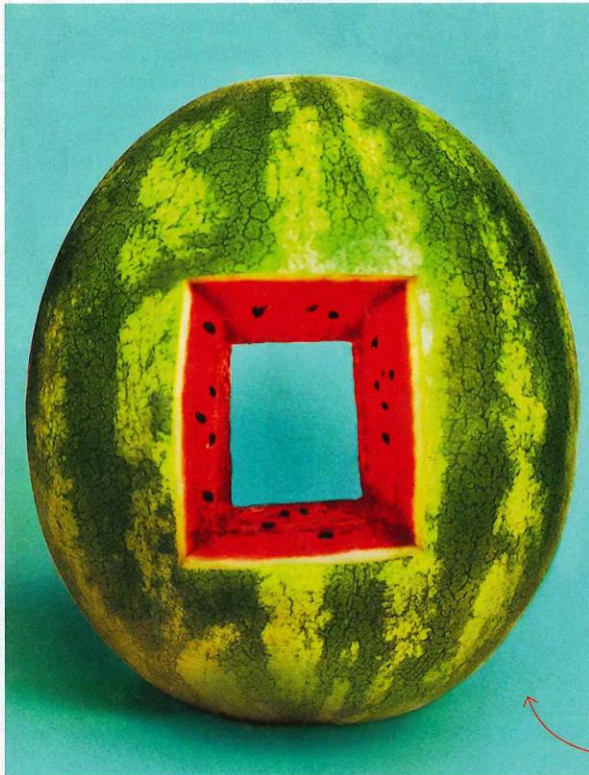




Hot
Topic

The Truth About Fruits & Veggies

Today's produce is less nutritious than yesteryear's. But that's not necessarily bad news. BY TAMAR HASPEL



FOR SOME FOOD LOVERS, PARTICULARLY those who follow the harsh critique of modern agriculture, it's become conventional wisdom that today's fruits and vegetables aren't as nutritious as they used to be. A landmark 2004 University of Texas synopsis of studies that compared what's now on store shelves to vegetables from 1950 found declines of 5% to 40% in certain nutrients among 43 types of produce. Much (but not all) of the produce we eat today does indeed contain lower nutrient levels than that from our parents' and grandparents' days.

But this kernel of truth is missing a bushel of context. One reason for the decrease in nutrient density in today's produce is a relentless, century-long focus on increased yield that has helped feed an exploding population. The industrialization of American agriculture, for all its problems, sustained a huge growth in population and a huge shift in where Americans lived.

"Post-World War II, nearly half the U.S.

Today's typical watermelon contains 38% less vitamin A than a similar watermelon harvested in 1950.

THE FOODCORPS CHRONICLE



Lessons from Cooking Light's charity partner. This month: Just one bite can make a big difference.

ERIKA VANDYKE
FoodCorps Service Member
YMCA of Greater Grand
Rapids
Grand Rapids, Mich.

In the war on unhealthy foods, FoodCorps member Erika VanDyke aims to win one battle at a time. "I try to get students to try just one bite of a new food. One bite can change their minds," she says.

At the two elementary schools where she works,

VanDyke serves as a lunch coach—a healthy-eating cheerleader of sorts. "During lunch, I go from table to table and suggest kids try the fruits and vegetables they have on their trays," she says. "I tell them, 'You don't have to like it, but you do have to try it.'"

When grapefruit was on the menu recently, VanDyke noticed much of it was going untouched. She offered stickers as a reward to anyone who sampled the sour citrus. "Some of the faces were priceless," she says. The result: Several new grape-

fruit fans—and a whole lot of kids with stickers.

"Trying just one bite helps instill in them the understanding that new foods aren't scary, and there's a chance they'll try more new foods down the road," VanDyke says.

—Kimberly Holland

FoodCorps, an AmeriCorps partner, aims to promote healthy eating by teaching kids to grow and cook their own food. To donate, become a recruit, or learn how a local school can become a FoodCorps site, go to foodcorps.org.