

The



Campaign

Cooking is the Key

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PRESS RELEASE

THE WORKERS BEHIND FOODS SUCH AS THE TESCO FINEST RANGE AND WEIGHT WATCHERS READY MEALS SIGNED UP FOR A TASTE OF HEALTHY COOKING.



In August Greencore, which employs up to 700 people on its production lines in Kiveton, invited a Cooking Bus, funded by Yorkshire Forward and run by the Focus on Food Campaign, to spend a week at the factory giving workers lessons in healthy home cooking.

Whilst they might spend all day working with food many of the staff agreed they were not all the best at cooking from scratch. And with the company determined to help all members of staff improve their health and fitness and learn more about healthy food through its Food First initiative the Cooking Bus should give them the boost they need.



Much of Focus on Food's work is done in schools teaching youngsters and training teachers but Cooking Buses also work in the wider community. Our visit to Greencore was the first one to a food producer.

And the visit proved to be a huge success. Staff from directors to shop floor workers came onto the Cooking Bus in groups of 12 to learn some basic cooking techniques and take part in some practical cooking for themselves in packed two-hour sessions.

Staff from Greencore's Kiveton site were joined by colleagues from the bakery site at Hull, the UK Centre at nearby Barlborough and the sandwich site at Manton Wood.

After a welcome and introduction, with drinks and hot muffins, staff first had a go at making either Butternut Squash and Red Pepper Soup or Tuscan Tomato Soup with Beans. They then went on to have a go at Roasted Vegetable Couscous and King Crab Cakes, others made a basic meat sauce then went on to produce Lasagne, Shepherd's Pie, Chilli Con Carne or Spaghetti Bolognese or they learned how to make Keema with Peas and vegetable curry and went on to produce their own Vegetable Samosas and Keema Samonsas with a tasty dip. The sessions were rounded off with a Fruit Smoothie demonstration and a well-earned refreshing taste.

Other staff did stalwart work washing up for their colleagues. It was a chance for staff to meet and mix and was very much a social occasion, an unexpected bonus according to Helen Sisson, Group Technical Director for Greencore Group at the UK Centre in Barlborough, Sheffield.

"It has exceeded our expectations in terms of a facility and as an event itself.



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“Initially it was only going to be the shop floor but we have had people across all different roles and the mix has worked really well. That has been an unexpected bonus and we would mix people up again because staff have said it has been good team work,” she said.

And Julia Matthews, Interim Human Resources Controller at Greencore in Kiveton, Sheffield, said she was delighted and throughout the week had had requests from other Greencore sites desperate for a Cooking Bus visit. She said she would love to have the Cooking Bus back again soon.

She said: “It has been fantastic for the staff. Initially there were reservations but once they have come they have been non-stop talking about it. We have had people coming back into the factory telling their colleagues ‘oh, you should have volunteered’.



“The recipes are really easy, cheap and quick.”

And the staff themselves were just as complimentary. Some admitted they had never cooked anything before and were quite apprehensive. But all of them relaxed once the practical work started and found it had been a much more enjoyable experience than they thought it would be.

Paul Charlesworth, of group auditing from the UK Centre, Barlborough, said: “I think it’s great to do the soups- they’ve always been a bit of a mystery. I did not know what to expect. It’s been much better than I thought - I can now make Samosas!”

Most of the sessions were mixed groups. However one session was devised to help those following the Weight Watchers programme and we included a men-only session, which proved the most lively of them all!



One of those on the men-only group was Paul Marshall, full time convenor for the TGWU at Greencore. And he had a life-changing experience: “Learning to chop an onion - it’s like finding the Holy Grail!” he said. “It’s fun to cook. The Cooking Bus is a great experience. Instead of a classroom atmosphere it’s more informal and there are some really good ideas. Keep up the good work!”

“It has been a real challenge,” said Anita Cormac, Director of the *Focus on Food* Campaign. “We know how hard it can be to change your dietary habits and it must be particularly hard if you are working with food all day, have changing shifts and a canteen of tempting treats available. “But having the skills to cook tasty, nutritious food at home will give people more choice in what they eat. We’re not here to preach but to provide some inspiration, or just some basic skills, in the kitchen.

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“It would be fantastic to have a dedicated Cooking Bus for use within the food industry to support initiatives like this at Greencore.”

Greencore management is very health conscious and provides free smoking cessation classes for employees, their own Weight Watchers class with some free sessions and a free month's membership at the local gym for employees and they encourage healthy eating in their canteen. But with the lure of spam fritters and all-day breakfasts, chips and cakes the temptation it can be hard to eat healthily and the company admits it has some obesity among staff and ongoing health and sickness problems.

As well as hands-on cooking the groups covered aspects of food education including nutrition and food safety and hygiene and food preparation skills.



The Cooking Bus which visited Greencore is supported by Yorkshire Forward - the Regional Development Agency charged with improving the Yorkshire and Humber economy.

Dave Marlow, project manager for the Food and Drink cluster at Yorkshire Forward said: “This first visit to Greencore provides an exciting new opportunity to extend the use of the Cooking Bus to a new audience. “If we change one or two hearts and minds people will talk about it and others will sign up to the experience and tomorrow we will change 20.”