Fall in Love with Family Meals

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ST. LOUIS - As we gear up for the fall season, it is inevitable that chillier temperatures will find their way to our doorstep, making homemade comfort meals sound especially inviting. When deciding what seasonable dishes to prepare, consider recipes that include ingredients grown and produced locally.

The farm-to-table philosophy continues to be popular, as many farmers' markets and local grocery stores have become fixtures in communities. Many refrigerator staples are foods that are made and sourced close to home. Real dairy milk is a great example of this. It takes 48 hours for milk to travel from the farm to the store, ensuring it is truly farm fresh when purchased. Not only is milk a local grocery item, but it contains thirteen essential nutrients, including high-quality protein. "Dairy foods are the top source of calcium and vitamin D in the American diet, and are critical for building healthy bones and teeth," states registered dietitian Maggie Cimarolli. "These nutrients are especially important for children. Unfortunately, many kids fall short in meeting the

recommended amounts," Cimarolli notes. Incorporating ingredients like milk, cheese, and yogurt into fall recipes can help check the farm-to-table box, while also adding much-needed nutrition.

Making comfort foods at home may make it easier to incorporate healthy food options, which can be difficult to find while eating out. Cooking and preparing meals at home can also help limit cravings for fried, high-caloric foods often found at restaurants. Finally, planning healthier dishes with family members may help encourage better eating habits among children. Research has shown that children and teens who eat more meals at home consume more calcium-rich dairy, fruits, and vegetables, and less fried foods and soda.

Busy work schedules, extracurricular activities, and evening outings can occasionally put the brakes on family meals. However, it is important to keep in mind that shared mealtime can promote healthy growth in children, both physically and emotionally. Scheduling sit-down meals, grocery shopping together, and preparing meals with local fresh ingredients can boost overall health, and foster family communication and engagement. Fall is a great time to turn over a new leaf and opt for homemade comfort foods that can be shared around the table with loved ones.

For more information on dairy nutrition, visit us at stldairycouncil.org, contact us at (314) 835-9668, or email us at info@stldairycouncil.org. For delicious and nutritious recipes for all seasons of the year, check us out on Facebook and Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.

Creamy Broccoli Cheese Soup

Soup season has officially begun! Whether cozying up on the couch to watch a Halloween movie or hitting up a tailgate party, this broccoli cheese soup is the perfect meal in a bowl. Make it in bulk and freeze to enjoy throughout the week!

Serves: 6

Prep Time: 10 Minutes

Cook Time: 30 Minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter, softened

- 1 small onion, diced

- 4 Tbsp. all-purpose flour

- 2 cups whole milk

- 1 cup half and half

- Salt and pepper to taste

- ¼ tsp. ground nutmeg

- 2 heads broccoli, cut into florets

- ¼ cup chicken broth

- 1 ½ cups grated sharp cheddar cheese

Directions:

1. In a large pot over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onion and cook 3 to 4 minutes.

2. Sprinkle the flour on top of the onion and use a whisk to work in the flour. Once combined, cook the onion-flour mixture for 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Add the milk and half-and-half, whisking constantly until combined.

4. Sprinkle in the salt, pepper, and nutmeg.

5. Stir the broccoli florets into the soup. Cover pot, reduce heat to low, and simmer until soup is thickened and broccoli is tender, about 20 to 25 minutes.

6. Stir in the chicken broth and check soup consistency. If too thick, add a little more broth.

7. Add the cheese and stir until melted. Pair soup with a favorite roll, or serve in bread bowls to save on cleaning extra dishes.