

## DAY OF SLOVENIAN FOOD

# The *Kuhnapato* project gains new dimensions

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Young chefs from Kobarid at the region competition *Kuhnapato* project.  
Photo: *Kuhnapato* project archives

*Kuhnapato* (*Cooking and All That*) started as an educational project about the food habits of past generations, but along with the desire to preserve these culinary riches it is evolving into a campaign to promote a healthy diet. Miro Cerar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, is the honorary patron of the *Kuhnapato* project.

The aim of the project, which was created seven years ago by Anka Peljhan, is to motivate Slovenian primary school pupils to explore their own food heritage, to teach them about the dishes eaten in the past, along with respect for a food culture based on using local and seasonal ingredients, and to inspire them to acquire cooking skills. Another goal of the project is to steer these young people towards healthier eating habits.

**From the very beginning this work has been interesting, because it is not limited to cooking and recipes, but also combines a knowledge of history, culture, the features of the local environment and characteristics of the seasons.**

Since Slovenia is a country with a very diverse landscape, the flavours and preparation of its food are also very diverse.

### BON APPÉTIT SLOVENIA

As part of the national programme *Dober tek Slovenija* (*Bon Appétit Slovenia*, the National Programme of Food and Physical Activity 2015-2025), started on the initiative of the Ministry of Health, primary school children from all around Slovenia are participating in the project *Kuhnapato*, which began in 2016 on 18 November, the Day of Slovenian Food, as a supplement to the activities of the Traditional Slovenian Breakfast project, which has been going on since 2011. These events see competitions take place in well-known restaurants and tourism establishments, under the watchful eye and mentorship of famous Slovenian chefs and ethnologists.

For example, in the first part of the project a number of students served as young cooks working in large school kitchens. There,

aided by the kitchen staff and in collaboration with the school food planners, they designed healthy, traditional, locally typical lunches reflecting the seasons or upcoming holidays for their fellow pupils.

**From November 2016 to March 2017, these young cooks prepared more than 150 healthy, balanced lunches, or more than 52,000 meals, served all throughout Slovenia.**

Their efforts thrilled their schoolmates, and encouraged them to obtain a long-term understanding of the importance and composition of healthy diets, in a playful and accessible manner. Moreover, this activity created ties of cooperation and friendship that fostered closer relations among these young people, both in and outside the classroom.

In order for this motivational and educational project to include even more primary school pupils who wish to demonstrate or build on their cooking skills, further activities are underway in the form of promotional appearances at cultural and educational events, such as the Culture Bazaar. Seminars are also being provided for school staff, along with workshops at local food producers for children throughout the school year.

In the second part of the project we witnessed cooking competitions, where the more successful groups of primary school children presented healthy and traditional lunches in a more competitive or gourmet setting. This means they perfected and refined the lunches that were originally designed to be cooked in big school pots, and then served them to expert committees in the form of attractive and mouth-watering presentations, along with explanations of the cultural and historic backgrounds of the dishes served.

**PRESENTING YOUR OWN CULTURE AND GETTING TO KNOW OTHERS**

Interest in these young cooks and the project as a whole is growing abroad, while Slovenian embassies are also hosting well-received presentations of local cuisine.

For example, in May 2017 a team of the best young cooks will be going to Washington DC, as part of the EU Embassy Open House Day.

**At this event, which takes place each year on the second Saturday in May, the young Slovenian cooks will be marking International Food Day, which falls on 10 May, by preparing a Slovenian menu (breakfast,**

**lunch and afternoon snack) for all the public schools in the city.**

In addition, and as part of what is now an annual appearance in the US, a group of primary school children involved in the *Kuhnapato* project will hold a cooking workshop with children involved in the Embassy Adoption Program. As in previous years, this activity is expected to inspire the children with regard to traditional Slovenian food and culture, and enable the participants to forge new, international friendships.

*Kuhnapato* is thus evolving into a project that fosters exchanges and interactions among different cultures, and not just the presentation of one. The experience of participating in the related events can have a deep impression on the children, and one that certainly has a positive influence on their lives and values.

The young people involved in the *Kuhnapato* project are also supported by the Health Minister, Milojka Kolar Celarc. In the initiative of the Ministry of Health and as part of the National Programme *Bon Appétit Slovenia*, the *Kuhnapato* project established new foundations to motivate adolescents to pursue a healthy lifestyle.  
Photo: *Kuhnapato* project archives



*“Through your youthful drive you are contributing to the even greater recognition of Slovenia around the world. It is wonderful to observe you, so it is no surprise that you inspire people everywhere. This year our fellow Slovenian Ana Roš became the Best Female Chef in the World. She, too, is distinguished by a respect for what is local, fresh and traditional. It is important for you to know your roots and draw from the knowledge of food handed down from generation to generation. Cooking is group work, it is creative work, and at the same time it is work that requires precision, knowledge, perseverance and patience. For this reason in the *Kuhnapato* project I see more than just cooking. It is an opportunity for you to grow personally and at the same time to be a role model not just for your peers, but for all of us. The intangible cultural heritage of cuisine is not important simply in order to preserve tradition, but also because at one time people knew how to use nature and foods in a healthier way. Today in Slovenia we are increasingly aware of the importance of high-quality food for healthy development. Food is life energy, food supports us in our daily activities, in stressful situations and in physical challenges. For several years now throughout the country the month of November has been marked by the Slovenian Breakfast event. On that day, in all the kindergartens and schools across the country, children receive an apple and bread and honey for breakfast. In this way we show to the public the importance of farming and beekeeping, and encourage a proper and healthy diet. We also devote particular attention to preserving an unspoiled environment. With your creative cooking of traditional Slovenian dishes, you represent all of this, respect for cultural heritage and nature, while helping draw attention to the preciousness of good health. You have been entrusted with an exceptional task, of convincing your peers in Slovenia and elsewhere that a proper attitude to food and respect for its production are important for a high-quality and full life. I am certain that you will exceed all expectations in your efforts, and I follow your successes with great joy, with no doubt that you will also inspire people in America. Slovenia is wonderful, and you are representing its diversity on a plate. This is important, as people living abroad should also be able to feel Slovenia.”*

Dr Miro Cerar  
President of the Republic of Slovenia  
Honorary patron of the *Kuhnapato* project



Photo: Government of the Republic of Slovenia Archives

In order to promote the Kuhnpatato project in Washington, the Slovenian Government Communication Office produced for the occasion a special booklet "Grandma's Kitchen - Recipes from Slovenia". Of course in the future this booklet will also be a great promotion of Slovenia elsewhere in the world.

