



Key Ingredients at the International Sonoran Desert Alliance, Ajo

The **International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA)** in Ajo hosted the second stop on Arizona's tour of Key Ingredients: America by Food. Ajo, a company-owned copper mining town until the mine closed in 1985, is surrounded by the Sonoran Desert and located at the crossroads of three nations: the United States, Mexico, and the Tohono O'odham Nation, which was the first stop on the tour. In hosting Key Ingredients, ISDA hoped to spark community dialogue about Ajo's tri-cultural history and diverse food traditions, as well as about healthy eating and their vibrant local agricultural economy.

The passing of the Key Ingredients torch from Topawa to Ajo was reflected at their Grand Opening, which took place in the **Curley School Auditorium** on December 12. The **Pisinemo Traditional Singers** shared local music from the Tohono O'odham Nation, and the **Desert Rain Café** in Sells added flavor to the event with tastings of tepary-bean-and-short-rib stew, cornbread, and squash pie. As they did at the Topawa opening, Ajo's *Las Artes* GED students also provided oatmeal-mesquite flour cookies baked in solar ovens.



The crowd enjoys the Desert Rain Café's stew, cornbread, and squash pie on the patio of the Curley School.



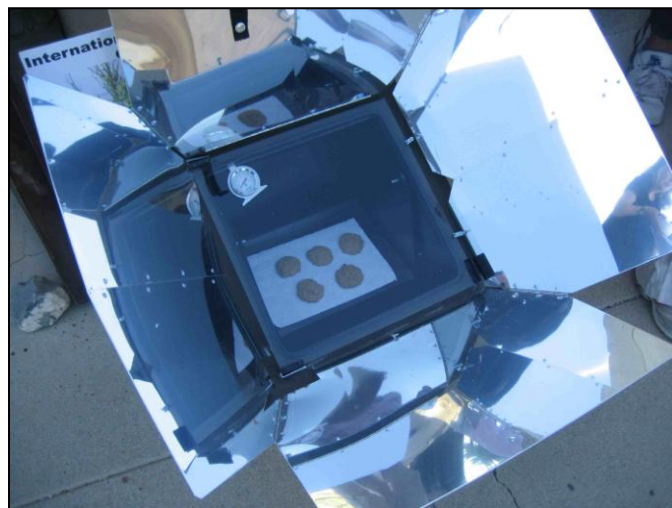
ISDA created a banner for visitors coming in from Ajo's south side.

Over 150 attendees viewed the Smithsonian and local exhibits that day, when they also heard **Dr. Gary Nabhan's** presentation, "State of Arizona's Foodshed: Food Diversity and Food Security Along the Border." Nabhan, an author, ethnobotanist, and food and farming advocate, discussed the unique tastes and qualities of desert foods, as well as sustainable growing and harvesting practices of the border region.

The Curley School is an artisan live/work complex, so ISDA's companion exhibit was a juried, multi-media art show entitled *On the Border: The Migration of Foods and Food Traditions*, which addressed foodways in the Southwest from historical, social, political, cultural, economic, and health perspectives. Several resident and local artists were represented alongside entries from Tucson, Phoenix, Tempe, Mexico, and the Tohono O'odham Nation. ISDA's talented print shop staff created a beautiful and informative exhibit catalog to accompany their local exhibit.



Drs. Gary Nabhan and Maribel Alvarez of Sabores Sin Fronteras/Flavors Without Border at Ajo's grand opening following Nabhan's talk.



Oatmeal-mesquite flour cookies bake in the Las Artes students' solar oven.

Also on view in the auditorium were historical photo displays and cookbooks from Ajo, which were set up on tables covered in Mexican oilcloth where visitors could write food memories and traditions. Yet another Key Ingredients-inspired exhibit was on display in the **Curley School Cafeteria Gallery**, as local artists were invited to create and sell themed pieces for *Kitchen Art: Form, Function, and Flights of Fancy*. Alongside beautiful and functional kitchen and dining implements were pieces of culinary-inspired art!

ISDA presented a Sunday speaker series to accompany Key Ingredients, with presentations including "The Food of Arizona: Many Cultures, Many Flavors" by author **Gregory McNamee**, "Eating the Depression: New Deal Food" by **Dr. Betsy Fahlman** of ASU, "Don't Cut the Ham Too Thin Boys: The Key Ingredients of Harvey Houses" by Old Trails Museum Director **Ann-Many Lutzick**, and "Cultural History of the Flour Tortilla" by **Dr. Maribel Alvarez** of the U of A's Southwest Center and *Sabores Sin Fronteras/Flavors Without Borders*.

ISDA also hosted six Movie Nights in partnership with the **Salazar-Ajo Branch of the Pima County Public Library**. Screened films included *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Ratatouille*, and *Soul Food*. The classic *Babette's Feast* also included a presentation on the cultural impact of coffee by **Andrew Sisk** of the **Oasis Café**, located in Ajo's historic square. **Tom Branson** discussed craft beer brewing and conducted a beer tasting following the documentary *Beer Wars*, while the screening of *Food, Inc.* included a discussion of sustainable agriculture with **Frank Martin** of **Crooked Sky Farms** and



ISDA added local artifacts to the Smithsonian's introductory kiosk that reflected the town's multi-cultural mining history, including a miner's bag, lunch bucket, and historic photo of an Ajo miner heading to work with lunch in tow.

Noland Johnson of Tohono O'odham Community Action's **Papago Farm**. The **Friends of the Library** group also hosted "Southwest Flavors: Cactus, Corn, Chilies, and More," a talk and food demonstration by author **Carol Niethammer**.

ISDA rounded out their Key Ingredients tour stop with a slate of family programs such as "Stars and Stories to Harvest in the Sonoran Desert" in the **Curley School Outdoor Auditorium**. Activities included a cookout, workshops on making healthy kebobs and natural birdfeeders, a performance featuring masks made by **Mari Kaestle's** art class, and a presentation by **Ric Alling** of the **ASU Planetarium** about how constellations relate to seasons, plants, and animals. Other family programs included "Play With Your Food," a workshop on how to create veggie food characters and garnishes with **Chef Ernie Green**, and a Sunday afternoon tour of community gardens, backyard chicken coops, and food-related historic sites.

ISDA also co-hosted two Christmas season programs with the **Catholic Church's Parish Hall**, including a Guadalupe Day Celebration and Pageant with *champurado* and *pan dulce*, and a "Kings Day" Celebration Dinner. Project partner **100 Estrella Restaurant** also hosted two events: a specially prepared New Years Eve dinner with two seatings, and a capacity-crowd cultural dinner prepared by Desert Rain Café using desert ingredients. ISDA's well-deserved closing celebration, "An Ajo Roundup," included live music, barbeque, and the sharing of food memories and stories of growing up in Ajo by local speakers and residents.

In addition to the 1,300 visitors to the Smithsonian exhibition, ISDA and their many project partners hosted over 3,935 visitors at a wonderfully diverse array of exhibits and programs that accompanied Key Ingredients, for a total visitation of 5,235 people. Project Director **Mimi Philips** writes of the experience,

"Food is simple to relate to on so many levels! We tried to address national history, local history, cultural nuances, agricultural issues, (past, present, and future), political issues, health issues...all around the theme of food...drawing on an engaging group of speakers, talented cooks, discussion-worthy films, and unique

community food events with accompanying musical performances and talented artists. We were constantly gathering around a topic that every age and culture relates to, yet shares nuances of how they experience it. There was something for everyone and our attendance confirmed it.

Ajo has such a history of building and celebrating community through the sharing of food. Having six weeks to savor the Smithsonian show along with diverse food-themed programming was a real treat for us and the many folks who visited. We thank you so much for this reason to energize, experience and educate our community!"



Visiting Topawa Project Director Jennifer Juan and her son enjoy the "cheese heads," Key Ingredients' most popular photo opportunity, at Ajo's opening.