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Contact: Judy Rusignuolo
USA Rice Federation
703-236-1453
jrusignuolo@usarice.com

Kinkini Banerjee
CWA
510-352-8325
kbanerjee@calwic.org

California WIC Association Stages ‘Iron Chef Wellness Cook-off’ With Brown Rice as the ‘Secret Ingredient’

SAN DIEGO — USA Rice Federation has partnered with the California Women, Infants and Children Association (CWA) to support its innovative statewide Worksite Wellness Program created for the state’s 3,500 frontline employees to promote the message: “Work Well, Be Well, Live Well.” The program fosters enthusiasm and healthy work habits at local agencies whose staff members counsel and educate more than 1 million Women, Infants and Children (WIC) families in choosing healthy foods and lifestyles.

As part of the initiative, CWA recently held an “Iron Chef Wellness Cook-Off” during its annual conference to encourage program administrators to create healthy recipes using foods available in the WIC food package. USA Rice sponsored the competition, which featured whole-grain brown rice as the “secret ingredient.” The contest was judged by a panel of culinary professionals including Rich Sweeney, a contestant on the popular “Top Chef” reality show; Michele Parente, features editor at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*; and Marie Simmons, rice advocate and cookbook author.

“The contest was a popular feature of our conference and a great success. Homemakers as well as the CWA members and WIC participants will appreciate these delicious, nutritious recipes that are also easily prepared and affordable,” CWA Executive Director Laurie True said.

Top honors went to Rohini Kubendran of the Antelope Valley WIC Program in Palmdale for [*Vegetable Brown Rice Pilaf and Curried Chickpeas*](#), which features brown rice, fresh vegetables, fragrant Indian spices, and curried chickpeas. “I wanted to showcase my native spices in a classic rice pilaf recipe that includes an accompaniment of seasoned chickpeas (garbanzo beans) to make a dish that is high in protein and fiber,” Kubendran said.

Runners-up included [*Confetti Brown Rice Salad*](#) submitted by Suzi Macaluso of Tulare County HHS WIC Program, Farmersville. The colorful rice salad features beans, corn, bell peppers and onions with Italian seasoning and a touch of curry. [*Wonderful, Incredible, Creative Fried Rice*](#) by Kris Mehan, Del Norte Clinics Inc, WIC, in Marysville, adds a twist to this classic dish with edamame (soy beans) and toasted walnuts.

WIC is a U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded supplemental nutrition program that provides healthy foods and nutrition education to 9 million at-risk mothers, infants and young children each month. The new food package launched in 2009 for the first time includes fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods including brown rice, and other healthy choices. California is the largest state WIC program, providing benefits to 1.4 million participants.

USA Rice, which represents America’s rice farmers and millers, is working closely with California WIC and other state programs to provide educational materials, supplier information, recipes and support to encourage increased selection of brown rice as a whole grain option by WIC consumers nationwide.

For more information about the CWA Worksite Wellness Program, visit: www.calwic.org/worksitewellness. To download winning brown rice recipes visit: www.usarice.com/wic.

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