Name: Date: Period:

Latin American Foods

Many of the foods we eat everyday originated in Latin America. Foods like tomatoes, chocolate, avocado, potatoes, squash and corn. The Aztecs and Latin American people enjoyed eating these items long before the Europeans. Two of the most common foods in the Aztec’s pantry were Maize (corn) and Cacao (chocolate).

Maize (corn) was the single most important food in the Aztec diet. This cereal grain was first cultivated in Mesoamerica. The first stalks of corn were only about an inch in length and grew on a single stalk. Once cultivated, maize grew in many different sizes, shapes and colors including yellow, red, white and blue. White was the most common color of maize. A rare blue-husked variety was considered to be a precious gift.

Cacao (chocolate) was first introduced by the Aztecs and Maya over 3,000 years ago. Xocolatl (show–KO-latl) which means “bitter water” was a frothy, bitter drink made from cacao beans. Hot water was mixed with roasted, ground beans, maize and flavorings (chili, honey or vanilla) and blended with a beating stick. The drink was then poured from cup to cup, creating a foamy head that would be served on top of the drink. Cacao beans were considered to be a valuable commodity and were often used as currency (money).

Tomatoes are native to Latin America. This fruit grew from Mexico to Argentina. The first tomatoes were not red. They were yellow and called “xitomatl” by the Aztecs. This means “plump thing with a navel”. Tomatoes were used in many dishes.

Pinto beans were eaten on a regular basis. These speckled beans were eaten whole or mashed. They were often used as a filling for dishes that included tortillas.

Squash came in many varieties including pumpkin, zucchini, acorn and butternut. This fruit is believed to have been cultivated in Mesoamerica as early as 10,000 years ago.

Potatoes were first grown in modern day Peru. These vegetable starches were exported to Europe in 1536. They became a major staple in the European diet.

Avocados were also present on the Aztec menu. This green fruit has an egg-shaped pit and was called “ahuacatl” by the Aztec.

Chicle or manikara chicle is a tropical evergreen tree that is native to Central America. This tree is the source of a sugary natural gum that was chewed by Aztecs. Companies like Wrigley use this to gum to manufacture (create) the chewing gum you see in stores and supermarkets.

Directions:

Answer the following questions using the text.

1. What modern day drink does “Xocolatl” resemble?

 A – Coca-Cola

 B – Hot Chocolate

 C – Milk

 D – Tea

2. What was the most important food in the Aztecs diet?

 A – Tomato

 B – Avocado

 C – Maize

 D – Cacao

3. What food was used as currency?

 A – Cacao Beans

 B – Pinto Beans

 C - Avocado Pits

 D – Maize Kernels

4. When was squash first cultivated?

 A – 1,000 years ago

 B – 100 years ago

 C – 10,000 years ago

 D – 10 years ago

5. Modern day Peru is the location for , a staple in the European diet.

 A – Tomatoes

 B – Pinto Bean

 C – Squash

 D – Potatoes