

The flavors of La Loma

A group of women from the townships of La Loma and Potrerillo, in El Paso (Cesar), are determined to maintain their ancestral culinary knowledge. We helped them publish a book of 71 delicious recipes from their region.



Group of women cooks at La Loma who graduated from a cooking course



Carmen Cuadro says her cooking secret is her good disposition



Typical dishes from La Loma

“Working with the women of La Loma is part of the Group's main cultural attribute: Social Awareness, which seeks to understand the context of the communities, their interests and their desires”.

Astrid Álvarez, President of Grupo Energía Bogotá.

For Carmen Cuadros, the key to the seasoning is not in the sweet pepper, the aromatic cloves, the annatto, or in adding a pinch of salt or baking soda with her right hand. For her, the secret to cooking is a good-natured approach, not being mad at anybody. “My mom taught me when I was a little girl, when we used to get up at three o'clock in the morning to make my dad's breakfast and lunch. She did everything while singing and telling stories or poems. Even plain salted rice came out delicious, because she did everything in a good mood”, she recalls.

Carmen's mother is 77-year-old Cenaida Mercado Pitalúa, a slim, sprightly woman who likes to make her own meals. She also inherited the keys to the region's cuisine from her mother. “Cooking and eating unites us, it is a tradition: back then, you'd go to your neighbor's house to have a glass of freshly drawn milk, still warm with that frothy cover. Ahhh, delicious! I wish those things would come back. We are attempting to do just that with this group of women”.

The women Cenaida is referring to belong to the Julio Cesar Altamar Muñoz Community Council. For years,

the group has been fighting to preserve the culinary history in the region, which has deep African roots. La Loma de Calenturas and El Paso were mostly populated by blacks from Africa, brought by the Spaniards in the 16th century to take care of the cattle ranches that were beginning to grow.

They are the same 70 women that recently graduated, along with 5 men, from four basic courses: Hygiene and Food Handling, Innovative Entrepreneurship, Traditional Cuisine, and Customer Service. The workshops were the result of the partnership forged with Grupo Energía Bogotá. One of these women is Eufrosina Vega, registered agent of the community council, who more than anyone else has promoted the preservation of the afro-rural culinary history at La Loma and Potrerillo, its neighboring township.

During 2019, in this jurisdiction, GEB built a 500 kV substation and is currently developing a 110 kV transmission project and another substation to guarantee energy service in the Colombian Caribbean region.

“In addition to helping rescue and strengthen the ancestral culinary memory, we train the in-

habitants of the region to launch food businesses and offer their portfolio to companies that have operations in the region,” says Diego Efraín García Molina, manager of the La Loma project.

At their graduation ceremony, in addition to their diplomas we gave them something they'd dreamed of for years: a book with 71 typical ancestral recipes from the region: *Saberes, sabores, olores y fogones de La Loma afrocolombiana* (The know-how, flavors, smells and stove of Afro-Colombian La Loma). During the courses, the participants wrote the recipes down themselves. If they were uncertain, wanting to ensure that the recipes were true to the ancestral tradition, they asked the old people in the region.

“We have been wanting to capture our traditions for many years, to consign them to a memory for life, and today it is a reality thanks to Grupo Energía Bogotá. This work is an homage to our women: afro, rural and head of household women. It is our history, created around a stove: it is the flavor of La Loma”, concluded Carmen Cuadros with her cheerful disposition, the key to her seasoning.