

El Salvador Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: Latin America

Primary Language(s): Salvadoran Spanish

Percent of Iowa's Population: .002% (5,125)

Background

In the early 16th century, the Spanish Empire conquered the territory, incorporating it into the Viceroyalty of New Spain ruled from Mexico City. In 1841, El Salvador became a sovereign nation until the 20th century, when it endured chronic political and economic instability characterized by coups, revolts, and authoritarian rulers. El Salvador's economy was historically dominated by agriculture, beginning with the indigo plant during the colonial period, and followed by coffee, which accounts for 90 percent of its export earnings. During the early 20th century, the country was ruled by military dictatorships followed by the Salvadoran Civil War from 1980-1992. The democratic process in El Salvador rests on a precariously balanced system since the Legislature decreed amnesty after the Peace Accords. Gangs have become an issue in the country leading to over 2 million Salvadorans living abroad in countries including the US, Canada, Mexico Costa Rica, and Sweden. El Salvador currently has a population of about 6.5 million inhabitants.



Papusa

Education and Literacy

According to statistics, only 82% of children make it to 9th grade. 6% of the children in El Salvador, do not attend school at all. Children who have finished 9th grade can go to secondary school, but only 33% will. The distribution of literacy is 79% men and 73% women.

Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

Some traditions of El Salvador include displaying fireworks during Christmas, devoting nine nights of prayer for the souls of the dead and using traditional medicine for folk illnesses. These customs are deeply rooted in most Salvadorans. El Salvador is 75 percent Roman Catholic but has a growing Protestant movement. The Catholic Church returned to its traditional conservative stance after the end of its Civil War. There are traditional remedies for some folk illnesses. The ojo, or "evil eye," is said to affect babies with fever. Traditional healers are called curanderos.

Holidays & Celebrations

Because of its large Catholic population, religious holidays are celebrated such as Christmas and Lent/Easter week. Independence is celebrated on September 15th with parades. Of all El Salvador Holidays, Fiestas Agostinas, in early August is one of the most popular ones. Held in the capital of San Salvador, a marching band wakes the city up at 4:00 a.m., after which parades, sports, food, and art exhibitions take place.

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Health Disparities

According to its results, it was found that 19.2% of children under five years of age suffer from chronic malnutrition. Anemia is considered a severe public health problem. It should be indicated that the population group with the highest prevalence of anemia is 6 to 11 months of age (46.1%) and the one with the lowest prevalence is 48 to 59 months of age (14.7%), highlighting the existence of a nutritional problem in the transition period from breast-feeding to solid foods for infants.

Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

Traditional foods and drink are particularly distinctive among the diverse cuisines of Central America. The culinary traditions are the result of a blend of indigenous and Spanish influences. Salvadoran food can be as familiar as chicken soup, or as exotic as fried palm flowers. Lots of fruits and vegetables are part of the daily diet. Tortillas, papusa, rice, meats, plantains and soups are part of most meals. Beverages include Kolachampan, a sugarcane-flavored soda; tamarind juice; horchata, a sweet herb and spice-based drink.

Considerations for WIC

- Counseling methods to be used include an understanding that Salvadorans are respectful of their elders and those in a position of authority so that they are not confused with being shy or illiterate.
- Cultural foods include fruits, vegetables, tortillas, beans, rice, eggs, plantains, and others need to be considered when discussing the WIC eligible foods they would be comfortable with. We would want to specifically point out what fruits and vegetables they can purchase that they are already familiar with and able to use.
- Foods, family and traditions are intertwined in Salvadoran society where it is not unusual to mix western medicine and traditional practices. WIC staff need to be sensitive to their traditions while trying to incorporate modern nutrition and medicinal knowledge to the families. Remember, its not just about the mom and baby but the entire family... immediate and extended.
- Be sure to refer families to those organizations and health care providers that they trust. Having an interpreter available makes a big difference as the family will feel much more comfortable discussing issues when they know their voice will be heard and translated correctly.
- By understanding and respecting the family's traditions and influences, WIC staff can lead the family into making small changes over time. As trust develops and families are taught how to incorporate WIC foods and accept referrals to other resources, their health and transition into communities will improve.

What's the Iowa Connection?

Iowa has a long tradition of welcoming immigrants. Typical places where Salvadorans work include health care (in home), laborers, meat packing plants, farm labor, domestic help, food service, restaurants, cleaning services, landscaping, and various types of construction jobs.



A traditional meal may include rice, beans, stewed meats and papusa which is pictured on the previous page. Papusa is a meat or vegetable stuffed tortilla. Fresh fruits and vegetables are also included.

How are we Living?

Of all the Hispanics living in Iowa, Salvadorans make up approximately 2.7% of them with the highest number of Latinos living in Buena Vista, Louisa, Marshall and Muscatine counties. Families typically remain intact as per their Catholic upbringing with the father as the Head of Household. Cooking and food preparation is typically done by the women of the household. Traditional foods such as papusas, beans, rice, tamales, fruits & vegetables are eaten.

