



OUR HISPANIC NEIGHBORS



Mealtime in Mexico

Eating good food is the best part of the day for many Mexican families. Whether the family is rich or poor, the kitchen is the most important room in the house. Here the Mexican woman rules. Even if the mother does not do the cooking herself, she prepares the *menu* (list of dishes for the meal). She tastes all of the food and puts just the right amount of seasoning in each pot.

For breakfast Mexicans like eggs fixed in a **variety** of ways. A favorite egg dish is *huevos rancheros*. These are eggs fried sunny side up on warm tortillas. The eggs are covered with red chile sauce. Refried beans are served with the eggs. Another favorite egg dish is made by adding finely chopped onions, tomatoes and chili peppers to scrambled eggs.

The main meal of the day is served about 2:00 in the afternoon. The father comes home from work and the children come home from school for the main meal.

Early each morning, Mexican women go to the market to buy the food for the main meal. Farmers sell their produce in the open-air markets. They bring squash, potatoes, corn, green beans, tomatoes and many other kinds of fresh vegetables. Some of the vegetables are found only in Mexican markets, like *chayote*. This is a pale-green fruit that is shaped like a pear, but it is eaten as a vegetable. *Jicama* is a vegetable that looks like a sugar beet on the outside and like an apple on the inside. It tastes like a water chestnut.

The largest open-air market in Mexico City takes up ten blocks. There are more than 2,000 stalls in this market. Food is not the only thing you can buy at this market. You can buy pots and pans, pottery and clothing, too.

Mexican women have more than 20 different kinds of beans to choose from. There are black beans, pink beans, purple beans, yellow beans and white beans. Chile peppers also come in many different sizes and shapes. There are fresh chile peppers and dried chile peppers. There are hot chile peppers and mild chile peppers.



Before going home, Mexican women stop at the *panaderia* (bakery) to buy warm *bolillos* straight from the oven. These little rolls are crunchy on the outside but soft on the inside. The women also buy sweet rolls, cookies and pies.

Now the vegetables must be prepared for cooking. The mother scrubs each vegetable many times. Then she soaks them in water with chemicals to kill any germs and bacteria. The little girls pick out any stones that may be in the dried beans.

Most Mexican dishes are cooked twice. Some dishes are boiled and steamed. Some dishes are fried and baked. Other dishes are boiled and roasted.

The main meal takes at least two hours to eat. After eating, Mexicans relax or take a nap during the *siesta*.

The evening meal for Mexicans is a very simple, light meal. It may not begin until 9:00 at night!