

Youth summer cooking camp encouraging healthy eating habits

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Author of the article: **Jake Romphf**

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Paul Morden/Sarnia Observer Simeon Ferrier, left, and Silas Ferrier, eight-year-old twins from Arkona, get ready to taste the lunch they helped make Tuesday at Camp Foodie in Forest. PHOTO BY PAUL MORDEN /Paul Morden/The Observer

Starting this week, three one-week food camps in Forest are teaching the basics of cooking and the importance of healthy, local food sources to children aged nine to 14 .

The first-ever Camp Foodie is fully booked, with 60 children taking part in the camp at the Forest Optimist Hall kitchens. Each week, 20 children will learn how to cook from a

professional chef, visit local farms and get hands-on kitchen and fire safety lessons from the Forest Fire Department. The campers also get to play several sports to get outside and active.

The camp had to start a wait list after it reached its registration capacity.

“For a small community, it’s a great thing to have that many kids out and interested,” said Scott Ferguson, the camp’s organizer. “The main goal is to teach healthy, local cooking.”

Ferguson said bad eating habits contribute to the worsening child obesity problem. Obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have tripled in the past three decades and 30 per cent of children, aged five to 17, were overweight or obese in 2017, according to Health Canada. Obese children are at a higher risk of developing health issues, such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and breathing problems.

Ferguson said the camp teaches children how to make simple, healthy meals, so they can stay away from the quick, processed and unhealthy options.

“We’re just trying to give them some good tips,” he said. “You can’t eat perfect every day, but at least they can learn some things they can do easy and hopefully pick up some good habits.”

The camp is also trying to show the children the local food products that come from and grow in this area.

“There’s lots of good stuff right here in Lambton County,” Ferguson said.

One day each week, the children will go to Forest Glen Herb Farm to help them see where their food comes from and they’ll have a picnic made with all locally sourced foods. The children will also be going on a tour of the farm to see how the herbs and spices are grown and dried, Ferguson said.

He said some of the food young kids are making on cooking shows, such as Chopped Junior, is amazing.

“The sooner you get them interested in it, the better off they’ll be,” he said.