

By Liza Marron

The camels in Capulin performed their antics for area residents during the LOCAL! harvest celebration at the Mudita Camel Dairy on Sunday. Families from the south San Luis Valley enjoyed a pristine summer day with the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition at the new homestead camel farm in Conejos County.

The six Mudita camels provided entertainment, kisses and photo opportunities for adventurous participants. Owners Meghan and Matt Stalzer and their small son Liam came to the La Jara Canyon on La Jara Creek about three years ago after first establishing the Mudita Camel Dairy in Saguache County about five years ago.

The dairy exists for the medicinal properties of the camel milk as well as the their fiber which was available in fudge treats, camel milk soaps and yarns on Sunday. "Mudita" from the Sanskrit language has no counterpart in English, but roughly translates to "our happiness comes from your happiness" - a great way to describe the atmosphere at this year's celebration of the harvest.

Festival master of ceremonies and DJ Abe Rosenberg kept the crowd delighted with dancing and a youth dance-off, a camel calling contest, stories and music. Local Conejos County band "Bittersweet" then took center stage and played the classics that took folks back to the 50's and 60's and some twisting and shouting was going on in the prairie dirt.

La Jara forager Maury Grimm of Nature's Table shared foraged delicacies and took people down on the creek for a plant walk that had eager participants learning latin such as *Rhus integrifolia*, also known as lemonade sumac, and tasting its citrusy berry, identifying sage, yarrow, goldenrod and a plethora of other tasty and medicinal plants common to the area.

Coalition director Liza Marron was delighted with the turnout from the community. "The Coalition festival planning team wanted to get out of its pattern to host celebrations only at its Rio Grande Farm Park in Alamosa County. Board member Meghan Stalzer offered their off-grid southern homestead as an ideal spot to venture out in the San Luis Valley to make new friends and to celebrate those who till the earth and tend to the animals nourishing the historic roots of self-sufficiency and community sustainability in Conejos County and the greater SLV."

The event was advertised in the Conejos Citizen newspaper, with flyers up at local businesses and on Conejos County facebook pages. Of the 200 people that flowed through the event and mostly stayed, over half of them were from the southern Colorado county of Conejos. Most of these festival-goers stayed for the whole event and enjoyed the tours, music, vendors and most of all - local food dishes.

Teresa Martinez of Tacos Martinez featured San Luis Valley meats and vegetables in her delicious tacos al pastor, asada and chicken taco stand. The Coalition's mobile kitchen "MOKI" served chard wraps and squash blossom poppers with fresh calabacita salad and a delicious peach crunch for dessert...all sourced from this region's family farms and ranches and western slope fruits.

The Coalition has a lot of gratitude to share for the LOCAL! Harvest celebration starting with Meghan and Matt Stalzer for hosting us at their lovely camel homestead. Thank-you to Zoila Gomez for translating for our Spanish-speaking attendees. We are all thankful to the band "Bittersweet" for their beautiful music and all the vendors that showed up to share the fruits of

their labor with the community. We could not have put on the event with our big crew of volunteers who helped with set up, helped to run the event and with takedown.

We appreciate all of the members of the community who attended and all who let us borrow tents and equipment when our two big festival tents did not work out in the prevailing wind.

And finally - we are so grateful to our Sponsors which allowed this event to be free to the public: Host Sponsor 1st SouthWest Bank, SLV Federal, Shangrilah/Milky Way Mountain Caprines, Conejos County Hospital, Salazar Meats, Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, Carole Counihan, Indiana Jones Bed and Breakfast, Vino Salida, Colorado Farm Brewery, Alan Simpson and Albert Francis.

The San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition works to “foster an equitable local food system that restores the health of the people, community, economy and ecosystem.” For more information on the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition go to www.slvlocalfoods.org .