

Sabor de San Antonio: Rediscovering roots through food, history, and multi-lingual science

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Event attendees with Chef Medrano.

San Antonio is a multicultural city shaped by centuries of cultural intersections. Known for its unique blend of Spanish, Mexican, and Native American influences, the city was initially founded as a Spanish mission in 1718 and later became a part of Mexico. These historical layers are vividly alive in San Antonio's language, arts, and cuisine, making it one of only two cities in the United States with the Creative City of Gastronomy status by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recognized globally for its contributions to the culinary arts and its dedication to preserving food traditions rooted in Indigenous and regional flavors.

At the 2024 CANVAS meeting, the special session "Sabor de San Antonio" celebrated the city's vibrant cultural heritage through a mix of scientific presentations, historical narratives, and culinary experiences. The session showcased Spanish-speaking students, a local historian, and a renowned local chef, offering attendees a deep understanding and profound appreciation of San Antonio's rich traditions and history.



Dr. Samira Daroub, 2025 SSSA President, welcoming the attendees.

A platform for science and culture

The session invited students to deliver rapid five-minute scientific presentations in Spanish from a range of topics across agronomy, soil health, and education. With two screens, each presentation was displayed in both Spanish and English, allowing the audience to engage with the research. This inclusive approach marked the Societies' commitment to linguistic diversity and encouraged Spanish-speaking scientists to share their work in their native language.

The selected presentations included:

- *El Remplazo Del Bosque Natural a Plantacion De Arboles Exoticos*—**Alejandro Atenas**, Texas A&M University

- *Effect of Ecological Intensification on Soil Health and Crop Production*—**Krista Zapata**, Purdue University
- *Cultivating Soil Awareness: Transdisciplinary Approaches in the Caribbean*—**Leidy Janneth Fernandez Montiel**, Penn State University
- *Predicción Genómica De La Exudación De Sorgoleone De Sorgo Tejano*—**Fabian Leon**, Texas A&M University
- *De Los Ladrillos Al Suelo: Desarrollo Del Currículo De Suelos Del 4-H LEGO® Club*—**Patricia Marie Cordero-Irizarry**, Mississippi State University
- *Impacto De Diversas Prácticas De Conservación En La Productividad De Pastizales*—**Julian Avila Bernal**, University of Florida



Caption: Students present their research in five-minute rapid talks in Spanish with bilingual slides. On the left is Patricia Marie Cordero-Irizarry, Mississippi State University, presenting her talk “De Los Ladrillos Al Suelo: Desarrollo Del Currículo De Suelos Del 4-H LEGO® Club.” On the right is Julian Avila Bernal, University of Florida, presenting his talk “Impacto De Diversas Prácticas De Conservación En La Productividad De Pastizales y Emisiones De Gases De Efecto Invernadero.”

Exploring San Antonio’s cultural history

Following the scientific presentations, history professor Dr. Omar Valerio-Jiménez from the University of Texas at San Antonio discussed the city’s historical roots and the rich contributions of Indigenous groups such as the Payaya and Coahuiltecan, the Spanish

colonists, Mexicans, and Anglo Americans who shaped the region. His talk provided rich context for appreciating the cultural influences that have shaped San Antonio's heritage and community.

A taste of the authentic Texas Mexican food

San Antonio is known for its Tex-Mex cuisine as well as the integration of Native American foodways into its culinary identity. The highlight of the session was Chef Adán Medrano's presentation on "The Art of Texas Mexican Food." Chef Medrano, a culinary expert and advocate for Indigenous food traditions, shared stories about the roots of Texas Mexican cuisine, which is deeply connected to the local land and Indigenous heritage. He emphasized how traditional ingredients and techniques have been preserved and adapted over generations, creating a cuisine that is uniquely Texan, yet proudly rooted in Mexican culture. His presentation was followed by tastings of historically relevant local dishes, allowing attendees to experience the flavors that reflect San Antonio's diverse history.

“Sabor de San Antonio” served as a reminder of the importance of culture and context in science and scientific meetings.

Attendees left not only with a deeper understanding of scientific topics, but also with a greater appreciation for the cultural richness that makes San Antonio a city like no other.

The authors of this article also served as organizers of the “Sabor de San Antonio” event at the 2024 CANVAS meeting.

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