

Simplot Chef Travels the Country Introducing Restaurants to Simplot Products



Dianna Fricke Recognized with Research Chefs Association President's Award

Across from Simplot Chef Dianna Fricke's desk it's hard to miss the large map of the United States with sticker dots scattered across it. Each sticker indicates the restaurant accounts that she has visited.

In her 18-year career with Simplot, Fricke has logged more than a million miles of air travel.

As Simplot's director of culinary, Fricke focuses on product development and creating new menu items that will be served at restaurants across the country.

"We are always introducing new products. My job is all about menu innovation and taking whatever is trending and bringing that onto the menu," she says.

Fricke's expertise goes beyond her work at Simplot. Recently, she received the Research Chefs Association President's Award (RCA).

The annual President's Award is given to one individual who demonstrates the highest level of commitment to the RCA and excels in the advancement of the culinary arts.

Fricke, who counts famed chef Julia Child as an inspiration, was the first woman chapter president of the Idaho Chefs de Cuisine as well as the first woman to earn her Certified Research Chef credentials from RCA. She has been an RCA board member for six years.

Fricke said she was surprised and honored to be chosen for the RCA recognition, adding that the organization is invaluable to helping chefs stay aware of the advances in the field of culinary arts.

"Just like technology, everything is always evolving and changing. You have to be on top of your game," she says.

Fricke said it's important to be innovative to make sure restaurants embrace Simplot products. Finding the right product and the right presentation that will appeal to restaurants often involves a great deal of experimentation.

"It's playing with your food, constantly" Fricke said. "We want to be new and different, but at the same time we want to keep things on the menu that people like."

Fricke's road to becoming a chef started as a child. She cheerfully admits her inclination to cook was born out of "survival."

"My mother is a terrible cook," Fricke says with a smile. "If you wanted to eat something that didn't come out of a box, then you had to prepare it yourself."

Fricke pursued her new found skill of cooking by earning a degree in culinary arts with honors from Western Culinary Institute in Portland, Ore. and a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in nutrition and dietetics from Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho.

She briefly worked at a bagel bakery and started at Simplot initially as an intern before becoming a Simplot chef.

Cooking is not just a job, but a passion for Fricke.

Her fiancée is also a chef, and the couple joined by their pet bull dog spend many hours cooking and entertaining with friends.

In the age where iPads are fast replacing paper recipes, Fricke maintains a special place in her heart for unique cook books.

"There's something about having a paper copy with the background stories that make it more interesting," Fricke said.

During her travels, she spends time "researching" at nearby restaurants.

"I'll have a list of restaurants that have interesting menus or hopefully they are plating things differently," she said.

Fricke finds plenty of inspiration at the restaurants she visits. A stack of menus on her desk are a testament to that and serve as a valuable resource to determine how some of Simplot's many products can make it on the menus of restaurants she likes.

And what is her favorite Simplot food offering?

"Roasted apples are probably one of my favorites," she says.

"I am a baker by trade, so I love baking, and the apples are so versatile. We do a pizza with them that's really good with a cream cheese base, apples, and then a streusel topping with cranberries and salted caramel sauce."

Whether it's roasted apple pizza or looking at new ways to use Simplot's venerable hash brown, Fricke said working at Simplot has opened up a whole new culinary world for her to do what she loves.

"Simplot has been an outstanding company to work for," she says. "I have been able to meet a lot of interesting people, and I'm always doing something different, which is fabulous."