

Chopped Challenge tests culinary chops

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — When it comes to talking about food and cooking, Tom Mueller, chairman of the Illinois Corn Marketing Board and a corn farmer from Taylor Ridge, probably is more comfortable talking about all the ingredients that can be made from corn.

“I do cook some at home. I do most of the grilling,” Mueller said.

On Ag Day at the Illinois State Fair, the culinary skills of Mueller and his daughter, Susan Coppess, were put to the test as they went up against representatives of the Illinois Soybean Association in the Chopped Challenge cookoff.

“We called it the ‘Commodity Classic’ because it had ingredients from all the different commodity organizations,” Mueller said.

Contestants had 30 minutes to come up with a complete dish from a basket of Illinois-made ingredients. On Ag Day, those ingredients were soynuts, cornbread mix, watermelon, Reinneck Ranch Salsa Rose salsa and pork.

“We had a corn muffins that we started that had some chili pepper in it, then we had a nice piece of steak on top of that. We had some strawberries and pepper salsa on top of that, garnished with roasted soynuts and some cream on top of that,” Mueller said.

“My daughter was the person who came up with what we were going to cook,” he said.

Coppess is no slouch when it comes to knowledge of food ingredients — she received her bachelor of science degree in food service from the University of Illinois and a master’s degree from DePaul University.

The corn team went up against the soybean team of Lynn Rohrscheib of Fairmount and Doug Winter of Mill Shoals. Both Rohrscheib and Winter are members of the United Soybean Board of directors.



Mindy Bunselmeyer (from left), Paxton Morse and Angie Barnard make their final choices in the Illinois State Fair Ag Day Chopped Challenge cooking contest. The contest, which was featured in the ag tent every day of the fair, pitted representatives of different organizations against each other. On Ag Day, the Illinois Corn Marketing Board and the Illinois Soybean Association faced off with the corn board team of Chairman Tom Mueller and his daughter, Susan Coppess, taking top honors.