

A special meal

Milpa Alta is a region to the south of Mexico City. It has a famous volcano – *Teuhtli* – and twelve villages and towns. Milpa Alta is also famous for a traditional meal every Christmas, called *La Rejunta*. The meal is part of the Christmas celebrations and it feeds huge numbers of people. The cooks make about sixty thousand tamales. Tamales are made from corn and have different fillings. They also make about fifteen thousand litres of hot chocolate. They make all of this food and drink in less than one week. The meal is one of the activities for people who go on a walk to the cave of *El Señor de Chalma*. It's an important place for people from the region at Christmas. The cave is about eighty kilometres away and the walk begins on the 3rd of January. About 20,000 people go on the walk each year. That's 20,000 hungry people!

Every year, the organisers of the meal change. This year, Virginia Meza Torres and her husband Fermín Lara Jiménez are the organisers, or *majordomos*. They waited for 14 years to do this. Lots of people want to organise the meal because it's a very important tradition. They put their names on a list. At the moment, the list has names for every year until 2046.

The preparation for the meal takes a whole year. At the start of the year, men collect wood from the forest. They store it near the home of the *majordomos* so that it will be dry and ready to use. The wood burns in the fires that they use to cook the food. The farmers in the area grow the ingredients for the meal, such as corn, meat and vegetables. Everything is natural; there's no ready-made food. Lots of volunteers help to cook and serve the meal.

Tradition is very important to the people of Milpa Alta, and one of the most important activities is eating together. One woman, Josefina García Jiménez, says that sitting together at the table shows love to your family. Everybody stays at the table after the meal finishes and they talk, tell stories and laugh together. At Christmas, *La Rejunta* is like a huge family meal.

glossary

corn (n) a plant you can eat