Ready-to-Go Exhibits Expand Consumer Food Safety Knowledge and Action

The Situation
Extension Educators are often given the opportunity to present at local resource and health fairs. These occasions allow Educators to maintain a strong presence in their community, market UI Extension, and provide reliable, research based information to participants. These fairs can often draw hundreds. For consumers, one-on-one contact with a local expert who can answer a participant’s question is valuable and can lead to linking participants to UI Extension for future questions. Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educators identified the need for an attractive, interactive food safety exhibit because food safety education is often times requested by fair organizers. Consumers who understand the magnitude of food safety risk and the serious nature of some of the foodborne illnesses are more likely to take steps to prevent foodborne illness for themselves and their family members.

Our Response
A team of five FCS Educators and the UI Extension Food Safety Specialist designed a professional, peer-reviewed exhibit with interchangeable information panels to provide flexibility in presenting food safety topics. The final product is a set of four ready-to-go, interactive exhibits, consisting of posters, a spin wheel (with question “wedges” for each topic), game show presenter software (with questions programmed for each topic), and appropriate handouts for each exhibit topic. The overall theme was Targeting Food Safety. Visit the website to view the materials: http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/foodsafety.

Program Outcomes
Since completion in April 2007, the Targeting Food Safety exhibits have assisted FCS Educators in providing reliable, research-based consumer food safety information to participants at 37 Idaho fairs, schools, conferences, church groups, and a discovery center.

The value of the information for consumers was tested using a retrospective pre-/post format survey. Seventy-five consumers at three venues who viewed the Targeting Food Safety with Thermometers exhibit said that they:
now knew it is important to use an instant-read thermometer when testing hamburger patties to see if they are safely cooked (92% after experiencing the exhibit as compared to 63% before participating in the exhibit).

intended to use a thermometer to test the internal temperature of hamburger patties with a food thermometer (83% after as compared to 29% before participating in the exhibit).

The interactive spin wheel proved an effective attention getter and has been adapted to other curriculums and venues such as the Smart Women, Smart Money conference and Extension Nutrition Program elementary school classroom lessons.

Educators using the exhibits have said:

- When I was asked at the last minute to be an exhibitor at an Emergency Preparedness Fair for a church group interested in food preservation, I was ready to go in just a few minutes and looked very professional. It allowed me to meet a community need that without the food safety display unit and easily obtained handouts, I would have had to decline.

- When I used the Kids poster at the Naples Elementary Learning Fair, the spin wheel and poster provided talking points for parents and eye-openers for kids—they loved it and everyone had lots of fun and took home a prize.

- I was contacted by a group who wanted Extension to present at a preparedness fair. Unfortunately, I was already scheduled to teach at another venue. I was able to loan the organizer of the event the Food Preservation display and the appropriate publications. I received very positive feedback from this individual.

For More Information

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