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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## HOME FOOD PRESERVATION: THE RULES FOR VEGETABLES AND MEAT

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Many people are responding to economic changes by growing gardens. Those gardeners plan to save even more money by preserving produce for later use. While many people have canned for years and understand the risks, those new to home food preservation may not be aware of the precautions essential in preserving food – especially in canning vegetables and meat. Improperly canned vegetables, meat and other low acid foods can produce a rare, but serious illness – botulism. *Clostridium botulinum* (*C botulinum*) bacterium causes the illness. The bacteria produce a nerve toxin that can cause paralysis. Since food borne botulism can be fatal, it is a medical emergency.

Recent cases of botulism have come from sources such as chopped garlic in oil, chili peppers, non-acidified tomatoes, improperly handled baked potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil and home-canned or fermented fish.

The perfect environment for botulism to grow is in an air tight, low acid environment – exactly the environment created in home canning. To eliminate the botulism spores, food must reach an internal temperature of 240 degrees. A water bath canner cannot reach a temperature above the boiling point of water, and will not kill botulism spores. A pressure canner is essential in guarding against botulism when canning vegetables and meat. Pressure canners reach 240 degrees. A pressure cooker is not a pressure canner. If you purchase a pressure canner, be sure that it is a canner, not a pressure cooker.

Tomatoes fall in the middle of the acidic scale and therefore acid must be added for processing in a water bath OR pressure canner. Acceptable acids include vinegar, lemon juice, or lime juice labeled as 5% acidic.

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When canning vegetables, use a U.S.D.A. recipe, adjust for altitude and have your pressure gauge tested at least every other year to ensure its accuracy. The University of Idaho Bonner County Extension Office offers publications on canning low acid foods, and provides a pressure gauge testing service. The office can be reached at 263-8511.

*Sue Traver is Extension Educator for the University of Idaho Extension in Bonner County.*

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