

IMPACT



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Preserve @ Home Brings Food Safety Knowledge to Rural Idaho and Beyond

The Situation

Many home canners are inexperienced and may not have been trained in safe home food preservation techniques. Consumer food safety, food preservation and food storage questions are common at UI Extension office because extension is recognized as a source of reliable and current information. However, not all Extension offices have a Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Educator who is knowledgeable in food safety and home food preservation techniques; so educators with food safety expertise cover multiple counties throughout Idaho.

In addition, students seeking FCS education certification need FCS 270 Intermediate Foods, which includes a component on food preservation; however, many of these students live outside of Moscow. Non-UI students also need this information before applying to the UI dietetics program, but few universities offer a food preservation course.

Our Response

A team of Extension Educators and Extension Food Safety Specialist, School of Family and Consumer Sciences faculty and Educational Communications web designers adapted the researched-based *UI/WSU Food Safety Advisor Volunteer Handbook* into a web-based module entitled Preserve @ Home (also listed in the UI Academic catalogue as FCS 404/504 Food Preservation).

The module includes the basic principles of food safety and food preservation, and practical applications of the principles. The course includes thirteen lessons of on-line and downloadable text, discussion board, real-time weekly chat, visuals, handouts, quizzes, FAQ's, and links to government websites on food safety and food preservation. Preserve @ Home was piloted in the summer of 2004 with 15 students located on campus and in 9 Idaho communities. Adjustments were made to the class, and it was offered both fall and winter semesters.

Program Outcomes

Students from Idaho, Montana and New Mexico with skill levels ranging from no experience or confidence to 10+ years of experience have completed the course. Students learned how to preserve high-quality products using a water bath canner, a steam pressure canner, dehydrator and freezer. They gained an understanding of the science behind food preservation techniques and food borne illness. As a result of Preserve @ Home research-based food preservation and food safety education is readily available in all Idaho communities.

Using a retrospective pre-test both course content and course format were evaluated.

Course content evaluations indicated that:

- 69% felt very confident in pressure canning meats, poultry and vegetables
- 75% felt very confident canning fruits, tomatoes and soft spreads

- 69% felt very confident drying food products
- 81% felt very confident freezing foods

Actions students plan to take as a result of Preserve @ Home include:

- “I am more cautious of food safety. I will also update all my canning books.”
- “Be more careful about the venting process while pressure canning.”
- “Clean cutting board and counter tops better.”
- “Change my dishrag every day. Make freezer jam. Can tomatoes (next summer).”
- “I want to make fermented pickles and sauerkraut. I have not done this yet.”
- “Condition my dried foods...”

Students who participated in the Discussion Board and weekly Chat rated it very helpful also. Students rated the web-based format and feedback from instructor as very helpful. Students’ comments on the course format included:

- “I liked the format... I enjoyed working at my own speed. I would print out the lessons and put them in a binder so I have them for future reference. I liked getting this up to date information, which helps with not only my job, but at home as well.”
- “...the flexibility, on line chat.”
- “It teaches knowledge that is used every day. Like proper handling of food, proper defrosting methods, and storage of foods.”
- “I liked the online quizzes because it gave me an opportunity to learn as I was taking the quiz.”
- “I took the class to "update" my knowledge in food preservation and to participate in and analyze a web-based class. I liked the consistent format, the use of color, and the graphics of the lessons on the internet (the printable files were fine, too) I liked clicking on the additional resources, i.e. Bad Bug Book and being connected immediately. That made researching a topic especially easy. I liked the glossary that was provided prior to the lessons.”

The Future

UI Extension will continue to evaluate, expand and improve the course. Faculty from the University of Idaho School of Family and Consumer Science will develop other modules to complete FCS 270 as a distance course.

For More Information

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