“Seafood at its Best” follow-up shows significant behavior change

The Situation
The 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee recommends Americans eat more seafood to obtain the health benefits that seafood offers. By consuming two servings of seafood per week that provides an average of 250 mg/day of omega-3 fatty acids, Americans can adopt the health promoting nutrition guidelines. To reduce their burden from cardiovascular disease, consumers need to increase their intake of seafood. Ensuring maternal dietary intake of long chain omega-3 fatty acids, in particular DHA, during pregnancy and lactation through two or more servings of seafood per week also has benefits for the infant, especially when women emphasize types of seafood high in omega-3 fatty acids with low methyl mercury content.

The Guidelines Advisory Committee also states that change is needed in the overall food environment to support the efforts of all Americans to meet the key recommendations of the guidelines. To meet these changes we need to enhance access to publicly available, user-friendly benefit/risk information that helps consumers make informed seafood choices. The “Seafood at its Best” curriculum was developed to empower consumers to make informed decisions.

Low seafood consumption can be explained in part by concerns and confusion about seafood safety, handling, and cooking. Many of these concerns result from inaccurate and sensationalized media reports. American consumers also are confused by conflicting information from governmental agencies and private organizations. Lack of knowledge and confidence in selecting and preparing seafood are often reasons for low consumption.

Our Response
Extension Educators in Twin Falls County, Gary Fornshell, Aquaculture educator and Rhea Lanting, Family and Consumer Sciences educator developed a curriculum to help consumers become more confident about buying and preparing seafood. Class participants will be better educated about seafood, often poorly understood in terms of selection, handling, storing, preparation, health benefits, and actual risks relative to perceived risks.

Factors that influence consumers choosing seafood are similar to choices of other foods, such as taste, price, convenience, or ease of preparation. Consumers of seafood do not think they have enough information about seafood. The curriculum addresses these concerns. The four-lesson “Seafood at its Best” curriculum includes:

1. What is seafood?
2. Health benefits of eating seafood.
4. Seafood tips (selecting, buying, handling, storing and cooking seafood).

The curriculum materials consists of an introduction for the instructor, lecture notes providing an introduction for each lesson, suggested activities, a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson, references for additional information and evaluation tools.

Program Outcomes
One hundred fourteen participants have attended the “Seafood at its Best” classes in Twin Falls and Boise. Follow-up surveys were mailed to class participants.
Participants were asked to complete the four questions and return the postcard. Questions asked were:

1. As a result of taking the “Seafood at its Best” class, I have changed my consumption of seafood.
2. By taking the Seafood class, I am a more confident and informed seafood shopper.
3. Since taking the Seafood class, I have improved my seafood cooking skills.
4. Would you recommend this class to others?

The survey response rate was about 39%, which is considered quite good. Although seafood consumption did increase among the participants, it was not a significant increase. However, 88% and 71% of respondents respectively, indicated they were more confident and informed shoppers and their seafood cooking skills improved as a result of the class. A total of 81% would recommend this class to others.

The “Seafood at its Best” curriculum was recently presented at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Conference. The curriculum will also be presented in February, 2011 at the Aquaculture America Conference. Seventy-four copies of the curriculum have been sold. The curriculum will be slightly revised when the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is published.


FOR MORE INFORMATION

Rhea Lanting, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Twin Falls County
246 Third Avenue East
Twin Falls, ID 83301
Phone: 208.734.9590
Fax: 208.733.9645
E-mail: rhlantin@uidaho.edu

Gary Fornshell, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Twin Falls County
246 Third Avenue East
Twin Falls, ID 83301
Phone: 208.734.9590
Fax: 208.733.9645
E-mail: gafornsh@uidaho.edu

Barb Abo, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Ada County
5880 Glenwood Avenue
Boise, ID 83714
Phone: 208.287.5900
Fax: 208.287.5909
E-mail: babo@uidaho.edu

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is recommending that we improve nutrition literacy and cooking skills. The “Seafood at its Best” curriculum is helping consumers improve these skills along with increasing the intake of seafood. The health benefits from consuming a variety of seafood outweigh the risks.