University of Idaho Extension educators offer regional food preservation workshop

The Situation
There has been a large increase in requests for food preservation classes and information the last few years. The increase in desire to preserve food may be attributed to the economy and families trying to stretch the family food dollar. Some people have become more interested in the quality and contents of their canned food. There are also those who are trying to provide healthy food for family members with special diet needs.

Since the economy is weak, the University of Idaho is unable to fill vacant Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension Educator positions or hire new faculty to provide food safety information. With this loss, it became important to train staff in county offices where there was no FCS faculty to answer food preservation questions.

The University of Idaho’s Extension Educators goal is to provide research based information to clientele in the communities where they live. With such a growing need for food preservation information, it became important for us to provide a class where safe food preservation techniques were demonstrated and practiced.

Our Response
With the growing need for reliable food preservation information FCS Extension Educators in the Eastern Region created a plan to offer classes throughout the region. Classes would be offered to all of the counties in the region but taught in Jefferson, Bannock and Franklin counties. We choose locations in three different areas of our district to provide easier access for our participants. A five week course was designed to cover the major food preservation topics. The topics for the five classes were: Canning Basics, Low-acid Foods, High-acid Foods, Freezing and Drying, Pickling and Preserves.

We divided the classes and topics up between seven Extension Educators. For convenience and travel reasons, one team would teach the same class at every location during the week. The next week another team would teach the class the new subject.

Between the three locations 38 people attended. The classes were designed to incorporate instruction at the beginning of class and then hands on experience to preserve food or practice methods discussed that day.

Program Outcomes
A retrospective survey was given to the participants during the last session. Participants were asked about knowledge gained and behaviors they planned to change or have changed. On the next page are some of the results of the survey.
Some of the comments made by the students about the food preservation workshop were:

- I loved the class! I took it to “get my hands dirty” and learn more about the act of food preservation. I learned a lot. It was a great experience.
- One thing I will never do is use a steam canner.
- I will dehydrate more and preserve a wider variety of foods.

In conclusion, the students that took the class learned proper food preservation methods and planned on putting them into practice. It was an enjoyable and practical experience for them. Also, eight county staff members were trained to better answer phone questions about food preservation or know where to find the answer.