Extension food preservation workshops help prevent foodborne illness

The Situation
Food safety is a top priority when considering home preserved foods. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 1 in 6 Americans get sick each year from a foodborne illness. Several of pathogens that cause foodborne illness are naturally found in foods preserved at home or spread by improper handling of foods at home. Examples include salmonella, clostridium perfringens, and norovirus.

According to a 2004 CDC report, improperly home-canned foods remains the main source for the dangerous foodborne botulism neurotoxins. Idaho ranked among the top three states of reported botulism cases over the 10-year period the report examined. The cost to the public resulting from botulism events is expensive with an estimated value at $322,000 per case. The cost becomes priceless when the possible loss of life exists.

Citizens living in Eastern Idaho expressed an increased interest in safe food preservation when the economy was in a downturn in 2010. Economic conditions contributing to interest in home food preservation continue. Other factors that influence a desire to preserve food at home include many Eastern District citizens growing their own gardens. An interest in eating locally grown produce continues as well.

Our Response
Increased interest in home food preservation was the impetus for a team of Eastern District Extension faculty to offer food preservation classes yearly since 2010. Educators divided a five-week series of lessons between one another. Classes for 2012 were presented in Bannock, Bonneville, and Lemhi counties. Lemhi was a new county in the series.

The curricula was modeled after the University of Idaho’s Master Food Safety Advisor’s training. Topics included Canning Basics, Canning High Acid Foods, Canning Low Acid Foods, Freezing, Drying, Pickling and Canning Preserves. All class participants received a copy of the USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning and numerous University of Idaho Extension food safety publications. They also participated in hands-on lab experiences with the high acid, low acid, freezing and drying, and pickling and preserves classes in order to practice their new knowledge and increase their food preservation skills.

Program Outcomes
University of Idaho Extension FCS educators seek to make a positive impact in class members’ lives. To determine if the classes were effective, participants completed a retrospective class evaluation at the conclusion of the class series. Thirty-nine participants...
completed the evaluation in 2012. The following are some of the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you attend the food preservation classes?</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be in control of what’s in my food</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To save money</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more self-sufficient</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To better use the produce I grow</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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As a result of attending these classes, you may have changed some of your ideas or behaviors.

a. Which of the following did you learn?

b. Didn’t already do this before class?

c. Will you do this after taking the class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a (%)</th>
<th>b (%)</th>
<th>c (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used up-to-date tested, resource based recipes and recommendations when canning foods</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted processing time for altitude when processing foods in a boiling water canner</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted for altitude when pressure canning by increasing the pressure as recommended for your elevation</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed all high acid foods including jams, jellies, pickles and relishes in a boiling water canner according to research-based recommendations</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When making home canned salsa, followed a tested research based recipe and processed according to recommendations</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The knowledge and skills gained in the food preservation classes will help reduce the risk of food borne illness, including the deadly botulism. As a class member stated: “Botulism can kill!” District FCS Educators were pleased to have another class member clearly tell us that he/she learned to “follow tested recipes exactly.” These results encourage us to continue offering food preservation classes into the foreseeable future. District FCS educators will continue offering food preservation classes in future years. Plans include unifying presentation and handout formats and offering classes in additional counties in the district.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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