

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Can it, freeze it, pickle it...enjoy it safely! Extension meets home food preserver needs

The Situation

Can preserving food be considered new and trendy? It depends on who you ask. Individuals have been preserving food for thousands of years. Yet, this year there has been increased attention to the pursuit of home canning and food preservation. The increase in home food preservation might be attributed to the economy, growing a garden for the first time, and attempts to stretch family food dollars. However, home food preservation also fits into the movement of home cooked food, local seasonal foods, sustainable agriculture, and food safety (knowing what is in your food). Many individuals have expressed that preserving food offers satisfaction and practical results. In today's onslaught of food issues (local, seasonal, organic, industrial), home preserving can also be viewed as a reflection of an individual's values.

Extension's mission is to bring research and knowledge to local communities. It is important that local educators understand trends, and in the case of food safety, make sure that individuals are using safe methods for home food preservation.

Our Response

As a result of the increase in home food preservation questions, both Ada and Canyon County Extension faculty have been responsive to community needs in two ways. The first response was to increase the number of trained volunteers. The second response was to offer additional classes and programs.

The Food Safety Advisor program (a.k.a., Master Food Preserver program) was open to any interested individual in the Southern Extension District – Ada, Adams, Canyon, Elmore, Gem/Boise, Payette, Owyhee and Washington. First-year Food Safety Advisors received 30 hours of training and lab work in food



preservation, food safety and volunteer development. Participants complete 30 hours of volunteer service in their community. Individuals can also continue their education and become an Advanced Food Safety Advisor. Advanced Food Safety Advisors complete 20 hours of volunteer time. The number of first-year trained volunteers doubled this year. Twenty-three individuals participated in the program giving back 741 hours of volunteer time and reaching 2,316 individuals. Twenty-five Advanced Food Safety Advisors donated 711 hours of volunteer time. Volunteer outreach is critical to fulfill the many phone questions, food safety classes and outreach requests. The Advanced Food Safety Advisors reached over 3,560 individuals.

The number of community classes and programs were also increased this year. Six hundred seventy-two participants attended 15 classes throughout the summer. Classes included, Home Canning Made

Easy, Pressure Canning – Anyone Can Do It!, Tomatoes, Salsa & Safety, Freezing Fundamentals, Pickling, and Jams and Jellies. It appears that class participation and interest has increased over 400%. We averaged 45 individuals per class (previous years averaged 15 individuals per class).

Program Outcomes

A retrospective follow-up survey was mailed to 142 participants. Participants were asked about knowledge gained and behaviors they changed or planned to change. Seven key safety strategies were targeted in the survey.

Food Safety Behavior	Before class DID REGULARLY	After class WILL DO REGULARLY
Used up-to-date tested, research-based recipes and recommendations when canning foods	28%	98%
Adjusted processing time for altitude when processing foods in a boiling water canner	42%	98%
Processed all foods including jams, jellies, high acid, pickles and relishes in a boiling water canner according to research-based recommendations	22%	97%
Processed all low acid foods such as green beans, meats, fish and combination foods in a pressure canner	18%	46%
When making home canned salsa, followed a tested research-based recipe and processed according to recommendations	11%	83%
When canning tomatoes and tomato products, added acid according to recommendations	24%	85%
Adjusted for altitude when pressure canning by increasing the pressure as recommended for your elevation	21%	67%

Participants also reported learning important food safety information when preserving at home:

- “I didn’t know the steps to canning tomato products. Now I feel comfortable with the steps and that my family will be safe eating the products I preserve.”
- “Canning has changed a lot in the last 30 years! I was never so aware of how the slightest bit of bacteria could cause a problem – and where it could come from.”

- “The classes gave me the confidence to can safely. Before classes I had only read about canning but felt uncomfortable about safety issues.”

Many noted learning about the importance of using up-to-date research-based recipes.

- “I believe it’s a class all canners should take to learn the importance and know the risks of not following tested research-based recipes.”

In conclusion, individuals who took our class showed an important increase in their plans to follow food safety recommendations. Extension Educators in Ada and Canyon Counties plan to continue to meet home food preserver needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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