

The Communicator

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Interim Director

Happy New Year	1
Search Committees Formed	1
Sabbatical Leaves Granted	1
On the Web	2
Heads Up!	2

Food Safety

Answers about Hand Sanitizers	3
Countering Raw Milk Advocates	4

Family Development

Poverty By the Numbers	5
Idaho's Low Income Children	6

Nutrition Education

Five Food Trends for 2008	7
Being Fit May Outweigh Being Fat	8
Update on the AHA Food Certification Program	8
Stand Up and Move to Lose Weight	8

Family Economics

Tax Record-keeping Tips	9
Achieving Financial Security: A Multi-step Approach	11
Family Economics Resources	12
Quote of the Month	12

School of Family & Consumer Sciences

University of Idaho
Extension

Contact Debra Rurnford, drurnford@uidaho.edu, about the email listserve or address correction.

The University of Idaho provides equal opportunity in education and employment. University of Idaho and USDA Cooperating.

Happy New Year

Welcome back to a new year of planning, programming, and implementation in the many aspects of Extension education.

Here in North Idaho, we have had at least eight inches of snow, adding a blanket of quiet to a campus full of students in the first days of spring semester.



Search Committees Formed

As I mentioned in the December *Communicator*, we are both dismayed and delighted by the imminent retirement of two FCS faculty members. Virginia Junk and Maddy Houghton will be leaving us at the end of the academic year this spring. We will miss their expertise and comradeship, but are thrilled by their new opportunities in retirement. We have begun the search for these two positions, and we could use your help in identifying prospective candidates.

We are searching for a full-time, tenure-track faculty member to supervise the students in the Coordinated Program in Dietetics as they complete their clinical rotations. We are also searching for a full-time faculty member to teach in the area of personal finance and housing. Watch the University of Idaho website <http://www.hr.uidaho.edu/default.aspx?pid=35496> for the vacancy announcements. Please pass



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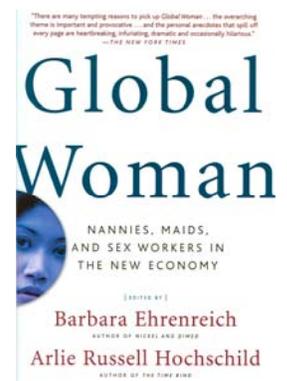
these announcements on to colleagues who might be interested.

Sabbatical Leaves Granted

Congratulations to Cynthia Schmiege and Kathe Gabel for their successful applications for sabbatical leave!



The goal of **Dr. Schmiege's** sabbatical leave is to develop a distance version of FCS 445/545 Issues in Work and Family. The School of Family and Consumer Sciences is developing a reputation for quality graduate education online, and this course will expand our offerings. One foundation piece of this online version of Issues in Work and Family is a case study of care giving of the elderly in the United States by immigrant populations. Dr. Schmiege will conduct fieldwork in Juneau, Alaska within the Philippine community, many of whom are employed in care giving. Dr. Schmiege was inspired by an edited collection of works by Arlie Rus-

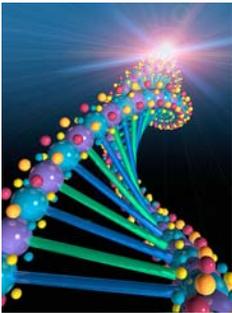


sell Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (Holt, 2002). This project supports the University of Idaho Strategic Plan to broaden student exposure to the international community, as well as implement technologies which support, maintain, and improve living and learning environments.

Dr. Gabel will be studying the emerging field of nutrigenomics. Nutrigenomics is the study of how food components interact with genes to alter what we are and what we look like. As a nascent science, nutrigenomics holds promise, especially to dietitians, to help clients choose foods that will effectively decrease disease risk. Dr. Gabel will travel to New Zealand to work with Dr. Lynnette Ferguson, Program Leader of the National Centre of Excellence in Nutrigenomics. Dr. Gabel



will be involved in current research projects, develop online nutrigenomics resources for dietitians and other health professionals, and create teaching strategies and lectures for upper division dietetics courses here at UI. For more information on this new field, see www.nutrigenomics.org.nz.



Please wish these scholars well as they prepare for well-deserved opportunities to take a break from the daily routine and pursue what they love.

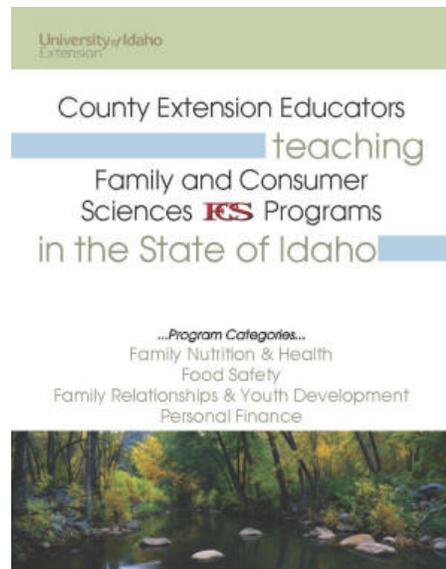
On the Web

Two publications are available online that highlight the expertise and activities of our Extension educators and specialists.

Previous editions of the *Communicator* have described Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights. This program is a weekend workshop in which participants travel, stay, and eat together, learning about diversity and human rights issues in the region. Organizers of the program recently published "Using a Historical Tour to Teach Extension

Audiences About Diversity and Human Rights" in the *Journal of Extension*, December 2007. The article is available online at <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007december/iw2p.shtml>.

Idaho is a leader in the quantity and quality of programs offered through County Extension. In an effort to spread the word about the range of subjects available to Extension audiences, specialists, and educators compiled a handy booklet, "County Extension Educators Teaching Family and Consumer Sciences Programs in the State of Idaho." The booklet is available on the University of Idaho FCS website http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/fcs/extension/news/ExtEducator_FCS_Booklet.pdf.



Heads Up!

The Haberly and Hepworth Endowment Awards are coming up. As you make professional development plans for the coming year, please consider applying for these fellowships. Several FCS educators participated in national conferences last year as a result of their awards. More information on the application process is on the FCS website, under Faculty/Staff Resources <http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/fcs/resources.htm>. The link to the Haberly and Hepworth Awards is on the lower portion of the page. The deadline is March 1st. Applications are limited to two pages, screened by the FCS Faculty Development Committee. Team and joint proposals are accepted. Start planning now!



Answers about Hand Sanitizers

The questions and answers below about hand sanitizers were written by a food science student at Kansas State University, who works for the International Food Safety Network. iFSN compiles and disseminates food safety news. The eight useful references used to prepare this information are cited at foodsafety.ksu.edu. The graphic above is available from the Minnesota Department of Health <http://www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/how/howto.html>.

What are alcohol based hand sanitizers?

The term hand sanitizer encompasses many types of gels, wipes, foams, or liquid solutions. These products typically contain ethanol, isopropanol, or n-propanol in concentrations ranging from 40 to 95 percent. The alcohol immediately destroys the bacteria and viruses that it contacts. Some sanitizers may also contain a moisturizer to help combat the dryness caused by the alcohol. Because of their ease of use and relative convenience, alcohol-based sanitizers have grown in popularity, and some people even use them as a substitute for hand washing.

How effective are hand sanitizers?

Research has shown that sanitizers are effective at killing and inactivating most bacteria and viruses. Alcohol-based sanitizers are recommended as a way to help prevent the spread of many common pathogens like tuberculosis and foodborne illnesses such as norovirus. These sanitizers are, however, not as efficient as hand washing in reducing numbers of bacterial spores, protozoan oocysts, and certain non-enveloped (non-lipophilic) viruses.



Food Safety

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Some of these viruses include HIV, Hepatitis A, and rhinovirus. It has been shown that sanitizers containing moisturizers may lead to the accumulation of more bacteria on your skin. Past research has suggested that hand sanitizers don't work as well on visually dirty hands. However, recent research, such as that done by Don Schaffner from Rutgers University, has shown that sanitizers can still significantly reduce the number of bacteria even with debris on the hands. There is currently no research that shows alcohol-based sanitizers contribute to the development of resistant bacteria.

Can hand sanitizers be used as a substitute for hand washing?

The differences between hand washing and using alcohol-based sanitizers are insignificant concerning pathogenic bacteria. However, hand washing is more effective in the removal of viruses, spores, and fungi. So no, hand sanitizers are not substitutes. Hand washing is still the champion of clean hands and preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Which soap you choose will also make a difference in how clean your hands become. Recent studies have shown that soaps containing antibacterial agents do a better job at destroying colony-forming units than plain soap. However, there is evidence that the overuse of such agents may lead to resistant strains.

What should I look for in a sanitizer?

When shopping for a sanitizer you should look for one containing at least 60 percent alcohol. A sani-

tizer with n-propanol is generally only found in Europe, and is slightly less effective against bacteria and viruses than both ethanol and isopropanol. Ethanol is more effective against viruses than isopropanol. Isopropanol is more effective against bacteria than ethanol because it is less volatile. Because the difference between their efficacies is not significant, either one will suffice when used in an adequate concentration.

Source: Stormer, A. "Hand Sanitizer Fact Sheet," International Food Safety Network, December 16, 2007, <http://foodsafety.ksu.edu>.

Keywords: handwashing, food safety.

Countering Raw Milk Advocates

Reuters New Service has identified raw milk as the top health issue of 2008. Raw milk advocates are becoming more effective at using the media to cast doubt on public health messages and confuse consumers with misguided health claims. With emerging media acceptance of raw milk, consumer confidence in public health messages about the real dangers of raw milk consumption is eroding. This makes our job of refuting the misinformation more challenging. Following is a list of some of the strategies often used by raw milk advocates:

1. Accuse large dairy companies of collusion with government to protect their economic interests, and denying the public their rights to a "safe, beneficial product."
2. Accuse the large dairies of pushing small dairy farmers out of the traditional dairy business, portraying farmers as economically disadvantaged, thus drawing support from consumers who also feel squeezed economically. Increasing raw milk sales provide an attractive source of needed capital.
3. Portray public health agencies as over-regulating the dairy industry.
4. Making unscientific and unsupported health claims for raw milk. Portraying pasteurized milk as unhealthy, and raw milk as healthy plays on the consumer's suspicions about big industry, and inherent distrust of government and technology.
5. Appealing to the mistaken belief that what is natural is best.

Raw milk potentially contains a wide variety of harmful bacteria that may cause illness and possibly death. From 1998 to May 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified 45 outbreaks of foodborne illness that implicated unpasteurized milk or cheese made from unpasteurized milk. These outbreaks accounted for 1,007 illnesses, 104 hospitalizations, and two deaths. Illnesses caused by pathogens found in raw milk can be especially severe for pregnant women, the elderly, infants, young children, and people with weakened immune systems. Consumers need to know that providing raw milk to vulnerable populations who cannot make an informed choice is a dangerous practice. Adults can make informed choices about raw milk consumption.

Idaho regulations do not permit raw milk to be sold by restaurants, grocery stores, or other retailers.

Sources of Information about raw milk:

- Raw Milk Q&A [FDA], <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/rawm-toc.html>
- Food Facts: The Dangers of Raw Milk [FDA], <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/rawmilk.html>
- FDA Raw Milk Position Statement [FDA], <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~ear/mi-03-4.html>
- American Medical Association Position on Milk and Human Health http://www.ama-assn.org/apps/pf_new/pf_online?f_n=browse&doc=policyfiles/HnE/H-150.980.HTM&&s_t=&st_p=&nth=1&prev_pol=policyfiles/HnE/H-145.999.HTM&nxt_pol=policyfiles/HnE/H-150.946.HTM&
- American Academy of Pediatrics Position on Unpasteurized Milk and Cheese <http://aapredbook.aapublications.org/cgi/content/full/2006/1/A.VII>
- FDA Testimony on Raw Milk [Ohio Department of Agriculture] <http://www.ohioagriculture.gov/dairy/documents/FDATestimonyRawMilk.pdf>
- International Association for Food Protection (IAFP) Position Statement "Milk Pasteurization and the Consumption of Raw Milk," <http://www.foodprotection.org/memberinterest/milk%20Pasteurization%20Paper.pdf>

Source: Costa, R.E., "Media Support for Raw Milk," October 27, 2007 post to Foodsafe Listserve; "FDA and CDC Remind Consumers of the Dangers of Drinking Raw Milk," *FDA News*, P07-34, March 1, 2007, <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01576.html>.

Keywords: dairy, food safety.

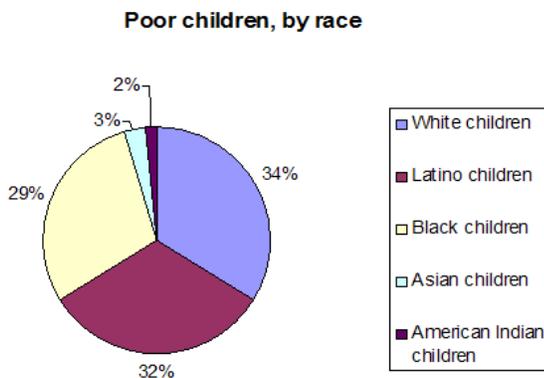
Poverty By the Numbers

By Race, White Children Make Up the Biggest Percentage of America's Poor

A fact sheet released in December by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) shows that, contrary to some common stereotypes about America's poor, at least one-third of the 13 million children living in poverty are white.

"Poverty affects children of all colors, contrary to stereotypes. The notion held by many Americans that poverty is not a white problem is simply false," says Jane Knitzer, EdD, director of NCCP, a research center at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. "The sooner all Americans realize these facts about poverty, the better chance we have of eradicating it."

The NCCP fact sheet shows that among America's poor children, 4.2 million are white, 4 million are Latino, 3.6 million are African American, 400,000 are Asian, and 200,000 are American Indian.



While the figures indicate that indeed more white children are poor, they also show, however, that higher percentages of minorities live in poor families:

- 10% of white children (4.2 million). In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among white children range from 7% in Texas to 12% in Michigan.
- 27% of Latino children (4 million). In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among Latino children range from 19% in Florida to 35% in Pennsylvania.



Family Development

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- 33% of black children (3.6 million). In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among black children range from 29% in California and Florida to 47% in Ohio.
- 12% of Asian children (400,000) and 40% of American Indian (200,000). Comparable state comparisons are not possible due to small sample sizes.

Nancy K. Cauthen, PhD, deputy director of NCCP, adds that America has 1.2 million more poor children today than in 2000. "It's troubling that the trend has been upward, but child poverty is not intractable. Effective public policies can make a difference."

One of the things NCCP recommends, says Cauthen, are strategies that help parents succeed in the labor force, which will in turn, help their children. "Low earning workers need higher wages but policies such as earned income tax credits and child care assistance are critical to supporting income growth for low-wage workers. These workers also need access to benefits that higher-wage earners take for granted, such as health insurance and paid sick leave."

Dr. Knitzer says she would also like to see more policies that target families with infants and toddlers, such as Early Head Start, which have been shown to improve children's cognitive development

and their behavior. “Starting early and continuing investments in high quality early learning through the preschool years, and indeed, into the early school years, are critical to America’s future productivity,” she says. “High-quality early childhood experiences can go a long way toward closing the achievement gap between poor children and their more well-off peers.”

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org. For the complete fact sheet *Who are America’s Poor Children? The Official Story*, access: http://www.nccp.org/publications/fact_sheets.html.

Keywords: children, family, income, poverty.

Idaho’s Low Income Children

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs. Children living in families with incomes below this level—\$41,300 for a family of four in 2007—are referred to as low income.

In Idaho, there are 216,130 families with 389,964 children and 42 percent (162,003) of those children live in low-income families (National: 39%), defined as income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Children are especially likely to live in low income families when they are young (47% of those under 6 years vs. 39% of those 6 years and older), and when they live in single parent homes (36% of low income children live with a single parent, compared to only 13% of those of higher income children).

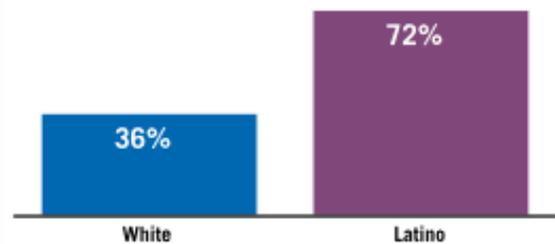
Most low income children in Idaho have working parents, with 72 percent having at least one parent employed full-time, year-round, and 21 percent with a parent employed part-year or part-time. Parent education has a strong link to family income for Idaho children:

- 88% (27,388) of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in low-income families.

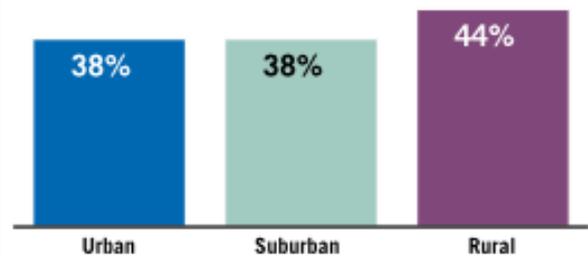
- 56% (53,164) of children whose parents have a high school degree, but no college education live in low-income families.
- 31% (81,452) of children whose parents have some college or more live in low-income families.

Latino children are more likely than white children to live in low income families and rural children are more likely than those in other settings to be low income—see charts below.

Children in Low-Income Families in Idaho by Race, 2006



Children in Low-Income Families in Idaho by Residence, 2006



State data for this report were calculated from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (the March supplement) of the Current Population Survey from 2005, 2006, and 2007, representing information from calendar years 2004, 2005, and 2006. NCCP averaged three years of data because of small sample sizes in less populated states. The national data were calculated from the 2007 data, representing information from the previous calendar year.

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org.

Keywords: children, family, income, poverty.

Five Food Trends for 2008

Datamonitor is an international company that collects and analyzes data on food and beverage products. They are projecting the following food trends for 2008:

Probiotics will be added to other foods. Probiotics are live microorganisms (usually a strain of Lactobacillus or Bifidobacterium), added to mainly yogurt products which transport the bacterium to the intestines intact. Research indicates these microorganisms may improve the digestive tract or immune system.



A Swiss company called Barry Callebaut launched a chocolate bar with probiotics at the end of October 2007. The company developed this product because sales of “traditional” chocolate have decreased because of its unhealthy and fatty image, and they found a way to prevent the microorganisms from being digested in the intestinal tract. The company claims that probiotics in chocolate are four times less likely to be digested than those found in yogurt.

Hot, spicy, strong flavored foods:

There will be more products that are spicy, hotter, and have a more intense flavor. This is in response to the increase in aging baby boomers whose sense of taste and smell has started to diminish. There has been an increase in sales of hot and spicy salsas, and the word “spicy” on new foods and beverages between 2003 and 2006 has doubled. The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board has reported that sales of stronger flavored cheeses such as blue cheese increased by 6.3 percent in 2006.



Food products that promote sleep and reduce stress. Research indicates there is a link between lack of sleep and obesity. Look for products that

promote sleep and reduce stress. Japanese farmers found that cows contain high levels of melatonin, a sleep aid, if the cows are milked at dawn. They have named this product Nakazawa Adult Milk.



Nutrition Education

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Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), an amino acid, has been found to reduce stress. A U.S. company called Jones Soda is currently developing a new beverage that contains GABA.

Producing environmentally friendly foods. Wind power and solar energy are being used to power more farms. Procter and Gamble has developed a water filter called Pur Flavor that lets consumers flavor water as it comes out of the tap, decreasing the need for bottled flavored water.



CAFFEINE

Caffeine added to more products. Previously, caffeine was found in coffee, tea, and added to some sodas. In 2007 caffeine was added to sunflower seeds, mints, potato chips, jellybeans and instant oatmeal. A new hot chocolate product, Swiss Miss Pick-Me-Up Hot Cocoa Mix with Calcium, contains as much caffeine as one cup of coffee (~100 mg caffeine).

Source: <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news/printNewsBis.asp?id=81699>;
<http://www.confectionerynews.com/news/ng.asp?n=80965-barry-callebaut-global-new-products-database-probiotic>.

Keywords: food, trends.

Being Fit May Outweigh Being Fat

If you overindulged over the holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's) and gained a couple of pounds, there may not be as much to worry about if you are physically fit.



A study conducted at the University of South Carolina followed 2,600 adults over the age of 60 for 12 years and measured their body fat, fitness level, and death rate. The results revealed, in general, that fitness was associated with a lower incidence of death. The exceptions were people who were severely obese and who had a high waist circumference (40 inches in men and 35 inches in women).

Lead researcher Dr. Steven Blair recommended walking briskly for 30 minutes five days a week as sufficient exercise. But individuals who exercise either longer or at a higher intensity had an even lower death rate. On the other hand, individuals who were the least fit had a death rate that was four times higher than the most fit individuals.

Source: *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 5, 2007, <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/298/21/2507>.

Keyword: exercise.

Update on the AHA Food Certification Program

Products that participate in the American Heart Association Food Certification Program contain a heart check mark stamp. In order to qualify for this program, one serving of a food product must:

- Be low in fat (\leq 3grams)
- Be low in saturated fat (\leq 1 gram)
- Be low in cholesterol (\leq 20 mg)
- Be low in sodium (\leq 480 mg)
- Contain at least 10% of the recommended daily value of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron, or dietary fiber.

Starting January 1, 2008, products must have less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving, in order to be certified.

Food companies are not required to participate in the Food Certification Program. The cost for certification ranges from \$3,150 to \$7,500, depending on whether a product is renewing its certification or applying to use the stamp for the first time. There are 104 companies and 779 certified products in this program.

Source: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4645>.

Keyword: trans fat.

Stand Up and Move to Lose Weight

University of Missouri researchers found that exercise alone isn't enough to help with weight loss.



They found that sitting for several hours resulted in a decrease in: (1) activity of lipoprotein lipase, LPL, (an enzyme involved in the breakdown of fat), to 10 percent of its normal level; (2) High Density Lipoprotein (HDL), the "good cholesterol," levels, and (3) metabolic rate (how fast a person burns calories).

Lead researcher Marc Hamilton theorized that there are approximately 20 pounds of muscle in each leg and these muscles need to be engaged in routine activities to prevent suppression of LPL. Further research is needed to determine how often a person should get up and move around in order to prevent LPL levels from decreasing.

Source: *Diabetes*, September 7, 2007 <http://diabetes.diabetesjournal.org/cgi/content/abstract/56/11/2655>.

Keyword: exercise.



Tax Record-keeping Tips

Nothing lasts forever, but you wouldn't believe it by looking at some people's record-keeping systems. Prolific pack rats keep every scrap of paper, just in case. And when it comes to tax paperwork, some folks are even more adamant. These documents will save me, they argue, if an Internal Revenue Service auditor comes visiting. But that's not necessarily the case, say tax and organizational experts.

There are Limits

When it comes to tax-related documents, you should save records that help you identify sources of income, keep track of expenses, determine the value of property, prepare tax returns or support claims made on those returns. However, common sense—as well as storage space—should be your guide. Accountants comment, "We get people looking at boxes of stuff in their basements and ask, can I toss it?" A lot of it, they can.

The rule of thumb for tax papers is hold onto them until the chance of audit passes. Usually, this is three years after filing. But if the IRS suspects you underreported your income by 25 percent or more, it gets six years to check into your tax life. That's why most accountants advise taxpayers, even those who are meticulous filers, to keep tax documents for at least six years.

Use It or Lose It

This means keeping 1099 miscellaneous income statements and receipts or canceled checks verifying tax-deductible expenses for six years. "Anything that you need to do your taxes, hang onto it," states a Midwest tax attorney. But don't go overboard. If you used something to claim a deduction, keep it for six years. If not, shred it. For example, all those



Family Economics

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medical bills are useless—and just taking up space—if you didn't accumulate enough to meet the deduction threshold of 7-1/2 percent of your adjusted gross income.

Some items, however, have a longer shelf life. Many accountants recommend storing your 1040 forms and W-2s indefinitely. Other records to keep are assets that a taxpayer will eventually sell, triggering a tax bill. So if you own a home, invest in the stock market or have retirement savings, tax pros recommend keeping these records indefinitely or at least until three years after you dispose of the asset.

House Buying—and Selling—Records

For most taxpayers, the biggest asset—and potential tax bill—is a home. While tax rules for home sales have changed in recent years, meaning sale profits don't automatically face IRS charges, any paperwork relating to a residence should be kept for as long as the home is owned. Single home sellers now can net capital gains of \$250,000 (double that for married couples) before owing the IRS. To determine whether sale profits fall within the tax-free limits, the seller must accurately establish a residence's basis. That means that records related to a home's value—settlement papers and receipts for improvements and additions—are critical.

And if you sold a house before May 7, 1997, that could affect your current home's basis. With home sales back then, taxpayers were able to defer tax on any gain by using the profit to purchase another home and filing IRS Form 2119. If the home you're now selling is the one your pre-1997 sale proceeds were rolled into, you'll need that information—and those old forms—to figure your current property's basis and any potential tax bill.

Taking Stock of Investments

Fast on the heels of home sales as tax triggers (and record-keeping headaches) are stock transactions. Not long ago, it was harder for people to invest so many people were conservative and saved money in a bank certificate of deposit (CD) or savings bond. But now with online trading, people are investing more. Keeping track of a CD or two wasn't that difficult, but when you move on to stocks, the tax record keeping becomes critical.

Investment account statements contain financial data that a taxpayer will need as long as the stock or mutual fund is owned. On the stock side, there may be splits that change the value of the holding and, therefore, the eventual worth of the stock, which is used to determine the taxable basis.

For mutual funds with reinvested dividends, owners pay tax each year on these earnings. These taxes are used to increase the funds' basis so when the fund is sold, the final tax bill will be less. Without statements, it's easy to lose track of those payments, and a fund owner could inadvertently pay double taxes on earnings.

Retirement Record Requirements

And then there are all those retirement savings plans, with many different rules. Contributions to traditional IRAs often are tax-deferred. But sometimes already-taxed money goes into these accounts, too. What happens to your taxes if you retire at age 59½ and start taking money out? That depends in large part on your record keeping.

Statements from IRA fund managers should note whether contributions were tax-deferred or already taxed. The financial reports also keep track of the tax-deferred earnings, compounding year after

year. These documents can help you make your case to the IRS when it comes time to pay the tax bill, so hang on to them all for as long as you have the account.

IRS Form 8606 also can help track retirement plan taxes. This form, which is filed only in the years that nondeductible contributions are made, calculates the taxable basis of an IRA. File and keep copies of each 8606 with your retirement plan data.

Business Considerations

If you operate a small business, from a moonlighting job to a small operation with several employees, dealing with records becomes a bit more complex. But even then, it doesn't have to overwhelm you.

The IRS generally focuses on self-employed travel and entertainment expenses, scrutinizing returns to make sure all the expenses are really related to the business and can be proven. In these cases, complete and accurate—but not overdone—contemporaneous records need to be kept until the audit threshold passes.

Unlike personal bank statements, business financial account records should be kept permanently. Similarly, anyone who has employees should hang onto employment information and related tax returns for as long as the business is running. And don't shred articles of incorporation, company by-laws, stockholder minutes, and trademark and copyright applications.

Pick a System, Any System

Once you've identified critical records, the next step is to decide how to keep the data. Electronic bill paying can help keep track of your financial and tax life, but so can a plain old check register; as long as expenditures are entered faithfully. It doesn't matter if it's a filing cabinet, cardboard boxes, or a complex computer program. The key, says organizational experts, is find your record keeping comfort level, pick a system and stick with it.

And when it comes to taxes, it's even more important to be proactive in record keeping. Start now, rather than waiting until next April's tax filing deadline. Such diligent organization could make any IRS

examination easier. In any kind of audit, the IRS is usually more forgiving if you make an honest mistake rather than if you're sloppy or fraudulent.

Source: Adapted from Bell, K., January 1, 2007, Tax Recordkeeping Tips, Bankrate.com, Retrieved 1/3/08 from http://www.bankrate.com/cbsmw/itax/edit/news/stories/news_071900.asp?caret=46 and Recordkeeping for individuals, IRS publication 552, retrieved 1/4/08 from <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p552/index.html>.

Keywords: record keeping, taxes.



Achieving Financial Security: A Multi-step Approach

There are very few absolutely "safe" investments. Stocks can plummet, real estate markets can crash, and sudden spikes in inflation can erode the value of savings deposits in even the safest bank account. So how do you make yourself secure? Financial planners reply that the answer lies in diversification. Simply put, don't put all your eggs, or your money, in one basket. Barring a major catastrophe, a diversified investment portfolio should be able to ride out even the steepest economic peaks and valleys. This is sound advice. However, there are additional, less publicized steps that you can take to achieve financial security.

Conventional wisdom offers three general steps towards ensuring both short-term and long-term financial health. Step one: get out of debt and stay out of debt. Step two: start an emergency fund and make sure you have adequate insurance (health, disability, life, home, vehicle, etc.) to protect yourself and your dependents. Step three: invest a reasonable amount of your income towards the day you no longer have an income. Many publications

have been written about each one of these steps and available for free from university Extension websites or at your local library. But there are three more strategies that can increase your financial security even further. These are the strategies that many of our grandparents practiced during the Depression, and during other periods when money was tight.

Strategy 1—Learn practical skills that you can use either to save money or to barter for other resources or skills. A friend reported that she could cut hair, tutor English, sew, cook, bake, garden, paint, and even perform light carpentry. Her husband is a teacher, but his list of practical skills would fill a page. These skills add significantly to their financial security. By saving them money, these skills allow them to live comfortably on less income than many of their friends require. They are also useful as potential sources of secondary income.

Strategy 2—Build a strong social and/or family network. Our grandparents understood the importance of community, the original all-purpose insurance policy. When someone in your own community or network of friends is in need, offer what help you can. It's a way to repay the people who have helped you in the past, and a kind of investment should you need assistance in the future.

Strategy 3—Live modestly. Popular culture suggests you should live in the biggest house, drive the most expensive car, and have the most expansive lifestyle you can afford. But living more modestly offers far more security and serenity. Even if you pay off the mortgage on a big house, you'll still have higher utility and maintenance bills to deal with, not to mention insurance premiums and property taxes. The same goes for the insurance and gas bills for the luxury car. Live simply and within your means, and you'll be in a much better position if your investments sour or your financial situation changes suddenly.

Protecting yourself financially is a multi-step process. It's impossible to predict every scenario you or your family could face in the future. There are, however, some steps you can take to influence a more favorable outcome, no matter what hap-

pens. These strategies can help you sleep more peacefully at night.

Source: Adapted from Muller, R., December 17, 2007, A Different Kind of Financial Security, The Dollar Stretcher electronic newsletter, Volume 12, Number 51.

Keyword: financial planning.

Family Economics Resources

Mortgage Payment Problems. The possibility of someone losing their home because they can't make the mortgage payments can be terrifying. Perhaps they are one of the many consumers who took out a mortgage that had a fixed rate for the first 2 or 3 years and then changed to an adjustable rate. Perhaps they are anticipating an adjustment, and want to know what their payments will be and whether they'll be able to make them. Or, maybe they're having trouble making ends meet because of an unrelated financial crisis. Regardless of the reason for the mortgage anxiety, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers Facts for Consumers, <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/homes/rea04.shtm>, so citizens can learn how to help save their homes and how to recognize and avoid foreclosure scams. Visit the [FTC website](#) or the [U.S. Financial Literacy and Education Commission](#) website to learn more about mortgages and other credit-related issues.

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formation. FYI—University of Idaho Extension faculty, Beverly Healy and myself are co-authors of the eXtension *Legally Secure Your Financial Future* website. Erik Anderson provided significant technical assistance.

Helping Older Family Members with Finances. A Pacific Northwest Extension Publication called "Helping Older Family Members Handle Finances" is full of sensitive written suggestions for talking with elders about their financial concerns. Authors Vicki Schmall, Tim Nay, and Sally Bowman describe how to approach a family member with thoughtfulness, caring and determination. They include a detailed list of discussion points and describe how to:

- be clear about your reason for talking
- look for natural opportunities to talk
- find a low-stress time and location
- acknowledge your family member's feelings
- express positive intentions
- anticipate the response
- respect your family member's right to make choices

They also explain such financial and legal tools as automatic bill payment, joint bank accounts, power of attorney and living trusts—any of which can make it easier for an older person to pay bills, conduct personal business and plan for possible future incapacity. For situations where family members have already become incapacitated, the authors present two more complex and intrusive legal tools: representative payee and conservatorship.

"Many families don't discuss finances until a crisis occurs—and then it may be too late," the authors write. "If you suspect a time may come when either you or a family member may not be able to manage personal finances, make plans now."

For a copy, download the publication from the publishing catalog of the University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, <http://info.ag.uidaho.edu:591/catalog/family.html>, then Family Finance.

Quote of the Month

Happiness is positive cash flow...and good health!