

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Extension offers education during food safety equipment calibration sessions

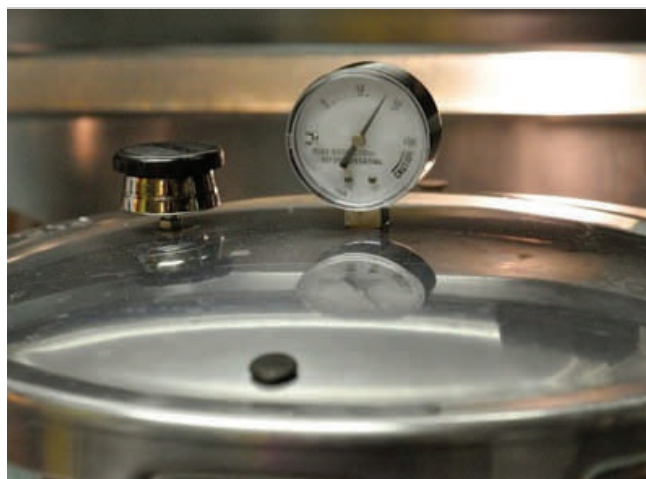
The Situation

Home food preservation has increased in the last few years. The Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio and the New York Times have reported on the popularity of home preserving. Jarden Incorporated reported that sales of canning jars were up 10% in 2010 after a 30% increase in sales from 2008 to 2009. The increase in desire to preserve food may be attributed to the sluggish economy, leading people to prolong the life of home grown and harvested fruits and vegetables. Some people have become more interested in controlling the quality and contents of their food. Others are trying to provide healthy food for family members with special dietary needs.

One key element in safe preservation of home canned products is the correct operation of home preservation equipment. The USDA recommends that dial pressure gauges be checked yearly to assure accuracy. Other parts, valves and seals should be inspected regularly as well.

Very few local organizations other than Extension check home canning equipment. National brand gauge distributors offer these services by mail but they often have a long turnaround time. Many consumers need information and gauges tested on a "just in time" basis, often checking days or hours before canning seasonal products.

The goal of University of Idaho's Extension education goal is to provide research based information to clientele in the communities where they live. With many clients coming to Extension for preservation equipment safety checks it was an opportunity to provide safe and reliable food preservation information during the equipment checks.



Our Response

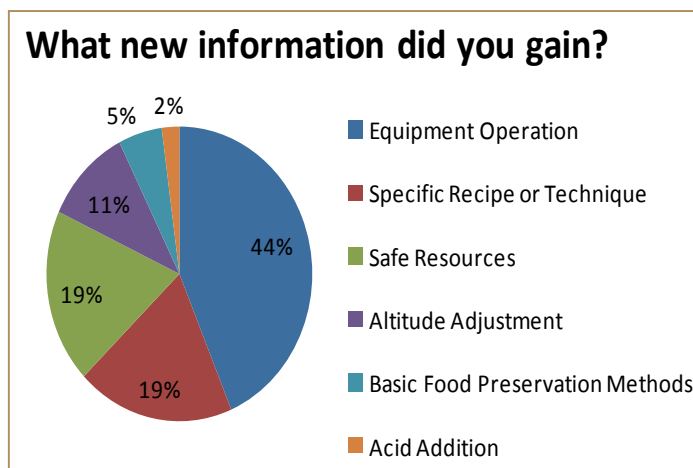
Educators throughout the state offer pressure gauge safety checks on a regular basis. Some occur on a monthly schedule, during office visits and during special events such as fairs or preservation classes. During these checks educators often share timely information including safety approved recipes, how to obtain research based resources, and help individuals evaluate the safety of their canning equipment. Clientele often learn new safe canning recommendations while getting equipment safety checked.

Program Outcomes

A written survey was given to clientele during gauge safety checks in eight counties across the state. Throughout a seven month period 153 responses were gathered. Eighteen percent of survey participants reported that this was the first time they had preserved food with a pressure canner. This demonstrates that Extension Educators are reaching clientele

new to food preservation where safe method education is critical. Educators shared new information with 62% of the clientele served and reinforced knowledge with 30% of the participants.

Clients shared they learned about a variety of topics during equipment checks. The information shared by Extension Educators is being used to change behaviors of clientele with 98% of survey participants stating they would use the information they gained.



Seventy three percent of clientele reported using reliable sources for recipes and information like the Extension office, the Ball Blue Book, So Easy to Preserve, and the USDA Guide to Home Canning.

Twenty four percent of participants were using questionable resources like the Internet, family members and cookbooks that often have outdated or misleading information. Several participants were using completely unsafe methods including making up recipes and very old books. Providing clientele with safe and reliable information prevents food borne illness related to improperly preserved food.

The University of Idaho and Extension Educators remain a critical source of safe home food preservation information and 99% of the clientele surveyed stated that they would return to extension for future food safety information. The pressure gauge safety checks offer an opportunity for educators to interact with clientele sharing updates and safer methods and reliable information that is not available through other resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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