



Increasing knowledge about safe home food preservation

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“I now understand the importance of following tested processes in canning tomatoes.”

—Participants in food preservation workshops

Situation

Hundreds of Wisconsin residents are turning to food preservation as a way to save money and ensure healthy, wholesome food for their families. For some, food preservation is a new activity, while others are returning to the practice after years away, following in the footsteps of an earlier generation.

A national survey conducted by the National Center for Home preservation at the University of Georgia indicated a critical need for education and increased awareness of safety-related concerns in the area of home food preservation. The study revealed that consumers too often used out-of-date recipes or methods that could fail to control harmful bacteria, causing illness or even death.

As the popularity of home canning and food preservation continues to grow, consumers need ready access to accurate information to ensure the products they prepare are wholesome and safe.

The resurgence of interest in home food preservation—and the growing awareness and concern about food safety—is drawing increased numbers of Wisconsin residents to University of Wisconsin-Extension’s Family Living food safety and preservation classes and resources.

Response

From providing one-on-one assistance and pressure canner testing, to workshops on preserving apples and drying zucchini, Family Living has been there to help with training and education.

In 2013, 48 Family Living educators reported reaching more than 7,800 individuals across the state with educational programs on how to preserve food safely. Approximately 5,250 of these (67%) represented one-on-one consumer contacts. Extension educators provided individualized help to Wisconsin residents, answering questions via phone and providing information at community events such as farmers’ markets.

Thirty-three percent of all individuals received home food preservation education through more than 300 group learning events, such as hands-on workshops or demonstrations, or lunch-and-learn events.

While face-to-face programs are a hallmark of UW-Extension, educators reach Wisconsin residents round-the-clock through web-based materials and print publications. Publications on safe food preservation have found a wide audience. The Extension Learning Store reports that consumers purchased nearly 7,000 copies of *Tomatoes Tart and Tasty*, a guide to safe tomato canning written by Family Living specialists, making it the number one seller.

Family Living Programs Impact Report

The second most popular publication is *Canning Salsa Safely*, also written by Family Living specialists. Both of these publications are part of the Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation series, which includes titles on canning meat, wild game, fruit, jam and pickles, as well as safely freezing fruits and vegetables. These publications and more can be found at fyi.uwex.edu/safepreserving/recipes/

Online resources also play an important part in keeping consumers up-to date on food preservation. An easy-to-use website dedicated to providing the latest information on food preservation and other food safety topics can be found at www.fyi.uwex.edu/safepreserving/

Outcomes

In 2013, Extension educators in 15 Wisconsin counties conducted an evaluation in conjunction with group learning events focused on best practices for food safety and home food preservation. Of more than 400 participants in 66 workshops, approximately 25% reported they had little or no experience preserving food at home; 50% had been preserving food at home for 2-9 years; and 25% had been preserving food for over a decade.

Using a post- then pre-survey method, data was collected from over 400 participants. Results showed increases in all measures—confidence, understanding and behavioral intent with respect to home food preservation impact indicators.

After a workshop on home food preservation:

- 91% of learners “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement *I am confident in my ability to safely preserve food at home* as compared to 46% reporting having this confidence before the workshop.
- 93% of learners “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement *I understand the importance of following up-to-date, research-tested recipes* as compared to 52% before.
- 89% of learners “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement *I will contact the Extension office if I have questions about safely preserving food at home* as compared to 49% before.
- 84% of learners “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement *I am confident in my ability to share safe food preservation recommendations with friends and family* as compared to 40% before.

When asked how they would use the information learned in the workshop, participants made statement such as:

- *I will consult resources provided in the workshop before drying food to ensure safe practices.*
- *I will test the gauge on my pressure canner every year.*
- *I now understand the importance of following tested processes in canning tomatoes.*
- *I will bring this info back to my mother who has been canning for years.*
- *I will use more up-to-date recipes.*

Through this variety of program offerings for consumers, Family Living Programs continues to reach Wisconsin residents with current, research-based information on safe food preservation.

To learn more about UW-Extension’s programs on preserving safe, high quality food, contact:

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