

programming for employed homemakers

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In recent years, homemakers employed outside the home have changed drastically in both number and composition! The U.S. Bureau of Census reports that over 50% of women between 20 and 65 years of age are now in the labor force. Census figures also indicate that the number of women employed outside the home has more than doubled in the past five years. There'll be an additional 22% increase by 1990.

One reason for the dramatic increase in the number of employed homemakers is inflation. Employed homemakers working full-time contribute up to 40% of the family income. The extra income generated by the employed homemaker has become essential to the maintenance of the standard of living for many low- and medium-income families. Other reasons for the increase in the number of employed homemakers include personal satisfaction, contact with other people, and a feeling of usefulness.

Planning educational programs in foods and nutrition for this new audience (employed homemaker) is a cause of concern to many county Extension home economists and specialists in foods and nutrition. County Extension agents are concerned about the type of nutrition educational needs that this time-conscious homemaker has and the methods that are most appropriate to reach this unique audience. At the same time, specialists are concerned about the development of educational materials that will support this program.

Educational Needs

To gain a greater understanding of the continuing educational needs of the employed homemaker in foods and nutrition

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and the method to best reach the employed homemaker, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service conducted a statewide survey of employed homemakers. The survey was designed to collect information to help answer the following questions:

1. Which nutrition areas prove most difficult to employed homemakers?
2. Where do employed homemakers seek foods and nutrition information?
3. Of those people who seek foods and nutrition information from the Extension Service, how do they usually obtain it?
4. What topics of interest in foods and nutrition would employed homemakers like more information about?

It was believed that answers to these questions could be helpful to both agents and specialists in planning and developing educational programs and supporting materials.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was sent to county Extension home economists in 85 counties emphasizing in-depth foods and nutrition programs for 1978-79. Each county Extension agent was asked to interview 10 homemakers judged to be representative of employed homemakers in the county. Fifty-nine counties volunteered to participate in the study and collected responses from 512 employed homemakers.

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The Sample

Of the 512 employed homemakers who participated in the study, nearly 55% of the respondents were over 36 years of age, while 44% were between 23 and 35 years old. The average size household was 3.3 (compared to the national average of 3.5).

The husband was the principal wage earner in 73% of the households. The wife or both husband and wife were listed as principal wage earners in 21% of the households. The majority of the employed homemakers (53.3%) held clerical positions, while 26% of the respondents held positions of a professional or technical nature.

About 25% of the employed homemakers indicated that 1 or more members of the household were on a special diet. About one-half of the special diets were for weight control,

10% for diabetes, and 21% were a combination of diets such as low sodium, bland diets, or low fat-low sodium diets. The remainder was distributed between low sodium, low protein, allergy, hypoglycemic, and bland diets.

Results

Nutrition Areas of Difficulty

Respondents were asked if they had difficulty in areas like planning nutritious meals, buying food, preparing meals, food spoilage, and food preservation. As shown in Table 1, planning nutritious meals was difficult for the largest number of respondents. The Extension educational program to be developed for this audience must take into consideration the special needs for planning nutritious meals whether they be eaten at home, at work, or in fast food or restaurant environments.

Resource materials appropriate to help employed homemakers plan meals that were balanced and appetizing in each of these environments were developed.

Table 1. Nutrition area of difficulty.

Nutrition area of difficulty (N=512)	Percentage
Planning nutritious meals	45.4%
Food buying	35.4
Food preparation	32.9
Food preservation	20.0
Food spoilage	18.0

Sources of Information

A second area of study focused on where employed homemakers most often sought foods and nutrition information. Table 2 reveals that the largest percentage of employed homemakers most often looked to the cookbook.

Employed homemakers should be directed to resources and cookbooks that have tested recipes to prevent wasting time and money. In addition, several publications were developed containing United States Department of Agriculture tested recipes.

Table 2. Sources of nutrition information.

Sources of nutrition information (N=512)	Percentage
Cookbook	66.1%
Relative or friend	43.6
Extension Service	40.9
Magazine or newspaper	27.6

*Extension
Methods Used*

A third area of the study asked the employed homemakers that if they got information from the Extension Service about foods and nutrition, how they usually obtained it. The responses in Table 3 reveal that visits to the county agent's office or home visit by the agent was the most popular method for obtaining foods and nutrition information.

Table 3. Extension methods used.

<u>Extension method (N=512)</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Face-to-face contact with county agent	40.6%
Extension newsletter	36.5
Agent newspaper articles	32.8
Telephone calls to county agent	20.3
Educational meetings	15.0
Agent radio or TV programs	14.5

Although the study didn't explore the time period when the employed homemakers would visit the county office, it's assumed that the lunch hours would be the most likely time for such a visit. Therefore, the agents are encouraged to have educational materials appropriately displayed.

Although one-to-one contact is a preferred method of obtaining information, it's impractical as the only method to reach employed homemakers. The county Extension newsletter was followed by newspaper articles, telephone calls, educational meetings, and radio or TV programs. A combination of methods, such as the newsletter and individual contacts, is recommended.

*Future
Program Ideas*

The final area of concern in the study addressed the type of foods and nutrition information already available that would be most useful to employed homemakers in the coming year. To help respondents identify the types of information available, each questionnaire contained the following statement:

The Texas Agricultural Extension Service provides educational programs and materials on many aspects of foods and nutrition such as normal nutritional needs and nutritional needs for special conditions. Other topics include how to plan and prepare foods for nutritious family meals that families like, buying foods that save time and money, how to preserve, store and handle foods to keep them safe to eat and the preparation of foods to meet different cultural needs.

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that 80% found buying food to save money and time a primary interest.

Table 4. Future foods and nutrition program ideas.

Area of interest (N=512)	Percentage
Buying foods to save time and money	80.0%
Normal nutritional needs of family	41.2
Preserving and storing foods	35.2
Meeting dietary needs	29.3
Cultural meals	16.8

Normal nutritional needs of family members was next in terms of usefulness, followed by preserving and storing foods and planning and preparing meals to meet dietary needs.

These areas of interest will be used in the county program building process when planning programs to fit the needs of the employed homemaker. Nine lesson plans and fact sheets for use by the agents were developed based on these areas of interest.

Implications

This study was conducted to gain a greater understanding of the continuing educational needs of the employed homemaker. Information obtained from the study will be helpful to agents and specialists responsible for planning and developing foods and nutrition education programs and supporting materials.

To do that task, the results of the survey were analyzed and reported to all Extension home economists in Texas. In discussing the survey results with agents and specialists in foods and nutrition, two conclusions were reached. First, the employed homemaker was very conscious of both her time and the nutritional needs of her family. Thus, nutrition programs must recognize both aspects if we're to effectively reach the employed homemaker. Second, employed homemakers relied heavily on written materials, such as cookbooks, agent newsletters, and newspaper articles for information.

With these two conclusions in mind, Extension foods and nutrition specialists in Texas have developed training materials for county Extension agents to use in conducting employed homemaker trainings during the next year. These materials include a series of nine publications or fact sheets with accompanying lesson plans for use by the Extension agent when working with the employed homemaker. In addition, barriers that could prevent participation in programs by this audience have been identified and agents have been asked for ideas of ways to overcome these barriers.

Also, special attention has focused on the development and implementation of a well-written newsletter. Appropriate support materials and information for improving the development of the county newsletter were provided through Extension communications. USDA's or other cookbooks have been suggested for use by employed homemakers.

Preliminary feedback from the agents indicates that the information gained from the results of this survey and the employed homemaker training have been enlightening. Agents have already incorporated into their 1981 plans of work the methods and educational resources for helping the employed homemaker. These programs will be completed throughout Texas before the end of 1980.

Conclusion

If we accept the premise that the viewpoint of the clientele is the cornerstone of effective Extension programs, this report shows that foods and nutrition surveys can help identify a program area. It also can help foods and nutrition specialists accomplish their role in helping agents identify problem-solving techniques. In addition, sharing survey results with agents can stimulate ideas necessary to develop programs to fit the real needs of a particular audience, and it can be done at a relatively low cost.