

5 Steps to Food Preservation Program Meets the Needs of Idaho Families

Abstract

University of Idaho FCS Extension Educators in southeastern Idaho developed a five-lesson condensed version of safe food preservation classes, driven by participants' interest to meet the needs of everyday home preservers. A post-test survey revealed that participants took the course to be self-reliant, use their own produce, and be in control of what was in their food in a safe manner. The shorter course format consisted of five hands-on classes. The hands-on design allowed students to ask questions and share stories during the workshop, tailoring the workshop to meet the needs of participants.

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Introduction

Recent years have shown an increased interest in food preservation, with sales of Ball canning jars up 20% in 2012, their best sales year ever to date (Parekh, 2013). The increase in the desire to preserve food may be due to the sluggish economy, families trying to stretch the family food dollar, and people prolonging the life of home grown and local produce. Many people have become more interested in the quality and contents of their preserved food and using food preservation to foster connections to the past and their family heritage (Nummer, 2002). There are also those who are trying to provide healthy food for members with special dietary needs. With this interest, there is an increase in requests for safe and reliable food preservation classes. University of Idaho Extension educators remain a critical source for safe home preservation information (Hoffman, 2012). The 2012 Eastern District's 5 Steps to Home Food Preservation program had 40 participants, while the previous year only had 22.

Extension's traditional Idaho Master Food Safety Advisor (MFSA) train-the-trainer program, designed to teach volunteers in proper home preservation techniques, is lengthy and time consuming. The program consists of eight to 12 lessons and requires participants to take a final exam and purchase an expensive manual. The graduating participants then serve as food safety advisors to other clientele. The MFSA program has a proven record of providing the public with research-based information (Maine, 2012).

However, the University of Idaho Extension wanted a program to provide safe information to meet

the needs of everyday home preservers. Family Consumer Science Extension educators in southeastern Idaho developed an innovative program using a condensed version of MFSA lessons. These lessons are driven by participants' interests and cover all main points and safety highlights necessary to preserve at home, while leaving out the train-the-trainer component. The program allows the group to work together in hands-on labs and learn from each other. This is based on the knowledge that adult learners are often the best resource for learning from each other when experiential techniques like group discussion is used (Ota, 2006).

5 Steps to Home Food Preservation

The shortened course consists of five hands-on classes. Topics include: Introduction to Food Preservation, Processing High-Acid Foods, Processing Low-Acid Foods, Freezing Foods and Dehydration, and Pickling and Preserves. Lessons consist of a lecture portion taught by area educators. A hands-on lab portion concludes the lesson, with participants using the research-based recipes and techniques learned in the lecture portion. Area educators who teach the classes are experienced food preservers who are able to offer suggestions and answer questions that the participants may have. Participants also get a chance to learn from each other. Classes have been taught in seven communities throughout the 3-year program. Lessons are held weekly, some in the daytime and others in the evening, depending on community preference. Each lesson is concluded in 3 hours and is participant driven, letting participants guide discussion on the topic of the week.

Workshop Impact

A written post-test survey was given to the participants during the last class in 2012. The surveys focused on the reasons participants preserve food and measured the knowledge, practice, and intent to use safety techniques learned in the workshop. Participants were asked multiple-choice and open-ended questions to determine reasons for taking the class, knowledge gained, current practices, and intent to use new practices. The responses to the first question on the survey, "Why did you attend this class?" are listed in Table 1. Table 2 illustrates the results from the remainder of survey.

Table 1.
2012 Post Survey: Reasons for Attendance
COMBINED 39 surveys completed

Reasons I attended the class	Yes (%)	No (%)
To be in control of what's in my food	74.4%	10.3%
To save money	51.3%	28.2%
To be more self-sufficient	84.6%	2.6%
To better use the produce I grow	87.2%	2.6%
Other (specify)	51.3%	2.6%

As shown in Table 1, the most stated reasons for taking the course was to be (1) Self Reliant, (2)

Use their own produce, and (3) Be in control of what was in their food. The success of this lesson format hinges on the ability to meet the clientele needs by teaching them to preserve using the most current and safe methods. Data shows the majority of participants learned new skills critical for food preservation safety that they will continue to use after the class. Participants were also asked to share comments. Six participants stated that they attended the class in order to create a safer product. One participant was interested in attending to meet diet considerations. One was interested in emergency preparedness, and two participants were interested in learning preservation as a hobby.

Table 2.

2012 Post Survey: Measure of Food Preservation Safety Knowledge, Practice and Intent
 COMBINED 39 surveys completed

	Knowledge		Practice		Intent	
	Learned	Already knew	Didn't do before class	Already did before class	Will do now	Won't do now
Used up-to-date tested, resource based recipes and recommendations when canning foods	79.5%	23.1%	30.8%	18.0%	66.6%	0%
Adjusted processing time for altitude when processing foods in a boiling water canner	59.0%	38.5%	28.2%	28.2%	56.4%	0%
Adjusted for altitude when pressure canning by increasing the pressure as recommended for your elevation	64.1%	25.6%	20.5%	15.4%	61.5%	0%
Added lemon juice or other acid when canning tomatoes and tomato products	61.5%	35.9%	30.8%	12.8%	56.4%	0%
Vented pressure canner for 10 minutes before processing	79.5%	18.0%	23.1%	12.8%	64.1%	0%
Follow the proper pressure canner cool down procedure	69.2%	18.0%	15.4%	18.0%	56.4%	0%
Processed all high acid foods including jams, jellies,	46.2%	48.7%	23.1%	33.3%	59.0%	0%

pickles and relishes in a boiling water canner according to research-based recommendations						
Processed all low acid foods such as green beans, meats, fish, and combination foods in a pressure canner according to research-based recommendations	71.8%	23.1%	33.3%	10.3%	61.5%	0%
When making home canned salsa, followed a tested research based recipe and processed according to recommendations	71.8%	15.4%	35.9%	7.7%	56.4%	5.1%

Table 2 illustrates that a minority (less than 30%) of participants stated they used the important safety techniques before the workshop. The majority (greater than 59% t) of class participants learned to use up-to-date recipes, adjust for altitude, add lemon juice when needed, vent their canner properly, process low acid foods safely in a pressure canner, and use approved salsa recipes. Forty-six percent of participants said they learned to process high acid foods safely in a boiling water bath canner. A majority of participants also stated that they planned on using recommended safety techniques and recipes after taking the class. When asked what they would do differently after class, a majority of participants stated they would now use recommended safety techniques. Two participants stated they would try new approved recipes, and two also were going to use equipment they had not used. Participants reported that the most important thing they learned included recipes, proper equipment use, safe techniques, and fun new ways to use home preserving.

Summary

The flexibility of the shorter five-class food preservation course allowed more participants to attend, while still increasing knowledge and changing behavior (McCann & Gold, 2012). The workshop was designed to serve the needs of families preserving food at home, and responses suggest the program met those goals. The Master Food Preserver program continues to serve community needs for local expertise in food preservation, but our shortened curriculum served a different clientele— that is, those seeking beginning level skills for home use.

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