

North Idaho food preservation bootcamp educates Extension faculty and staff

AT A GLANCE

To combat the need for increasing food preservation knowledge across the 10 northern counties, a two-day boot camp was held to increase the knowledge and skills of county faculty and staff.

The Situation

The past few years have seen a nationwide increase in the number of people interested in preserving their own food at home. This has led to an increase in clientele reaching out to their local University of Idaho Extension office looking for guidance. While there are ten counties within University of Idaho Extension northern district receiving these inquiries, there is only one family and consumer sciences Extension educator in the district with a focus on food safety/food preservation. This has led to other Extension faculty and staff located often being relied upon to address food preservation questions asked by members of their community.

Our Response

To provide this much needed education to UI Extension offices across northern Idaho, Extension educator Amy Robertson decided to hold a two-day food preservation bootcamp. With help from other colleagues, she was able to secure the kitchen at the Latah County Fairgrounds as it is centrally located within the district.

Each day consisted of lecture style lessons as well as hands-on food preservation labs. The topics covered



Extension personnel cutting and prepping potatoes for pressure canning.

on day one included foodborne illness and food safety basics, boiling water canning and practice addressing client canning questions. The second day covered pressure canning, dehydration, freeze drying and a final review in the form of food preservation jeopardy.

There were eight faculty and staff representing five counties in attendance. There was a \$50 registration fee that covered the food and canning materials as well as the learning resources. Each participant received a University of Idaho Extension apron, a new Ball Blue Book, a USDA guide to home canning and a binder with the handouts from each lesson.

Program Outcomes

To determine the knowledge gained by participants, a retrospective evaluation was administered to gauge what they knew about safe food preservation practices before the program, versus after the program.

Post-class evaluations revealed that while taking these classes, participants increased their knowledge in the following areas:

- 75% increased their knowledge of foodborne illnesses
- 100% reported they will use up-to-date tested, resource-based recipes and recommendations when canning food.
- 100% reported they will recommend canning tomato products with added acid.
- 100% they will adjust for altitude when boiling water canning and when pressure canning.

Many of the comments from faculty and staff attendees showed an increase in both knowledge and confidence:

- Five participants stated they felt more confident answering food safety and food preservation questions from clientele.

- Three participants stated they were no longer scared to pressure can at home.
- Six participants stated one important thing they learned was how crucial it is to use research-based and up-to-date recipes for home food preservation.

The results of the evaluation as well as comments from participants demonstrate the importance of food safety/food preservation training for University of Idaho Extension personnel. Cooperative Extension is a go-to resource for many people when it comes to food preservation. It is important to make sure we provide those individuals answering these questions with the tools to do so correctly.

The Future

This program was valued by those who attended. Many of them also expressed an interest in future training to refresh and update their knowledge. There were also several people within the northern district who expressed interest in attending but had scheduling conflicts. These and other reasons have contributed to plans to hold a food preservation bootcamp at least every two or three years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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