**2020 District 3 Food Preservation Plan Summary**

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**RELEVANCE**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a growing request and need for food sustainability information. Families were needing their food to last longer and stretch their food dollars. Many families are also planting gardens and showing interest in food preservation, canning, and food storage.

Community members need education on how to improve their quality of life through the consumption of wholesome, nutritious, homemade, and homegrown foods and gain an understanding of food storage principles and ideas. While Agents routinely conduct hands-on food preservation workshops, the need to practice social distancing prevented such events from occurring. The thought of individuals engaging in food preservation without the proper knowledge was a concern, given the serious consequences that can result when food is preserved improperly. Distance technology could be used to teach the basics of canning, freezing, and drying. Therefore, participants would enhance their knowledge of safely preserving foods using the latest practices from USDA and the program, *Preserving the Harvest*, based on program materials previously developed by Dr. Jenna Anding, Professor and Extension Specialist.

**RESPONSE**

The 2020 program year was unlike any other as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service along with other agencies, organizations, families, and individuals responded to a different work, school, and home environment due to the global response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID19) pandemic. With its network across the state, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service was able to respond at the local, regional, and state level with virtual educational efforts designed to reach individuals and families with resources and education to help them continue with aspects of their daily life related to health, safety, agriculture, and youth development. Although our educational activities, outcomes and impacts may look different for 2020, we continue our efforts *to help Texans better their lives.*

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service identified the following educational program to educate citizens on the topic of food preservation. Programs were marketed through all available means including radio, newspaper, social media, and fliers.

* Organized District 3 FCH planning group made of 6 agents, with specialist support, to plan and implement and online series addressing food preservation, met virtually 5/15/2020, 5/20/2020, and 7/14/2020

Two multi-county live/online educational series titled “Preserving the Harvest” were conducted by agents from Wilbarger, Parker, Archer, Knox, Hardeman, and Baylor counties. The series included sessions on:

* First Series:
	+ 6/2/2020-Introduction to Equipment-76 attended
	+ 6/4/2020- Water Canning Basics and Salsa-63 attended
	+ 6/9/2020-Jams, Jellies, and Pickles-68 attended
	+ 6/11/2020-Pressure Canning Basics and Vegetables-52 attended
* Second Series:
	+ 8/4/2020-Drying Herbs-24 attended
	+ 8/11/2020-Drying Fruits and Vegetables-18 attended
	+ 8/18/2020-Freezing-12 attended
	+ 8/25/2020-Jerky-12 attended
* In addition, a series of short videos was developed to demonstrate critical steps in both water-bath and pressure canning. This allowed the team to reach both auditory and visual learners. All materials, including the videos and recipes featured were made available to the program participants.

**RESULTS**

There was a total of 100 participants who attended at least one class in the two educational series. In addition, 23 participants reviewed the series recordings. A pre and post-test survey was conducted with the series and the results were:

* Sixty participants completed the pre-evaluation:
* Between the two series, 31 counties from Texas were represented and two additional states within the United States
* While many of the participants reported experience freezing foods, fewer than one-third had experience in using a water-bath canner, pressure canner or dehydrator to preserve foods.
* Some participants were using food preservation techniques that are unsafe (3 out of 60 were using the open kettle methods to can foods, and at least 2 admitted to using the oven for canning).
* For those who owned a dial gauge pressure canner, most reported that the gauge had not been tested within the past year.
* Thirty-six participants completed the post-evaluation:
* At the beginning of these workshops, only 22% (8) of the participants perceived their knowledge and skills in home food preservation as either “good” or “excellent”.  Immediately after the series that percentage rose to 97% (35)
* 100% (36) of the participants who completed the evaluation were either completely or mostly satisfied with the workshop.
* 91% (33) of the respondents reported that they planned to make changes as a result of what they learned in these workshops.  Such changes included following only research-based methods, using up-to-date recipes, and updating their resources to reflect current guidelines and recommendations.
* 97% (35) of the participants reported planning to preserve food at home.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to Dr. Jenna Anding for her time and expertise to adapt the programs for an online audience and for assisting with teaching online classes. In addition, appreciation is expressed to the FCH committees in Wilbarger, Parker, Archer, Knox, Hardeman, and Baylor counties for their guidance and support of Extension programming within their respective counties.

**FUTURE PLANS:**

Due to success of this effort and feedback received from clientele, the team is planning to offer a food preservation series in 2021. The series will again be offered virtually.