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Food Facts For You!

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An Overview of Food Safety Programming Statewide; Lunch and Learn; District Inservices; Announcing: Master Food Preserver Training – Summer 2008; In the Spotlight: Food Safety after a Flood; Focus On: Food Allergies; UWEX Web Resources: Food Safety and Health

An Overview of Food Safety Programming Statewide

My sincere thanks to those of you who completed the Food Safety Programming Assessment in July. We had nearly 100 responses by the deadline, 98 in all, and with those responses came a great many ideas to improve food safety programming in the state. I have already acted on some of those ideas and will incorporate many more in the coming months. A summary of the results follows.

Who answers food safety questions, and how many each month? Most of the questions pertaining to food safety or food quality are answered by Extension educators. In only a few offices do support staff answer questions on food safety, and only one county has volunteers that staff the phone during the busy summer and fall months.

While the volume of calls varies throughout the year, 50% of respondents indicated that their office averaged less than 10 consumer questions on food safety/food quality each month; 28% of respondents indicated that their office averaged 10 to 20 consumer questions on food safety/food quality each month; and 18% indicated their office received 20 or more consumer food safety questions each month.

What are the most popular question topics? In response to this question, food preservation was mentioned most often as the topic for consumer food safety questions; perhaps no surprise since this survey was administered during the summer gardening season. The most popular question topics can be categorized as follows:

- **Food preservation** – perhaps no surprise due to the timing of the survey
- **Food handling and storage** – especially questions related to the proper length of storage for foods, where to store foods, and the safety of food that is improperly stored
- **Food preparation** –temperatures for cooking foods, safe internal temperatures, how to grill foods safely, only a few responses noted questions about recipes
- **General food safety** –questions about pathogens, general questions about foodborne illness, and food handling guidelines
- **What to do when the power goes out** – it was surprising that this one topic appeared as many times as it did; we have some excellent resources available in this area (see below)
- Consumers are also asking questions about **foodborne illness outbreaks, food recalls, imported food** and other ‘hot topics’

How are questions answered? When asked to rank the format of your responses to food safety questions, 70% indicated that **phone** is the number one way in which these consumer questions are answered. For other educators, **teaching session** was the way in which food safety questions were most often addressed.

How confident do you feel when responding to food safety/food quality questions? In general, educators feel confident in their ability to answer these questions. Of the 98 total responses, the percentage of individuals responding 'confident' or 'very confident' in their ability to respond to each topic was:

- Basic food safety knowledge (Fight BAC): 98%
- Food preservation (canning, freezing, dehydration, etc): 60%
- Cooking foods (cooking methods, safe internal temperatures, etc): 94%
- Storage of food items (location, time/temperature, etc): 91%
- Cleaning and sanitizing (products, procedures): 96%
- Food spoilage (evaluating when a food is fit for consumption): 84%
- Food safety (knowing when a food is safe/unsafe to eat): 95%
- Food ingredients and preparation: 83%
- Emerging topics (food recalls, safety of imported foods, etc): 43%

What would increase your confidence in responding to food safety/food quality questions? While educators feel confident responding to questions in many areas of food safety/food quality, the following would further increase confidence (listed in order of preference):

- professional development or training, especially at District meetings – nearly 1/3 of those asking for training mentioned food preservation training in particular
- fact sheets or reference materials on food safety topics
- regular updates, such as newsletters or Wislines
- web-based information or training materials
- news releases on emerging topics

Particular hurdles to increased confidence include: the sporadic and unpredictable nature of the questions, and the lack of time for professional development.

How useful is food safety/quality knowledge? The majority of educators, 88%, indicated that food safety/quality knowledge is useful or very useful in their work.

When faced with a food safety/quality question that you can't answer, what do you do?

Usual first response. If educators don't know the answer to a question, they...

- Look in UWEX publications – This is the usual first response for 58%, highlighting the nature of questions during the busy home food preservation season.
- Search UWEX or UW web pages – A substantial number of educators (23%) search UWEX or UW web pages for information as their first response when they don't know the answer to a question.

Next steps. As a second step, educators tend to ...

- Look in UWEX publications or on UWEX web pages – 53% of the time
- Call Barb – 23% of the time

Other strategies include searching Extension resources outside of UW or, less frequently, contacting other Extension specialists or agencies outside of Extension. The **last resort** for 84% of educators is to tell consumers that the information is not available ☺. (Thank you for your diligence in this area.)

How should information or updates be delivered, and what might be the topics?

When asked how you would like to receive information or updates, you listed (# of times each topic appeared is in parenthesis):

- District meetings or regional workshops (40)
- Fact sheets (21)
- Wisline (14)
- Website (11)
- Newsletters (10)
- Emails (4)
- News releases (1)

The topics that were listed include: food preservation, safety of imported foods, food storage, food recalls, and general food safety, especially an advanced overview, i.e. food safety 102 (as opposed to food safety 101). Other ideas were regional Master Food Preserver updates for already-trained volunteers and a 'topic of the month' with accompanying handout that could be posted to an office bulletin board or used as a handout.

In some offices, staff or trained volunteers help respond to food safety questions. How should we provide updates to these individuals? Ideas included:

- sharing email updates with staff, volunteers and community partners, e.g. information on food recalls with food pantries
- including others in Wisline updates, especially including trained Master Food Preservers or Master Gardeners for food preservation Wislines
- circulating copies of newsletters at the office or with outside volunteers
- sharing fact sheets with community partners

Thank you again for sharing such a wealth of information. Please continue to offer ideas and suggestions. And thank you for all you do in food safety/quality programming☺!

Food Safety Lunch and Learn Wislines - 2007/2008

You will have seen the email message, but just a reminder that one of the survey ideas is already taking shape: Food Safety Lunch and Learn. I have suggested a topic for each, but don't let that deter you. The format for these will be open question and answer – so keep track of those questions and share them with the group. Please note these dates on your calendar and share this message with support staff and others who may wish to attend with you. All programs will be from 12 noon until 1 pm.

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|------------------------------|--|
| • Monday, September 10, 2007 | Food Safety Update: Recalls and Back to School |
| • Monday, November 12, 2007 | Holiday Food Safety |
| • Monday, January 14, 2008 | New Year's Food Safety Resolutions |
| • Monday, March 10, 2008 | Summer Food Preservation Training – Q&A |
| • Monday, May 12, 2008 | Summertime Food Safety |

Please join me for these sessions so we can learn together!

Food Safety Updates @ District Inservices

I have been in touch with several districts to schedule **Food Safety Updates** during District meetings.

- November 14, 2007 Central District
- January 16, 2008 Eastern District
- February 28, 2008 Quad Counties
- May 15, 2008 Southern District

I look forward to having the chance to discuss current events with you at that time.

Announcing Master Food Preserver Training – Summer 2008

We have a full schedule planned for Master Food Preserver training next summer. These classes will fill up quickly, so make sure you check you calendar if you are in need of this type of training – or alert others in your office, such as support staff, who may be interested. If you are interested, contact the class coordinator listed for the class that you would like to attend. As more details become available re cost/location, I will share those with you.

June 17-19	Iowa County Dodgeville High School 912 West Chapel Street Dodgeville, Wisconsin 53533	Contact: 608-935-0391 Donna Peterson Ruth Schriefer Sarah Weier
June 30 – July 2	Price County	Contact: 715-339-2555 Barbara Haynes
July 8-10	Outagamie County	Contact: 920-832-5121 Karen Dickrell
July 14-16	Rock County Clinton High School 112 Milwaukee Road Clinton, WI 53525	Contact: 608-757-5689 Angela Flickinger
July 29-31	Adams County Adams Friendship High School 1109 East North Street Adams, WI 53910	Contact: 608-339-4237 Theresa Wimann

What is Master Food Preserver training? Master Food Preserver and Food Safety Volunteer is an intensive three-day training program designed to introduce participants to the basics of food safety and home food preservation. Participants completing the pretest, the three-day hands-on training, and scoring a satisfactory grade on the daily take-home examinations and the final test will receive Master Food Preserver certification. Trained Master Food Preservers are asked to provide at least 20 hours of volunteer service to UW-Extension in their county, helping to answer general food safety and food preservation questions.

Over the course of the three-day workshop, you will have the opportunity to learn about the following topics:

- ◆ general food safety, microorganisms and home food processing
- ◆ canning high acid foods
- ◆ canning low acid foods

- ◆ freezing food
- ◆ jams, jellies and related products
- ◆ food dehydration
- ◆ pickles, relishes and fermented products

There will be time set aside for learning, group discussion and hands-on exercises. The training generally runs from 8 am until 4 pm daily.

Who should sign up for MFP training? This type of a program is designed for dedicated staff and volunteers. The Individuals who sign up will be expected to attend **all 3 days** of training. This is not a program for individuals with no experience in home food preservation! The ideal candidate will have at least some exposure to canning food at home, will be open to learning new skills and knowledge, and, once trained, will be effective at supporting UWEX-sponsored food preservation programming – answering questions, testing pressure canners, conducting workshops, and so forth. In addition to participation in the **3-day training program** (face-to-face), materials will be provided in advance of the training and there will be a **pre-test** due at registration on the first day, **take-home assignments** during the training, and a **post-test** required of all participants.

What is the cost of the training? The cost for the training generally runs from \$50 to \$100 for the 3-day course. This cost includes bulletins, materials, food, jars, facility charge, etc.

I hope to see many of you at these trainings next summer!

In the Spotlight: Food Safety after a Flood

A flood or the loss of power due to storms could jeopardize the safety of your food. Knowing how to determine if food is safe and how to keep food safe will help minimize the potential loss of food and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. This fact sheet will help you make the right decisions for keeping your family safe after a flood.

ABCD's of Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency

Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F. This may be difficult when the power is out.

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Use 2 ½ to 3 pounds of dry ice per cubic foot in your freezer; 50 pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot full freezer for 2 days. Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.

Be prepared for an emergency...

... by having items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on the outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Make sure you have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food. Remember to use these items and replace them from time to time. Be sure to keep a hand-held can opener for an emergency.

Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emergency. If you live in a location that could be affected by a flood, plan your food storage on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water. Coolers are a great help for keeping food cold if the

power will be out for more than 4 hours—have a couple on hand along with frozen gel packs. When your freezer is not full, keep items close together—this helps the food stay cold longer.

Digital, dial, or instant-read food thermometers and appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep appliance thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times. When the power is out, an appliance thermometer will always indicate the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer no matter how long the power has been out. The refrigerator temperature should be 40 °F or below; the freezer, 0 °F or lower. If you're not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with a food thermometer.

Food Safety after a Flood

If your garden was flooded with water from a stream or river, can you still harvest the produce? Do not attempt to harvest any items from a garden flooded with water from a river or stream. This includes tomatoes or peppers, but also potatoes and carrots. Flood waters can bring with them harmful microorganisms, chemicals and other contaminants that can make food unsafe. Some of these contaminants may not be removed or destroyed with peeling or cooking. It is best to throw produce from a flooded garden away.

If flood waters covered food stored on shelves and in cabinets, what should you keep and what should you throw out? Many food items are unsafe once they come in contact with flood water. Here is a guide of what to keep and what to discard:

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water – this would include raw fruits and vegetables, cartons of milk or eggs.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Food containers that are not waterproof include those packaged in plastic wrap or cardboard, or those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps. Flood waters can enter into any of these containers and contaminate the food inside. Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and **home canned foods** if they have come in contact with flood water, because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods and discard any food in damaged cans. Can damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

How do I salvage canned items? Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (for example, flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved if you do the following:

- Remove the labels, if they are the removable kind, since they can harbor dirt and bacteria.
- Thoroughly wash the cans or retort pouches with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
- Brush or wipe away any dirt or silt.
- Rinse the cans or retort pouches with water that is safe for drinking, if available, since dirt or residual soap will reduce the effectiveness of chlorine sanitation.
- Then, sanitize them by immersion in one of the two following ways:
- Place in water and allow the water to come to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes, or
- Place in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available) for 15 minutes.
- Air-dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.

- If the labels were removable, then re-label your cans or retort pouches, including the expiration date (if available), with a marker.
- Food in reconditioned cans or retort pouches should be used as soon as possible, thereafter.
- Any concentrated baby formula in reconditioned, all-metal containers must be diluted with clean, drinking water

How should I clean my pots, pans, dishes, and utensils? Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils (including can openers) with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available).

How should I clean my countertops? Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available). Allow to air-dry.

My home was flooded and I am worried about the safety of the drinking water. What should I do? Use **bottled water** that has not been exposed to flood waters if it is available.

- If you don't have bottled water, you should **boil water** to make sure it is safe. Boiling water will kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for boiling. Boil the water for **one minute**, let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.
- If you can't boil water, you can **disinfect it using household bleach**. Bleach will kill some, but not all, types of disease-causing organisms that may be in the water. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for disinfection. Add **1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops)** of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach **for each gallon of water**, stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.
- If you have a well that had been flooded, the water should be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede. If you suspect that your well may be contaminated, contact your local or state health department or county Extension office for specific advice.

Summarized from: Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency. FSIS. <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>
Other resources available from UWEX: <http://www.foodsafety.wisc.edu>

In the Spotlight: Safety of Produce from Flooded Gardens

As a result of recent flooding, questions have been raised about the safety of consuming produce from gardens that were under water for a day or two. How concerned you have to be about using garden produce after a flood depends, to a large degree, on whether that flood water was "clean", i.e. standing rain water, or water that may have been contaminated with sewage, river or creek water, farm run-off, or industrial pollutants.

The most conservative answer — one that eliminates any and all risks — is that you discard all produce that was covered by contaminated flood water. However, with weeks left in the growing season, you may wish to salvage some crops. Here are tips for considering what can be salvaged and what must be discarded from your flooded garden.

Begin by **discarding** all **leafy vegetables** such as lettuce, cabbage, or spinach. It's not possible to scrub these crops, and they have many ridges and crevices that could contain contaminated

silt or bacteria. All **soft fruits** such as berries should also be discarded because they too are impossible to clean.

Examine produce carefully before picking it. If it is soft or cracked, or has open fissures where contamination might have entered, throw it out. Produce from plants that survive flooding with water that was not contaminated should also be discarded if it is bruised, cracked, or otherwise blemished. Root crops from "clean" flooding should be OK if the upper parts of the plants survive essentially undamaged.

Produce that can be safely consumed in the short term is **produce that will be cooked**. Begin by washing green beans, tomatoes, peppers, summer squash and other mid-season crops in water. Do not use soap. Rinse with clear tap water and soak for 2 minutes in a weak chlorine solution of 2 Tablespoons bleach to a gallon of water. Rinse in cool, clean tap water. Peel and cook thoroughly before eating. Change the bleach solution if you notice the water is no longer clean.

For **underground vegetables** such as beets, carrots and potatoes, wash in water, rinse and sanitize as directed above. Peel and cook thoroughly before eating. Note: beets may be peeled after cooking, if desired.

Melons and other fruits which will be eaten raw **should not be consumed**. Recent foodborne illness outbreaks linked to melons suggest that these low-acid fruits may not be safe even if surface-sanitized.

Late-season vegetables that result from flowers produced on growth that develops after flood waters subside should be OK. To increase safety, cook them thoroughly, or at least wash them well and peel them, if possible, before eating. This could include tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, cucumbers, and similar vegetables.

Flood-damaged garden produce that is otherwise unfit for eating – such as tomatoes that are cracked or decaying – **should not be canned** or otherwise preserved. Garden produce that **would** be safe to consume after washing, sanitizing and cooking may **alternately** be safely canned. **Do not attempt** to freeze or dehydrate these items, however.

Never sell produce from a flood-damaged garden at a farm market or farm stand until you are sure that all contamination has been removed from the garden, usually a period of at least one month after the last incidence of flooding. Check with the Division of Food Safety of the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (608) 224-4000 if you have questions about market sales of garden-flooded produce.

What You Need to Know about Food Allergies

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, an estimated 2% of adults and about 5% of infants and young children in the U.S. suffer from food allergies. Allergic reactions to food vary in severity, but approximately 30,000 people require emergency room treatment and 150 die each year as a result of them. The only means of preventing allergic reactions is to avoid the foods that cause them.

To help people avoid the risks food allergens pose, the FDA requires that the labels of all foods the agency regulates (all foods except meat, poultry, and certain egg products) must clearly identify the source of all ingredients that are -- or are derived from -- the eight most common

food allergens. This requirement became effective January 1, 2006, so there may still be some product labels in stores or people's homes without this information. While more than 160 foods can cause reactions in people with food allergies, the eight most common allergenic foods account for 90% of food allergic reactions, and are the sources from which many other ingredients are derived.

Eight Most Common Allergenic Foods:

1. Milk
2. Eggs
3. Fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod)
4. Crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp)
5. Tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans)
6. Peanuts
7. Wheat
8. Soybeans

Unless they are part of the ingredient's common or usual name (or are already clearly identified in the ingredient list), these eight food allergens may appear on food labels either:

- **In parentheses** following the name of the ingredient, e.g., lecithin (soy); flour (wheat); and whey (milk); or,
- **Immediately after** or next to the list of ingredients in a "contains" statement, e.g., Contains Wheat, Milk, and Soy.

Symptoms of food allergies typically appear from within a few minutes to two hours after a person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic. Symptoms can include:

- Hives
- Flushed skin or rash
- Tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth
- Face, tongue, or lip swelling
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Coughing or wheezing
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Swelling of the throat and vocal cords
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness



Food allergies can be life threatening! Stay informed to better educate yourself and consumers about this risk. For more information on food allergies and allergen labeling, go to FDA's webpage at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/alrqqa.%20html> or call FDA at: 1-888-SAFEFOOD.

UWEX Web Resources: Food Safety and Health

Be sure to update your county's web pages to highlight food safety and health resources! These resources will keep you, and the consumers that you serve, up-to-date on emerging issues and help you to answer all those questions which come into your office.

Food Safety & Health – the premier resource for food safety & health information for Wisconsin consumers. Your source for up-to-date and research-tested information on food preservation, food safety, starting a small food business, and hot topics in food safety and health. **We share the relevant.** Link: www.foodsafety.wisc.edu

If you have any questions about updating your county's web pages to feature this site, please let me know!