Abstract

Objective: Form a collaboration for food systems programming that brings together Extension educators from “farm gate” to “consumer plate.”

Target Audience: Extension professionals working with consumers, youth, agricultural producers, food service, and food processors.

Theory, Prior Research, Rationale: Today’s consumer faces many decisions influencing food choices. However, 98% of Americans are several generations removed from direct farming, according to former United States Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. As a result, they are less familiar with how our food systems work.

Description: In response to consumer concerns (i.e., food safety, GMOs, pesticides, etc.), we formed a statewide interdisciplinary team of Agriculture, Family/Consumer Science, Food Science, and 4-H professionals to work together to reach consumers from “farm gate” to “consumer plate.” The steps, which are continually evolving, included (1) Dividing into teams [production agriculture, food processing, youth, and consumers/food service] who met together and separately, electronically and face-to-face; (2) Establishing a listserv and web-based location to share information; (3) Creating a logic model; (4) Conducting a statewide survey to determine program priorities; (5) Identifying areas to work together; and (6) Developing core questions all teams could use in clientele surveys.

Evaluation: Quantitative and qualitative data support this approach: (1) The survey [n=1,208] identified food safety as our state’s top priority and gave us a common emphasis; (2) Staff in different disciplines collaborated in developing programs, articles, and social media; and (3) The core set of questions used with all clientele helped aggregate data.

Conclusions and Implications: This statewide collaboration model could be replicated and implemented by others in Extension for greater outreach in food systems education.

Funded through normal office operating expenses.

2017 Nebraska Extension Collaboration Highlights from “Farm Gate” to “Consumer Plate”

Foodborne illness stood out as a common concern of Nebraskans with over half (53%) very concerned (go.unl.edu/Nebraska-food-report). These survey findings were used throughout 2017 to guide program planning and activities. As a result...

CONSUMERS / FOOD SERVICE
- 1,806 foodservice staff participated in food safety training to become a ServSafe Manager (741) or ServSafe Food Handler (981 English/ 84 Spanish).
- “Barf Bucket” training, a nationally recognized program, trained 434 childcare centers/home providers to prevent spread of Norovirus infection.
- 216,000+ individuals accessed web materials to teach/learn about food labeling, when food is still acceptable to eat, and how to reduce food waste.
- Home canning classes helped 200 consumers use safe produce handling, updated processes, lab tested recipes, and correct storage guidelines.

YOUTH
- “Ag literacy is a great way for our students to see the connection of how science and Nebraska agriculture impacts their everyday life.”-Teacher
- Over 26,000 youth learned about agriculture through ag literacy programs such as Ag Festivals, Animals Inside & Out, Embryology, Dairy Ambassadors, and Local Beef.
- Raising Nebraska, an interactive agriculture experience on the State Fair grounds, connected over 356,000 youth and adult consumers to Nebraska agriculture through field trips, tours, State Fair, and more.
- 3,600+ Nebraska youth were certified in Livestock Quality Assurance to implement good production practices ensuring animal care and well-being.

PRODUCTION AG
- Annually, 2,850+ livestock producers increase their knowledge of animal care, well-being, health, antimicrobial stewardship, food safety, and product quality topics/practices through Beef and Pork Quality Assurance training.
- 160 Nebraska dairies increased their knowledge of animal care and practices which assure food safety, quality, and value of milk produced in the state.
- 1,000+ farmers attend Crop Field Days to learn latest production practices.
- 200 sheep and goat producers certified in proper healthcare techniques.
- 60 fruit and vegetable growers were trained on the latest Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) guidelines.

FOOD PROCESSING
- Training and certifications were provided to the food processing industry to support them in meeting regulatory standards, improving food quality, and ensuring food safety.
- 126 professionals in all food sectors qualified for certification in 5 programs:
  - Better Process School and Acidified Better Process School
  - Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance Qualified Individual Certification
  - Food Microbiology Workshop
  - Food Processing Management Certificate

Working together, we could report: “Over 42,000 youth and adults statewide made changes and/or reinforced knowledge of food safety practices from food production to food consumption.”