Food Programs: Helping Every Time You Eat!

Two messages are emphasized in all of UNL Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County’s food programs — the importance of nutrition as well as food safety.

Some educational programs highlight a particular aspect of these messages, but Extension Educator Alice Henneman has found it more effective to blend nutrition and food safety information with how-to tips people can use every time they eat.

The Great Taste of Good Nutrition

Eating a healthy diet helps promote good health and reduces risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, certain types of cancer, diabetes, stroke and osteoporosis — the leading causes of death and disability among Americans.

Lancaster County Extension’s programs help people select and prepare healthy, enjoyable foods.

“Nutrition and Osteoporosis,” developed last year, was used again this year as a workshop for work sites and community groups. The materials were also put on the Internet — the Powerpoint lesson was downloaded 5,046 times this year.

Handling Food Safely

Food safety is a farm-to-table issue. Lancaster County Extension is the lead agency in Lancaster County for educating consumers about food safety. Many consumers call the extension office with home food safety concerns.

In partnership with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, Extension Educator Alice Henneman blends nutrition and food safety information with how-to tips people can use every time they eat.

Several activities were initiated to promote food safety. A food safety packet was distributed to 125 companies and more than 300 offices of city/county employees.

Food safety information was distributed to about 2,000 UNL students who rented refrigerators. A food safety quiz activity was offered at 33 senior sites in conjunction with the Area Agency on Aging. A handwashing poster was developed for schools, WIC clinics, Head Start, grocery stores, nursing homes, Lincoln/Lancaster offices and many other locations.

Lancaster County Extension also partners with community organizations in providing ServSafe training to commercial food service establishments on food safety procedures.

Blending It All Together

In food preparation, nutrition decisions and food safety procedures go hand in hand. Lancaster County Extension Educator Alice Henneman was quoted and provided information for an Oxygen magazine article “Stop Overeating After Dark,” July 2002.

Nutrition Education Program (NEP) partners with 161 agencies, classrooms and coalitions to teach budgeting food dollars, saving money through meal planning, saving time by fixing quick and easy meals and keeping food safe to eat, feeding infants and children and preparing nutritious snacks.

Malnutrition and food insecurity are real issues in Lincoln. In 2001, 17,841 people accessed food through the Emergency Food Pantries System and 2,087,031 pounds of food were distributed by the Food Bank — a 10 percent increase over the previous year.

Limited-income adults may participate in NEP classes or receive individualized lessons, including meal planning with Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and commodity foods.

One woman took pride in learning how to make homemade pizza. She stretched her food dollar $10 a month by preparing pizza four times, rather than purchasing it. Another continued on next page.

Limited-Income Residents Stay Healthy Through Nutrition Education Program

Above: Lancaster County Extension NEP staff lead a game of Food Jeopardy at the Lincoln Action Program. Left: Sudanese women learn tips on how to feed their families. Right: Participants sneek in food safety information whenever appropriate.

Nutrition Education Program offers a variety of materials to help people select and prepare healthy food. The Web site has also been featured in the Washington Post (“Five Things We Will Do in 2002,” Jan. 3, ‘02) and Before Your Pregnancy by Amy Ogle, M.S., R.D. and Lisa Mazzullo, M.D., (2002).

Food Reflections, an e-mail newsletter, is sent to more than 6,800 health professionals, educators and consumers. It is listed in a new USDA publication, “Eating Smart: A Nutrition Resource List for Consumers.”

“Cook It Quick” was created for both on-site presentations and for access via the Internet. Materials emphasize quick, nutritious food preparation and food safety. “Fast Meals Using Few Ingredients” (based on Cook It Quick) was part of Brian GHI’s “Your Health” series and attended by approximately 350 people. Cook It Quick Web pages receive 8,000 hits per month.

Agricultural Programs Support Nebraska’s Premier Industry

Lancaster County has 1,540 commercial farms covering 421,000 acres — farm products bring in more than $82 million annually. UNL Cooperative Extension continues to make agricultural profitability and sustainability a priority issue.

Lancaster County Extension Educator Tom Dorn fulfills this goal through numerous workshops and meetings, educational resources, person-to-person contacts and a Web site.

The Agriculture and Acreage Web site, which has won a national award, is constantly updated and expanded. Last year, “Answers to Frequently Asked Questions” and a Farm Management section were added. One recent Web user commented, “Great Web site. Has great links. This is the first place I head for when looking for information about agriculture.”

Dorn also manages the Pesticide Container Recycling program for Lancaster County and surrounding counties. Pesticide containers are collected and then recycled into parking lot bollards, fence posts, traffic lane markers and more. In Lancaster County last year, more than 6,250 pesticide containers were collected. In the past seven years, 60 tons of plastic have been diverted from area landfills.

In a joint effort with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension coordinates waste pesticide product collections across the state. More than 12,400 pounds of waste pesticide and PCB’s were collected in Lancaster County at waste pesticide product collections such as this one at Waverly Coop. Picture is Extension Educator Tom Dorn.

2002 was the third drought year in a row for Nebraska and Cooperative Extension continued to respond to the need for information on minimizing agriculture losses. Lancaster County Extension Educator Tom Dorn developed educational resources for use statewide on “Drought-stressed Corn” and “Blending Grain and Feedstuffs — How to Figure the Proper Proportions.”

There has also been an increased interest in irrigation development. IRRIGCOST, a spreadsheet developed by Lancaster County Extension, assists farmers in estimating annualized costs of owning and operating an irrigation system. 350 producers attended a series of six Farm Bill seminars presented in Lancaster County by Lancaster County Extension, the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service. These seminars helped explain farm bill provisions and how to calculate the most advantageous program option for a particular farm.