



IMPACT 2026

Through Extension programs across the nation, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educators provide a multitude of Educational opportunities to meet the needs of diverse audiences.

Food Safety

Overview

Extension food safety and food preservation programs across the United States continue to play a critical role in protecting public health, improving food security, and strengthening local food systems. Through hands-on workshops, certification programs, and community education, Extension professionals are equipping individuals, families, volunteers, and food entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills needed to safely prepare, preserve, and handle food.

Food Safety Training Protects Public Health

Food safety education remains essential as foodborne illness continues to pose a major public health concern. According to national estimates, millions of Americans experience foodborne illness each year. Extension programs address this challenge by providing research-based education on proper food handling, preservation techniques, and sanitation practices. Across many states, participants reported substantial increases in knowledge, confidence, and behavioral intentions following participation in Extension programs. In **Illinois**, for example, restaurant workers participating in a two-day food safety course demonstrated strong outcomes, with 98% reporting they would apply updated food safety skills such as safe cooking practices, employee hygiene, and proper sanitation procedures. These programs help protect public health by reducing the risk of contamination in both commercial and home food environments.



Home Food Preservation Builds Skills and Reduces Waste

Home food preservation education also remains a key component of Extension programming. As more individuals seek self-sufficiency and ways to reduce food waste, demand for canning, freezing, fermenting, and dehydrating education has increased significantly. Participants in hands-on workshops learn science-based preservation methods that reduce the risk of dangerous foodborne pathogens such as botulism while extending the shelf life of fresh foods. In **Colorado** and **Illinois**, hundreds of participants attended preservation classes covering canning, dehydration, and fermentation, with 97% indicating plans to apply the information they learned. Programs like these provide practical skills that allow families to safely preserve seasonal foods and reduce household food waste.



Illinois Canning and Home Food Preservation

Food Preservation Supports Household Food Security

These educational efforts also contribute to improved household food security. In communities facing economic challenges, the ability to safely preserve food can provide year-round access to nutritious foods that might otherwise spoil. For example, in **Georgia**, Extension educators connected food preservation education to the needs of residents experiencing food insecurity, emphasizing that preserving seasonal harvests helps ensure “availability,

affordability, and nutritional value” of foods throughout the year. Similarly, Extension programs in **Kentucky** reported that 80% of participants demonstrated safe food handling skills, and more than 18,000 pints of food were preserved to supplement family meals, directly supporting household food resources.



Georgia's Pepper Jelly Class

Food Safety Education Encourages Small Business Growth

Extension food safety programming also supports economic development by preparing individuals to safely produce and sell food products. Cottage food business courses, entrepreneurship training, and food safety certification programs help aspiring food entrepreneurs understand regulations, pricing strategies, and safe production practices. In **Colorado**, more than 7,000 individuals have completed a statewide cottage food safety course, gaining the knowledge necessary to operate home-based food businesses. Participants frequently report that their motivation is to earn income while sharing their skills and passions with others. These programs strengthen local food economies by helping entrepreneurs start safe and compliant businesses.

Workforce Training Improves Food Handling Practices

Workforce training initiatives also play a significant role in protecting community health. *ServSafe* and other food safety certification programs prepare foodservice employees to safely handle food in restaurants, schools, hospitals, and childcare facilities. Across several states, participants demonstrated improved knowledge and confidence in preventing foodborne illness. In northeast **Colorado**, *ServSafe* training participants reported applying safer practices daily, with the potential to positively impact more than 21,000 individuals through improved food handling practices in food service settings.

Extension educators also leverage innovative delivery methods to expand access to food safety education. Online courses, social media outreach, and collaborative networks help reach broader audiences and reinforce key safety messages. For example, **Michigan's** food safety outreach efforts generated hundreds of thousands of social media views, expanding awareness of safe food practices among community members.

Innovative Outreach Expands Educational Access

Overall, Extension food safety and food preservation programs demonstrate measurable impact across multiple dimensions. Participants gain practical knowledge and confidence in safe food handling, households increase their ability to preserve nutritious foods, entrepreneurs launch food-based businesses, and food service workers strengthen their professional skills. Together, these outcomes contribute to healthier communities, stronger local economies, and improved food security nationwide.



New Mexico's Chile Preservation and Food Safety

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