Teens Serving Food Safely
2003-2016

The Situation
Recent high-profile foodborne illness outbreaks have made the news and placed more emphasis on food handling at all levels of the food chain.

Teen food handlers play a major role in preparing food at home and in commercial food service establishments. In fact, a job at the local café or fast-food establishment is often the first employment experience for many teens. However, with the rapid turnover that occurs in food service work, training in safe food handling often does not occur.

Extension Response
Teens Serving Food Safely is a statewide food safety education effort the NDSU Extension Service conducts in cooperation with high school family and consumer science teachers, with outreach to parents. The lessons teach the four steps to food safety: clean, separate/don’t cross-contaminate, cook and chill.

The curriculum consists of five lessons based on the Fight BAC (short for bacteria) campaign. It has been used with more than 10,000 students since 2003. Through grant funding and donations, each student receives a food safety kit, which includes meat and refrigerator thermometers, a magnet showing internal temperature recommendations, a wash-your-hands mirror cling and brochures to take home. The North Dakota Beef Commission provided food thermometers, and the North Dakota Nutrition Council has provided funding for other materials in the kit.

Impacts
Test score averages for 10,075 students have shown an increase from 52 to 84 percent correct. Follow-up surveys have shown positive changes in food-handling behavior, such as an increased awareness of the importance of cleaning and sanitizing to prevent cross-contamination.

As measured by a one-month follow-up survey with 6,375 students:
- 80 percent reported washing their hands more often during food preparation.
- 68 percent reported being more careful about cleaning and sanitizing utensils to prevent cross-contamination.
- 48 percent had shared their knowledge about food safety with others.
- 39 percent already had applied what they learned when preparing food for the public.
- 22 percent had used a food thermometer more often.
- 22 percent had checked refrigerator and freezer temperatures more often.

Feedback
Students said:
- “It opened my eyes and taught me how easily people can get sick from food if you are not careful.”
- “I learned important things that are lifelong lessons.”

Public Value Statement
On average, each person consumes four meals away from home per week. Handling food safely can help prevent foodborne illness outbreaks.

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