On the Move to Better Health: Kids Cooking School

Public Value Statement
Improving health behaviors can increase quality of life and save millions of dollars in collective health-care costs for North Dakotans throughout their lifetime.

The Situation
According to North Dakota statistics, only 3 percent of children meet the daily recommendation for fruits and vegetables. Adequate fruit and vegetable consumption is linked with preventing chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Research has shown that hands-on culinary nutrition education and gardening activities can improve skills and increase the intake of fruits and vegetables.

Extension Response
The On the Move Cooking School curriculum consists of eight hands-on lessons that can be delivered in camp settings, after-school programs or as weekly lessons. Each lesson has specific objectives, key concepts, physical activity, worksheets, associated recipes, a parent newsletter and evaluation tools. The lesson topics included measuring, reading recipes, identifying and using equipment, safe food handling, reading nutrition labels, meal planning, and hands-on cooking and baking. Each child received a cooking kit and cookbook at the conclusion of the program.

Impacts
Some 974 children from 18 counties have participated in the multisession 10-plus-hour programs. As a result, children improved their knowledge of nutrition, food safety and health concepts through hands-on learning delivered in a variety of settings.

A three-month follow-up parent survey showed children had applied the skills they learned.
- 83 percent were independently preparing food at home.
- 71 percent were confidently using kitchen equipment at home.
- 76 percent were offering help more often with food preparation.

Feedback
“My son has been very interested in helping/doing things himself in the kitchen, getting his own snack, getting a knife and asking to cut his banana instead of just eating it so he can practice with the knife, and just being more aware/helpful in the kitchen overall (clearing his plates, etc.).”

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