Teens Serving Food Safely, 2003-2019

Public Value Statement
On average, each person consumes four meals away from home per week. Handling food safely can help prevent foodborne illness outbreaks. The total cost associated with the six leading causes of foodborne illness (Campylobacter, C. perfringens, E. coli, Listeria, Salmonella and Shigella) is $6.6 billion.

The Situation
Recent high-profile foodborne illness outbreaks have 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 often is the first employment experience for many teens. However, with the rapid turnover that occurs in food service workers, training in safe food handling often does not occur.

Extension Response
Teens Serving Food Safely is a statewide food safety education effort NDSU Extension conducts in cooperation with high school family and consumer science teachers, with outreach to parents. Teens learn 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 11,000 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 provided funding for other materials in the kit.

Impacts
Test score averages for 11,816 students have increased from 53% to 86% correct. Follow-up surveys have shown positive changes in food-handling behavior.

As measured by a one-month follow-up survey with 7,508 students:

- 80% reported washing their hands more often during food preparation
- 69% reported being more careful about cleaning and sanitizing utensils
- 48% had shared their knowledge about food safety with others
- 40% already had applied what they learned when preparing food for the public
- 22% had used a food thermometer more often
- 22% had checked refrigerator and freezer temperatures more often

Feedback
Students said:
- “I liked learning something new and that I can apply it in my everyday life.”

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