

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Preserving with confidence

Extension's volunteer Master Food Safety Advisors help consumers extend the usefulness of seasonal and local foods and ensure safe food preservation practices at home.

Situation

Advances in food science and safety mean people can now access a reliable, trusted, and current source of information to successfully preserve foods at home. In recent years, Extension offices around the country have reported increased consumer interest in food preservation education. Without knowing how to properly can, freeze, dry or ferment foods for long-term storage, people put themselves and others at risk of foodborne illness.

Extension's Response

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, land grant university Extension programs around the country began offering Master Food Preserve trainings to increase consumer access to research-based food preservation and safety know-how. Colorado State University Extension has maintained this successful statewide volunteer program for more than 30 years. In 2006, CSU Extension changed the title of the program from 'Master Food Preserver' to 'Master Food Safety Advisor' (MFSA) to emphasize the importance of food safety within food preservation.

For instance, certain preservation techniques passed from generation to generation are no longer safe. Some types of bacteria have developed the ability to grow in lower temperatures and more acidic conditions. To help consumers use the latest best practices for food safety, volunteer advisors:

- Answer food preservation inquiries at county Extension offices
- Provide information at local farmers' markets and fairs
- Conduct presentations and workshops
- Prepare educational displays and write articles for newsletters and newspapers.

In addition, volunteers might teach proper hand washing to pre-schoolers or instruct school-age children on how to safely prepare a snack and store perishable food items.

To become a certified MFSA volunteer, participants take 30 hours of intensive training through a local county Extension office on methods of food preservation and food safety and participate in ongoing training updates. Through lectures, discussion and hands-on demonstrations, volunteers learn how to prevent foodborne illness. They also learn how to safely store food and preserve acidic and low acidic foods, pickle and ferment, make foods, freeze and dehydrate.

Volunteers annually donate a minimum of 40 hours of service. They are active in eight counties throughout Colorado. The largest programs are in Larimer and Routt counties.



The Bottom Line

- Master Food Safety Advisors help consumers adopt and practice the most current, research-based techniques in food preservation and food safety.
- Master Food Safety Advisors help prevent food-borne illness.

By the Numbers

- Number of counties with MFSA volunteers: 8
- Number of MFSA volunteers in Colorado: 54
- Number of volunteers hours contributed in 2010: 2,060
- Estimated value of MFSA volunteer service: \$42,950

Results

The MFSA program ensures that consumer confidence regarding safe food preservation practices remains high. Under the supervision of county Extension Family and Consumer Science (FCS) agents, volunteer advisors are the first line of response to consumer questions about canning, freezing, and storing foods. When they share their knowledge with the community, citizens gain access to the most current research-based practices in food preservation and food safety. The flow of information doesn't stop there. A previous study on consumer confidence related to Washington State University's Master Food Preserver program showed that 80 percent of individuals who received information shared what they learned with at least one or two other people.¹

Volunteer advisors help county Extension agents keep food preservation education relevant to community needs and interests. By tying food preservation classes and workshops to seasonally available and locally grown foods, volunteers help community members support local agriculture while increasing their self-sufficiency. For instance, in Larimer County, experienced volunteers help teach food preservation classes from spring through fall on canning basics, making and preserving salsa, jellies and jams, drying foods, fermenting vegetables, and preparing foods at high altitude.

Master Food Safety Advisors play an invaluable public health role by helping reduce the threat of foodborne illness. For instance, many people want to know how to recognize the presence of botulism, what causes its growth, and how to prevent it from occurring. By helping consumers understand how improper food storage and preservation can lead to food-related illnesses, volunteers bridge an important knowledge gap and reinforce CSU Extension's role in connecting individuals and communities to unbiased, reliable and research-based information.

¹ www.joe.org/joe/1987summer/iw2.php - High Consumer Confidence, Hillers and Fox.

County & Area Partners

Boulder County

Chaffee County

Eagle County

Larimer County

Pueblo County

Routt County

Tri River Area

Contact Information

Mary Schroeder

CSU Extension

Dept. of Food Science & Human Nutrition

(970) 491-7335

mary.schroeder@colostate.edu