

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

County partnership increases participation in food safety education

A county partnership and targeted marketing has expanded Larimer County Extension's efforts to train more food handlers and prevent foodborne illness.

Issue

Access to safe and nutritious food is the foundation of community health. To prevent foodborne illness, food service employees need to know how to safely prepare, store and serve food. In Colorado, county health departments enforce food safety regulations at restaurants, delis, bakeries and other food-related businesses. For years Larimer County complemented this effort by offering food handler trainings through a program called *Step Up to Food Safety*. When budget cuts eliminated the program, the county collaborated with CSU Extension to provide food safety trainings to retail food establishments.

Extension's Response

Because of CSU Extension's expertise in food safety and adult education, the county health department asked Extension to fill the education gap by teaching *Food Safety Works* in 2005. Extension nutrition and food safety specialists developed *Food Safety Works* through a grant to prepare entry-level or first time employees for jobs in the food service industry. The curriculum was developed in collaboration with the county health department. From 2001 to 2002, Extension piloted the curriculum with Colorado Work Force centers, youth correctional facilities, and high school vocational programs. The program's success allowed Extension to adapt it to training food handlers in a variety of settings: public schools, retail establishments, hospitals, and volunteer organizations such as churches and fair concessionaires.

Food Safety Works teaches food handlers how to prevent foodborne illness in the work place by properly washing hands, cleaning and sanitizing equipment, safely handling and storing food, and avoiding cross-contamination. The two-and-a-half hour class costs \$30 per person. It is offered throughout the year in four different communities and is available in English and Spanish. To help grow awareness of and participation in *Food Safety Works*, the county helps promote the training during health inspections. Since 2007, Larimer County Extension has generated nearly \$19,000 in *Food Safety Works* course fees.



The Bottom Line

- By teaching *Food Safety Works* trainings to food handlers at the county level, CSU Extension provides much-needed public health education that many county health departments can no longer offer because of staffing shortages and reduced budgets.

By the Numbers

Larimer County Food Safety Works in 2009:

- Total number of food handlers trained: 533
- Total number of FSW trainings: 33
- Percentage reporting gain in knowledge: 92%
- Total revenues generated in course fees: \$9,972

Impact

Larimer County Extension has the most robust *Food Safety Works* program in Colorado thanks to its close working relationship with the county health department. Since starting to offer *Food Safety Works* in 2005, enrollment has increased by 139 percent with the biggest gain occurring between 2008 and 2009 when Extension began mailing a quarterly food safety newsletter to 1,100 county restaurants and food-related businesses. The newsletter contains information on current issues, emerging pathogens, regulation updates, and the *Food Safety Works* training schedule, which is marketed primarily by health department inspectors who encourage restaurant participation.

Across the board, *Food Safety Works* participants gain confidence and improved knowledge about food safety topics. In feedback surveys, participants strongly indicate they plan to make changes in their food handling practices, an outcome that can help prevent foodborne illness, improve public health, and provide consumers with a safe and wholesome eating experience outside the home.

Colorado State University Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado counties cooperating. Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. October 2010.

“It’s a valuable resource to be able to get folks who are in the industry to direct them to a source where they can get basic food safety education and a reasonable cost. You can’t get a better deal than you do through Extension.”

– Jim Devore

Larimer County Environmental Health Specialist

County Partners

CSU Extension family and consumer science agents offer *Food Safety Works* in over 20 counties statewide:

Bent
Boulder
Delta
Douglas
Eagle
El Paso
Fremont
Gunnison
Hinsdale
Larimer
Las Animas
Moffat
Montrose
Otero
Ouray
Pueblo
Routt
San Luis Valley Area
San Miguel
Summit
Weld

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