HEALTH & NUTRITION—UI Extension helps stretch food dollars in 34 Idaho counties

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THE NUMBER OF IDAHOANS RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS each month nearly doubled in the past three years from 87,232 in 2007 to 176,600 in 2010. That’s why two University of Idaho Extension-run federal programs have also greatly increased their efforts to help Idahoans make their food stamps stretch as far as possible and to provide families with the healthiest foods.

“Rice and beans remain among good options, and when we see families that stock up on bottled water or on sodas, we encourage them to consider spending that money on fresh fruits and vegetables instead,” says Linda Gossett, Ada County UI Extension educator who heads up EFNEP—the USDA’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, in Idaho for 42 years.

Gossett hires and trains five nutrition advisors to work with low-income families with children throughout Ada, Canyon, and Elmore counties.

The advisors, some of them bilingual, bring cooking demonstrations, recipes, and food-buying tips to low-income patrons of some 30 Idaho agencies including food banks, WIC programs, health and medical groups, pregnant and parenting support agencies.

Similar to EFNEP, the Extension Nutrition Program (ENP), in its 16th year in Idaho, helps limited-resource adults maximize health benefits of their food dollars in 31 Idaho counties thanks to 28 UI-trained nutrition advisors. “Because of the current economy, people are having a harder time than usual making their food dollars stretch,” said Martha Raidl, UI Extension nutrition education specialist in Boise. “These individuals are much more likely to get diabetes or heart disease because of a poor diet,” says Raidl, who directs Idaho’s ENP.

Raidl believes ENP “serves a very useful role to help economically hard hit people choose food wisely and make sure they don’t run out of food dollars.” A month after attending a MyPyramid nutrition class, Raidl said “participants had increased their intake of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products by 30 to 50 percent according to followup surveys.” Combined, the two programs reached some 197,000 low-income Idaho residents in fiscal 2010. The USDA spent $2.4 million on the two Idaho programs in fiscal year 2010.

Seafood program supports dietary guidelines

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FOR THE FIRST TIME, Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 specifies how much fish we each should eat for maximum health and heart-health benefits—8 ounces a week. But most Americans eat less than half that, according to the guide issued jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (see www.dietaryguidelines.gov).

“We are thrilled, because we already have in place a curriculum Seafood at Its Best, that supports federal findings,” says Gary Fornshell, University of Idaho Extension educator who co-authored the curriculum with Rhea Lanting, both in Twin Falls.

But why would such a curriculum originate in Idaho? “At a conference, trout producers complained about the lack of public understanding of seafood’s dietary value. They wanted a way to demystify questions around seafood concerns or benefits,” said Fornshell.

The curriculum, currently purchased by 85 extension educators throughout the U.S., addresses: What is seafood?; health benefits of eating it; seafood-borne illnesses and risks; and seafood tips (selecting, buying, handling, storing, and cooking). Some 100 people attended classes on the topic in Twin Falls and Boise. Follow-up surveys showed 88% of respondents were “more confident and informed” about buying and cooking seafood as a result of materials learned. The curriculum, $35 plus shipping, is available from calspubs@uidaho.edu.

Media-rich website helps pros, parents feed young children

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IS YOUR CHILD A PICKY EATER? Does he face allergy problems? Are you at a loss for mealtime topics with your young child? How do you help your child learn eating habits to help avoid obesity?

Answers are as near as this website: www.cals.uidaho.edu/feeding.

University of Idaho Family and Consumer Sciences professors Janice Fletcher in child development and Laurel J. Branen in foods and nutrition, teamed up to create training in best practices for childcare providers feeding children up to age 5. Their online resources include frequently asked questions, handouts on multiple topics, and 75 video clips that either demonstrate best practices or the tap wisdom of experts.

While their audience is primarily people who manage childcare centers, their insights can also help parents feeding their young children at home. Branen and Fletcher funded their research and educational products from $2.6 million in USDA grants.

DID YOU KNOW?

30 MILLION
NUMBER OF FOOD-SIZE TROUT—12” OR LONGER—THAT IDAHO FISH PRODUCERS SOLD IN 2009. THAT’S 73% OF THE 41 MILLION TROUT SOLD THROUGHOUT THE U.S. RECEIPTS TO IDAHO TROUT PRODUCERS: $36 MILLION.

Source: 2010 Idaho Agricultural Statistics ... including Idaho State Department of Agriculture’s Annual Report