

WSU Extension Food Preservation Programming Policies

The Extension Administrative Team reviewed organizational priorities and policies related to consumer food preservation programming. This review was the result of recent increases in consumer demand for food preservation information and related questions from county offices regarding support for programs in this area, including creation and maintenance of the Master Food Preserver Program. Our deliberations were influenced by two key developments: First, the recommendations of the Academic Priorities process (A2P2) in 2008 which included de-emphasizing food preservation extension programs in favor of redirecting resources to higher priority health promotion programs; and secondly, ongoing concern from the university Attorney General's Office regarding the liabilities associated with consumer food preservation programs, particularly in the absence of local food safety faculty expertise.

As a result, we agreed upon the following policies, effective March, 2010:

- Master Food Preserver (MFP) volunteer programs will continue only in counties where a local faculty member with appropriate training/expertise in consumer food safety is available to train and supervise volunteer activities on an ongoing basis. Counties without these faculty resources will not continue to offer or create new MFP programs. Currently, active programs in Clark, Whatcom and Benton/Franklin counties would be supported under this change in policy. Because the policy requires ongoing supervision of volunteers at the local level, having a qualified faculty member from another county come in to train volunteers would not meet the new requirements.
- Fee-based consumer food preservation classes are an option for meeting local demand, presuming that a qualified person with food safety expertise is available to offer the training. Volunteers who have had recent (2 years or less) updates in their own food preservation training could be utilized as trainers for fee-based classes in counties that are no longer eligible to continue a volunteer program. Snohomish County Extension began offering fee-based classes last year and provides a model for this approach.
- Consumers often phone county offices with food preservation questions. Plans are underway to create a new resource kit that will help direct consumers to publications and web-based information that can be accessed for guidance. These resources include a DVD demonstration series from the University of Georgia that could be purchased directly by consumers or be part of a local lending library at a county office. We are also exploring the feasibility of creating seasonal web-based food preservation resources that could be posted on county websites during the season. We are asking that counties without local food safety expertise refrain from referring food preservation questions to faculty located in other counties that do have this expertise in respect for the inequitable demands on their time that result.
- County offices that still offer testing for pressure canner gauges can continue to do so only if they follow the guidelines in the Extension Policies and Procedures. For review of this policy (established in 2004 in cooperation with the AG's Office), go to <http://ext.wsu.edu/admin/>, click on Programs: Specific on the left side menu, then scroll to the Testing Pressure Canner Gauges section. The policy requires use of the Assumption of Risk form which is included in that section.