

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Virtual cooking club brings youth and families together in their home kitchens

AT A GLANCE

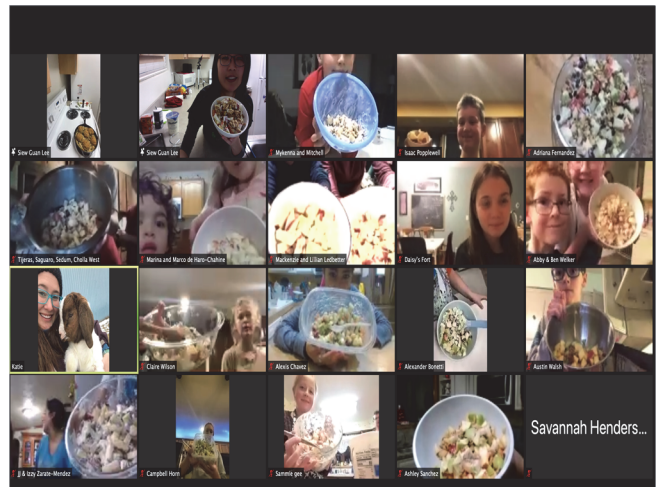
The live cook-along Zoom sessions taught youth and families nutrition, food safety and cooking skills from the comfort of home.

The Situation

Research shows that home-cooked meals are more likely to contain fruits, vegetables and whole grains without increasing food expenditures than eating out. Getting children involved in home meal preparation is associated with better diet quality, higher self-efficacy in food preparation and more willingness to try new foods. Yet, parents/caregivers often avoid involving children in meal preparation due to the perception of increased time and the mess involved. In addition, many in-person classes were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic due to class sizes, spaces and health concerns.

Our Response

In light of the increased interest in home cooking during quarantine, Extension professionals developed and conducted *Virtual Cooking Club: Kids in the Kitchen* in 2020 to continue meeting community needs and providing impactful programming in these challenging times. This family-based cooking program provided opportunities for children and their parents/caregivers to prepare recipes in the comfort of their home under the guidance of the family and consumer sciences (FCS) Extension educators/agents through Zoom.



Zoom view of *Virtual Cooking Club: Kids in the Kitchen* session. Photo credit: Katie Scheer.

Program Outcomes

From April 2020 through January 2021, 13 virtual cooking sessions were offered throughout Idaho and Georgia, leading nearly 500 youth and adults from 16 counties and five states to receive this hands-on educational program. Average attendance was 40 participants, almost tripling regular in-person classes, with more than half of participants attending two or more sessions. Youth participants ranged from ages four to 18, with an average age of a fifth grader.

Surveys were given after each class to assess skills, knowledge and self-efficacy in the kitchen. Survey questions were adapted from the *iCook 4-H* curriculum.

Participant responses were analyzed ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) when answering the survey question, “How much do you agree with the following statement?” Mean scores ranged from 4.33 to 4.92 signifying most responded “agree” or “strongly agree” with the survey statements.

Survey Statements	Mean Score
I wash my hands before preparing meals and after handling raw meat or eggs.	4.92
I understand the difference between measuring wet and dry ingredients.	4.53
I feel more comfortable using a knife safely after this class.	4.33
I know how to follow a recipe to make something to eat.	4.72
I believe that food doesn't have to be fried to taste good.	4.48
I understand why these recipes are healthier versions of favorite foods.	4.62
I am sure that I can make the recipes that we made today on my own or with my family.	4.59
I plan to prepare healthy foods or snacks with my family.	4.58

When asked, “What has the cooking club meant to you and your family?” the responses included:

- “Being able to cook with the family is wonderful!
- “It has been fun for the kids, and beneficial to me in that they all work together.”

- “Family time cooking in the kitchen has been so unifying. Our 6-year-old who participated is a picky eater, but because she was involved in the cooking, she took pride in the food she prepared and ate the food that we prepared together in the class.”
- “It has been a great family activity.”
- “Time to be together and learn a new skill.”
- “I loved the idea of how healthy the meal was and how you incorporated that idea in with teaching the kiddos the importance of that.”

The Future

The program has received four awards from the 2021 Idaho Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences and Georgia Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. The collaborators have also been selected to present at the 2021 National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Conference in November. With the program's success, the Extension professionals plan to continue offering the program even after the pandemic subsides. Online delivery means youth in other states could join existing sessions. The program provides a sustainable and low-cost program delivery model that can be used by many Extension professionals and has strong potential to grow beyond Idaho and Georgia.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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16-21-slee-virtual-cooking • 5/21