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Establishing a national center for home food preservation

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Home food preservation remains an important and popular cultural activity. The Cooperative Extension System (CES) and USDA have long been recognized as credible sources for science-based recommendations. The last developmental work on these recommendations was completed a decade ago. Establishment of a National Center for Home Food Preservation was proposed to meet the needs of Extension agents for offering credible research-based information.

The objectives of the Center were to update home canning and freezing guidelines; to identify future research needs; and to conduct a needs assessment for home food preservation programming in Extension.

Two email surveys were sent to state CES contacts to (1) identify recent or current research of relevance to home canning and freezing recommendations, and (2) have a survey to county Extension agents forwarded. County agents were asked to categorize the types of informational requests received in this program and to identify topics on which they need additional information and assistance. Laboratory studies were conducted to develop home canned products using tropical produce and falling into the categories of specialty or condiment foods. A peer review of proposed USDA recommendations for home freezing was conducted and incorporated into a new publication for distribution to the CES and public.

Extension responses indicate that 45 percent of home food preservation requests are for canning, 21 percent for freezing and 12-13 percent for pickles and jams/ jellies. The most requested processes are for condiments. Issues regarding processing equipment and evaluating recipes were cited by more than 50 percent of respondents. Product development resulted in acceptable condiments adequately acidified (pH less than 3.8) to reduce food safety risks for home preparation. Peer networking resulted in identifying needs for additional collaborations across the CES around home food preservation. The Center received continued funding and will now include additional mechanisms (electronic and curricula) for information dissemination and expansion of laboratory studies for product development and equipment studies.