OSU Extension delivers answers during, after botulism crisis

It was a church potluck like any other. But within days, botulism from improperly home-canned potatoes killed one woman and hospitalized 24 others.

Shannon Carter, Fairfield County family and consumer sciences educator, and other Ohio State University Extension professionals jumped into action in April 2015, providing urgently needed information to the community, media and health department officials.

Food safety is a prime focus of Extension, with specialist Sanja Ilic working with produce growers and restaurants to reduce risks in food handling and on projects helping high-risk consumers, including the blind and cancer survivors.

In Fairfield County, Carter increased fivefold the number of food preservation classes she offered in 2015.

“Anyone who cans (food) should take the class,” said Deb Kilbarger, Fairfield Department of Health registered sanitarian and food program supervisor. “Even if you’ve done it forever, there might be a safer way. Extension is the only place I’m aware of that offers classes like this. Hopefully, these classes will prevent anything like this from happening again.”

More: go.osu.edu/homefoodpresv

“As soon as it happened, people were relying on the Extension office to get education out about canning and botulism. Even people who have canned for a long time can still learn something new. That’s why these classes are so important.”

— Aubry Shaw, daughter-in-law of Kim Shaw, who died from the botulism outbreak

ESSENTIALS

In 2014, OSU Extension offered 181 food safety classes to 2,458 participants in 50 counties. Of those who took home food preservation classes:

• 78 percent reported they would always use current, official canning recommendations, which is up from 16 percent who, before attending the class, said they would always do so.

• 67 percent reported they would always acidify tomatoes before water-bath canning them — a vital food safety precaution — which is up from 16 percent before the class.

• 66 percent reported they would always use a pressure canner to process low-acid foods, which is up from 22 percent before the class.
WE CONNECT WITH PEOPLE IN ALL STAGES OF LIFE.

We work with families and children, farmers and business owners, and community leaders and elected officials to build better lives, better businesses and better communities that make Ohio great. We do this through a focus on the following impact areas.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

We teach people how to apply research in their daily lives in order for them to make informed choices about everything from finances to healthy living to food safety.

PREPARING YOUTH FOR SUCCESS

Our 4-H youth development program delivers skills in leadership, communications, math, science and research to 216,000 young Ohioans. Ohio 4-H extends its reach through special in-school, after-school and summer programs.

ENHANCING AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Ohio’s diverse agricultural, horticultural and forestry industries contribute $105 billion to the state’s economy every year. We assist with technology, marketing and educational support, protecting Ohio’s position in the global marketplace. We also work to enhance the environment, water quality and natural resources in the state — balancing economic progress with environmental sustainability.

ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

Our economic, small business and job development programs are tailored to local community needs in every county, whether metropolitan, rural or a combination of both.

OSU Extension’s mission

Engaging people to strengthen their lives and communities through research-based educational programming

Locally based, jointly funded

We are the university’s community-based research and outreach arm, delivering knowledge from The Ohio State University to every county in Ohio.

We are jointly funded through a line item in the State of Ohio’s budget, through county funds and through the federal government. We do not receive funding from student tuition.