

impact

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

School pantry “Mystery Box Cook-Off” increased students’ food insecurity awareness

AT A GLANCE

The “Mystery Box Cook-Off” improved high school students’ food insecurity awareness and increased confidence in planning and preparing meals at home.

The Situation

An estimated 41.2 million Americans lived in food-insecure households in 2016, and 13 million were children. Food insecurity refers to an inability to acquire adequate and nutritious food to sustain a healthy and active life due to a lack of money or other resources. In Idaho, one in five children is struggling with hunger or food insecurity. Children who are food insecure experienced a reduction in the quantity, variety and frequency of food intake. Several studies suggest that food-insecure children have an increased risk of negative health, development and socialization outcomes. Hence, food insecurity among children is critical because it affects not only children’s current health status, but also their future well-being.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension Eat Smart Idaho is a federally funded program that provides nutrition education to low-income Idahoans. The program promotes behavior change by educating adults and youth about dietary food quality, food security and food safety. In addition, Eat Smart Idaho engages community partners to support policy, systems and environmental changes for target audiences to make healthy choices.



Students took different roles preparing foods during cook-off.

Eat Smart Idaho partnered with Canyon Ridge High School in Twin Falls, Idaho to adopt a healthy food pantry. In particular, the team helped reorganize the pantry based on MyPlate food groups and the first-in-first-out concept. Healthy eating signage including MyPlate messaging and healthy choice identifiers were posted in the pantry.

In April 2018, family and consumer sciences (FCS) Extension educators collaborated with Eat Smart Idaho and FCS teacher at Canyon Ridge High School to hold a school food pantry “Mystery Box Cook-Off.” The purpose of this event was to create awareness of food insecurity in Idaho among high school students and help students understand how to stretch food dollars and eat healthy. Prior to the cook-off, students toured

