

In Our Field: Eating right ... it's easier than you think

By MARY WELCH-BEZEMEK Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, April 17, 2014 12:20 am

How often do you go home after a long hard day and hear “What’s for Dinner?” The CalFresh (formerly Food Stamp) Nutrition Education Program at the University of California Cooperative Extension offers a wide variety of nutrition classes to adults and children in Imperial County to help answer this age-old dilemma.

We offer four-week classes (one hour each) for adults on topics such as: “My Plate,” “Plan, Shop, Save and Cook,” “Eating Smart, Being Active” and “Making Every Dollar Count.” This curricula is designed to provide everyday tips on how to live a healthy lifestyle. The four-week classes are taught in both Spanish and English and are held at various agencies throughout the county (i.e, schools, churches, community centers).

These classes are fun and the trainers are energetic with an enthusiasm for teaching, sharing and learning. Many times we learn as much from the participants in the classroom as they learn from us. The sharing of ideas/menus/recipes is always fun and helpful when it comes time to decide “What’s for Dinner.”

We also work with youths in our county and offer a train the trainer program where we train a teacher, for example, on school curricula ranging from pre-school to eighth grade. The student curricula consist of “Nutrition to Grow On” and “Farm to Fork,” which are gardening curricula. Learning to “Read Across my Pyramid” (or my plate) and “Eat Fit” for junior high students teaches them to set both personal and family goals. A personal goal may be to drink only one soda a week or to increase fruits and vegetables to five servings a day. A family goal may be to help with the food preparation and healthy food purchasing or to clean your room once a week. This teaches our youth and teens to set goals and make a plan to follow and live an active, healthy lifestyle.

Safe food handling and food preparation classes are offered as well. While we’re on the topic of nutrition and food preparation, I recently attended a SERVSAFE MANAGER course (ServSafe, National Restaurant Association) to update myself on proper food handling. I would like to share a few tips that may seem obvious but we may slip up on from time to time:

Always wash your hands before and after touching each food that is being prepared. Remember to use soap and water and rub your hands together causing friction, which helps in removing much of the bacteria. Rinse raw fruits and vegetables using a soft scrub brush, if appropriate, to remove

excess dirt. Use plastic cutting boards, as bacteria can hide in the grooves of wooden ones. Whichever type of cutting board is being used, remember to wash after each use with a solution of one teaspoon chlorine bleach per quart of hot water. To prevent cross contamination, always wash boards after cutting raw meat, poultry, or seafood and before cutting other types of food such as fruits and vegetables.

The hot summer months are just around the corner, so remember to keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Check with your friends, neighbors and churches and give us a call to schedule a nutrition and healthy eating class with you. Let's learn together "What's for Dinner." You can reach us at the Cooperative Extension office at 760-352-9474.

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