

# EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

## 2012 NC Cooperative Extension Onslow County

### Participants Learn How to Safely Defrost Foods

Foodborne illnesses are almost 100 percent preventable, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 76 million foodborne illnesses occur in the US each year, including 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths.<sup>1</sup> Proper food safety practices in preparing and storing food can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses. Because of the dangers associated with foodborne illnesses, the NC Cooperative Extension, in partnership with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), has taken the initiative to teach proper food safety skills to families in Onslow County.

Participants learned about the harmful effects of food borne illness, the rapid growth of dangerous bacteria that can occur from thawing foods out at room temperature, proper hand washing, safe cooking methods, and acceptable defrosting procedures. Before taking the class, the majority of the participants indicated they were defrosting foods by leaving it out on the counter for several hours. Even though this was a common practice years ago, research has shown that other methods are safer. All participants said they were going to now defrost the foods using the recommended methods, and they were going to family and friends to stop leaving food out to defrost. EFNEP not only is teaching about the importance of food safety, but is also helping to reduce food borne illnesses in Onslow County, which will in turn improve people's health and help reduce health care costs.

*EFNEP helps address the challenges limited resource families face when introducing healthy changes through nutrition education, cooking classes, exercise strategies, and shopping on a limited budget.*

### EFNEP Uses Real Life Examples

Changing behavior can be very challenging for anyone because diet and lifestyle is greatly influenced by a person's culture, physical environment, and social networks; these challenges are often compounded for limited resource families because of constrained budgets. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) helps address the challenges limited resource families face when introducing healthy changes through nutrition education, cooking classes, exercise strategies, and shopping on a limited budget. This program improves the lives of each one of these families through the positive changes they have made to reducing their risk of obesity related illnesses and supporting healthy lifestyles.

One reason why EFNEP participants are successful at changing lifestyle habits is because EFNEP uses real life situations to reinforce the skills learned in class. This is because people are more likely to adopt a new practice when they are able to translate class lessons to their own environment. Through collaborative efforts with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, EFNEP participants have the opportunity to tour a grocery store as a part of a series of classes where participants learned how to feed their families healthier foods on a limited budget.

Participants used the tour to practice using the skills they learned in class, such as comparing nutrition labels and practicing unit pricing on many different healthy foods. All the participants practiced finding foods low in fat, sodium, and high in nutrition. Participants were challenged to shop for nutritious foods from each food group to take home and prepare for their families. Each participant purchased a whole grain product, vegetable, fruit, low fat dairy item and a lean protein using skills gained in EFNEP for under \$10. As a result of the tour, participants said they had become more confident in their ability to shop for healthier foods, and the experience connected the lessons learned in class to their real life shopping needs. Each participant expressed greater confidence in their ability to feed their families healthy foods on limited incomes.



1. Mead PS, Slutsker L, Dietz V, McCaig LF, Bresee JS, Shapiro C, Griffin PM, Tauxe RV. Food-related illness and death in the United States. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 1999, 5:607-625.

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