

SUCCESS STORIES

UAF Cooperative Extension Service

Getting creative during the pandemic: Extension reaches new audiences online

Issue

The Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center closed its doors to the public in March due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Extension specializes in hands-on public outreach, so this created a significant barrier.

Response

In an effort to continue its outreach without face-to-face classes, many of our instructors turned to online learning platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live. Classes were offered at no or low cost because Extension recognized that the pandemic caused financial hardship for many.

Mat-Su Health, Home and Family Development agent Julie Cascio has done an exceptional job adapting to the transition. She taught a variety of online food preservation, diabetes prevention and birch tapping workshops. While distance delivery work wells for many classes, Julie says that teaching canning presents challenges because the time it takes to show the full process is not conducive to online teaching. Since March, she has taught 22 online classes and has reached 582 people. While switching to online teaching was a challenge, Julie, along with our other instructors, have embraced the challenge.

Videos of the recorded classes were also sent out to those who registered, so that people who had scheduling conflicts or internet connection issues could watch the videos later. In addition to teaching online classes, Julie has also been working on testing dial gauges used for canning and helping the StrongWomen and StrongSeniors groups continue their strength-training programs.



Julie Cascio prepares vegetables as part of a healthy foods demonstration at the Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center. Photo by Edwin Remsberg

Results

Since the pandemic, interest has grown in food preservation and food safety topics and with gardening. UAF Extension has extended its reach through online classes and social media, connecting with people all over Alaska. While not ideal for all topics, teaching online during the pandemic has allowed Extension to continue providing valuable information about food safety, food preservation, health lifestyle choices, youth development and gardening.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Julie Cascio

Health Home and
Family Development Agent
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Cooperative Extension Service
Mat-Su/Copper River District in Palmer
jmcascio@alaska.edu
907-745-3677



Agriculture,
Natural Resources
and Extension