Celebrate National Food Safety Education Month

Central Florida celebrates as September is National Food Safety Education Month (NFSEM), an annual observance to focus attention on the importance of safe food handling and preparation in both home and commercial kitchens. Created by the foodservice industry in 1995, NFSEM is widely supported by federal, state, and local government agencies; the food industry; and consumer organizations. This year’s theme for NFSEM is:

Four Steps To Food Safety. Educators will be working to increase public awareness of the invisible cause of foodborne illness microorganisms that may make food unsafe when the four basic messages, Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill, are not followed. Listed below are Four Steps To Food Safety that we can take to help prevent foodborne illness in the home:

- **Clean!** Everything that touches food should be clean. Cleanliness is a major factor in preventing foodborne illness. Even with food safety inspection and monitoring at Federal, State, and local government facilities, the consumers have the role of ensuring that food is handled safely after it is purchased. Always wash your hands and surfaces often. Bacteria can easily spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, sponges and countertops.

- **Separate!** Fight cross-contamination! Cross-contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food from other foods, cutting boards, and utensils. An example of cross-contamination is cutting raw meat, poultry, or fish on a cutting board and then slicing salad vegetables on the same cutting board without washing the cutting board between uses. If possible use a different cutting board for raw meat products and never place cooked food on a plate which previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

- **Cook!** Use a food thermometer in cooking. Using a food thermometer is the only way to tell if food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy harmful microorganisms. Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of foods, such as meat, hamburgers, poultry, egg casseroles, and any combination dishes to ensure that a safe temperature is reached and that harmful bacteria like *Salmonella* and *Escherichia coli O157:H7* are destroyed. For more information on proper temperatures for specific foods contact your local Extension Office.

- **Chill!** Make sure the temperature in the refrigerator is 40°F or below and 0°F or below in the freezer. Use a refrigerator/freezer thermometer to check the temperature. Harmful bacteria grow most rapidly in the Danger Zone the unsafe temperatures between 40 and 140°F so it's important to keep food out of this temperature range. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within 2 hours of purchase or preparation or within 1 hour if the temperature is above 90°F. Never defrost food at room temperature, the best way is to thaw food in the refrigerator. For quick thawing, submerge in cold water in airtight packaging, or thaw in the microwave, and cook the food immediately.

To learn more about safe food handling and local classes, call the Osceola County Extension Office and ask to speak with Christy Walter, Family & Consumer Sciences/4-H Agent, (321) 607-3000

Food Service managers and employees can call us about our upcoming Food Manager Certification Class and Employee Food Safety Training. In addition to food safety classes, this month we will be offering a Basic Landscape Design Class Part I, on September 16th, Part II on September 23rd and Part III on September 30th at the St. Cloud Library. Please call for further information and to register.
programs are open to all persons regardless of race, color, age, sex, handicap or national origin.

See also the UF/IFAS Publication Be Smart, Not Sorry - Keep Food Safety in Mind

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