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Giving a 4-H Foods Demonstration

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Preparing for and delivering a demonstration is one of the many rewarding opportunities available for boys and girls in 4-H. Not only does the member gain excellent public speaking skills, he or she also has a wonderful opportunity to share the subject-matter knowledge gained through 4-H project work to teach other youth, parents, and community members.

The skills needed to give an effective demonstration are similar regardless of the subject matter being taught. The topic needs to be properly researched and the presentation should be developed in a logical sequence with an introduction, body, and summary. Good visual aids should be used to help the audience understand what is being explained. However, a foods demonstration is somewhat specialized and does require some extra consideration. The following suggestions will help staff and volunteers assist youth in preparing and delivering a successful foods demonstration.

Food Storage: All ingredients must be properly stored in preparation for the demonstration. This may require the member to pack ingredients in a cooler while traveling to the demonstration site.

Equipment: Verify exactly what equipment will be provided for the demonstration. Often the equipment available in a county 4-H contest will differ from that at state competition. Some good questions to ask are:

- Is there a stove and oven available? Is it gas or electric?
- Will there be refrigerator space in which to store ingredients or will the member need to pack ingredients in a cooler?
- Is there a microwave available?
- Is there a preparation area available, or will preparation work have to be done at home?
- Is there a kitchen area in which to wash dishes following the demonstration? What cleaning supplies will be provided?
- How many tables will be provided for the demonstration? Does the table have a demonstration mirror?
- Will an extension cord and easel be provided?

Supplies: The member will need to provide all of the food ingredients, pans, cooking utensils, and clean up supplies needed for his or her demonstration. Preparing a check list of all the supplies needed is a great idea and will help avoid a last-minute crisis. In preparing a check list, consider the following items:

- Refrigerated and non-refrigerated food ingredients, including spices, cooking spray, or other pantry items
- Bowls for ingredients
- Mixing bowls
- Pots, pans or baking sheets
- Measuring glasses, cups, and spoons
- Knives
- Cutting board
- Mixing and cooking utensils
- Paper towels, aluminum foil, plastic wrap, wax paper, and plastic storage bags
- Container or tray to display the final product
- Tablecloth
- Apron
- Paper goods, utensils, and napkins for serving final product
- Hair covering
- Washing and drying cloths
- Dishwashing soap
- Posters or other visual aids
- Cooler for ingredients that need to stay cold
- Trays
- Recipe handouts
- Already prepared finished product and/or product at interim stages
- Mirror
- Any equipment needed that is not being provided such as a blender, toaster oven, etc.

Preparation: In many cases a preparation area will be provided where contestants can wash, chop, and pre-measure ingredients as needed. However, if this space is not available, members will need to do these preparations at home.

Clean Demonstration Area: The contestant will want to keep his or her work area neat throughout the foods demonstration. Setting up trays with the supplies and ingredients needed for each step is very helpful. The trays should be organized in the order they will be used and placed on a table behind the presenter, if available. The member would bring the appropriate tray forward as needed. When finished with a step, he or she would place the used utensils and ingredients that are no longer needed back on the tray and put the tray on the back table. This way, the front demonstration table stays neat and well organized. The audience needs to see each step, so the area in front of the presenter needs to stay clear. A damp cloth should be kept handy to keep the work area and hands clean.

Ingredients: Use a practical size for ingredients. A one-pound bag of flour will be easier to manage than a five-pound bag. Dry ingredients, like flour and sugar, can be placed in plastic storage containers with lids rather than being left in the original bag. This makes it much neater and easier when measuring. Whenever possible, avoid referring to an ingredient by its brand name. For example, refer to “cooking spray” rather than “Pam[™].”

Containers: Whenever possible, use clear containers and mixing bowls. This allows the audience to see what is happening. It also gives a neater appearance. A group of mismatched containers is distracting. Conserve space by using the smallest container that is practical to hold each ingredient.

Mixing Utensils: Avoid using a metal utensil to mix ingredients. The “cling, cling” on the side of the bowl is distracting. Use plastic or wooden mixing spoons.

Preparation and Cooking Skills: In a 4-H contest, members will want to demonstrate their ability to break eggs, measure, peel, cut, etc. However, they will need to balance the demonstration of these skills with the time allotted for the demonstration. For example, if the recipe calls for a number of dry ingredients, the member might measure out one of them, but have the others pre-measured, or demonstrate how to cut one tomato, while having the other vegetable ingredients pre-chopped.

Words and Actions: In a good demonstration, talking should be naturally combined with the action. Some steps take longer than others, requiring more talking time during those steps. For example, in making banana bread, there would be considerable time in mashing the bananas. This would be a great time for the 4-H youth to talk about the nutrition of bananas, explain where bananas grow, or how to select a ripe banana. Avoid “dead air” time, where nothing is being said.

Time Lapse: Some steps will take too long to demonstrate. For example, in a breads demonstration, there would not be enough time to completely knead the bread. The member can show the technique of how to mix the ingredients and then say, “Next, I knead the dough like this (demonstrate kneading). I would continue kneading the dough until it is smooth and elastic, which takes approximately ten minutes. To save time, I have already prepared and kneaded an example to show you.”

Final Product: In some demonstrations, there may not be enough time to completely make a final product, such as the breads example mentioned previously. In this case, the member could make a finished product ahead of time and have it nicely displayed with an attractive garnish in a basket, serving tray, or other appropriate container. When showing the final product, the work area should be as neat as possible, preferably with all other items removed to the back table. If the member is working on a table that does not have a demonstration mirror, he or she can bring a large hand mirror. By angling it at a 45° angle, the audience will be able to see the final product.

Clean Up: The demonstration area needs to be cleaned up quickly to allow the next contestant or presenter time to set up. Plastic wrap, aluminum foil, or plastic storage bags are helpful in preserving the remaining food ingredients and final product. Depending on where the member gives the demonstration, there may not be a kitchen area available to wash pans and equipment. In that case, the member will need to take the equipment home to clean. Ask about the clean up arrangements before the contest or demonstration.

Personal Appearance: Members should give careful consideration to their appearance when giving a foods demonstration—after all, they are preparing food. First of all, the member needs to wash his or her hands prior to the demonstration. Hair should be secured in a pony tail, hair net, or other appropriate covering. An apron should be worn. Necklaces, bracelets, or rings that might be distracting should be avoided. Clothing should be clean and neat. Long sleeves, ruffles, low-cut necklines, etc., can cause the member to fumble with his or her clothing and are distracting.

Themes: Youths can create a very appealing demonstration by coordinating either the color and/or the theme of their tablecloth, apron, posters, trays, etc. For example, a youth demonstrating how to make pumpkin pie might use an orange tablecloth or wear an apron with a pumpkin print.

Visual Aids: Posters and other visual aids can add significantly to a demonstration. Prepare neat posters with lettering large enough for the audience to read. It is common to utilize a title poster, a couple of posters that list the recipe and explain each step, and a summary poster.

Recipe Handouts: After the demonstration, the audience will want a copy of the recipe. Make sure to include the title, ingredients, instructions, and quantity yielded. If sharing the demonstration in a 4-H contest, check on the regulations regarding distributing hand outs to the audience.

Serving the Judges: The paper goods for serving the judges are usually provided in a 4-H contest. However, check with your county Extension agent prior to the contest.

By following these guidelines, boys and girls can prepare for and deliver an interesting and informative foods demonstration. Like all demonstrations, practice is important. This is especially true for a food demonstration which requires the member to cut, mix, and cook at the same time they are talking to their audience. Encourage members to give their foods demonstration to their family, friends, and club members. By doing so, they will feel much more confident when presenting in competition or for the community.

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