

2017 Reciprocal Meat Conference – Education and Extension Tools

Meat and Muscle Biology™



General Public Education of Food Myths and Urban Legends: Hormones, Antibiotics and GMOs

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Objectives

Approximately 1% of the American population produces food and fiber for the remaining U.S. population. Most Americans are currently 3 or more generations removed from the farm and no longer have firsthand knowledge of how food and fiber are produced. Additionally, food production has developed into several different breeding and growing methods, all of which compete for market share. This has led to confusion as to the nutrition, health and safety of many food products. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System initiated a Food Myths program in 2014. In 2014, it was geared toward education of how meat is produced in the U.S. for extension agents. In 2015, the program was expanded to explain GMO plants used in food production. The target audience changed as well to all consumers of food and fiber. The objective of these meetings is to educate consumers on how food is produced and help them decipher all of the choices they face when purchasing food.

Materials and Methods

Currently, the Food Myths program is 2 h in length and explains the various ways food and fiber are produced in the U.S. Participants are encouraged to ask questions throughout the program to make the best food and fiber choices for their families. All information presented is re-

search based and presented by extension educators with firsthand knowledge of breeding and growing methods used in plant- and animal-based U.S. agriculture.

Results

Through program surveys, 82% of participants indicate their knowledge has increased as a result of attending the Food Myth meetings. Interestingly, though, 70% or more of participants indicated that they would not change their consumption of various types of food after attending the meetings. A total of 47% of participants did indicate that they would read packaging and labels more closely as a result of these trainings.

Conclusion

Food production is a highly debated topic among consumers and science-based information is often not part of the conversation. Through these series of meetings, consumers from all sides of the food debate were able to learn the truth about how food is produced and what years of research have proven about different production methods. While the major of these consumers indicated that they learned at these meetings, relatively few indicated that they would change their behavior as a result, showing that these beliefs are deeply rooted and not easily changed.