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Community

Learning thrifty home cooking

By Carol Reeves
Gazette-Times reporter

Because she lives alone, Terry Faler says it's much easier to rely on convenience food than to fix dinner for herself from scratch.

But since taking a cooking class last spring to help low-income families eat healthier diets using locally-grown produce, she spends a lot more time in the kitchen. In fact, she enjoyed the class so much she's signed up again for the Cooking Club classes starting Oct. 1 at First United Methodist Church.

"I thought it was great," Faler said, recalling the homemade vegetable soup, spring greens salad and baked squash filled with apple stuffing the class fixed during one lesson.

"You get to eat what you cook and take home the leftovers. It's very hands-on," she said.

Faler was one of 21 people who enrolled in last April's classes. The big turnout convinced the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership to offer the class again this fall.

The Methodist church, Oregon State University Extension, the Hunger and Food Security Committee at St. Mary's Catholic Church and the South Corvallis Food Bank are also partners in the program.

What makes the Cooking Club unique, according to project coordinator Liv Gifford, is the way it encourages participants to connect with local farmers and locally grown produce.

"It also familiarizes people with the fruits and vegetables that are available locally and encourages them to incorporate them into their daily diet," Gifford said.



Andy Cripe | Gazette-Times
Corvallis resident Terry Faler used to rely heavily on convenience foods, but has learned ways to quickly and thriftily cook from scratch at a class.

This fall's classes will look a lot like the classes offered last April. Area farmers will personally deliver fresh produce each week and then students will be divided into small groups to learn how to prepare recipes using that week's produce.

Janice Gregg from the Linn County Extension office will teach the classes assisted by volunteers from local churches.

"If we can get folks to include just one or two more servings of fruits and veggies a day into their families' diets, it will make a difference in their health," Gregg said.

Because low-income populations suffer disproportionately from diet-related illnesses such as obesity and diabetes, Gifford hopes offering cooking classes that emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables will make a difference.

"Low-income people often feel they have fewer options in terms of their diet and when life is very full and complicated, as it often is for them, it's harder to make that effort to make a dietary change," Gifford said.

Putting a face on local farmers may help as well, she said.

"The perception is that high quality, fresh foods are more expensive but we hope to back that down a bit and help people think of creative ways of accessing fresh fruits and veggies. We want to help people realize farmers' markets are not just a yuppie destination," she said.

IF YOU GO

What: The Cooking Club, a four-week series of cooking lessons for low-income families

When: 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, beginning Oct. 1

Where: First United Methodist Community Center, 1165 N.W. Monroe Ave.

Class sessions: "More Veggies the Whole Family Will Like" (Oct. 1); "Preventing Illness with Good Food" (Oct. 8); "Using Foods From Pantries" (Oct. 15); "Nutritious Meals on a Tight Budget" (Oct. 22)

Cost: Free; but pre-registration is requested by Friday. Child care is provided.

Information: 207-2001