

Successful Transformation of Food Preservation Classes to an Online Format

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Abstract

The Michigan State University Extension Food Safety team successfully transitioned face-to-face food preservation programs to a live webinar format in 2020. Classes included demonstrations and activities during instruction. Due to the large interest, a series of Food Safety Q&A sessions are also offered weekly, complementing and expanding food preservation knowledge for consumers. Through this effort, we were able to reach a large diverse audience from across the country as well as the world. This online education effort was timely due to the increase in the number of consumers preserving food at home as evidenced by shortages of canning supplies such as canners, jars, lids, etc. Live panelist discussion revealed the depth of misinformation and unsafe practices happening with food preservation and the need for more researched-based education. This modified format increased our knowledge in presenting Zoom webinars, creating interactive presentations and video demonstrations that can be duplicated in other states.

Introduction

Michigan State University Extension food preservation classes have historically held traditional in-person programs using instructional teaching and hands-on activities or demonstrations. Upon the stay-at-home order, classes quickly transitioned to an online class format. Topics were selected based on general themes that included topics such as Blanching and Freezing; Canning High-Acid Foods and Low-Acid Foods; Dehydrating; and Pickling. To offer a wider variety of subject matter, topics evolved into Preserving Meat; Peaches - Can or Freeze; Preparing Soups and many more. Classes were held weekly April through December at two different times, accommodating a wider audience.

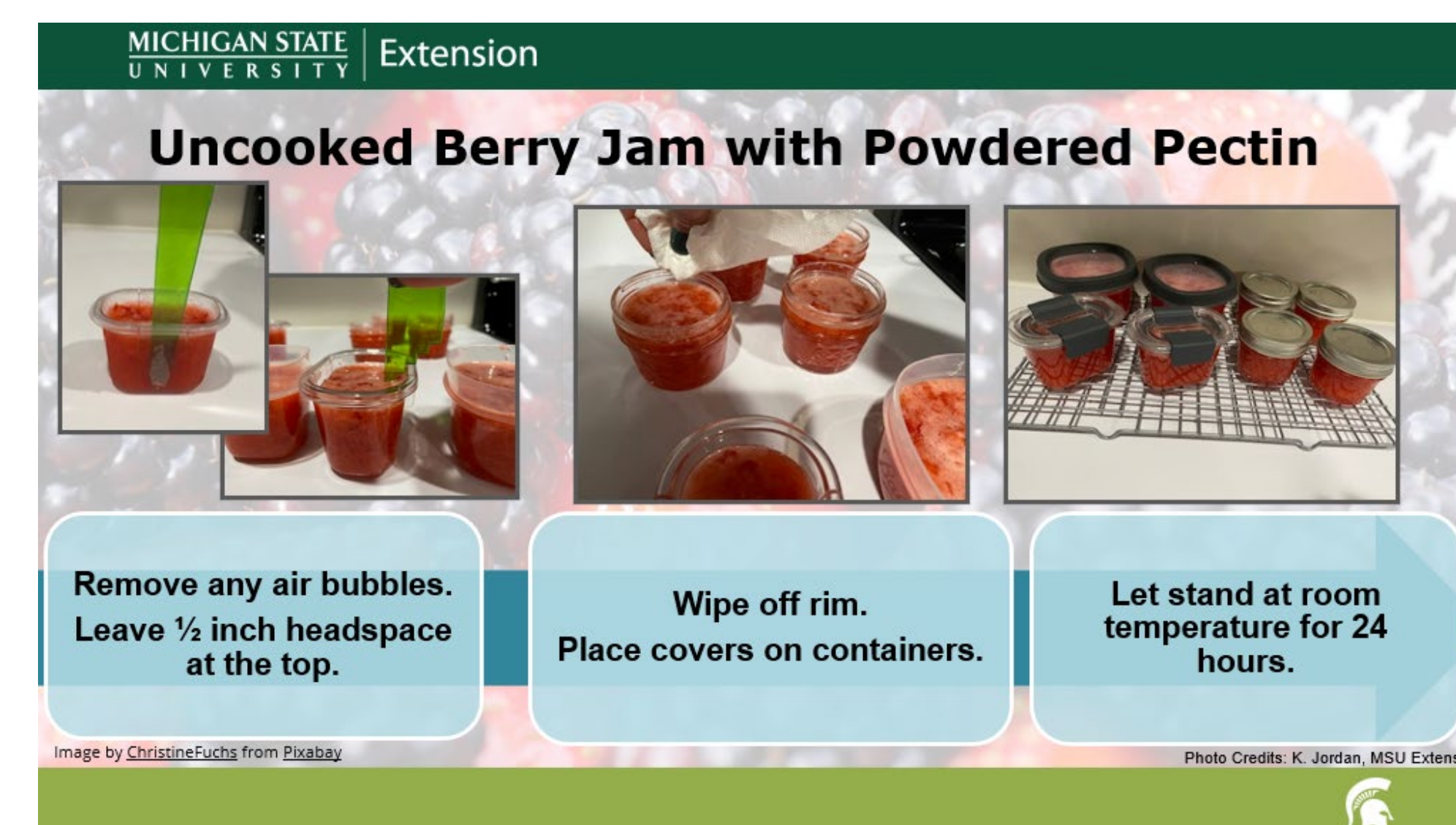
Program marketing strategies such as social media posts successfully increased local, national and international audiences. Using research-based recipes is important in food preservation, yet many people are getting their information from friends/family or the internet instead of using research-based resources, according to class webinar polls. Research from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) shows consumers have reported practicing open kettle canning, a potentially dangerous method. In fact, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 30% of botulism outbreaks are from home canned vegetables and the result of not following instructions from research-based recipes, or not using a pressure canner when indicated. Extension remains a trusted resource for food preservation. Our efforts to educate the community are critical to safely preserve foods at home and prevent foodborne illness.

Methodology

Teaching delivery medium: Online via Zoom Webinars

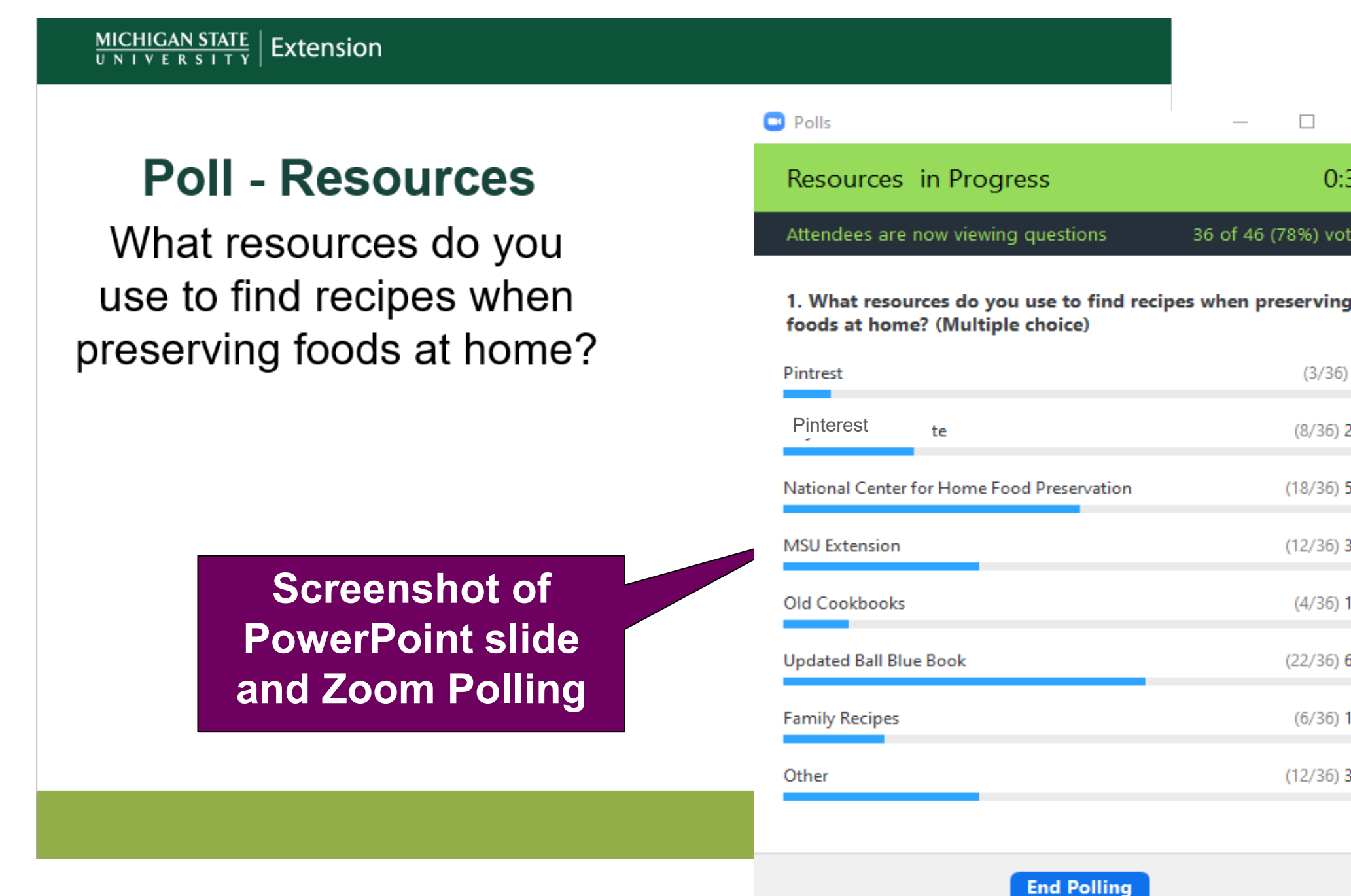
Development of classes

- Microsoft Teams was used to schedule, collaborate, organize and create material remotely.
- Class topics used were research-based methods and processes chosen based on season and demand
- Live panelist discussion Q&A at the end of the session.
- Interactive Polls included for participant engagement
- Video demonstrations and step-by-step photos were used to increase participant knowledge



Conclusion

Live online food preservation education programs resulted in increased participant reach versus face-to-face programs in previous years. Self-reported evaluation results indicated increased knowledge of safe food preservation methods, knowledge of where to find research-based recipes and intentions to preserve more foods at home. Online programs provide opportunities for increasing education outreach and offer flexible and convenient learning opportunities that are responsive to emerging issues.



Screenshot of PowerPoint slide and Zoom Polling



Marketing

- Promotional material was sent to MSU Extension offices covering all 83 Counties in Michigan .
- Utilized social media outlets such as: Facebook was used to promote classes and resources.
- MSU Extension websites, newspapers, radio and tv were used to provide registration links and promotion.

Results

Program Outcomes

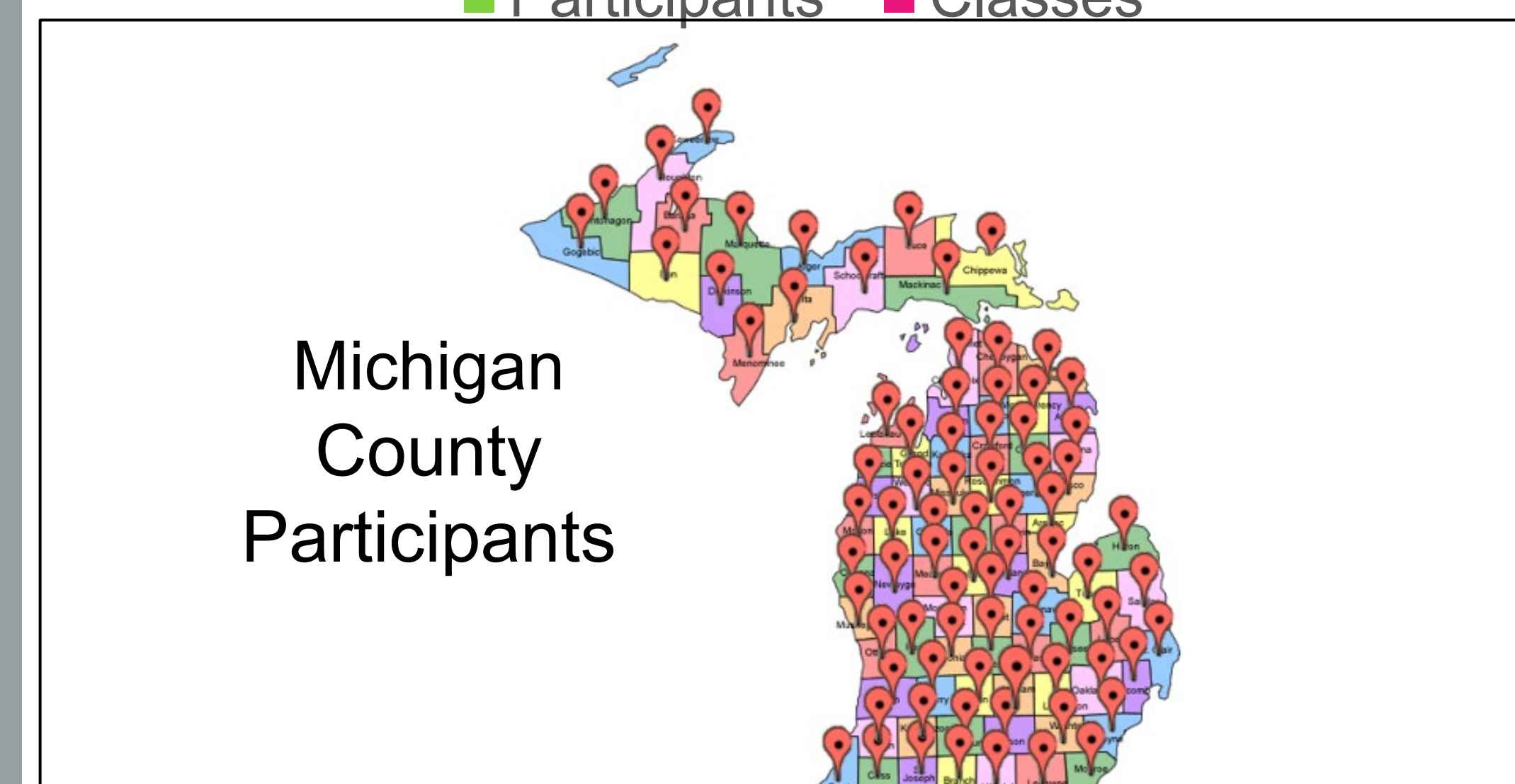
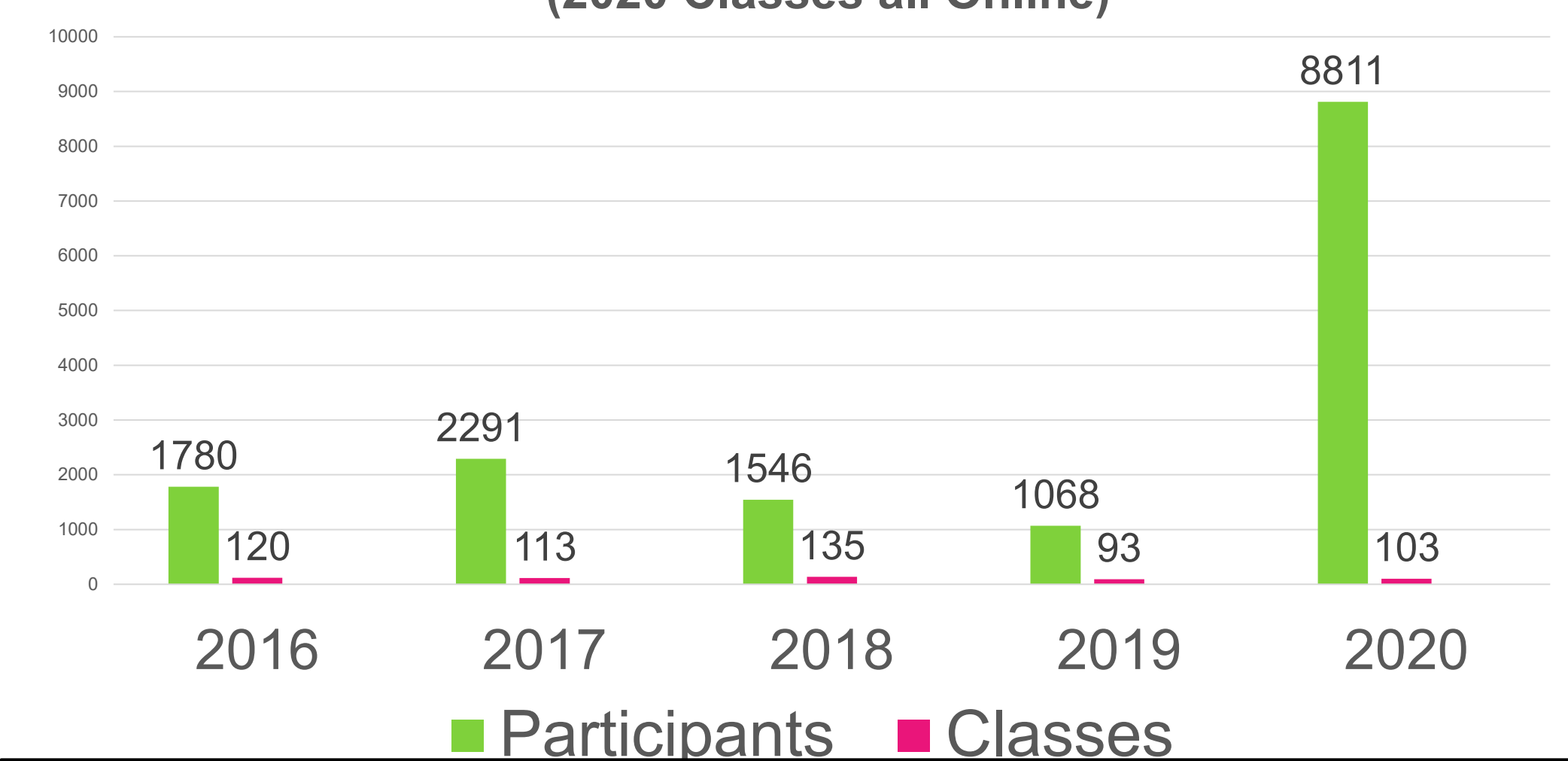
- Participants complete a retrospective survey after the program using a Likert scale evaluation.
- 86% were confident in their knowledge of safe home food preservation practices
 - 93% were confident in their ability to follow safe home food preservation practices
 - 88% know where to go for safe, research-tested recipes
 - 83% are confident in their abilities to share safe food preservation methods with friends, family and online communities
 - 83% will use the food preservation resources provided
 - 74% will explore information on the MSU Extension page
 - 61% will check their resource with up-to-date resources
 - 72% follow the research-based directions provided
 - 76% preserve food more often at home

Results, continued

5 Year Food Preservation Program Outreach



5 Year Food Preservation Snapshot (2020 Classes all Online)



Acknowledgements

- National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP)
- USDA
- Newell brands
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)