A Look at the Canning Record

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TO HAVE CANNED between 143 million and 160 million quarts of fruits and vegetables in a year is a pretty fair sized job. Iowa homemakers, assisted in some instances by their families, did just that last year, if a survey which we made shows the true picture of what happened in 1943.*

The survey was made by Iowa State College and the State Nutrition Council. Obviously we could not ask every single family in the state about their 1943 canning, but we did ask 692 families. The method of gathering the information from these 692 was carefully worked out with the assistance of our statisticians so that every family in the state had a chance to be included. In other words, our interviewers reached farm people, town people, city folks, those of every economic level, every nationality and in every kind of work.

The survey was scientifically set up so that we can depend on it giving a reasonably accurate picture.

The survey was a “look” not only at the canning done, but also at the amount of gardening, the amount of foodstuffs preserved by other methods than canning such as drying, brining, freezing, etc., and the amount of food stored in pits, caves and cellars.

The picture looks about like this:

Summary of Iowa’s 1943 Food Preservation and Storage

(Estimated for State)

- 150,000,000 quarts canned
- 2,500,000 quarts frozen
- 5,900,000 bushels stored
- 500,000 pounds dried
- 1,000,000 gallons brined
- 20,000,000 containers jelly, jams, relishes, pickles

Our survey showed that about 83 to 88 families out of every 100 in Iowa had a garden and nearly 95 out of every 100 had canned food. Canning was found to be by far the method most frequently used in preserving food. Storage in pits, caves and cellars came second.

Why Did Canned Food Spoil?

The survey showed that we need to do a better job of canning, for in 1943 about 2 million quarts spoiled. The survey showed 1.43 percent spoiled of the total canned, which may not sound like so much, but when it’s applied to a state with “its sleeves rolled up” and going after canning on such a large scale, it means that food enough for 16,000 persons had to be thrown away because it did not keep. This figure of canned goods for 16,000 allows 125 quarts per person as recommended in the 1943 Iowa canning budget.

Why did the canned food spoil? We put that question to the people interviewed and got their opinions. About 40 out of every hundred families had some food spoil. The amount varied from 1 or 2 cans to 100.

One-third of the women attributed their spoilage to defective lids; one-fourth had no idea. Common reasons given for spoilage were that the food had stood too long before it was canned; it was of poor quality; poor technique had been used; lids or rubber rings were old; new rings were of poor quality; not enough sugar for fruit (an erroneous belief). Miscellaneous reasons which the women gave were under-processing, rubber rings in wrong places, lids or jars not sterile, inexperience, uneven heat in processing, cooling too slowly and jars too full.

Solve Spoilage Problems

What can we do to make sure that less of our 1944 canned goods spoil? Here are our recommendations:

1. Get reliable information about canning methods. The Extension Service has a supply of these publications: “Wartime Canning of Fruits and Vegetables,” and “Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables and Meats.” (If the Extension Service supply should be exhausted, these can be purchased for 5 and 10 cents, respectively, from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.)

2. Another free booklet, “Take Care of Your Pressure Canners,” may be obtained from the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, Washington, D. C. “Canning Fruits and Vegetables” is a pamphlet now being prepared by the Extension Service, and it will be available shortly at your
Inside the kitchen cupboard door may be kept a sheet to record the canning.

county extension director's office or from the Extension Service at Ames.

The best information concerning canning by the hot water bath that we have been able to assemble from several years of experiments at the Iowa Station is available in FS 69, "Canning Food That Keeps," a reprint from the April, 1943, FARM SCIENCE REPORTER. This may be had for the asking.

2. Have reliable equipment. If you use a pressure cooker have the gauge checked by the manufacturer, the county extension home economist in your county, or send it with 10 cents to Dr. Louise J. Peet, Household Equipment Department, Home Economics Building, Ames.

Make sure your jars are sterilized. Some of the women interviewed thought that scalding the jars was sufficient. The safe method is to boil them and the lids for 15 to 20 minutes.

If you are planning to use glass jars that once held coffee, mayonnaise or something of the sort, get the flat metal discs which are to be used with the original screw caps that came with the jars. The discs may be obtained from the grocer.

Examine all jars which use self-sealing lids for nicks in their tops, because a tiny nick may prevent a perfect seal. Likewise, a tomato seed or a bit of food on the rim will prevent a perfect seal.

Don't use old rubbers. You can, of course, use new rubbers purchased last year which were not needed. Cool the jars well after they are processed before they are stored.

Zinc lids that were removed from jars where there was spoilage are risky to use. It will be safer to throw these away and replace them with new ones. If you must use old zinc lids that were on jars that spoiled, do not use them for non-acid vegetables such as corn, peas and beans. In any case, be sure to boil them 20 minutes in water containing vinegar.

3. Use good canning procedure. Work with small enough quantities so that you can finish the job before you become tired and therefore careless. Another highly important point is to use only perfect fruits and vegetables. A few moldy peas, a spoiled spot in a tomato or an apple may be the cause of many cans of spoiled food. Selection and preparation of food for canning should not be done by children or older people with poor eyesight.

Keep the processing timetables in constant view, pinned to the kitchen curtains, thumbtacked to the wall, fastened to the inside of the cupboard doors with adhesive tape or some such method. If these tables are kept out where you can readily look at them, you'll probably do less guesswork in processing.

Set an alarm clock to tell you when the processing time is up, or write down on a card when the processing should be finished and fasten this card to the kitchen wall, the curtains, or some place handy.

The foregoing suggestions touch only briefly on the main points that may help to avoid some of the canning spoilage loss. But get all of the reliable information that you can as suggested at the beginning of this discussion.

Have a Canning Plan

One of the "slips" in our home canning has been the lack of any plan, our survey showed. Few of those interviewed knew how much they had put up without making a special count. Practically none had a canning plan worked out in relation to the nutritional needs of their families. Many women told the interviewing person that by December all of some foods were gone or that most of the total foods canned had been eaten.

One way to determine what you should put up is to note how many times a week...