

Daily Union Article  
Saturday, December 3, 2016  
Title: Dining In Day 2016

The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) has established December 3, 2016 as Family & Consumer Sciences Day – a day designed to promote family and consumer sciences programs and professionals that help support family mealtime. AAFCS has taglined this day as “Dining In” Day – promoting healthy family meals that are both prepared and shared together with the family unit.

### Why was the “Dining In” theme chosen?

- Encouraging families to prepare simple, healthy meals and eat together **supports** the essence of family and consumer sciences: “**Creating Healthy and Sustainable Families.**”

Eating together has many benefits, including improving family communication. In addition, children tend to perform better in school and get along better with their peers as a result of sharing family meals together. Literacy skills improve when children dine with families.

Mealtime spent together at home is a great way for families to begin building healthier eating habits and enjoying more quality time together. It gives families the opportunity to take a break from their hectic schedules and reconnect with each other. Families can make meal time a team effort by choosing the menu together, dividing up the meal preparation tasks to get everyone involved, and using the time for fun conversation.

- There’s a **nationwide obesity epidemic**, especially in children and teens, and a lot of that has to do with unhealthy eating and lack of food preparation knowledge.

More than one-third (34.9% or 78.6 million) of adults in the United States are obese and although Kansas is lower than the national average at 30%, the statistic is still alarming. Children don’t escape from this epidemic. For those aged 12-19, the Center for Disease Control reports that the rate of obesity has increased from 5% in 1980 to 21% in 2012 in the U.S.

- Research has shown that the **whole family benefits from family mealtime** by improving family communication, having better nutrition, fostering family traditions, and teaching life skills, such as meal planning, budgeting, and food preparation. Healthy eating combined with physical activity can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing certain health-related diseases.

When we make the decision to eat away from home, we lose most of the control we have for the ingredients and nutritional value of the food we consume. No doubt, eating on the run is part of today's American lifestyle. But there is solid proof for why this should be limited. In the United States, there are over 160,000 fast food restaurants. Geary County has experienced a significant increase in the number of fast food restaurants beginning in 2009 (.6 restaurants per 1,000 residents) and slightly ranks above the national average of .73 per 1,000 population. The most recent data shows that the county now rests at .74 fast food restaurants per 1000 residents. AAFCS reports that 97% of childrens' restaurant meals do not meet nutrition standards.

According to the Kansas Health Matters website, categorically, fast food is NOT the best "first choice" for our family meals. "Fast food is often high in fat and calories and lacking in recommended nutrients. Frequent consumption of these foods and an insufficient consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables increase the risk of overweight and obesity. Individuals who are overweight or obese are at increased risk for serious health conditions, including coronary heart disease, type-2 diabetes, multiple cancers, hypertension, stroke, premature death and other chronic conditions. Fast food outlets are more common in low-income neighborhoods and studies suggest that they strongly contribute to the high incidence of obesity and obesity-related health problems in these communities." <http://www.kansashealthmatters.org> – Fast Food Restaurant Density.

### **"Dining In" Makes Cents!**

"Dining In" is a financial decision, as well. A March 2015 report from the U.S. Commerce Department shared that for the first time ever, US consumers are spending more on dining out than they are at the grocery store. The average American goes out for lunch two times a week and typically spends \$10 for each meal, according to a 2013 Forbes magazine report. It goes on to report that this lunch excursion totals to an average of \$936 per year – just for one person's lunch costs for eating out.

The average American eats out four to five times a week and spends **\$232 per month** eating meals prepared outside the home which equates to the average meal outside the home costs a person **\$12.75**. In 2013 alone, Americans spent \$659 billion eating their meals away from home.

**Let's Get Started!** Getting started begins with making the decision to dine in more often. That's where the "Dining In" campaign comes in. AAFCS is promoting a single day, a single meal with the intent that it becomes the first step for families in making a conscientious decision to change their eating patterns. The organization offers the following tips for Dining In:

1. Make family meals a priority and agree upon a schedule.
2. Try to have regular family meals two to three times per week.

3. If dinnertime doesn't work, have family breakfasts or snacks.
4. Keep meals simple. Slow cookers save time in the evening!
5. Double recipes and freeze food for a second meal.
6. Set aside 30 minutes on the weekend for meal planning.
7. Make family meals fun and include children in food preparation.
8. Discuss neutral or positive topics at the table.
9. Eliminate distractions like TV and cell phones.
10. Eat slowly, and enjoy your time as a family!

Next week, we'll take a look at meal planning mechanics! For ideas on how to make meal time equal family time, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

