



Identifying Accurate Internet Resources for Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health Demonstrations¹

Amy Simonne and Linda B. Bobroff²

One of the goals of Florida 4-H activities is to help young people develop skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. These skills can help them acquire knowledge, develop initiative, assume responsibility, achieve satisfaction from work and accomplishments, and develop a positive self image. Learning life skills includes asking questions, doing research, and solving problems. This learning happens when 4-Hers prepare for public speaking and demonstrations. Acquiring research-based information is critical for the development of accurate demonstrations. Demonstration projects that are scientifically sound and credible reflect well on the 4-Her, the county Extension 4-H program, IFAS, and the University of Florida. County faculty and volunteers have knowledge and skills in many areas. The goal of this fact sheet is to assist 4-H county faculty and volunteers in directing youth to accurate, research-based sources of information on nutrition, food safety, and health.

Internet Safety for Parents and Youth Leaders

Researching information on the Internet exposes young people to a vast amount of information from a wide array of sources, many of which they would otherwise not be exposed to. Parents and youth leaders should obtain information on Internet safety from the FBI website at <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm> before the young people begin an Internet search.

How to Identify Reliable Internet Sources

Several Web search engines (e.g. Google, AltaVista, Excite, Infoseek, Lycos, Yahoo, and WebCrawler) are available for exploring the Internet. All of them offer basic searches based on key words. Most of these search engines allow users to specify search options such as simple, advanced, or refined searches using Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR,” “AND NOT”), which are commonly used in traditional database searches. However, each of the search engines may reach different Internet

-
1. This publication is FCS8797, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Published October 2006. Visit the EDIS web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
 2. Amy Simonne, Ph.D., associate professor, and Linda B. Bobroff, Ph.D., RD, LD/N., professor; Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611. Reviewed by Marilyn Lesmeister, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, IFAS, University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Larry Arrington, Dean

domains. Once sources of information are identified, only reliable Internet sources should be used. As a general rule, reliable sources come from website addresses that end with “.gov,” “.edu,” and “.org.” Some “.com” sites contain reliable information, but may have a commercial bias. MedlinePlus recently released a tutorial to help people search the Web, available at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/training/trainers.html>. The tutorial also is available from the Information for Librarians and Trainers page at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthywebsurfing.html>.

Sites Ending in ".gov"

Government websites are designated as “.gov.” In the United States, “.gov” sites can belong to federal, state, or local governments. These sites should provide reliable and unbiased information. However, one should notice the date the information was posted to the website. If the goal is to get the latest information on particular issues in food science, food technology, nutrition, food safety, and health, the best sources to start with are federal government websites. State and local government websites provide information that pertains to state and local issues and interests. In order to ensure accuracy, Internet information should be verified by checking with printed information, such as research journals, or consulting with experts in that field of study. Florida 4-H youth also can contact the county Extension staff to obtain information for their projects. Each state in the United States has at least one Land Grant University, so youth in all states can contact their county Extension staff, who receive information and training from state specialists at their Land Grant University. Food safety/nutrition state specialists can be found through the federal government website at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html.

Sites Ending in ".edu"

This designates a university or other educational institution website. In general, information from “.edu” websites is based on research findings that are unbiased and reviewed by other experts in that

field. As with all sites, be sure to check the date when the information was posted to the website.

Sites Ending in ".org"

websites run by groups such as professional organizations, groups of governments such as the United Nations (UN), multi-agency groups, nonprofit organizations, consumer groups, trade organizations, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have a “.org” designation. It is advisable to screen these websites very carefully before citing the information. One way of screening information is to cross-check the information with one or more reliable sources or to check with experts in the field. The websites of organizations such as the American Heart Association (<http://americanheart.org>), the International Association of Food Protection (<http://www.foodprotection.org>) and the Institute of Food Technologists (<http://www.ift.org>) usually provide accurate, comprehensive, and reliable information.

Sites Ending in ".com"

Commercial sites have a “.com” designation. Commercial websites sometimes provide useful and reliable information. However, one needs to evaluate the information carefully. Commercial sites may be more interested in selling product(s) or promoting their opinion than in providing accurate and unbiased information.

Food Science and Technology/Food Safety websites

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118516872/home?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

The website of the Institute of Food Technologists provides access to both members and the public on subjects related to food science, food technology, food safety, and nutrition.

<http://www.foodprotection.org/publications/>

This website provides information specifically on food safety for both professionals and consumers.

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/default.htm>

The United States Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition provides information on the safety of products regulated by the FDA.

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/>

This site is a gateway to all government food safety information for consumers, professionals, and others. This website also connects users to state food safety agencies.

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on diseases and pathogens, environmental hazards, and surveillance illness data as well as emerging food safety and health issues.

<http://www.epa.gov/>

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides safety information related to environmental issues. This includes industrial chemicals and other man-made products.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS) contains research-based information on various topics including food safety, nutrition, and health. The website is equipped with a search engine that users can navigate.

<http://www.fightbac.org/>

The Partnership for Food Safety Education's website provides educational materials related to safe food handling. It supplies materials for educators, media, and consumers.

<http://www.homefoodsafety.org/index.jsp>

This site belongs to the American Dietetic Association. It provides information on topics from food safety to nutrition.

<http://www.who.int/foodsafety/en/>

The World Health Organization (WHO) website provides information related to food, nutrition, food safety, and health. The organization also provides publications on issues that are relevant to both the underdeveloped and developed world.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/>

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) website provides science-based information on various food safety regulations and issues pertaining to the Europe Union.

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>

The website of the United States Department of Agriculture-Food Safety and Inspection Service provides food safety information on meat, poultry, and egg products as well as seasonal food safety tips. The information generally is related to the products that are regulated under this program.

Nutrition Websites

<http://www.eatright.org>

This is the Web page of the American Dietetic Association. It provides science-based information related to nutrition, health, and well-being.

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

This site is the federal government's gateway to reliable information on nutrition, healthy eating, physical activity, and food safety for consumers, educators, and health professionals.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>

This is a search page to the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference. A search tool also is provided so users can look up the nutrient content of over 7,000 different foods directly from this page.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

Just about any health statistic can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics website.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

This Tufts University site provides links to numerous reliable nutrition sites, professional associations, journals, and newsletters.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Information Center provides reliable resources for consumers, nutrition and health professionals, and educators. The site includes downloadable educational materials, government reports, research articles, and more.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

The National Institutes of Health's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute provides consumers and professionals free health information related to a variety of health conditions. It also includes information about clinical trials.

<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/>

The USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion provides leadership for the development of educational materials, including MyPyramid and MyPyramid for Kids. Here you can find educational materials and information related to the 5-A-Day program, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the interactive Healthy Eating Index, and many other resources. You also can link to the USDA's other program Websites, such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC), School Lunch Program, Food Stamps, etc.

<http://www.diabetes.org>

The American Diabetes Association Web site provides information about diabetes research, prevention, and other helpful information for persons with diabetes, health professionals, and the general public.

<http://www.americanheart.org>

The American Heart Association website provides information on heart diseases and conditions, including heart attack and stroke warning signs, healthy lifestyles, publications, and resources available to the public.

<http://www.cancer.org>

The American Cancer Society website provides information on types of cancers, statistics, current research, and various resources for help. The Food and Fitness section focuses on healthy living to reduce cancer risk, as well as eating during treatment.

<http://www.aicr.org>

The American Institute for Cancer Research educates the public about the results of current research on cancer prevention.