Make Meals and Memories Together.
Amanda Scott, Program Specialist, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program
August 2009

**Family Meal Time:**
**Make Meals and Memories Together**

With today’s busy schedules, many families do not have time to sit down and enjoy a meal together. But having family meal time has many benefits says Texas AgriLife Extension Service agent [insert name here].

In fact, research shows that compared to children who seldom participate in family meals, children who sit down to regular family meals consume more fruits, vegetables and fiber, consume less soda and fried foods, and eat less heart damaging saturated and *trans* fat. Families that eat together also have more time and opportunities to communicate and build relationships and these children tend to perform better academically.

For some, there can be many barriers to family meals notes [insert name here]. Between work, school-related, and other activities, families may find they lack time for family meals and do not have the time to cook. In some cases, the parent may not know how to cook. The prevalence of fast food and other convenience food items makes cooking practically a non-essential skill. Still, [insert name here] notes that families can experience the positive benefits of family meals by eating together at least four to five times per week and offers these tips:

- If possible, start eating meals together as a family when your kids are young. This way, it becomes a habit.
- Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar!
- During the meal, focus on each other. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later.
- Talk about fun and happy things and make meal time stress-free.
- Encourage your child to try foods, but do not lecture or force your child to eat.

[Insert name here] also says that you do not have to cook an elaborate meal to enjoy the benefits of family time together. Instead of cooking a time-intensive meal, spend your time and energy with your family. Try quick cooking stir-fry, soups, or no cook sandwiches and salads. You can also do some tasks for meal preparation before-hand. For example, wash and cut vegetables or make a fruit salad the night before. Cook lean beef or turkey for spaghetti, tacos, or chili and store in the refrigerator or freezer until ready to use. You might also consider batch cooking which can provide leftovers for lunch the next day or supper for two nights in a row.

To learn more about family meals, recipe ideas, nutrition, or physical activity contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension Service county office at [insert contact information here].