

Engle's 'Wanderings' Creates Wealth Of Research For Her Job As Lancaster County Home Economist

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— Althea Engle has finally come home after years of "wanderlusting" that took her crisscrossing the U.S. and abroad.

Her wanderings were not purposeless. As a registered dietician with a master's degree, Althea has spent years in researching nutrition and evaluating diets. Now, she wants to use all the knowledge she has gained through research in her position as home economist for Lancaster County Cooperative Extension.

"People find nutrition information confusing. I hope to clarify it and interpret how scientific findings are produced," she said.

The Conestoga Township native remembers the 4-H cooking club of her youth where she learned to make chili con carne and a salad dressing that she continues to make today.

It was the combination of exposure to 4-H cooking classes, her grandmother's cooking expertise, and her work in the family's bakery business that influence Engle to pursue a degree in home economics at Goshen College, Indiana.

After she taught home economics at Solanco High School for one year, a restlessness prompted her to search for other opportunities to use her degree. She found it by working in Greece with the Mennonite Central Committee for two years. While there, she volunteered her services by first teaching cooking at a poor rural village and later demonstrating how to use commodity foods. This was a "Food for Work" program where villagers planted trees in exchange for food. The waterfront area had

little resources and was being developed as a resort area to help provide income for the residents.

Engle had to set up a cooking program. She quickly learned that American favorites were not taste-receptive to Greeks. She gathered Greek recipes to teach and compiled them into a cookbook.

At first, Engle used a translator during her teaching sessions, but soon she became fluent enough to teach independently. Previous studies in Latin, French, and Spanish, and a perchance for languages enabled her quick adaptation to modern-day Greek.

After a two-year volunteer stint in Greece, Engle felt a need for more nutrition education and returned to the states to study at the University of Wisconsin. After receiving a master's degree in nutrition and food science, Engle taught a year of home economics in Wisconsin and did a nutritional evaluation of the state's Head Start Program before moving to Florida. It was at the University of Florida that Engle had her first experience in working with cooperative extension. Her responsibility was to train aides to work in the Extension's statewide Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Engle visited a migrant camp in order to plan the training and decide upon foods that would help low-income families improve their diets. Nutritional aides visited individual homemakers to teach nutrition, community resources available to meet their needs, use and care of kitchen equipment, food safety, sanitation practices, food money management, and food preservation.

After two years with EFNEP, Engle joined a team that conducted



Althea Engle is the recently-appointed Lancaster County Cooperative Extension home economist. Engle has worked in many different areas of the U.S. and abroad, mostly in research, and hopes to use her knowledge to teach others proper nutrition.

health and nutrition examination surveys. As dietary coordinator, Engle interviewed people to collect data for a nationwide survey to determine the nation's nutrition habits. Those who participated in the survey received an extensive health examination in exchange for answering the questions. A cross-section of one to 74-year-olds showed that malnutrition was a problem, especially in southern states.

For four years, Engle became the field operations manager in charge of mobile units set up at different locations across the U.S. A team of 15 people traveled together to work approximately three to six weeks in each state.

"I met interesting people from all over the U.S. and it definitely broadened by horizons. I learned to do things I would never have attempted otherwise," Engle said. Hawaii and Washington state were two of Engle's favorite places.

When that study was phased out, Engle spent in interim period in Lancaster County until she was hired by American Health Foundation to work in New York. Research by the Foundation changed from time to time, depending on grants. Some of Engle's research included doing food recalls with elementary school children and evaluating the results, analyzing diets from different countries for colon cancer research, and a feasibility study on a low-fat diet to prevent reoccurrence of breast cancer.

Findings showed the correlation between diet and health. But, Engle said, people often find nutritional information confusing. She hopes to clarify and interpret how scientific findings are produced as some findings if not worded correctly tend to encourage sensationalism rather than factual findings.

Engle would like to use her research background in her extension work by offering innovative programs that influence the health of people. Of prime importance to her is using dietary guidelines to encourage lower-fat and more fruit and vegetable consumption.

Since Engle began her job at the extension on April 18, she is becoming acclimated to the position, which in addition to county home economist requires her to oversee the EFNEP program in Dauphin, York, Franklin, and Lancaster counties. She has not yet decided upon definite programs and methods, but she would like to offer hands-on classes for lower-fat cooking and foods with ethnic diversity.

Her research has convinced her of the need for dairy products.

She said, "I really want to see people drink more milk. It's important to prevent osteoporosis. When I was growing up, we drank milk at every meal. It's important that children drink milk during those early years when bone mass is being built."

Engle herself is a fan of plain yogurt. She enjoys the taste and believes this cultured dairy product is an excellent source of calcium needed to prevent osteoporosis.

Engle, influenced by world travel and nutritional studies, enjoys trying ethnic foods, especially if they are nutrient-packed. Here is a recipe that incorporates yogurt and an ethnic flavor from Bulgaria. Bulgarians are known for their longevity — many live to be 100 years of age. Bulgarians consume large quantities of yogurt, which may play a role in their longevity.

COLD YOGURT AND CUCUMBER SOUP (TARATOR)

3 small cucumbers
3 cups plain yogurt
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons finely minced garlic
½ teaspoon salt or to taste
5 tablespoons chopped walnuts
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
Peel the cucumbers. Slice them in half lengthwise. Scoop out and discard the seedy core. Cut the flesh into ¼-inch cubes.

Place the yogurt in glass, stainless steel, or other noncorrosible bowl. Beat the yogurt 1 minute with a spoon.

Beat in the olive oil one teaspoon at a time. Be sure each new teaspoon of the oil is thoroughly beaten into the yogurt before adding the next teaspoon.

Add the cucumber, garlic, salt, and all but 1 tablespoon of the walnuts to the bowl. Thoroughly blend the ingredients.

Cover the bowl and refrigerate and neatly ladle it into the soup bowls. Garnish the top of each serving with dill and the remaining walnuts. Serve immediately.

Additional keys to success: Buy cucumbers that are small for their variety. Large cucumbers will be exceedingly seedy and their flavor will be too bitter even soaking them in salted water won't completely diminish their bitter note.

Whole-milk yogurt is preferable to the skimmed product. You can decrease the quantity of minced garlic to taste, but if you use less than 1 teaspoon, you shouldn't call your soup tarator. For the sake of color contrast, use nonwhite soup bowls. A deep red, black, or yellow hue is ideal. If fresh dill is unavailable, substitute fresh mint.

EFNEP Advisors Win First-Place Award



Brenda Stallman and Anita Rhawn, nutrition education advisors, won a first-place award for teaching youth at a juvenile detention center.

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— Brenda Stallman and Anita Rhawn, nutrition education advisors for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) of the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, won a first place award from the Pennsylvania Extension Professionals Association for their "Learn to Earn" 4-H program with youth at Barnes Hall, a juvenile detention center. Called "The Boli Rollers" 4-H Club, the group learned to make money at a "legal" enterprise while making their

favorite and most successfully prepared food — stromboli.

While learning techniques of proper food handling for food safety, organization for mass production, and management and marketing for profitability, the youth had "hands on" experience making stromboli and selling them to agency personnel and close friends. A profit of \$633 was made and contributed to the purchase of toys for "Toys for Tots." It was the first time in their life that some of the youth had wrapped a present.