Farm-to-School (FTS) activity by holding a School-Farm Conference and an Imperial Valley Agriculture Tour.

Use of Research: My county is a rural county with large agricultural lands. However, its community has to pay more to purchase locally produced fresh vegetables through supermarkets because of a shortcoming in direct marketing and food supply chain. School and food pantries play important roles in supporting under-resourced families. Research showed Farm-to-School activities benefit all partners in a way to build a healthy food system.

Target Audience: Teachers, nutrition educators, school food service directors and staff, food bank and food pantry staff, farm bureau director and growers were recruited through flyers, social media posts, direct emails, and personal contacts.

Program Description: Conference workshops topics and agricultural tour sites were decided by stakeholder advisory committee and participants survey results. Conference provided experiential learning opportunities for participants to engage in nutrition curriculum exploring, gardening, and increase their agricultural and food literacy.

Evaluation Methods: Post-workshop and post-agricultural tour evaluation surveys were administered.

Results: We had 40 participants in our county’s first farm-to-school conference representing teachers, food service directors, and administrators from 7 school districts, 7 organizations, 2 state government representatives, and 2 ag industry representatives. According to our post-conference survey, 96% of participants felt their FTS knowledge increased; 88% learnt a variety of curriculums; 96% felt more resourceful; 84% feel confident in engaging and facilitating farm-to-school activities; 88% said they plan to start integrate what they learnt to work; 66% indicated they planned to apply for a farm-to-school grant; 87% better understood local agriculture after the tour and 93% learned a variety of crops and research, and 72% increased confidence in finding community partners to collaborate.

Conclusion: We achieved our goal of bringing together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system to increase the capacity for farm-to-school activities.

Funding: NIFA

Resilient Rural Food Access

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Background: Food insecurity significantly threatens individual health and community economic vitality. Rates of food insecurity increased across all communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pryor & Dietz, 2022). Local organizations that provide families with food support are potentially critical in supporting resilient rural food systems. Limited research has explored how these organizations in rural communities navigated pandemic-related food systems stressors.

Objective: To identify factors rural community key informants (CKI) used towards resilient food systems in rural communities in times of stress.

Study Design, Setting, Participants: CKI from family and food serving organizations in rural (RUCA 7+) communities across 13 states throughout the US were identified by local partners and recruited by the data collection team. Forty-three CKI participated in audio-recorded, open-ended, semi-structured interviews. Kansas State University’s IRB approved this study.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Interview questions and sample selection were informed by Food Systems Theory (Misselfhorn et al., 2012) and Social Organizational Theory of Action and Change (Mancini & Bowen, 2013). Transcript analysis used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) focusing on axial codes identifying resilient food system navigation. Codes were used to identify themes explaining resilient rural food systems under stress. County Health Rankings data provided further context and linkage to themes identified in data.

Results: Preliminary findings indicate rural food serving organizations experienced the following changes to functioning that supported resilience in their rural food systems during COVID-19: new collaboration strategies and community capacity building with existing and previous partners, uniquely influenced by relationships, rural community factors, and the nationwide influx of funding resources and increased focus on wrap-around supports (WAS) including partner organization or resource referral, and direct education opportunities.

Conclusion: Some organizations formed new partnerships and many with extant connections pivoted partnership strategies. Partnerships proved critical to connecting clients to WAS necessary for navigating community stressors. Community stressors resist complete identification yet building partnerships in advance helped food systems resiliently adapt. We will include a list of partners with whom rural organizations found value.

Funding: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Kansas State HATCH

Senior’s Perceived Barriers to Accessing an Urban Charitable Food Assistance Program

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Background: With the increasing rate of senior populations with low-incomes across the United States, charitable food assistance (CFA) programs are a vital resource to address food access needs among this population. Seniors with food insecurity may face unique challenges that limit their ability to access nutritious food.

Continued on page 6
Wang (continued)

Objective: To explore senior clients' perceived barriers of utilizing an urban CFA program and to identify solutions to reduce access barriers for this population.

Study Design, Settings, Participants: The research team and a large urban CFA program, that serves >1000 households/week and utilizes a pre-packed food distribution model, developed a focus group questionnaire based on the Five A’s of Access framework. Staff recruited senior clients that seldom used their program (n=35) to participate in five focus group sessions in 2022.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two coders used an inductive thematic analysis approach to identify common themes and subthemes.

Results: Participants described negative and positive attributes that fell under all Access domains. For perceived barriers, participants mentioned that they lacked personal transportation or relied on family/friends to pick up food, pre-packed food items misaligned with personal or health preferences, and were confused around food distribution procedures. For positives, participants expressed gratitude for the organization and appreciated the friendly staff and volunteers. Suggestions to improve the CFA program included implementing a client-choice model, reducing canned foods, and increasing distribution of fresh produce, meat, and seafood.

Conclusion: Although participants valued the atmosphere of mutual respect of this CFA program, they might show higher CFA utilization rates if transportation and food acceptability barriers are addressed. Recognizing that CFA programs are pressured to balance limited resources with client needs, future studies should focus on strategies that could address all dimensions of food access while considering resource constraints.

Funding: San Jose State University Circle of Friends Scholarship Awardees; Sunnyvale Community Services

SuperShelf Transformation: Centering Equity in a Predominantly African American Community

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Objective: To move towards a food system where all people thrive, a multi-sector partnership of state agencies, University of Minnesota, hunger relief and health care entities joined forces to build an evidence informed model (SuperShelf) for transforming food shelves across Minnesota. This presentation highlights a SuperShelf transformation in one urban food shelf serving predominantly African Americans. The objectives were to 1) respect the dignity of food shelf clients, 2) create a welcoming environment for African American community members, 3) increase access to healthy, cultural foods, and 4) increase the cultural humility of food shelf managers and volunteers.

Use of Theory or Research: Behavioral Economics (setting up the environment to make healthier choices easiest, such as offering fresh, culturally desirable fruits and vegetables attractively up front), Social Determinants of Health/Systems Approaches (considering systemic factors limiting healthy choices in the neighborhood).

Target Audience: This curriculum focused on food shelf managers, volunteers and clients.

Program Description: SNAP-Ed Educators worked with food shelf managers to provide clients with healthy food choices, to identify and source more culturally desirable healthy foods, and to increase the variety of fresh produce offered. They connected the managers with funding for equipment to better display healthy foods, and with culturally, visually appealing signage and artwork for the space. Clients were surveyed regarding their food preferences, challenges, and experiences. Managers and volunteers were trained in cultural humility, client choice, and being welcoming and respectful.

Evaluation Methods: Biennial Statewide Food Shelf Survey (client surveys, food manager interviews), food shelf observations.

Results: This particular food shelf showed an increase in the African American community’s engagement in the food shelf, more culturally appropriate foods being offered, an increase in client choice, and a more welcoming environment.

Conclusion: The success of SuperShelf has generated interest of many partners, including forty local public health organizations (covering 46% of counties in MN) adding SuperShelf in their 2023 work plans. SuperShelf successes and challenges presented are relevant for food shelves beyond Minnesota.

Funding: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — Education; Minnesota Department of Health

Wasted Food Listening Sessions: Understanding Citizens’ Attitudes And Behaviors

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Background: It is estimated that about 25% of food brought into homes is not consumed and that approximately 40% of food is wasted. The issue of wasted food is getting renewed attention from a diverse group of researchers. The consequences of wasted food are complex and far reaching. More recently with the concern around climate change, wasted food contributes to greenhouse gas emissions in multiple ways.

Objective: Listening sessions were conducted to identify attitudes toward and awareness of wasted food and current household practices to reduce food waste. We sought to identify opportunities and motivators to modify behavior to reduce waste.

Study Design, Settings, Participants: We conducted 5 one-hour listening sessions, two sessions were in person

Continued on page 7