Empowering Food Citizens Through a Coordinated SNAP-Ed Garden-Based Nutrition Education Program

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Objective: Implement a coordinated nutrition and gardening-based program in a SNAP-Ed eligible school facilitating policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change interventions.

Use of Theory or Research: Studies show coordinated garden-based nutrition education interventions have potential to improve children’s diet quality and are associated with more positive food choices.

Target Audience: K-5th grade students in a SNAP-Ed eligible school.

Program Description: The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service (UADA CES) SNAP-Ed Program partnered with other CES programs, community organizations, and an elementary school in Northwest Arkansas to establish a school garden and implement garden-based nutrition education. The garden was constructed between the K-2nd grade and 3rd-5th grade buildings, making it convenient for all students to utilize the garden. SNAP-Ed personnel delivered nutrition education lessons throughout the school year using Pick-A-Better Snack and School Garden Lesson Plans curricula, reaching 893 students. “Garden Time” was incorporated into the school day, allowing students time to visit the garden (40 minutes every 3 weeks). SNAP-Ed personnel participated in parent night events to share information with parents. Members of the School Garden Club worked in the garden and harvested produce during summer. Local farmers and producers visited the school and shared their expertise with students. This project was a collaboration between 4-H Healthy Habits, Arkansas Discovery Farms, UADA Master Gardeners, the Elementary School, and UADA CES SNAP-Ed.

Evaluation Methods: In collaboration with partners, PSE change efforts were identified in accordance with the Program Evaluation And Reporting System (PEARS).

Results: PSE change efforts resulting from implementation of this coordinated program included: initiated use of the garden for nutrition education; initiated opportunities for parents/students/community to work in the garden; initiated and maintained edible gardens; incorporated physical activity into the school day or during classroom-based instruction; incorporated physical activity/reduced sitting during usual, on-going site activities.

Conclusion: This coordinated gardening-based nutrition education program led to initiation and maintenance of PSE change interventions towards empowering youth and families to become food citizens.

Funding: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education

Empowering Tennesseans to Improve Nutrition Security and Reduce Food Waste

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Objective: Evaluate a statewide initiative to improve nutrition security and reduce food waste.

Use of Theory or Research: In 2021, 10% of US households experienced food insecurity. Black and Hispanic households experienced food insecurity at higher rates. Yet, one-third of food produced in the US is unused, making food the largest category of material in US landfills. These issues are costly and negatively impact health, well-being, and our environment.

Target Audience: University of Tennessee Extension (UTE) county agents who participated in the 2022 Tennessee Food Waste Awareness Week (TFWAW) statewide food drive.

Program Description: In April 2022, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) coordinated TFWAW, a statewide initiative to improve nutrition security and reduce food waste. TFWAW was implemented through a multi-sector network of 40+
organizations, including UTE. This network launched a social media campaign to raise awareness and encourage action among individuals, farmers, institutions, restaurants, and other stakeholders to prevent food waste. In-person events with educational opportunities about food resource management, composting, and repurposing food were also held. UTE faculty coordinated a statewide food drive for TFWAW, inviting county UTE offices to host a food drive as part of the statewide initiative. UTE county agents worked with local partners and 4-H youth to collect nutritious food donations and provide education about food waste and food insecurity via social media, in-person presentations, informational booths, and other methods.

**Evaluation Methods:** UTE county staff completed an online survey to report outcomes of their food drive.

**Results:** Over 617,000 Tennesseans were reached through education and outreach. Forty-three of 95 UTE County offices, in rural and urban areas, participated in the food drive. UTE collaborated with grocery stores, schools, and media outlets, collecting over 12,000 pounds of food and providing over 11,000 meals.

**Conclusion:** This statewide initiative to improve nutrition security and reduce food waste provides an example of how to address and coordinate these efforts to help improve donations and quality of donations at food banks.

**Funding:** Nutrition Education Program Design Implementation and Evaluation

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**Empowering Volunteers in a Rural Community to Improve Nutrition Security**

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**Objective:** Evaluate the impact of an Extension-supported intervention to improve nutrition security on the capacity of local volunteers.

**Use of Theory or Research:** Ten percent of US households experience food insecurity. Prevalence is even higher among some households, including those in rural areas. Community-based interventions that engage community members to design, implement, and sustain interventions have been effective in improving nutrition security.

**Target Audience:** Community volunteers and steering committee members.

**Program Description:** In one rural, economically distressed Tennessee county, Extension personnel supported community volunteers to address rising rates of food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of a CDC High Obesity Program (HOP), Extension personnel convened partners and volunteers to implement food distributions through the United States Department of Agriculture Farmers-to-Families program (FtF). Through this Extension-supported intervention, volunteers gained experience and self-efficacy collaborating to address an emerging need. When FtF ended, volunteers formed a community-driven partner network to improve nutrition security with continued support from Extension in the form of education, resources, and connections with community partners.

**Evaluation Methods:** Extension personnel regularly met with volunteers to determine needs and evaluate projects. Extension personnel also evaluated the program through Ripple Effects Mapping with community leaders serving on a steering committee for the HOP project.

**Results:** Volunteers formed a sustainable network of 41 volunteers representing 29 organizations to improve nutrition security. Following FtF distributions, the network hosted 17 mobile food distributions, established one new food pantry, and supported five food pantries. H2O steering committee members who participated in Ripple Effects Mapping identified the food distributions as a critical first step towards engaging the community to address food insecurity.

**Conclusion:** An Extension supported intervention increased capacity of volunteers to improve nutrition security in a rural county. Extension staff, embedded in rural and urban communities, across the United States can leverage partnerships and resources to address emerging needs, empower communities, and improve nutrition security.

**Funding:** Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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**Engaging Black Men and Fathers in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed)**

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**Objective:** To address the gender disparity in SNAP-Ed’s adult participants, a statewide team formed to engage more men and fathers in their families’ healthy behaviors around food, physical activity, and mental flourishing. They tailored their engagements to the interests, concerns, and needs of men and fathers.

**Use of Theory or Research:** Social Determinants of Health - in spaces where families experience health disparities due to systemic racism and persistent disinvestments, nutrition and health must be understood within the contexts of where people live, work, learn and play. Deeper understanding of lived experiences is especially critical for fathers who have been largely under-represented in nutrition education. The program utilizes participatory approaches to understand fathers’ perspectives and experiences.

**Target Audience:** African American men and fathers living in an urban neighborhood with a history of redlining and systemic racism that has created persistent poverty and lack of access.

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