Understanding Foodways and a New Way to Conference

The Society of Nutrition Education and Behavior’s (SNEB) international conference provides nutrition professionals with the opportunity to explore the latest in nutrition education and behavior change research, practice, and policy. In recent years, notably in the wake of the COVID pandemic, we have witnessed a concerning rise in the financial deficits incurred by SNEB due to our conferences hosted in hotels; so, a change to our conference model is unavoidable. I have been asked to envision and create a new model that retains everything we love about SNEB but is fiscally viable. To achieve this, we are holding the conference at the University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville, TN. To put both the need for and advantage of change into perspective, a gallon of coffee in D.C. at our last conference cost SNEB $200, but will only cost $20 next year at UT. I am confident that the changes we are making will result in exciting and positive outcomes for our conference and society.

One of the things that has not changed is that our conference has a theme. The 2024 SNEB conference theme is, “Understanding Foodways: Learning, Growing and Sustaining.” Since announcing this theme, I have had many people ask, “What is a Foodway?” Foodways refers to why we eat what we eat and what that means. Foodways are shaped by culture, religion, tradition, geographic location, climates, time periods, politics, and socio-demographic power differentials.1-5 In 1942, the term foodways was coined by three graduate students who were studying the food behavior of people living in under resourced communities.6 In 1971 Jay Anderson defined foodways as: “the whole interrelated system of food conceptualization and evaluation, procurement, preservation, preparation, consumption and nutrition shared by all the members of a particular society.”7 Since then, other constructs have been included such as attitudes, beliefs, transferring of knowledge, activism, justice, folklore, symbolism, and tradition as well as food production including gathering, presentation, distribution, marketing and food waste.1,8

The theme also includes the words Learning, Growing, and Sustaining. I hope all of us will experience these three things during our conference, but these are also things we work towards in our practice. In nutrition education, on the way to behavior change, learning is often one of the essential parts of the process. In our practice, we hope that people we work with will not only grow in their knowledge and skills but also grow healthy bodies and we of course want to sustain these positive outcomes. Learning, Growing and Sustaining also refers to our work towards learning how to grow a healthy global sustainable food system.

I hope you will all come to learn more about foodways, grow new skills so we can better help others, and find ways to sustain our passion for what we do and see the exciting changes to the conference model. If you do come, in addition to everything you already love about an SNEB conference, you will find an amazing, vibrant city with so much to do! So, let’s get started planning an amazing experience in Knoxville, TN July 29 — August 1, 2024. Please think about submitting a program proposal (due early October) and about an abstract you can submit in January and let me know if you are interested in helping to plan this conference.

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REFERENCES