

FOCUS

ON

Community Nutrition Education Programs

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University
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When looking at national statistics, it is clear that many Oklahomans are struggling nutritionally and with their overall health.

Oklahoma ranked 50th in the percentage of adults who consumed fruit two or more times per day. More than 84 percent of Oklahoma citizens reported consuming less than five servings of fruits/vegetables per day compared to almost 77 percent of the national average. When considering overall nutritional status, Oklahoma ranks 50th among the 50 states.

Another prominent risk factor for poor health is limited physical activity. Oklahoma ranks 47th nationally as approximately 30 percent of Oklahomans reported participating in no physical activity in the past 30 days compared to 22.6 percent nationally.

The percent and national rank of obese Oklahomans continues to increase. In 2006, Oklahoma ranked 38th with 26.8 percent of the adult population obese; in 2007, the ranking rose to 44th as the percent of obese adults climbed to 28.8.

These, and other factors, contribute to the high rate of chronic disease and mortality among the state's population. One in every 10 (277,500) Oklahoma adults were diagnosed with diabetes in 2007. In 2005, Oklahoma ranked the 4th highest diabetes mortality rate in the nation. The total cost of diabetes for people in Oklahoma has been estimated to exceed \$1.8 billion annually. The average life expectancy (2003) of Oklahomans is two years shorter than the national average of 77.5 years of age.

To address these concerns the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers Community Nutrition Education Programs (CNEP) in 43 counties across the state. CNEP provides researched-based nutrition education to low-income families and youth to help them:

- Plan more nutritious meals
- Prepare, eat, and enjoy healthy and delicious food
- Manage food dollars more efficiently
- Develop job and life skills
- Increase physical activity

Lessons cover a variety of topics including food equipment and knowledge, MyPyramid and the food groups, understanding food labels, meal planning, food safety, pregnancy, feeding infants and children, and healthy meals for seniors.

Through one-on-one and small group lessons participants gain valuable nutrition information to positively impact their well-being.

Last year, OCES leveraged state monies to bring \$3.5 million in federal nutrition education program funds to the state.

If Oklahoma is assumed to be representative of the national average in terms of cost-benefits effects of this program, then the effect of the CNEP funding resulted in health care savings of more than \$26 million from the prevention of nutrition-related chronic diseases and conditions among Oklahoma citizens, according to the Battelle study conducted in 2007.

By providing services to those who need it most, OCES is striving to make an impact and improve the health and wellness of Oklahoma.



Glenn Muske
Interim Assistant Director
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service



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- **Farm to You Exhibit to Teach Oklahoma's Children**

Community Nutrition Education Programs help stretch food dollars

Everyday on the news we hear about the state of the economy. Businesses have to lay off workers or close their doors completely. Families are unable to make their mortgage payments. Consumers are losing money on their investments.

With all of this economic uncertainty, many families in Oklahoma and across the country are struggling to make ends meet.

Additionally, the USDA announced recently that the Consumer Price Index for all food has been rising at an accelerated rate in 2007 and 2008, a trend that is expected to continue into the first half of 2009. Families living in poverty have been hit especially hard by rising food costs. Because lower income families have less money to spend, they spend a higher percentage of their total income on essentials, such as food.

Debra Garrard-Foster, coordinator of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Services' Community Nutrition Education Programs (CNEP), said there is help available for those limited income families in Oklahoma.

"Some families across the state run out of food before the end of the month. Others simply don't know the best strategies for stretching their food dollars in order to both prepare nutritious meals and make their budgeted funds last until the next payday," Garrard-Foster said.

Oklahoma families that are looking for information about buying and selecting food, learning more about food safety, improving food preparation skills and increasing their ability to stretch food dollars, CNEP has a

program for them called Fresh Start, Nutrition and You.

"In addition to all of that information, Fresh Start focuses on meal planning in order to offer a variety of foods, proper food storage to help prevent or reduce food waste, food safety, nutritious recipes and improving skills in food production/gardening," she said. "And the best part is that CNEP offers this program at no cost."

The program currently is available in more than 40 counties across the state and is taught by paraprofessionals known as Nutrition Education Assistants. These NEAs work with participants on weekly lessons that involve hands-on learning experiences.

Ideally, participants enroll for six months to a year. This time frame helps them master the skill of meeting their family's nutritional needs.

"We have all of the participants take a pre- and post-test to help us determine the level of behavioral change they make while they're enrolled in the program," Garrard-Foster said. "Before starting the program, many of them reported that they ran out of food before the end of the month. In addition, they said they simply didn't know how to plan, shop for, and prepare healthy foods."

During the last year, the program reached more than 5,100 families. Twenty-one percent of them received the lessons via home visits by the NEA. The other 79 percent were taught in group settings.

Pre/post surveys of CNEP participants indicate that families develop skills that make them better prepared to cope with rising food costs.

- 48 percent of CNEP graduates more often planned meals in advance.
- 40 percent of CNEP graduates more often compared prices when shopping.
- 38 percent of CNEP graduates less often ran out of food before the end of the month.
- 44 percent of CNEP graduates more often used a list when grocery shopping.

More information about CNEP can be found online at www.fcs.okstate.edu/cnep or by contacting your county Cooperative Extension Service office.



CNEP in the Classroom

Research shows that healthy eating habits developed in children can last a lifetime. To guide these habits, CNEP provides nutrition education to youth in third and fourth grades of qualifying schools. Last year, more than 23,800 Oklahoma youth participated in interactive learning experiences designed to teach concepts of MyPyramid food guidance system, the importance of hand washing and eating breakfast everyday, as well as appropriate and healthy snacking.



2008: The year in numbers...

Number of families participating in CNEP - **5,104**

Average number of lessons CNEP graduates receives - **12**

CNEP graduates who make a positive change towards a healthier diet - **95%**

CNEP graduates reporting their children ate breakfast more often - **28%**

Number of school children participating in CNEP who have learned and practiced skills in selecting low-cost healthy foods - **23,886**

What's in a Name?

The Food Stamp program is the nation's first line of defense against hunger.

As of October 1, 2008, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program. The new name reflects changes in the program including a renewed focus on nutrition and putting healthy foods within reach of low-income families.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was designed and continues to:

- Strengthen the agricultural economy.
- Support local commerce by using normal channels of trade.
- Improve levels of nutrition among low-income families.

During FY08, more than 3,900 Oklahoma grocery stores received \$485 million* in revenue through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Research shows that every \$5.00 in new benefits generates \$9.20 in total community spending.

*2008 OKDHS Annual Report



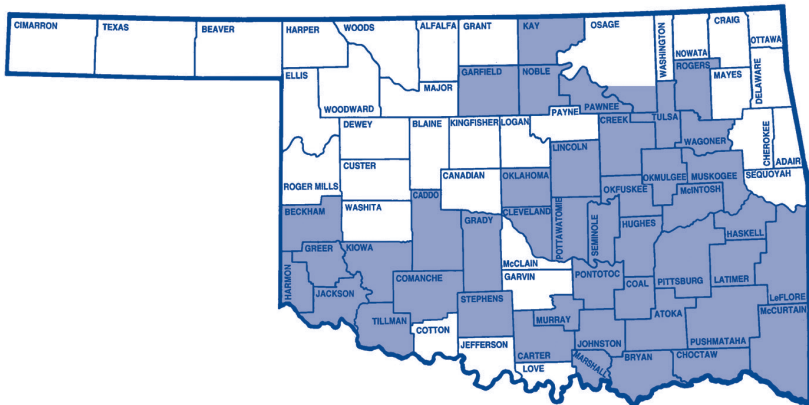
“When I first started this class, I weighed more than I ever had before and was eating wrong. I was also afraid that I was teaching my son bad eating habits.

As I went through this class, I found some easy ways to make good food. I learned to watch what I eat and how to prepare my food.

During this program I lost 27 pounds and I have lots more energy.

I can also see an improvement in my son's energy level as well.”

Stephanie Brown,
CNEP Participant



Farm to You Exhibit to Teach Oklahoma's Children

CNEP has joined OCES, university, community and commodity partners to fund the Farm to You exhibit to specifically address the nutrition, health and agricultural education needs of Oklahoma youth.

When it comes to nutrition, Oklahoma's children may not be making the grade.

Increasing rates of overweight and obese children, a high prevalence of dental decay, limited physical activity and a low consumption of fruits and vegetables are just some of the major health concerns related to children across the state.

And that's where the *Farm to You* experience comes in.

The *Farm to You* is an interactive adventure designed to help students from first to sixth grade learn how food is taken from the farm and used by their bodies for good health.

“It's important that children learn where their food actually comes from,” said Diana Romano, the state coordinator for the *Farm to You* exhibit. “This is the first step in their finding out how to use these foods for their own good health.”

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, 4-H and Oklahoma State University have collaborated with other groups, including Oklahoma State Department of Health WIC Service and Southwest Dairy Farmers, to bring the *Farm to You* adventure to Oklahoma.

Farm to You measures 40 feet by 40 feet and allows children to walk through the adventure from one station to another. Altogether, nine stations make up the exhibit, including Cheeseburger Farm, To the Market, Healthy Cool Café, Mouth, Stomach, Small Intestine, Muscle, Bone and Skin.

“Students get to take part in the adventure as they visit the stations,” Romano said. “They actually get to follow food from the farm as it is taken to market, brought home and then consumed. They even follow it through the body.”

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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
STILLWATER, OK 74078

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Even though youth will only spend an hour in the exhibit, the hands-on activities help them remember what they learn.

“Our objectives are pretty clear,” said Deana Hildebrand, associate professor and Extension specialist in the nutritional sciences department at Oklahoma State University. “We hope children will come to understand the link between farms and the foods they provide and our own good health.”

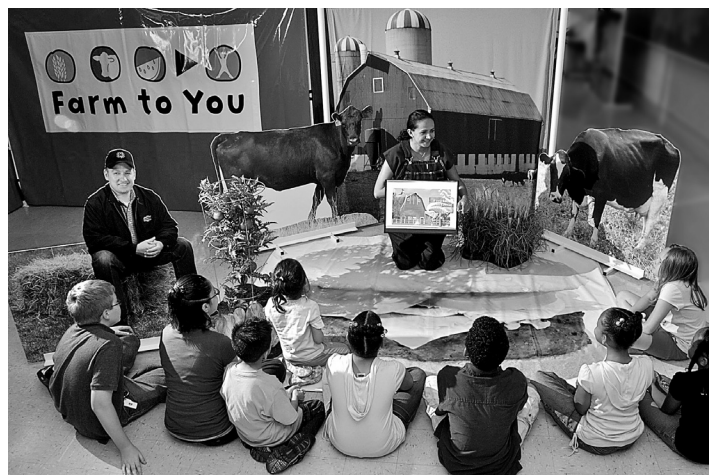
The *Farm to You* exhibit should also help youth understand that what they eat actually fuels their bodies and contributes to their health.

“Basically, this exhibit will help educate children so they will have the information they need to make healthier choices when it comes to nutrition, physical activity and

even personal hygiene,” Hildebrand said.

The *Farm to You* exhibit is being offered to schools at no cost, though volunteers will be needed to help set up and take down the exhibit and to work at the different stations.

“So far children have been excited about the exhibit,” Romano said. “We’re eager to get it out so that people will start talking about it. Our goal is to help educate every child in Oklahoma.”



For more information about *Farm to You*, visit www.farmtoyou.okstate.edu.