

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Congressional District 11

Serving Avery, Buncombe, Clay, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Transylvania and Yancey counties



Children Get Excited About Nutrition

In Yancey County, Bald Creek Elementary partnered with the local health department and Cooperative Extension's EFNEP program to produce a vegetable garden on school grounds through a grant received from the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project. The purpose of the project was to promote the student's intake of fruits and vegetables and to increase the availability of healthy food retail sites in the community.

This summer, Bald Creek enlisted the county's 4-H EFNEP program assistant (PA) to lead the children in garden-based nutrition education camp. Meeting with the children twice a week for four weeks, the PA facilitated hands-on learning activities that taught gardening skills, basic nutrition, and food preparation skills. Each day the children prepared and taste-tested their own fruit and vegetable snacks. Snack recipes were sent home to help students share their experiences with family members.

One parent emailed the EFNEP PA and said, "I am thrilled that you were involved with the children's day camp happenings at Bald Creek! When the children came home, they tell me all about the fruit or vegetable dish they had made with you that day."

The children attending Bald Creek's garden-based education camp were equally as excited. When preparing a cooked cabbage dish, one child exclaimed, "This is a new food for me!" Another stated, "I've never seen anyone cook cabbage before!"

Post program surveys indicated the children participating in this summer gardening camp had increased their nutrition knowledge, preparation skills, and intake of fruits and vegetables. Specifically, 90% of the children enjoyed learning nutritional facts about the fruits and vegetables they grew, 97% of the children enjoyed preparing those fruits and vegetables as snacks, and 100% of the children enjoyed taste-testing the healthy snacks they prepared. These improvements help promote good health and prevent these children from contracting chronic diseases related to poor fruit and vegetable consumption as they grow older.

Mother Experiences the Value of Family Meals

Studies have shown that eating together as a family reaps a wide spectrum of benefits.¹ Family mealtime experiences sharpen communication skills and build family bonds.² Nutritionally, families who eat together consume more fruits and vegetables, a wider variety of vitamins and minerals, and more juice.³ They intake less soda, fried foods, and saturated and trans fats.⁴ In addition, children who eat with their family more frequently carry these behaviors with them and choose healthier foods when eating away from home.⁵ Academically, children who eat with their families are more motivated at school and get better grades.⁶ And socially, they are better adjusted. They are able to build lasting friendships with peers and are less likely to do drugs or be depressed.⁷

To encourage families in Buncombe County to eat together more often, Cooperative Extension's Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) delivered the "Fix it Fast, Eat at Home" lesson to a class of young mothers. During a subsequent lesson, one young mother shared that for the first time in years, her family is now eating their meals together and talking to one another. The children have enjoyed sharing the events of their days with her as much as she has enjoyed preparing EFNEP recipes for them; recipes that have been so enticing that even her daughter has been willing to try new vegetables!

The young mother said making this change in their family's eating behavior took time and effort, but after the significant difference it was making for her family, she knew the effort was worth it. Both she and her children have begun to treasure the special times eating as a family offers them. Because of EFNEP, family relationships are growing stronger and her children are eating a greater variety of healthy foods. She was amazed that something so simple could reap such great rewards.

1. Fulkerson, J.A., Kubik, M.Y., Story, M., Lytle, L., & Arcan, C. (2009) Are there nutritional and other benefits associated with family meals among at-risk youth? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45:389-395.
2. Fulkerson, J.A., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Story, M. (2006) Adolescent and parent views of family meals. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 106:526-532.
3. Neumark-Sztainer, D., Hannan, P.J., Story, M., Croll, J., & Perry, C. (2003) Family meal patterns: Associations with sociodemographic characteristics and improved dietary intake among adolescents. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 103:317-322.
4. Ibid.
5. Neumark-Sztainer, D., Wall, M., Story, M., & Fulkerson, J.A. (2004) Are family meal patterns associated with disordered eating behaviors among adolescents? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35:350-359.
6. Eisenberg, M.E., Olson, R.E., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Story, M., & Bearinger, L.H. (2004) Correlations between family meals and psychosocial well-being among adolescents. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 158:792-796.
7. Ibid.

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