

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Martin County



Families Learn How to Save Money While Buying Health Foods

In Martin County, many families living in poverty struggle to provide healthy meals. This is a major concern because poverty is strongly associated with a wide range of health problems, including chronic disease. Research shows that the highest rates of obesity occur among population groups with the highest poverty rates.¹ This is partly influenced by the fact that the lowest cost food options are usually composed of unhealthy calories, including refined grains, added sugars and fats. Poverty is associated with low fruit and vegetable consumption and lower-quality diets.

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension in Martin County emphasizes food resource management tips in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). During the program, participants learned important skills that would help them plan, purchase, and prepare healthy low cost meals for their families. They learned how to plan weekly healthy meals, properly read food labels, and calculate unit prices in order to get the best bargain for their family. Each week families were asked to share what skills they were able to practice. All participants reported they ate more meals at home as a result of being better prepared, reduced the amount of money spent and were better able to choose the best value. Each family reported saving approximately \$7.00 to \$9.00 every week, and with knowledge gained will be able to save significant dollars over time while eating healthy and preparing foods at home.

Students Prepare and Taste Healthy Meals

In Martin County, the number of overweight and obese children has steadily grown in recent years. This problem has serious consequences; schools and other agencies have seen the negative health implications associated with excessive weight in children and value prevention programs that promote healthy lifestyles.

Prolonged unhealthy eating and physical inactivity significantly contributes to chronic disease and obesity. These findings are especially alarming for children and youth because being overweight or obese increases the risk of chronic diseases. Without proper interventions in our community to reverse this unhealthy and dangerous trend in young people, then the youth in Martin County risk not living long, healthy and productive lives.

Because childhood obesity has become a major problem in recent years, the NC Cooperative Extension has conducted programs with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) aimed at reducing the number of youth impacted by this epidemic. Each lesson incorporates a food preparation activity that allows students to prepare and taste their own healthy meals, which encourages students to take what they learned in class and use it in their everyday lives. Parents have requested more healthy kid friendly recipes and report that the students not only participate in cooking, but they enjoy the new foods. As a result, entire families are eating healthier and decreasing their risk of chronic disease.

EFNEP helps address the challenges limited resource families face when introducing healthy changes through nutrition education, cooking classes, exercise strategies, and shopping on a limited budget.

1. Drewnowski A, Specter SE. (2004) Poverty and obesity: The role of energy density and energy costs. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 79(1): 6-16.

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