

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2013 NC Cooperative Extension Congressional District 9

Serving Mecklenburg and Union counties

Community Comes Together to Improve Health and Family Bonds

Research suggests that families who eat together are less likely to dine out (fried food and soda) and are more likely to serve fruits or vegetables and other healthy foods during dinnertime.¹ Family meals provide parents a learning opportunity where they can teach social skills, table manners, and basic cooking skills.²

Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Mecklenburg County offered a series of EFNEP classes to the residents of a low-income apartment complex. During the lessons, participants learned strategies to make healthy choices, including preparing more meals at home. At each lesson, participants met in the kitchen of the property's rental office and prepared a healthy recipe as part of the lesson.

Following the lesson each week, a few of the participants would combine their money to purchase the ingredients for the recipe, and one participant would host the other participants and their families for dinner that week. The weekly dinner featured the EFNEP recipe alongside other family favorites. In case one participant missed the lesson that week, the others would teach the participant how to make the recipe. One participant shared that before the EFNEP lessons, she didn't like to cook, and her family ate mostly convenience foods and fast food. She said because of the lessons, they now select healthier choices—foods lower in sugar and sodium. Her son enjoys the Easy Fruit Salad recipe, and she prepares it for him to eat as an after school snack. After a recent class, the participant shared, "I love that I decided to learn, enjoy, and see firsthand how to eat smart and move more!"

This community's story is a great example of how simple changes can make a dramatic impact on health and wellbeing of all members of the families served by the program. With the knowledge and support EFNEP provides, families and communities are encouraged to live healthier lives.

EFNEP Graduates Improve the Economy and the Flavor of Their Food

Heart disease is the number one health related illness in Union County.³ Heart disease can be partly attributed to diets high in sodium and fat and inadequate physical activity.

In order to help reverse the high numbers of heart disease in Union County, EFNEP recently worked with a group of participants to encourage a low sodium diet, alongside other healthy behaviors.

Through EFNEP, the women were connected to a local horticulture Extension Agent who taught them how to grow herbs. During the series of classes, three program participants became interested in promoting the use of fresh herbs to increase the health of their community by reducing the incidence of high blood pressure. They began selling fresh herbs from their gardens at local farmers markets.

The women say that their herb gardening has been a great way to involve their grandchildren, whom they are raising, in physical activity. They also shared that gardening has been a great way to spend time with the kids and teach them how they can flavor foods with herbs. Currently, the ladies grow peppermint, chocolate mint, catnip, lemon mint, basil, parsley, chives, spearmint, and sage.

Because of EFNEP, these families had the opportunity to learn how to grow herbs and incorporate them in recipes to improve the health of their families, as well as, the health of their community. Additionally, they were able to connect with local farmers at the market and learn about small business ownership. The women were excited that they could contribute to the local economy by selling locally grown crops.



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. Marino, M., & Butkus, Sue (n.d.). Background: Research on family meals. <http://nutrition.wsu.edu/ebet/background.html>.

2. Family Nutrition: The Truth about Family Meals. Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date September 2008. Revised January 2012. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

3. Union County Health Department, 2011 Union County State of the County Health Report. http://www.co.union.nc.us/Portals/0/Health/Documents/SOTCH_2011.pdf

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