

# EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

## 2013 NC Cooperative Extension Craven County



### Participants Learn about New Vegetables and Buying in Season

The Trust for America's Health 2011 report, *F as in Fat*, found that North Carolina has the 14th highest adult obesity rate.<sup>1</sup> One of the risk factors resulting in higher rates of obesity is low consumption of fruits and vegetables. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 40.8% of adults in North Carolina reported eating fruit less than one time per day. Additionally, 21.9% of adults reported eating vegetables less than one time per day.<sup>2</sup>

To reduce risk of overweight, obesity and other nutrition-related chronic diseases, a diet with adequate amounts and a variety of fruits and vegetables is necessary.

The Craven County Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partnered with the county's Family Literacy program to offer an EFNEP series that included as one of the lessons, "All About Winter Squash," to new immigrant parents. A pre-survey found that none of the participants had ever tried or heard of winter squash and were unaware of its nutritional benefits. The EFNEP program assistant took this as an opportunity to introduce not only winter squash, but other winter vegetables they would enjoy cooking and serving as a part of healthy meals for their families. Participants learned that buying local, in-season produce would also help them save money and help them offer high quality, highly nutritious foods to their families.

During the program, participants learned about the nutritional value of deep-colored fruits and vegetables like winter squash. They learned ways to store and prepare it. In addition, they enjoyed samples of butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash in different recipes. One participant shared that she never realized the color of foods is indicative of its nutritional value. After trying one of the recipes, she shared that she was surprised at how much she enjoyed winter squash.

During a follow-up lesson, one of the participants shared her personal successes with introducing new vegetables to her family. She noted she is choosing more deep-colored fruits and vegetables and has already included winter squash in her monthly meal plan. She has introduced her family to fruits and vegetables that are local to their new country and has been able to save money by shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season. By including a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables in her family's meals, this participant is assuring that her family's health has the benefits these foods offer.

### EFNEP Partners with Schools to Change Student Food Choices

Craven County has the 15.4% of children, ages 2–4, exhibiting overweight and 12.5% are obese.<sup>3</sup> Teaching children to make healthy choices is key to reducing their risk for overweight, obesity and other nutrition related chronic diseases.

In Craven County, the Kindergarten teachers in one elementary school found that although nutrition education was being taught as a part of the healthy living unit in their classes, student food choices did not change. The teachers observed that students continued to bring in processed snacks and packed lunches that were high in fat and sugars. Seeking help to improve their students' nutritional choices, teachers contacted the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) program assistant to request that she conduct a series of classes with each kindergarten class at their school.

During the series of interactive nutrition education classes, the 4-H EFNEP program assistant taught the students the importance of making healthy eating choices and helped students identify foods that would be a healthy choice. The hands-on food tasting activities allowed the students to try different choices for snacks. Children learned to use the USDA's *MyPlate* to help them identify good choices for both meals and snacks. They were encouraged to make fruits and vegetables one of their top choices for their snacks. The program assistant facilitated games to teach about the food groups, which made learning engaging and fun. By repeating the concepts taught each week, the students were better able to remember what they learned. They also shared the handouts and recipes with their parents.

As a result of the program, one Kindergarten teacher shared that she has observed her students discussing the food groups during lunch. She stated that she has observed the children talking amongst each other about what groups they could identify and how closely their lunch looks to the recommendations of *MyPlate*. The snacks the children now bring from home include fruits and vegetables as well as trail mix and low-fat cheese. Making healthy choices in the school cafeteria and bringing healthy snacks and packed lunches to school demonstrates a transfer of knowledge resulting in changed behaviors. It also indicates that not only did the children learn to make healthy choices, but they also shared what they learned with their parents and parents are now providing healthy foods in meals and snacks they pack for their children to take to school.

1. Trust for America's Health. *F as in fat: How obesity threatens America's future*, 2011. Washington, DC: Trust for America's Health; 2011.

Available at: <http://healthyamericans.org/assets/files/TFAH2011FasInFat10.pdf>

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables*, 2013. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.

3. 2011 NC N-PASS, North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System County Obesity Rates found at: [http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/Data/Texts/NC%20NPASS%202011TABLE\\_County%20obesity%20rates.pdf](http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/Data/Texts/NC%20NPASS%202011TABLE_County%20obesity%20rates.pdf)

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