

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Cabarrus County

Children Learn the Connection Between Local Foods and Good Health

When asked where their food comes from, children attending a local summer program in Cabarrus answered, "The grocery store!" Like many children today, that's what they knew. They had never been told or experienced the rest of the story.

Over the years, families in America have moved from the farm, where they grew and ate their own fresh food, to the metropolitan areas where busy schedules dictate meals are made from processed, convenience foods instead. Children no longer get to see where their food really comes from and the consequences of that are seldom given a thought. But as the trend to buy local food has grown in popularity, it has become increasingly clear that children who really know where their food comes from, often choose to eat a greater variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and make more nutritious food selections overall.

In Cabarrus County, where 22.5% of the children and 66.5% of the adults are overweight or obese, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) understands the need for making children more cognizant of the relationship between where their food comes from and good health. When recently working with children attending a summer daycare, EFNEP explained the importance of eating from MyPlate's five food groups. The children learned that categorized by the wholesome nutrients contained, the foods found in each group built healthy bodies. EFNEP specifically highlighted the importance of eating a variety of foods found in MyPlate's fruit and vegetable groups because they are low calorie and contain important nutrients. To help the children better connect with these foods, EFNEP provided the children with hands-on tasting experiences. They sampled vegetables, not often a child's first choice in favorite foods. Sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, radishes, and zucchini were offered. No seasoning, dressings or sauces were served as accompaniments so the



children could experience the flavor of each vegetable in its natural state.

Additional hands-on experiences were had when EFNEP took the children to a food incubator farm. While there they studied the local food supply, the nutritional value of eating local food, and the impact selling local foods at farms stands and farmers markets has on the economy. They observed both cutting-edge and traditional farming methods. The children saw tomatoes growing in a high tunnel and learned how the tunnel extends growing seasons; bee hives and learned how important they are to the production of one third of all food we eat; and a sweet potato patch where they learned NC grows more sweet potatoes than any other state. Many of the children had never before been to a farm or seen food growing in the field.

After their farm visit, the children shared that knowing where their food came from had given them a deeper appreciation for the farmer and the farming process. They agreed fresh foods could be more economically nutritious than the processed foods they had been accustomed to eating. Plus, they tasted good!

Through the efforts of EFNEP, this group of Cabarrus County children has learned where their food comes from and the many benefits of buying it local and eating it fresh. They now know nutrient dense, fresh foods provide the energy and strength needed to play hard and perform well, mentally and physically.

Research confirms that children who choose to eat nutritious foods grow into healthier adolescents and adults. As a result of what these children learned through EFNEP, they will be more likely to choose healthier foods for meals and snacks and, eventually, grow into healthy, productive Cabarrus County adolescents and adults.

Resources:

2012-2016 Cabarrus County Needs Assessment

<https://www.cabarruscounty.us/government/departments/commissioners/Documents/Meeting%20Documents/2012%20Community%20Needs%20Assessment%20Nov.%205%20BOCC%20Meeting.pdf>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2010/dietaryguidelines2010.pdf>

Beyond the Grocery Store. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/margarette-purvis/beyond-the-grocery-store-_b_1070259.html

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.

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