

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Gaston County



Children Vow to Eat Their Veggies

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the latest research has shown children's vegetable intake has remained unchanged since 2004. Although this is not a setback, it indicates there is still work to be done to achieve the Healthy People 2020 intake target. Eating the recommended intake adds under-consumed nutrients to the diet and decreases the health risks leading to certain illnesses later in life.

To help achieve the recommended intakes, research cited by the CDC suggests increased attention to the goal being given in multiple settings including children's schools and homes. For this reason, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Gaston County partnered with the county's school system to offer a series of lessons through which children learned the nutritional benefits of eating a variety of vegetables every day. Through hands-on food preparation and tasting experiences, the children also learned that preparing vegetables in different ways changes their texture and taste. Since it can sometimes take 10 or more times of tasting a food to acquire a taste for it, trying a vegetable prepared in a variety of ways would allow them the opportunity to find and enjoy the taste they like best.

Recently, the EFNEP program assistant stated many of the children with whom she has worked have claimed to not like vegetables. Often, they were unwilling to even try tasting them. However, this year one class of third graders surprised her. When offering them a variety of vegetables to taste, some not typically familiar to children their age, every child willingly sampled one of each. The majority of children then stated they liked most of the vegetables they'd tried, especially the pickled okra! Although pickled beets were not among their favorites, some stated they might learn to like them if their moms would serve them at home. Of no surprise to the program assistant was the children's typical favorite, fresh vegetables dipped in Ranch dressing.

At the end of the vegetable lesson, the students accepted the EFNEP challenge to share the results of their vegetable-tasting experience with their families. They also vowed to taste all vegetables prepared for them at home.

By participating in EFNEP, these third graders learned to enjoy a greater variety of vegetables. The additional nutrients provided by including vegetables in their diets will lead to better overall health and a reduced risk of contracting debilitating illnesses later in life.

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.

References:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/fruit-vegetables/>

http://www.pbhfoundation.org/pdfs/about/res/pbh_res/stateplate.pdf

http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6331a3.htm?s_cid=mm6331a3_w

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