

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Union County

Vision Impaired Grandmother Saves \$50 on Groceries Following EFNEP

Food resource management was very challenging to a visually impaired Union County grandmother. Frustrated by the struggles she experienced when striving to make ends meet, she contacted the local Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Her goal was to improve the family's nutritional intake while reducing its food budget. The money saved could be applied to other household needs, making life more comfortable overall for everyone.

Upon entering EFNEP, the grandmother shared her situation. Having to rely on friends and family for transportation, her trips to the grocery store were erratically scheduled. While there, shopping was difficult. Uncertain as to when she would return, she could only guess at how much she should purchase and hope that the food she brought home would not spoil before it could be used. Many times she either bought too much that was ultimately wasted, or too little and needed to return to the store sooner than anticipated.

Food wasted in American homes costs a family of four anywhere from \$1,365 to \$2,275 annually. To help this grandmother reduce her food waste costs, EFNEP taught her how to plan meals, shop wisely, and store food safely as a way to overcome the loss factors related to mismanagement. EFNEP also taught her food preparation skills to help reduce loss due to cooking error.

As the EFNEP series progressed, the grandmother shared how she had been incorporating EFNEP's food resource management and preparation tips into her daily routine. She had started creating weekly meal plans that included casseroles or one-dish entrées. Combining foods from several MyPlate food groups into one dish was not only economical and nutritious, but easy and fast to prepare.

When shopping, she purchased only those perishables her family could eat within a few days and properly froze those they couldn't. Doing so kept food from spoiling. In addition, the grandmother had begun practicing EFNEP's safe food preparation skills. She cooked with an electric skillet, a method often employed by people with limited vision to reduce the safety risks associated with stovetop cooking. She had also started accurately measuring ingredients thanks to the puff paint Braille applied on the measuring cup provided as an EFNEP skill builder. Strategically placed, the paint marked key increments on the cup allowing her to "feel", not approximate, ingredient amounts.

Learning the importance of planning, she now set aside time each Saturday to plan meals for the week ahead. Many of the recipes in her plan came from the EFNEP Cookbook. To speed meal preparation throughout the week, she placed washed and sliced vegetables in zip-lock bags and stored them in the refrigerator so they'd be ready to use when needed. To reduce the cost of meat, she bought larger pieces

when on sale and asked the butcher to repackage them into specific cuts of meal-sized portions. This way, each package could safely be stored in the freezer until needed for its assigned meal. Even her grandson had become motivated to help in the effort to reduce the family's food budget. He searched store ads for good buys and clipped coupons.

By the time she graduated, the food resource management skills learned in EFNEP had allowed this grandmother with poor eyesight to achieve her food resource management and nutrition goals. She was making fewer trips to the grocery store, more competently judging purchases while there, and preparing fast, tasty and nutritious meals for her family at home. Smart planning and wise shopping had saved her \$50.00 a week. By reducing food waste, she had saved even more. The money accrued by practicing these cost saving measures has allowed her family to meet other important household needs, making daily life easier for all.



EFNEP Lessons Results in Policy Changes at Collaborating Center

A primary goal of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is to encourage personal behavior change that results in the adoption of healthy eating and physical activity. Through EFNEP's partnerships, the personal changes in participants often inspire policy and environmental changes within partnering organizations.

In Union County, a local community center has hosted several EFNEP series over the years. In each series, the importance of making wise food choices and staying physically active has been emphasized. Recently, the manager shared that the Center's partnership with EFNEP had been instrumental in influencing its decision to take a more active role in modeling healthy lifestyle behaviors to its members.

To accomplish this, a policy change would need to be implemented. No longer would the Center offer high calorie foods and drinks at the meetings it hosted. Those choices had previously been based on economics, not health. Upon learning EFNEP's Plan, Shop, Cook, and Eat principles, the manager now knew that nutrient dense food choices could be economical as well if planned wisely. Planning a menu comprised of MyPlate's five food groups, comparing prices and nutrient labels when shopping, using low-fat cooking methods, and practicing portion control when serving would save the Center money and provide its guests with healthful food choices. A policy was established stating that fresh garden vegetables, fruit salads, yogurt, and lean meats would be served at all meetings.

Reference:

Source (Accessed 7/7/2015): D. Gunders, Wasted, pp 12-13, www.nrdc.org/food/files/wasted-food-ip.pdf

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