



Nutrition Education Program

2017 Annual Report: Mercer County

Our Focus

The Nutrition Education Program works in all 120 counties to improve the lives of limited-resource Kentuckians through education and changes in behavior and in community. Through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service has agents and nutrition assistants across the state who are dedicated to improving lives in their communities.



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

Our Challenge

Poverty

In Kentucky, household median income is \$46,659, which is much lower than the U.S. median of \$57,617.¹ Kentucky has high rates of poverty and food insecurity when compared to the United States as a whole.¹

	Kentucky	U.S.
Total Poverty	18.5%	14.4%
Child Poverty	25%	19.8%
Food Insecurity	17.3%	13%
Very Low Food Secure	7.4%	5.2%

In 2014, an estimated 3,720 Mercer County residents lived in poverty, and 1,138 of them were children. This is a 33.4% increase in total poverty and 13.7% increase in child poverty since 2007.²

SNAP benefits

Participation in the SNAP program among those who are eligible for its benefits is higher in Kentucky than in the U.S. as a whole.¹

In 2015, 2,887 Mercer County residents received SNAP benefits, a 28.0% increase since 2007.³

	Kentucky	U.S.
SNAP Participation	91%	83%



Obesity

Nearly half of all American adults experience one or more preventable, diet-related chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.⁴ Kentucky has a high prevalence of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, ranking in the top 10 when compared to other states.⁵ A large body of evidence shows that healthy eating habits and regular physical activity can help people achieve and maintain good health and reduce the risk of chronic disease throughout life.⁴

In 2013, 5,718 Mercer County residents were considered obese, representing 35.8% (29.3%-42.2%) of the county's population.⁶

Our Solution

Provide hands-on, nutrition education to limited-resource audiences, focusing on:

- Buying and preparing healthy foods
- Developing new meal planning and cooking skills
- Adopting new healthy lifestyle behaviors
- Managing SNAP resources

In 2017, **8,666** Mercer County residents with limited resources participated in nutrition education lessons.

Our Results

IN MERCER COUNTY

Lifestyle improvements

In 2017, **95%** of adult participants made a positive change in food group choices and **74%** showed improvement in one or more food safety practices. In addition, **81%** began to plan meals in advance more often and **78%** used the “Nutrition Facts” on food labels to make food choices more often. Youth participants also experienced behavior changes, with **96%** improving their ability to choose healthy foods.

Our Success

At-risk students are inspired in nutrition classes

In an effort to teach new, younger audiences through the Nutrition Education Program, the SNAP-Ed assistant partnered with the Mercer County School Day Treatment, a classroom for at-risk high school students. An assessment showed that several did not eat many vegetables and very little fruit. They also couldn't identify many foods or food groups. Using MyPlate, the assistant designed a program where students made recipes and learned new skills. After becoming interested in vegetables and herbs, the students wanted to grow a garden so they talked to the horticulture agent and got seeds. Students built a greenhouse and also tilled a small garden behind the school. They grew a bountiful garden and harvested tomatoes, which led to interest in food preservation. They then canned their tomatoes and used them in recipes supplied by the SNAP-Ed assistant. In evaluations, 63% of students were drinking fewer sugary drinks, had increased physical activity and were washing fruits and vegetables before they ate them. Half were eating more vegetables, exercising for at least an hour on more days and checking food expiration dates. In 10 lessons, students progressed from knowing little about nutrition to considering careers in restaurants and farming. One student plans to be a chef.



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Nutrition Education Program
Family and Consumer Sciences Extension



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SOURCES: 1. Frac.org/reports-and-resources/national-and-state-program-data-2, accessed December 2017; 2. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates; 3. Kentucky Department for Public Health, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Statewide Summaries, December 2007, 2013, 2015; 4. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans; 5. Stateofobesity.org, accessed December 2017; 6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), County Data Indicators, Obesity Prevalence

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