



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 their 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 where they live.

Our Challenge

Poverty

According to US Census estimates for 2016, the median household income in Kentucky is **\$46,610**, almost 20% lower than the U.S. median household income of **\$57,617**.¹ Kentucky also has higher percentages of poverty and food insecurity among its population compared to census estimate for the United States overall.

	Kentucky	U.S.
Total Poverty	17.2%	12.3%
Child Poverty	24.4%	19.5%
Food Insecurity	14.7%	11.8%

In 2016, an estimated **3,088** Mercer County residents lived in poverty, and **963** of those were children under 18. This represents a **7.8%** decrease in total poverty and **7.6%** decrease in child poverty since 2008.¹

Obesity

Today, about half of all Americans have one or more chronic diseases, often related to poor diet.² These include high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke which are often associated with obesity.



In 2017, the percentage of obese adults in Kentucky was **34.3%**, ranking it in the top 10 states for highest obesity rates in the country. Kentucky was also ranked in the top 10 for high percentages of adults with diabetes (**12.9%**) and adults with hypertension (**39.4%**).³ 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.²

In 2014, **34%** of Mercer County's adult population were considered obese.⁴

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 2018, 9,944 Mercer County residents with limited resources participated in nutrition education lessons.

Our Results

IN MERCER COUNTY

Lifestyle improvements

In 2018, 99% of adult participants made a positive change in food group choices and 99% showed improvement in one or more food safety practices. In addition, 93% showed improvement in one or more food resource management practices and 89% made changes to be more physically active. Youth participants also experienced behavior changes, with 98% improving their ability to choose healthy foods.

Our Success

Community garden makes healthy food accessible to families

Mercer County NEP Assistant, Extension Agent for Horticulture and Bluegrass Community Action partnered to offer a community garden for families without an area to plant fruits and vegetables. Fifteen plots were provided for 15 families. The NEP Assistant applied for the community grant to purchase plants. Bluegrass Community Action provided raised beds and the Horticulture Agent shared information on planting and care for the fruit and vegetables. Several families had no gardening experience and were given the opportunity to choose what they would like to grow. Most wanted tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon or cantaloupe because that is what they were familiar with and looked forward to growing these staples. Participants were also encouraged to try growing something they had never tried such as squash, zucchini, eggplant or peppers, with most trying at least two new vegetables. Each month, the Horticulture Agent and NEP assistant would partner at the Community Action Building to share information with the participating families. The NEP assistant would demonstrate how to use the items they had grown in recipes they could make for their families. Families took pride in the garden and sent pictures they had taken with the children gathering fruits and vegetables. Pictures were also sent in of new recipes that participants had made using the vegetables. Over half of the families stated they had tried something new in their diet because of the garden. Several even canned homemade salsa and stated they were interested in growing more items next year to preserve.



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SOURCES:

1. U.S. Census Bureau Small Area and Income Poverty Estimates
2. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans
3. The State of Obesity Report 2018
4. 2018 County Health Rankings & Roadmap

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