

Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP)

*Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) &
The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)*

Overview

The University of Wisconsin-Extension Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) is comprised of two federally-funded nutrition education programs for low-income individuals and families. Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE), the larger of the two programs, offers nutrition education for FoodShare-eligible persons in 64 Wisconsin counties. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a longer-term educational program for low-income families with young children in 6 Wisconsin counties. FSNE is a partnership between the Food and Nutrition Service of USDA, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Eligibility

WNEP educational programs are available to low-income persons in participating Wisconsin counties. FSNE programming is for families or individuals who are enrolled in, or eligible for, Wisconsin FoodShare. Low-income families with young children are the primary audience for EFNEP education.

Access/Participation

During fiscal year 2005-2006:

- WNEP taught thousands of learners through 312,742 educational contacts. Twenty-five percent of participants were families with young children; 55 percent were school age youth; 12 percent were older adults; and 6 percent were adults between 18 and 65 years. WNEP educators reached persons of many diverse cultural groups: 76 percent of participants were Caucasian, 12 percent African American, 4 percent Asian, and 4 percent Native American and 11 percent Hispanic or Latino. Educational programs are offered in a variety of settings using group sessions, learn-while-you-wait, lessons for individuals and other strategies.
- WNEP provided community-based nutrition education programs in partnership with nearly 800 agencies, including public sector or government-funded agencies, private non-profits, schools, private sector agencies and others. Learners were taught at job centers, WIC, food pantries, in group homes, schools, senior dining sites and HeadStart.

Program Impact

- **Handling Food Safely.** Food safety education is an important part of WNEP. After lessons on handling food safely, 61% of the learners stated that they would start, or more often, refrigerate hot leftovers in shallow containers for quick cooling, and 61% stated that they would start, or more often, wash cutting boards after each use.
- **Managing Food Dollars.** A major goal of WNEP is to help limited resource families become more food secure by teaching them to track spending, manage food dollars and plan nutritious meals. Among EFNEP learners 76% improved in their use of food resource management practices such as planning meals, comparing prices or using grocery lists; and

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85% improved in nutrition practices such as considering healthful choices when selecting food, reading nutrition labels, planning meals or feeding children breakfast. After playing a learning game on the benefits of meal planning, 76% of FSNE learners said they would do more planning ahead for their meals.

- **Choosing Healthful Food.** Children in grade school are taught the importance of fruits and vegetables. After the lessons, WNEP educators sent surveys to the parents or primary caregivers of the children. 58% of the parents who responded reported that their children were more willing to taste new foods; 54% reported that their children had been eating more fruit; and 41% reported that their children had been eating more vegetables. WIC participants taught by WNEP educators also gained knowledge or changed their eating behaviors: 77% of the participants who were asked said that they were going to try to eat more fruit each day and 92% said that they had learned something that would make it easier to use WIC foods in family meals and snacks.

Positive Developments & Trends

- FSNE and EFNEP-funded educators continue to make progress reaching the neediest segment of our population with nutrition education. Food Stamp-eligible families, adults and youth are currently reached by these two programs in 64 Wisconsin counties. As additional Wisconsin counties are ready to initiate FSNE, UW-Extension has the systems, resources, and expertise to build and grow those local programs.
- FSNE programming occurs in collaboration with hundreds of local agency partners. Educational programs take place in partnership with WIC, schools, senior meal sites, food pantries and free food programs, FoodShare and job training programs, and group homes. In recent years collaborative planning and programming with WIC has been developing and growing.
- The identified needs of each local county help determine the priorities and programming emphases of the nutrition education efforts.
- FSNE and EFNEP educators are increasingly developing skills and resources in the realm of offering learner-centered educational programs. Learner-centered education is designed to engage the learners and build on their existing knowledge and skills.
- UW-Extension is able to draw upon an extensive University research base of knowledge in foods, nutrition and the most effective teaching methodologies.
- UW-Extension has the accountability experience and infrastructure that is essential to undergird a large complex federally-funded nutrition education program.

Concerns, Problems & Negative Trends

- Nutrition education programs frequently experience the challenge of finding low income residents who are available or have time to participate in lessons.
 - In the age of welfare reform, as income support resources are linked with the requirement for employment, low income residents are increasingly working outside the home and are less able to devote time to optional activities such as nutrition education.
 - Federally-funded programs which have been traditional sources of learners or referrals for nutrition education continue to decrease their requirements that participants visit their

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office locations--WIC participants no longer are required to visit the WIC clinic each month; FoodShare requirements for office visits are decreasing as web-based application systems are developed.

- Outreach and marketing continue to challenge nutrition education programs. Both FSNE and EFNEP have so much to contribute to the health and welfare of our low income residents but we need to improve our methods and systems for making sure that potential participants as well as potential partners know how they can be involved with these nutrition education programs.
- Research has established U.S. rates of childhood obesity have increased 5 fold among children age 6 to 11 years and have witnessed a three fold increase in obesity among teenagers and children age 2 to 5 years. Rising rates of obesity are increasing the urgency facing nutrition educators and others concerned about the health impacts, especially since low-income people are at greater risk than the general population.
- The Associated Press recently reported a review of 57 nutrition education projects across the U.S. aimed at improving children's eating habits were generally unsuccessful in altering children's actual eating behavior. The research cited the influence of poverty, parents, media and food deserts as contributing to the difficulty of changing behavior. Research suggests that strategies that focus more on behavior than education may be more effective.

WNEP would be more effective if...

- Relationships, collaborations and referral networks between WNEP and other agencies and programs continue to grow and develop so the needs of low income residents are met in the most effective and efficient manner possible.
- Staff at partner agencies, policy makers, and potential WNEP participants is increasingly aware of the work and mission of WNEP.
- WNEP and public health specialists could collaborate with more food pantries and food banks to assess the nutritional quality of food packages and inventories to provide the organizations with objective feedback on the healthfulness of emergency food.
- WNEP explored the feasibility of encouraging more low-income households to establish home gardens or to participate in community gardening ventures in their neighborhood.