

# FOCUS

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## Nutrition and Youth

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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University  
Spring 2009

**Cooperative Extension** – How often have you seen that phrase? How often have you wondered what it meant? This issue of *Focus* provides an excellent example of the meaning using an Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) example.

**Cooperative** – *Farm-to-You* is a result of multiple partners, state, commodity and community, working together on a relevant, timely issue. OCES was certainly one of the partners but OCES itself demonstrates cooperation as support from programs comes from local, state and federal sources. In this case of *Farm-to-You*, space is provided by Oklahoma County; dollars and in-kind came partially through state dollars as well as federal dollars through the Community Nutrition Education programs administered by OCES.

*Farm-to-You* also demonstrates the larger cooperative efforts that make good programs great. Outside partners include the Oklahoma Department of Health, the Southwestern Dairy Farmers, and the OSU Department of Nutritional Sciences.

**Extension** - According to the US Department of Agriculture, Extension means “reaching out,” and “extend[ing]” the resources of the land-grant universities, such as OSU, to solving public needs through non-formal, non-credit programs.

In the case of *Farm-to-You*, two issues were identified through local input and campus-based research. The first issue asked, “Do you know where your food comes from? Even though we are in a strong agricultural state our younger generations have less and less of an understanding about the food they eat – where it comes from and how it moves from farm to table.

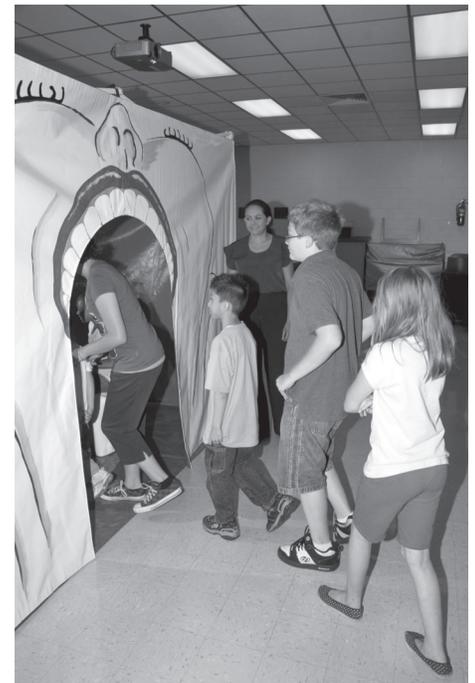
The second issue arose from findings such as those noted in the last issue of *Focus*. Citizens of Oklahoma, including our children, ranked low in overall health status, had a limited understanding of good nutrition and how to improve one’s nutritional intake, and often do not have adequate exercise.

The *Farm-to-You* response to these issues was an interactive educational exhibit with supplemental classroom materials that address these concerns. Not only do children receive educational programming but materials are sent to the parents and other OCES nutritional programs are offered.

*Farm-to-You* demonstrates the meaning and results that Cooperative Extension programs have had in the past, today, and will have tomorrow. With 1400 elementary students being reached each month, *Farm-to-You* is a perfect example of how cooperative education on community-identified priority issues can improve the quality of life of Oklahomans of all ages.



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### In This Issue –

- ***Farm to You: Teaches youth about health and agriculture***

# Farm to You: Teaches youth about health and agriculture

Oklahoma school children are learning about how the foods they eat get from the farm to their dinner table and how this food is used for good health.

*Farm to You* is an interactive, walk-through display geared toward kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade students.

The exhibit is a joint effort of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development and agricultural education programs), Oklahoma State University Department of Nutritional Sciences, Oklahoma State Department of Health (WIC Service) and Southwest Dairy Farmers. The goal of the exhibit is to assist elementary school-age students to choose agriculturally-sound foods and develop healthy eating, physical activity and hygiene habits.

The *Farm to You* exhibit began traveling to county sites in September 2008. As of March 1, 2009 it had traveled to 24 community sites, been served by 451 volunteers and experienced by 8,800 students. Three marketing events were conducted, increasing the awareness of parents, school personnel and community members on the importance of teaching the link between agriculture and health.

Deana Hildebrand, OCES nutrition specialist, said it is important for children to know where food comes from and how their food choices are related to their health.

Poor eating habits and sedentary lifestyles among Oklahoma's youth indicate the need to educate children on the importance of eating healthy and being physically active.

"The importance of the information available in this exhibit can be found in the major health issues prevalent in our target audience," Hildebrand said. "Children in kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade don't normally consume enough fruits and vegetables. They often have excessive calorie consumption and low physical activity levels which contribute to being overweight. This age group also has a high prevalence of dental decay, low consumption of milk and dairy foods and a high rate of smoking among adolescents and teens. Being overweight as a child increases the risk of developing diabetes and cardiovascular disease later in life. Eating habits and lifestyle practices develop early in life, so it's important to promote a healthy lifestyle at an early age. The *Farm to You* exhibit does just that."

The *Farm to You* adventure begins at the Cheeseburger Farm and continues through eight stations, following food from the farm to the market and through the body to explore the relationships between agriculture, food and health.

Hildebrand said the station's lessons have been tied to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Priority Academic Student Skills and the food group clings are made available to school cafeterias to help students identify MyPyramid foods groups when selecting breakfast and lunch meals.

The student activity books were developed for use in the classroom to aid in teacher/student discussions and reinforce agriculture, nutrition and health messages. Family newsletters were developed to promote OCES as a resource for agriculture and nutrition information, as well as extend agriculture, nutrition and health messages into the home environment. These messages are consistent with the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2005) and the MyPyramid Food Guidance System and specific to health issues of children in Oklahoma.

Diana Romano, a registered dietitian, serves as the state coordinator for *Farm to You* and she said the exhibit travels to any part of the state.

"Any school that wants to have the exhibit should contact their local Cooperative Extension office first," Romano said. "The county office then contacts me and I schedule it and train the personnel."

The school must have a 40-ft by 40-ft, 10-ft high indoor space available, at least eight volunteers to set it up and take it down and nine volunteers to be station presenters.

"Many children don't know where food comes from and how their food choices are related to their health," Romano said. "This exciting adventure will help Oklahoma children

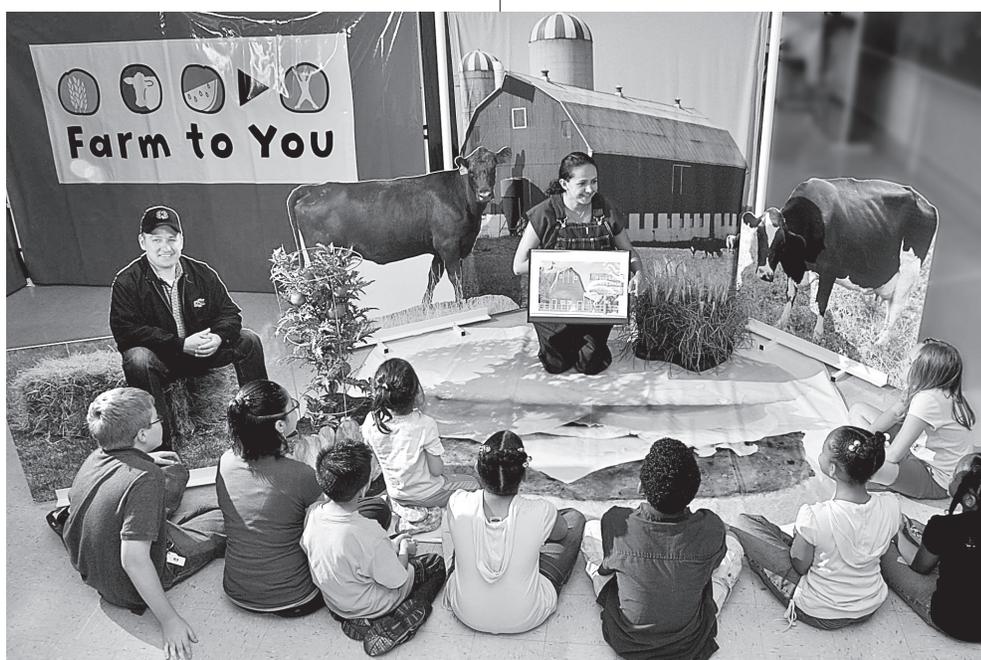
make this connection."

Teachers have reported the time spent at the exhibit is worthwhile and that it is generating good questions and discussions about food, nutrition and health. Students have said "Thank you for showing us all this stuff about your bones and your body. I really like the beginning where it had that big hamburger. That was my favorite." Other favorites were "Learning how to keep your teeth healthy and strong and choosing the right food."

High school age students are also benefiting from the exhibit. The Kellyville Family Consumer Sciences teacher trained FCS students to be the station presenters. She reported, "It worked beautifully and that high school students and the elementary students are still visiting with each other about nutrition." Hildebrand responded the feedback of positive interaction between students is exciting to receive and shows promise *Farm to You* will continue to stimulate health-promoting conversations among students across Oklahoma.

"We are confident these small but significant improvements in attitudes and increased awareness have potential to motivate Oklahoma school children toward sustainable dietary, physical activity and hygiene behavior changes, thus reducing risk for developing chronic diseases and related economic burden," Hildebrand said.

More information about *Farm to You* is available at [www.farmtoyou.okstate.edu](http://www.farmtoyou.okstate.edu), or by contacting Romano at 405-713-1125, ext. 2122 or [Diana.romano@okstate.edu](mailto:Diana.romano@okstate.edu)





FOCUS is a publication designed to direct attention to innovative Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences programs and to share program philosophy and updates of new and changing program directions. Your comments and suggestions for topics for future issues are welcomed and appreciated. Please send all correspondence to FOCUS, Family and Consumer Sciences Cooperative Extension, 135 HES, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078. FOCUS is published three times yearly by the Family and Consumer Sciences Cooperative Extension program.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$289.95 for 500 copies. 0409 GH.

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