

# FOCUS

ON

## Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

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The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) has been serving populations in need for more than 35 years through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

EFNEP assists low-income youth or low-income families with young children in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for nutritionally sound diets. The program has helped low-income families in Oklahoma improve their family diets and nutritional well-being.

Poor health disproportionately affects minority and limited income populations. The integrated EFNEP curriculum teaches a high-risk audience the skills needed to reduce their risk of obesity and other chronic diseases.

EFNEP serves a diverse Oklahoma population. According to 2004 program data, 5 percent of EFNEP enrollees were Hispanic, 27 percent were black, 16 percent were Native American, and 51 percent were white.

A study conducted in 2000 found that Oklahoma realizes a 36 percent gain in their tax dollar investment from EFNEP. This gain comes from the decrease of nutrition-related illnesses, which in turn reduces medical costs and increases worker productivity. EFNEP program data proves that the program improves health and saves money.

The President's budget for FY 2006 includes a 4 million dollar increase for EFNEP. Congressional support is required to make this increase a reality and allow us to reach more Oklahoma youth and families with EFNEP. Please let your congressman and senator know how you feel about the proposed increase for EFNEP.

The following articles provide more in depth information about this practical program that is making a real difference in the health of Oklahoma citizens, and potentially reducing their long-term health care costs.

Your questions and suggestions for improving the quality of life for Oklahomans through family and consumer education programs are always welcome.



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OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE  
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# What is EFNEP?

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's (CSREES) Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a nutrition education program that currently operates in all 50 states and in American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

It is designed to assist limited resource audiences in acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitudes and changed behavior necessary for nutritionally sound diets, and to contribute to their personal development, and the improvement of the total family diet, and nutritional well-being.

Nutrition Education Assistants (NEAs) teach EFNEP curriculum and usually live in the communities where they work.

They recruit families and receive referrals from neighborhood contacts and community agencies such as the Food Stamp Program or WIC.

## *EFNEP for Families*

Through an experiential learning process, adult program participants learn how to make food choices that improve the nutritional quality of the meals they serve their families.

Participants increase their ability to select and buy food that meets the nutritional needs of their family. They gain new skills in food production, preparation, storage and safety, and learn to better manage their food budgets and related resources, such as Food Stamps. EFNEP curriculum is delivered as a series of lessons, often over several months, by nutrition education assistants and volunteers, many of whom are indigenous to the target population.

The hands-on, learn-by-doing approach allows the participants to gain the

practical skills necessary to make positive behavior changes.

## *EFNEP for Youth*

The delivery of EFNEP youth programs takes on various forms. EFNEP provides nutritional education at schools as an enrichment of the curriculum, in after-school care programs, as well as through 4-H clubs. Lessons focus primarily on nutrition, food preparation and food safety.

## *EFNEP Makes a Difference*

In its 35-year history, EFNEP's reputation for quality information and educational techniques has grown. Throughout

Oklahoma, EFNEP has collaborated with school systems, community agencies and other state and local programs to improve the well-being of Oklahoma's population.

Increased funding for EFNEP would allow more low-income and minority families with children to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for nutritionally sound diets, as well as improvement in physical activity and overall well-being.

**Debra Greene-Garrard**  
CNEP Coordinator

**Stephany Parker**  
CNEP Nutrition Education Specialist

## 2004: The year in numbers...

967

Number of families participating in EFNEP.

19

Average number of lessons EFNEP graduates receive.

93

Percent of EFNEP graduates who make a positive change towards a healthier diet.

42

Percent of EFNEP graduates who less often run out of food before the end of the month.

32

Percent of EFNEP graduates who report their children ate breakfast more often.

10,475

Number of school children participating in EFNEP who have learned and practiced skills in selecting low-cost healthy foods.

69,817

Estimated dollar value of volunteer time spent supporting EFNEP's mission.

# Oklahoma EFNEP Receives Congressional Support for Increased Funding

Stillwater, Okla. - U.S. Third District Congressman Frank Lucas signed a letter supporting increased funding for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

EFNEP has had level funding of \$59 million for more than 20 years. The program has never reached the maximum authorized funding of \$83 million. Due to the low funding, EFNEP reaches only 2 percent of the eligible population nationwide.

Lucas expressed great concern over funding cuts of EFNEP, stating, "Many of these programs are critical to the needs and well being of our citizens. There is currently an epidemic of obesity in this country, yet cuts to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program have caused the layoff of hundreds of Extension staff that educate low-income families on the benefits of proper nutrition."

Lucas continues to support EFNEP because of its proven success. He recog-

nizes the need to increase EFNEP's outreach in the efforts to reduce obesity and improve the nutritional status of Oklahoma's families and youth, as well as those across the country.

For 35 years, EFNEP has provided education on basic nutrition including portion sizes, food preparation and safety and economical food buying to low-income families and youth.

In 2002, EFNEP was recognized as the best federal program for increasing fruit and vegetable intake— a behavior that has been linked to reducing obesity.

In the past four years, EFNEP has reached more than 5,000 adults and 51,000 youth in Oklahoma.

EFNEP continues to give back to the taxpayers. According to a 2000 research study, for every \$1.00 spent on EFNEP, Oklahoma saves \$1.36 in increased worker productivity and decreased medical costs.



**Congressman Frank Lucas visits with Elizabeth Smith, EFNEP Nutrition Education Assistant, about her success in providing nutrition education to Oklahoma youth in Comanche County.**

## Teachers and Students Appreciate Youth Program

When the school year started last fall, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program nutrition education assistants geared up to start teaching nutrition to third and fourth grade students

in Atoka, Choctaw and Pushmataha counties.

All of the schools in these counties have a high percentage of the student population who receive free or reduced lunches. The EFNEP NEAs taught the nutrition program to 380 third and fourth graders in the three counties. Target schools included both small, rural schools and larger schools.

Lesson topics included the Food Guide Pyramid, Serving Sizes, Food Safety, Let's Eat a Good Breakfast, Healthy Snacking and

Putting it All Together.

To help supplement the curriculum material, learning experiences and hands-on activities were included. These additional components, such as games, films, activity sheets and the opportunity to prepare a healthy snack for themselves, enhanced the students' learning and heightened their interest.

One teacher participating in the program reported that her students' achievement scores were higher as a result of the program being taught in her classroom. On pre- and post-evaluations, 11 percent of the students showed improvement and increased knowledge regarding food safety practices.



