



# The Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program

University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is designed to improve the nutrition of low-income families with young children, and youth. Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture since 1969, EFNEP is an integral part of the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, and one of the federal government's oldest educational outreach programs for low-income families.

Feeding a family on a limited budget is extremely challenging as low-income families face inadequate and expensive housing, lack of health care, cuts in welfare benefits, lack of day care, and few educational or career opportunities to help them get out of poverty.

EFNEP offers knowledge and skills to help people control and manage their food and nutrition practices for better health and quality of life. For some families, this simply means having enough food at home to last from payday to payday. When combined with food assistance programs such as WIC or the Food Stamp program, EFNEP makes a difference for improving food choices and health. Families with young children with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level or with other resource limitations such as poor housing, inadequate access to food, limited reading skills or physical disability can qualify for EFNEP. Youth living in targeted areas also qualify to participate in EFNEP.

EFNEP offices are located in some of Connecticut's poorest areas -- Hartford, New Haven and Eastern Connecticut. During 2000-2001, 55% of EFNEP families who reported their income had incomes at or below 75% of the poverty level. With incomes that low, families have great difficulty avoiding chronic hunger.

EFNEP's approach to nutrition education is unique. Specially trained EFNEP Community Nutrition Educators who know their communities well, work with program families in their homes or in small groups. EFNEP families participate in nutrition education usually for at least four to six months.

Working on individual needs of each family, EFNEP staff help homemakers understand the relationships of food and nutrition to health and fitness, to get the most for their food dollars and Food Stamps, to prepare nutritious meals and snacks that their families will like, and to handle and store food safely. Special needs such as nutrition during pregnancy, infant and child nutrition, consumer nutrition, or weight control are emphasized as appropriate.

EFNEP helps families connect with local agencies that provide assistance which they may need, and often help families enroll in other federal food programs. EFNEP staff also work with youth in after school, community and special summer programs.

EFNEP is evaluated with quarterly reports documenting enrollment and with dietary assessments of participants. EFNEP staff also conduct informal evaluations with family members, looking for changes in food and nutrition practices that show improvement. During 2000-2001, 94% of EFNEP participants improved their food choices.

Currently 8 EFNEP community Nutrition Educators work in four EFNEP units under the supervision and guidance of EFNEP Supervisors who are Cooperative Extension Nutrition Educators. One state level EFNEP Director and an Administrative Assistant provide resources, training, and materials for EFNEP staff.

Connecticut has witnessed an increase in the numbers of families with children using soup kitchens and emergency food assistance. With current documentation linking hunger and poverty in Connecticut, EFNEP is crucial to giving families and youth education for survival.

EFNEP's small staff can only begin to meet these growing needs. Cooperation with other agencies and organizations at the state and local levels is essential for expanding EFNEP's outreach. EFNEP helps community agencies working with low-income people

by extending staff, time, resources, and by offering personalized, culture-specific education and materials developed for low reading levels. EFNEP has worked with a wide variety of agencies and organizations and is highly valued for its contributions in the community.

As part of the University of Connecticut, EFNEP brings informal, quality education to people who otherwise have very little access to the higher education system in Connecticut.

Since EFNEP began in Connecticut, over 35,000 low-income families with over 107,200 family members have been enrolled. 80,000 more families with about 325,000 family members have been reached through short-term community education programs. Over 123,700 youth have participated in EFNEP and 9800 volunteers have helped EFNEP staff in many ways.

EFNEP can provide low-income families and youth with ideas for better nutrition and health. People also learn skills that build their self-sufficiency and self-esteem. For more information about EFNEP, contact the EFNEP office nearest you.

<http://www.canr.uconn.edu/nusci/outrch/EFNEP.html>

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