

**FY 2020**

# **SOUTHEAST REGION SNAP-ED TOPLINE:**

**Critical Nutrition Supports  
during the COVID-19 Pandemic**



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# ABSTRACT

## Background

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) is the federal nutrition education program of the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP-Ed is designed to increase the likelihood that individuals with limited budgets can eat a healthy diet and achieve a physically active lifestyle based on the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020) and public health approaches. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Southeast Region SNAP-Ed program includes eight states with 25 implementing agencies (IAs) and their partners.

This evaluation of the Southeast Region SNAP-Ed program assessed:

- SNAP-Ed Policy, Systems and Environmental (PSE) changes implemented throughout the Southeast Region, including medium-term and long-term changes (MT5/MT6 and LT5/LT6)
- The COVID-19 response in implementing SNAP-Ed programming in the Southeast Region (SER)

## Methods

Medium-term and long-term PSE changes were reported by the SER IAs using a Microsoft Excel template or through a data export from the Program Evaluation and Reporting System (PEARS). Descriptive analyses were conducted to calculate the number of PSE changes and the reach of those changes. IAs reported how they have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic via a SurveyMonkey questionnaire. Descriptive analyses of this data were also conducted.

## Results

IAs reported a total of 1,359 PSE changes across 7 states with a combined reach of 1,161,289. Of those changes, there were 108 (7.9%) policy changes, 602 (44.3%) systems changes, and 649 (47.8%) environmental changes. For long-term PSE changes, a total of 666 sites (91%) reported a multi-component intervention with their PSE nutrition change and a total of 194 sites (97%) reported a multi-component intervention with their PSE physical activity change. Also, all IAs reported adaptations to their SNAP-Ed programming based on COVID, which included partnering with 12,188 new or existing partners to implement direct education, PSE changes, and social marketing programs and moving direct and indirect education materials online.

## Conclusion

In 2020, states and IAs were able to quickly pivot to meet the needs of their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching more than 1.1 million people with PSE changes. Adaptations that proved successful included the development of digital resources, moving education classes online and maintaining and expanding partnerships.



# INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) is the federal nutrition education program of the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP-Ed is designed to increase the likelihood that individuals with limited budgets can eat a healthy diet and achieve a physically active lifestyle based on the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020) and public health approaches.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Southeast Region (SER) SNAP-Ed program includes eight states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The Southeast Learning Community was a partnership between Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition (PHI CWN), USDA SER, state SNAP agencies, and 25 implementing agencies (IAs) and their partners. IAs deliver SNAP-Ed throughout the SERO region.

This evaluation assessed SNAP-Ed Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) changes implemented by SER IAs for the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020. Of particular interest were medium-term (MT) and long-term (LT) indicators focused on nutrition supports (MT5, LT5) and physical activity and reduced sedentary behavior supports (MT6, LT6) that are defined in the Interpretive Guide to the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework (USDA-FNS, 2016).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way SNAP-Ed programs were delivered in FFY 2020. Thus, in addition to PSE change data, data were collected to assess how SER implementing agencies (IAs) adapted their programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.





# METHODS

## Policy, Systems, and Environmental Changes

PSE changes were reported by the SERO IAs using the MT5, MT6, LT5, and LT6 indicators as described in Table 1. PSE activities were reported in a Microsoft Excel template or through a data export from the Program Evaluation and Reporting System (PEARS).

**TABLE 1: SNAP-ED EVALUATION FRAMEWORK INDICATORS RELEVANT TO PSE WORK**

Relevant Indicator	Description
<b>MT5b/MT6b</b>	Total number of policy changes
<b>MT5c/MT6c</b>	Total number of systems changes
<b>MT5d/MT6d</b>	Total number of environmental changes
<b>MT5e/MT6e</b>	Total number of promotional efforts for a PSE change
<b>MT5f/MT6f</b>	Reach: Total potential number of individuals who encountered the improved environment or were affected by the policy change on a regular (typical) basis and were assumed to be influenced by it.
<b>LT5a/LT6a</b>	The total number of sites or organizations that implemented a multi-component and multi-level intervention with one or more changes in MT5/MT6 (site or organizational adoption of PSE changes and promotion) and one or more of the following additional components: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Evidence-based education</li><li>2. Marketing</li><li>3. Parent/community involvement</li><li>4. Staff training on continuous program and policy implementation</li></ol>
<b>LT5b/LT6b</b>	Total number of components per site or organization, and types of components implemented during the period assessed

## COVID Response

SNAP-Ed activities for FFY 2020 were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, additional data collection tools were added to the SER evaluation to capture how IAs adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection tools were developed to include information about COVID-19 impact on PSE activities, partners, direct and indirect education programs that have been moved to virtual settings, and success stories that took place in FFY 2020. An online SurveyMonkey questionnaire was created to capture how IAs have adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# RESULTS

## Nutrition and Physical Activity Supports (MT5 / MT6)

IAs reported a total of 1,359 PSE changes across 7 states with a combined reach of 1,161,289. Of those changes, there were 108 (7.9%) policy changes, 602 (44.3%) systems changes, and 649 (47.8%) environmental changes. These PSE changes were supported by 95 promotional changes directly paired with a PSE and 456 promotional changes not directly paired with a PSE change.

**TABLE 2: TOP 3 NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PA) POLICY CHANGES (MT5B/MT6B)**

Nutrition Policy Change (MT5b)	Frequency	Nutrition Policy Change (MT6b)	Frequency
Policy for increasing nutrition education or cooking activities	51	Policy to increase time spent doing physical activity	11
Established or improved food/beverage or nutrition-related policy (childcare wellness, school wellness, workplace wellness, etc.)	9	Established or improved physical activity policy (childcare wellness, school wellness, workplace wellness, etc.)	3
Healthy retail policy	7	Policy restrictions on physical activity as a punishment	2

**TABLE 3: TOP 3 NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PA) SYSTEMS CHANGES (MT5C/MT6C)**

Nutrition System Change (MT5c)	Frequency	PA Systems Change (MT6c)	Frequency
Initiated or expanded farm-to-table/use of fresh or local produce	52	Incorporated physical activity into the school day or during classroom-based instruction (not recess/free play or PE)	47
Implemented novel distribution systems to reach high-risk populations, such as home delivery for the elderly, farmers market, etc.	50	Improved quality of physical education	28
Improved free water access, taste, quality, smell, or temperature	36	Increased or improved opportunities for unstructured physical activity time/free play	27

**TABLE 4: TOP 3 NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PA) ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES (MT5D/MT6D)**

Nutrition Environmental Change (MT5d)	Frequency	PA Environmental Change (MT6d)	Frequency
Edible gardens (establish, reinvigorate, or maintain food gardens)	<b>294</b>	Increased or improved opportunities for structured physical activity	<b>44</b>
Improved appeal, layout or display of meal food/beverages to encourage healthy and discourage unhealthy selections	<b>67</b>	Initiated new or expanded access to facilities for after-hours recreation or shared use	<b>14</b>
Initiated or expanded use of the garden for nutrition education	<b>35</b>	Improved or expanded physical activity facilities, equipment, structures, or outdoor space	<b>13</b>

**TABLE 5: TOP NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PA) PROMOTIONAL CHANGES (MT5E/MT6E)**

Nutrition Promotional Changes (MT5e)	Frequency	PA Promotional Changes (MT6e)	Frequency
Used interactive educational display (that will stay at the site), other visual displays, posters, taste testing, live demonstrations, audiovisuals, celebrities, etc. to prompt healthy behavior choices close to the point of decision	<b>65</b>	Installed signage and prompts for use of walking, stairs, and bicycle paths	<b>8</b>
Took steps to improve the appeal of the school meal program in order to increase meal participation	<b>12</b>		
Initiated or enhanced limits on marketing/promotion of less healthy options	<b>7</b>		

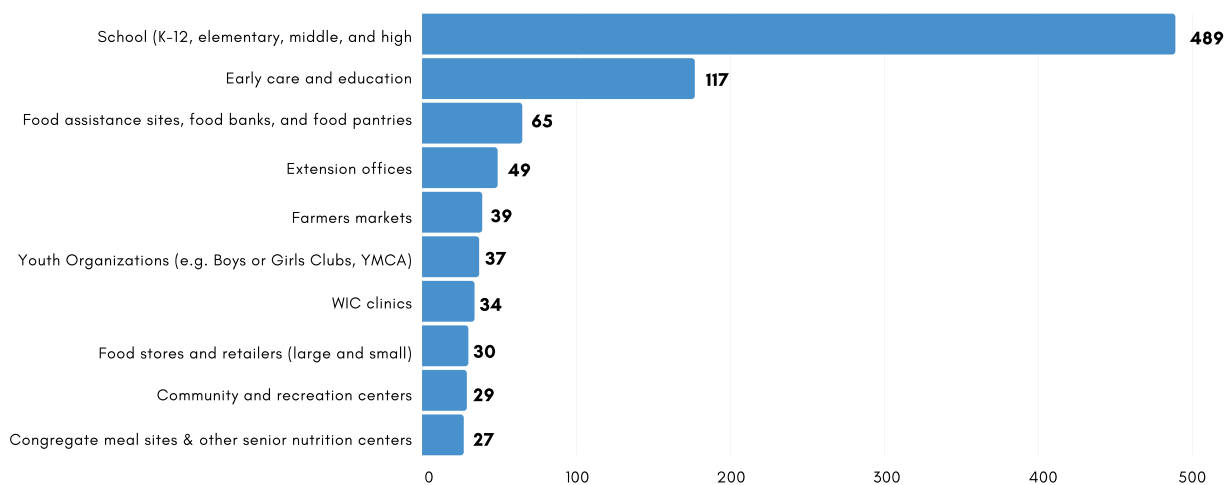
PSE changes took place in multiple settings where people eat, learn, live, play, shop, and work. The domain of PSE changes varies by state, but the most common setting was the learn setting.



**TABLE 6: REACH BY DOMAIN**

Domain	Reach
Learn (e.g. schools, early childhood education, libraries)	<b>900,517</b>
Shop (e.g. food stores, farmers markets, food banks)	<b>178,053</b>
Play (e.g. parks and open spaces, gardens, community centers)	<b>29,255</b>
Live (e.g. public housing, shelters, places of worship)	<b>36,969</b>
Eat (e.g. restaurants, congregate meal sites, USDA summer meal sites)	<b>1,653</b>
Work (e.g. job training programs, worksites with low wage workers)	<b>498</b>
Not Reported	<b>14,344</b>
<b>TOTAL REACH</b>	<b>1,161,289</b>

**FIGURE 1: TYPES OF SETTINGS WITH PSE CHANGES IN SER REGION**



## NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SUPPORTS IMPLEMENTATION (LT5 / LT6)

PSE changes were further assessed to see if they were implemented as a multi-component intervention. The implementation features are intended to enhance the likelihood of the interventions' impact and sustainability and therefore represent the long-term (LT5 and LT6) indicators from the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework (USDA-FNS, 2016).

A total of 666 sites (91%) reported at least one nutritional support (MT5) PSE change, a total of 194 sites (97%) reported at least one physical activity support (MT6) PSE change, and 10 sites implemented a PSE change that was classified as both MT5 and MT6 with one or more of the following components:

- Evidence-based education
- Marketing
- Parent/community involvement
- Staff training on continuous program and policy implementation

**TABLE 7: TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPONENTS PER SITE, FOR SITES THAT IMPLEMENTED AT LEAST ONE MT5 OR MT6 PSE CHANGE (LT5B/LT6B)**

Number of components	LT5b		LT6b	
	Number of Sites	Percent	Number of Sites	Percent
One component	311	46.7%	5	2.6%
Two component	122	18.3%	11	5.7%
Three component	55	8.3%	9	4.6%

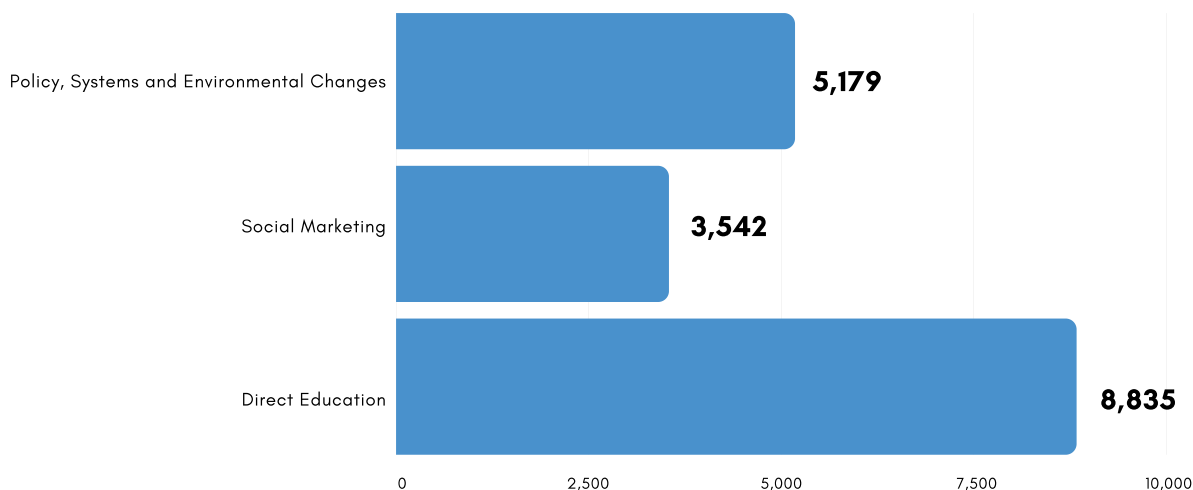
**TABLE 8: NUMBER OF SITES IMPLEMENTING AT LEAST ONE MT5 OR MT6 PSE CHANGE AND EACH TYPE OF THE SPECIFIC ADDITIONAL COMPONENT (LT5B/LT6B)**

Specific Components	LT5b		LT6b	
	Number of Sites	Percent	Number of Sites	Percent
Evidence-based education	529	79.5%	187	95.4%
Marketing	274	41.2%	179	91.2%
Parent/community involvement	297	44.7%	187	95.4%
Staff training on continuous program and policy implementation	335	50.4%	185	94.3%

## COVID RESPONSE

All IAs responded to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire from all 8 SER states. In FFY 2020, IAs partnered with 12,188 new or existing partners to implement direct education, PSE changes and social marketing programs. With this, 8,835 partners engaged in direct education, 5,179 participated in PSE change work and 3,542 conducted social marketing efforts.

**FIGURE 2: TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTNERS INVOLVED WITH SNAP-ED INTERVENTION TYPES**



One of the key objectives during COVID was to increase or maintain partnerships, specifically programs supported by the USDA's FNS. On average, IAs partnered with 3 FNS programs. The most common FNS programs were:

- Summer Meals (59%; n=16)
- State Nutrition Action Committees (SNAC) (56%; n=15)
- Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP) (48%; n=13)
- National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs (44%; n=12)

### Direct & Indirect Education

In total, 243 direct education programs, which either covered nutrition or physical activity, moved online and 8,881 direct education sessions were delivered online. The primary two platforms for direct education included: Zoom (n= 18) and Facebook (n=9).

For indirect education, 13,995 indirect education materials were moved online (which included materials like handwashing flyers). The primary platforms for indirect education included Facebook (n=22) YouTube (n=12), and Instagram (n=9).



# CONCLUSION

In 2020, SER SNAP-Ed states and IAs were able to quickly pivot to meet the needs of their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adaptations that proved successful included the development of digital resources, moving education classes online, and maintaining and expanding partnerships. Since 2017, states have increased their PSE efforts and ultimate impact (even during the global pandemic), increasing the total estimated reach from 830,049 in 2017 to more than 1.1 million in 2020. PSE changes also nearly doubled from 701 in 2017 to 1,359 in 2020. Most sites in SER are implementing multi-component and/or multi-level interventions therefore if continued, will lead to sustained, effective PSEs over time (USDA-FNS, 2016).



# ALABAMA

## STATE PROFILES



1 in 6 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**727,000**

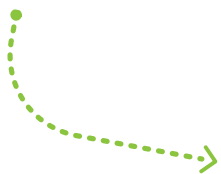
1 in 7 of the state population



### POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

#### TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 151



#### TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:



14 TOTAL  
**POLICY** CHANGES

- Nutrition: Developed nutrition policies for new food distribution sites



68 TOTAL  
**SYSTEMS** CHANGES

- Nutrition: Increased access to community food gardens for residents
- PA: Increased opportunities for unstructured physical activity



69 TOTAL  
**ENVIRONMENTAL** CHANGES

- Nutrition: Cultivated edible food gardens
- PA: Increased access to bike and walking paths

#### # OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE



75% Evidence-based education  
50% Marketing  
100% Community involvement  
25% Staff training



55% Evidence-based education  
56% Marketing  
58% Community involvement  
14% Staff training

# SUCCESS STORY

## COLLABORATION TO CREATE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE COVID RESOURCES FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) is on the front lines leading the COVID-19 response. Staff working on State Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) at ADPH coordinated a collaborative effort with the Chronic Disease Branch and Office of Minority Health to develop COVID-19 materials that would reach vulnerable populations with culturally appropriate messages and information.

The collaborating partners developed handwashing materials in Spanish and modified existing materials to be more culturally sensitive. A one-page flyer was created to highlight ADPH healthy lifestyle programs to bring awareness of the link between obesity and chronic disease and COVID-19. Additionally, food access resources were identified to share with low-income families who may be struggling to make ends meet during COVID-19. The Communication Branch promoted the resources through zip code-specific public service announcements that reached low-income audiences in Black Belt counties. The Disability and Health program reviewed materials to ensure they were appropriate for individuals with a disability.

A web page for Vulnerable Populations was added to the ADPH COVID-19 website to house these resources. The new page and materials were promoted on ADPH social media accounts and shared with multiple ADPH programs such as [Women, Infants, and Children](#), the [Office of HIV Prevention and Care](#), [Well Woman](#), and the ADPH District Outreach Coordinators. Outside partners received thousands of hard copies to disseminate resources to vulnerable families.

The website and social media posts made a statewide impact on SNAP-Ed participants by providing credible resources and information related to COVID-19. ADPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Division added a food access resource page to their website as an added success of their work.



### KEY PARTNERS

- Chronic Disease Branch
- Office of Minority Health
- Nutrition and Physical Activity Division
- Communications Branch
- Disability and Health program
- Alabama Department of Senior Services
- Montgomery Area Food Bank
- Community Health and Education Resources
- Whatley Federally Qualified Health Clinic
- District Outreach Coordinators

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# SUCCESS STORY

## SNAP-ED EDUCATOR INSTRUMENTAL IN OBTAINING COVID-19 COMMUNITY RELIEF GRANT FUND FOR COMMUNITIES FACING HUNGER NEEDS



In 2020, the **North Alabama Agriplex** received multiple COVID-19 Community Relief Grant Funds, including \$99,200 from the **United States Department of Agriculture Farmers to Families Program**, to purchase fresh, local produce for redistribution at local emergency food sites. **Roberta McClellan**, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) educator in Cullman and Marshall Counties, was instrumental in the Agriplex acquiring grant funds. **Roberta** provided conversions for cups of produce and retail prices of produce as data to support the grant application using the Garden Harvest Database tool developed by Alabama Extension SNAP-Ed at Auburn University. The grant allowed the Agriplex to distribute fresh produce in four Alabama counties: Blount, Cullman, Lawrence, and Winston. **Roberta** also coordinated with **Jennifer Palmer** and **Annette Casteel**, SNAP-Ed educators to support additional produce distribution efforts in neighboring counties.

The Agriplex is a community center established to promote, support, and educate residents on Alabama's agriculture. Through this new grant, SNAP-Ed educators built on existing community relationships to support new activities. SNAP-Ed educators provided services and resources at food distribution sites to increase food and nutrition security for families. Their efforts supported drive-through pantries by weighing produce for reporting, disseminating recipe cards and nutrition education resources in the produce boxes.

These joint efforts resulted in **990 food boxes** distributed monthly to families facing food insecurity. Community volunteers were also involved in the initiative, as a local Boy Scouts troop assisted the Agriplex in assembling the food boxes. Produce donations from **LouAllen Farms** to The Kitchen Food Pantry ultimately benefitted families facing food insecurity. The Kitchen Food Pantry purchased **300-400 pounds** of food each week, which resulted in up to four pounds of food for an additional **100 recipients** weekly.

“Thanks to a partnership with the Cullman County Extension, Roberta McClellan weighed our produce every week enabling us to count how many servings went into the community of fresh produce. \$79,360 was paid to local farmers for fresh fruits and vegetables ranging from strawberries to winter squash. 42,221.5 pounds of fresh produce (8,445 servings) were distributed to over 20 local feeding agencies.”  
- Rachel Dawsey, Director of the North Alabama Agriplex

### KEY PARTNERS

- Agriplex
- The Kitchen Food Pantry
- Main St. Ministries
- USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program
- LouAllen Farms

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# FLORIDA

## STATE PROFILES



1 in 8 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**2,847,000**

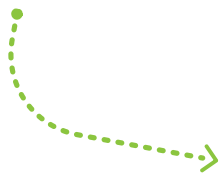
1 in 8 of the state population



### POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

**TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 333**



**1**

TOTAL PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY (PA)  
CHANGES

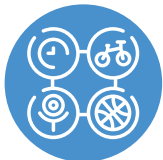
**332**

TOTAL NUTRITION  
CHANGES

**655,629**

REACH

### TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:



**1 TOTAL  
POLICY CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Developed nutrition policies for new food distribution sites



**62 TOTAL  
SYSTEMS CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Improved access to quality water
- PA: Increased opportunities for unstructured physical activity



**270 TOTAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Cultivated edible food gardens

### # OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE

**1**

PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

100% Evidence-based education  
100% Marketing  
100% Community involvement  
0% Staff training

**278**

NUTRITION

81% Evidence-based education  
4% Marketing  
10% Community involvement  
30% Staff training

# SUCCESS STORY

## COLLABORATING TO INCREASE COMMUNITY ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS



When COVID-19 began, members of the Central Florida Alliance to End Hunger (CFAEH) Food Access Working Group gathered to determine how to engage partners to provide healthy food and nutrition education resources to meet a growing need in the community. The working group, co-chaired by Angela Corona, former public health specialist with the University of Florida – Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension Family Nutrition Program (FNP), developed plans for a new produce distribution site in a high-need area of East Winter Garden. However, the proposal depended upon funding and resources that were not guaranteed.

St. Luke's United Methodist Church only had funding to provide about four weeks of food distribution to food-insecure families. Needing to find a source for free produce, Corona reached out to the [Society of St. Andrew \(SoSA\)](#), a major gleaning organization with a regional office in Orlando, Florida. She coordinated a meeting between SoSA and the CFAEH working group.

As a result of that meeting, SoSA committed to providing gleaned produce at Shepherd's Hope Health Center, the new East Winter Garden distribution site, weekly. The SoSA-gleaned fresh produce sustained the distribution site for 12 weeks, beginning April 23, 2020, until harvest season ended. During that time, St. Luke's was also able to use SoSA produce to support distributions at other churches and organizations. FNP printed healthy recipes and physical activity handouts to distribute with the produce at Shepherd's Hope and partnered with the [American Heart Association](#) on identifying appropriate resources for distribution.

In total, leveraging the partnership with SoSA allowed St. Luke's to provide fresh produce at their distribution site and other sites, ultimately impacting **500-700 individuals** per week during the program.

“Angela Corona connected us with our own community partner that we had known for some 20 years, but in a new way. Because of this connection, we were able to extend four weeks of distribution to 12 weeks.”  
– Mariam Mengistie, Executive Director of missions, St. Luke's United Methodist Church

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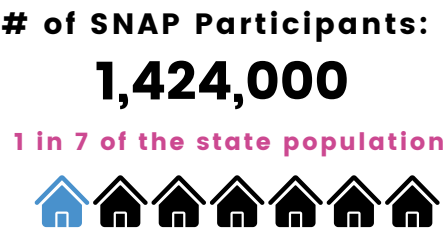


### KEY PARTNERS

- Central Florida Alliance to End Hunger Food Access Working Group
- St. Luke's United Methodist Church
- UF/IFAS Extension Family Nutrition Program
- Society of St. Andrew
- American Heart Association
- Shepherd's Hope Health Center

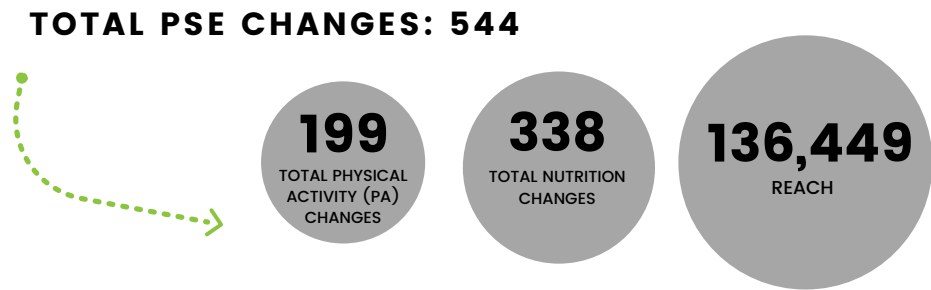
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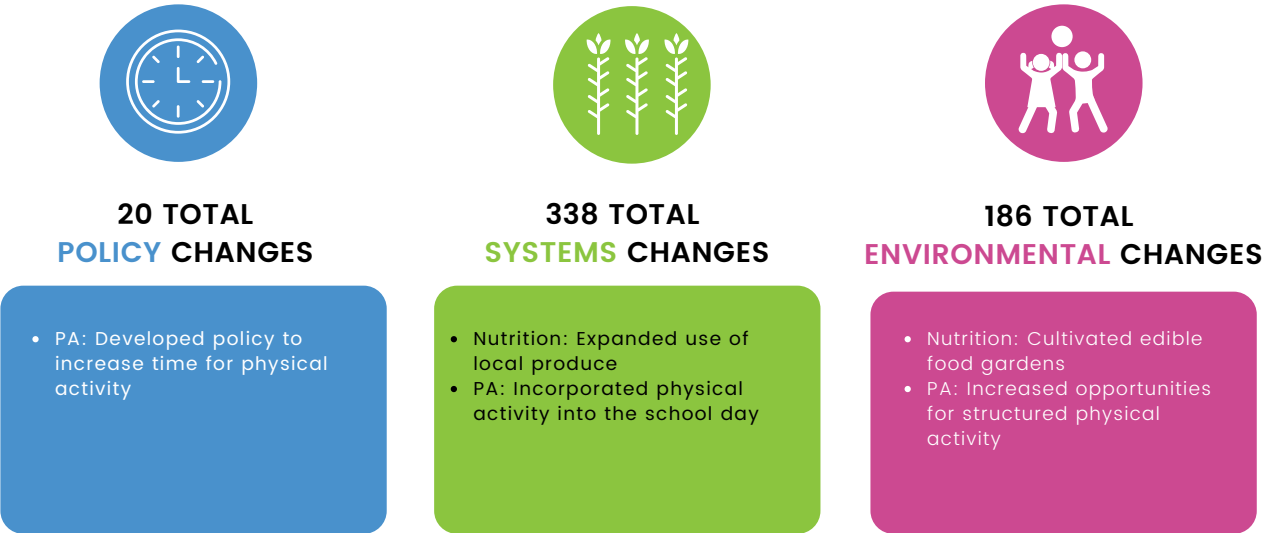


## POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.



### TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:



### # OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE



# SUCCESS STORY

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN WEST CENTRAL GEORGIA



The Georgia Department of Public Health's (GDPH) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) program funded the West Central Health District (WCHD), which includes Clay County. After the onset and spread of COVID-19 globally, WCHD, like many other community-based programs, had to adjust its approach. WCHD focused its efforts on policy, systems, and environmental change interventions as they posed the least risk to participants and could address a community problem exacerbated by COVID-19, food insecurity. Clay County has a poverty rate more than double the state average and is a food desert, as the closest grocery store is approximately 25 miles away.

In 2020, WCHD had three community gardens located at the Fort Gaines Housing Authority, Historical Society, and an empty lot located in Fort Gaines. In Clay County, residents had the opportunity to participate in a patio/container gardening initiative. The gardens remained open to the public so community members could harvest food at their leisure during the pandemic.

Given the lack of food access in Clay County, WCHD established a food distribution project to maximize the SNAP-Ed-supported community gardens' impact on the local food system and environment. WCHD secured a site to use for food distribution. Local donations and grants allowed WCHD to buy equipment for space and prepare the site for inspection. They established a produce box distribution system that allowed individuals to sign up and be placed on a waiting list to receive monthly food boxes.

Boxes were distributed 2-3 times each week to people on the list. Well-connected and trusted community members delivered the produce boxes to families in need. Announcements for produce pick-up events were sent by email, phone, and word of mouth and distributed through community partner networks.

The community garden food distribution initiative delivered produce boxes to a monthly average of **200 households** in Clay County. Additionally, they provided **600 food boxes** monthly that included produce and foods donated by partner organizations. The produce boxes distributed **360 pounds** of tomatoes, **120 pounds** of cucumbers, **250 pounds** of squash, **16 pounds** of broccoli, **52 pounds** of cabbage, **10 pounds** of spinach, and **75 pounds** of peppers. More produce was harvested directly by community members. WCHD utilized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities to establish a sustainability plan to maintain their community gardens.

### KEY PARTNERS

- City of Fort Gaines
- Clay County Board of Commissioners
- Clay County Community Health Center
- Clay County Headstart
- Convoy of Hope
- Division of Family & Children Services Office in Quitman and Clay County
- Fort Gaines Housing Authority
- Historical Society of Fort Gaines

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# SUCCESS STORY

## OPEN HAND'S PRODUCE PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM PIVOTS ONLINE



Since 2016, Grady Health, Open Hand Atlanta, and Wholesome Wave Georgia (WWG) formed a partnership to address food insecurity and pilot a produce prescription program. The program included nutrition counseling, nutrition education using the Cooking Matters curriculum, and six weeks of fresh fruits and vegetables provided during cooking classes. Grady Health's adult patients, who screen positive for food insecurity and are low-income, get enrolled in the program. The intense six-month produce prescription program supported by four and a half months produce prescriptions worth \$1 per family member per day from WWG.

Due to COVID-19, the partners pivoted to an online program using a client-centered approach. Instead of in-person classes, Open Hand utilized an online, HIPAA-compliant platform to host Cooking Matters classes. While the once-per-week class structure was maintained from years past, offering live virtual classes multiple times a week allowed clients the flexibility to make up a session if they were unable to make their regular class time. Open Hand worked with chefs to create asynchronous cooking class videos with weekly recipes and how-to content, and clients shared photos and descriptions of recipes they cooked each week. All clients participated in technology orientation sessions before virtual classes began. Attendees who continued to encounter technology challenges received additional support. Tablets were loaned and home-delivered to participants who needed them to participate in the program. In previous years, clients received produce in-person during Cooking Matters classes and via produce voucher redemption at Fresh MARTA Markets after classes ended. Using public transportation would have put clients at higher risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, so Open Hand coordinated home delivery of weekly produce prescriptions funded by WWG.

The produce prescription program impacted participants' food security, health behaviors, and self-efficacy in cooking practices.

- Statistically significant reduction in food insecurity

Pre- to post-Cooking Matters course survey results also showed increases in healthy eating and food resource management behaviors, including:

- Consumption of low fat or fat-free milk
- Consumption of low fat or fat-free dairy products
- Using "nutrition facts" on food labels
- Comparing prices before buying foods
- Increase confidence in cooking healthy food

These results indicate that the COVID-19 adaptations worked well for participants, while some online elements may continue post-pandemic to meet specific needs.



“It worked very well. I lost ten pounds! I would've preferred in-person if it weren't for the pandemic, but I get twisted about going out now, so I preferred online for the situation. I really enjoyed it.”  
- Participant from Grady

### KEY PARTNERS

- Grady Healthcare Systems
- Emory University School of Medicine
- Wholesome Wave Georgia
- Emory Rollins School of Public Health

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# KENTUCKY

## STATE PROFILES



1 in 7 people face hunger



Number of SNAP Participants:



1 in 8 of the state population



### ADAPTATIONS DUE TO COVID-19

One of the key objectives of the SNAP-Ed work in the region during COVID was to increase or maintain partnerships, specifically programs supported by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). On average, implementing agencies in Kentucky partnered with 5.5 FNS programs, which included [State Nutrition Action Committees \(SNAC\)](#), [Summer Meals Programs](#), and the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#).

Number of partnerships maintained or developed in FFY 2020:



7,251

Number of nutrition education materials moved online:



84

Mean number of Food and Nutrition Service partnerships per IA:

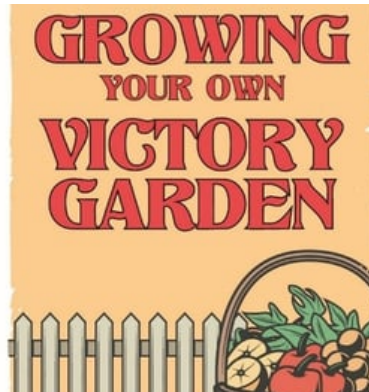


5.5



# SUCCESS STORY

## PIVOTING TO INCREASE FOOD ACCESS DURING THE PANDEMIC



The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Nutrition Education Program works with clients across Kentucky every year to provide materials, supplies, and expertise for growing gardens at community sites, public schools, recovery centers, and family plots. Their efforts reimaged, they addressed increasing food insecurity related to stay-at-home orders, higher unemployment rates, and grocery shortages due to the pandemic. A new project, and materials, were developed to address this crisis through the Victory Garden campaign and “Growing Your Own” publications. This campaign provided needed supplies and education to help families grow their food at home.

Nutrition Education Program Assistants, often working side-by-side with other Cooperative Extension Agents, provided gardening supplies, tools, seeds, and instructional materials via mail, porch delivery, or Grab-and-Go bags distributed at County Extension offices. Community partners, such as farmers’ markets and food pantries, also helped with distribution.

Gardening provides many benefits beyond nutrient-rich garden-fresh produce and physical activity. It also provides a sense of control and self-sufficiency during these difficult times. Since June 2020, an estimated 17,086 gardening supplies and materials have been distributed.

Clients and Nutrition Education Program Assistants received a survey to determine the impact of the gardening efforts. According to survey results, **256 family gardens** were grown during the summer of 2020. Almost half (45%) of the gardens reported this year were grown by first-time gardeners. More than **1,050 bushels of garden produce** were grown during that summer. Over half (65%) of survey respondents reported that gardening had helped them spend less on their family’s food. Some clients also extended their food security by canning, freezing, and drying their produce. They reported preserving over **3,420 quarts**.



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
Cooperative Extension Service



“We gave out Victory Garden Kits at the Extension office including seeds, gloves, calendars, and gardening trowels. We also worked with Grant County Community Action Agency and gave out information at their annual plant giveaway.”  
- Grant County SNAP-Ed Assistant

“It has brought so much joy in terrible times. Hopefully, I can be able to teach and pass down gardening to my children and be able to provide healthy food for my family that’s affordable.”  
- Participant

### KEY PARTNERS

- The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension
- Kentucky Department of Agriculture
- Kentucky State University

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# MISSISSIPPI

## STATE PROFILES



1 in 5 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**455,000**

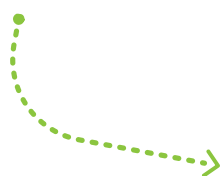
1 in 7 of the state population



### POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

#### TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 42



**42**

TOTAL NUTRITION  
CHANGES

**5,024**

REACH

#### TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:



**11 TOTAL  
SYSTEMS CHANGES**

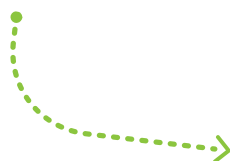
- Nutrition: Increased access to community food gardens for residents



**31 TOTAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Cultivated edible food gardens
- Nutrition: Improved in-store displays of food to encourage healthy eating choices

#### # OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE



**13**

NUTRITION

92% Evidence-based education  
23% Marketing  
15% Community involvement  
8% Staff training

# SUCCESS STORY

## FOOD PREPARATION SKILLS ARE MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER



Many low-income individuals and families in Mississippi struggled to afford food before the pandemic and are now facing increasing difficulties. According to Feeding America, the 2020 projected food insecurity rate in Mississippi is 23%. Food skills education can be advantageous for families struggling with food insecurity. Knowing how to shop and prepare meals at home more efficiently can ease the burden for many low-income families.

Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU) provides a six-week cooking course, Cooking Matters for Adults, to parents and caregivers of children 6-years-old or younger. Participants learn skills related to meal planning and preparation, grocery shopping, food budgeting, and nutrition. Four of the six lessons include hands-on facilitated cooking experiences. Although in-person direct education ceased in March 2020, Cooking Matters for Adults courses restarted in August 2020. Since that time, seven Cooking Matters for Adults courses were at MSU Extension county offices. These classes included **36 adults**, of which **32 (89%) graduated**. Instructors and participants followed Mississippi State University Extension Procedures for Programming during COVID. Procedures were communicated with participants and included screening upon arrival, required face-covering physical distancing, and individual food samples for tastings.

Cooking Matters for Adults targeted several factors that included cooking barriers, food resource management, healthy food preparation, and cooking confidence. Participants in the seven courses since August 2020 showed the most improvement in food resource management and healthy food preparation. Of the graduates, 66% reported an increase in food resource management skills; and 78% reported an increase in healthy food preparation behaviors.

As related to the food resource management factor, 31% of participants reported more frequently planning meals ahead of time; and 44% of participants reported more frequently using a grocery list when shopping. As related to the healthy food preparation factor, over a third of participants reported improvements in reading nutrition facts labels or nutrition ingredients lists (34.4%), identifying foods on sale or using coupons to save money (38%), and using unit pricing to find best values (34%).

“It has caused me to reflect on my grocery shopping and increased my purchases of more frozen and fresh vegetables. It has also made me takeout [sic] my cookbooks and re-imagine some of my old recipes.”  
- CMA participant

“Participants said they were glad to have quick and easy recipes to cook because all they had been eating was fast food.”  
- Community Wellness Planner



### KEY PARTNERS

- Share Our Strength
- Mississippi State Extension

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# NORTH CAROLINA STATE PROFILES



1 in 7 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**1,329,000**

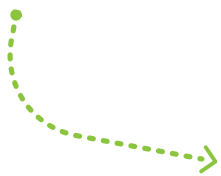
1 in 8 of the state population



## POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

**TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 213**



**28**

TOTAL PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY (PA)  
CHANGES

**183**

TOTAL NUTRITION  
CHANGES

**108,175**

REACH

**TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:**



**62 TOTAL  
POLICY CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Developed nutrition education policy



**89 TOTAL  
SYSTEMS CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Improved systems to reach high-risk and/or vulnerable populations
- PA: Incorporated physical activity into the school day



**62 TOTAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Cultivated edible food gardens
- PA: Improved opportunities for physical activity, including additional facilities, structures, or outdoor space

**# OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE**

**13**

PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

92% Evidence-based education  
54% Marketing  
62% Community involvement  
62% Staff training

**108**

NUTRITION

94% Evidence-based education  
47% Marketing  
43% Community involvement  
37% Staff training



# SUCCESS STORY

## FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM (FMNP) PRODUCE DISTRIBUTION



In 2014, Durham County launched its Double Bucks (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program incentive) program, which also doubles Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (Senior FMNP) vouchers distributed in summer months.

This summer Durham's Innovative Nutrition Education (DINE) collaborated to implement a project that would allow WIC and Senior FMNP recipients to receive their vouchers, spend them and utilize Double Bucks safely during the coronavirus pandemic. A new system was developed to provide choice to participants and follow social distancing guidelines. Five drive-thru local produce distribution were established, three for WIC clients and two for seniors, between June 2020 and August 2020.

Families were given appointment times to visit the drive-thru locations. While appointments were being made, participants were asked how much of their vouchers they wanted to spend. The farmers packed bags of produce based on the pre-purchased value and doubled that amount using Double Bucks funding. FMNP vouchers were distributed to participants and signed on-site.

In addition, to produce, participants received resources in their produce bags including healthy recipes, safety precautions at the market, information regarding changes at WIC, and information about Double Bucks eligibility, to encourage families to continue using the program year-round.

One WIC distribution site also distributed 50 "grow kits". These kits, created by DINE team members, contained seeds and materials needed for children to start planting their home gardens, regardless of their level of available space.

A total of 78 older adults and 105 WIC families redeemed a total of 846 five-dollar FMNP vouchers. The vouchers' value was doubled through the Double Bucks program resulting in nearly \$8,000 in local produce distributed at the five drive-thru sites.

Of WIC participants surveyed:

- 100% found the produce distribution useful.
- 52% noted it was the first time they heard about the Double Bucks program.

Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI-USA) and DINE staff hope to make a case for increased funding of FMNP vouchers in the future, given the redemption rates at markets have increased significantly over the past three years. Hopefully, these successful, well-attended distributions will lend additional support for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services FMNP office to expand the program.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Durham Farmers' Market
- RAFI-USA
- Durham WIC
- Durham Head Start/Early Head Start
- Durham Center for Senior Life

“ Partner Quote:  
"A huge thank you ladies! I think the first FMNP drive through was amazing for the clients. Once again, Many Thanks! What a great team!!"  
- Holly Branch (Durham WIC Director)

“ Participant Quote:  
"They were very nice, I didn't have to wait long; was a great experience"  
- WIC customer



Public Health

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# SUCCESS STORY

## FARM FRESH: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO PREVENTING DIABETES, SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMS, AND INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS IN RURAL NORTH CAROLINA



Individuals and families living in rural Appalachia experience unique challenges to achieving good health. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread across the nation, households living within this community experienced an increased need for food assistance, reduced transportation options, changes in employment status, and cancellation of in-person health services. To meet the needs of the community, members of Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC's emergency food provider network partnered with local farms to launch Farm Fresh, a program that combined fresh produce with a health education texting campaign. To identify Farm Fresh participants, staff and volunteers at food pantry sites were trained to utilize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Prediabetes Risk Test to identify individuals at risk for diabetes. Those recognized as "at-risk" were given the option to participate in the program. The food pantry partners received a grant to purchase produce directly from the farm. Farm Fresh transformed the physical food environment at the food pantry by increasing the variety of healthy food options and improving the storage capacity for fresh produce.

The health education texting campaign included a combination of direct education designed to increase consumption and variety of vegetables and increase physical activity and promotional materials that included recipes and handouts. Complementary activities included training pantry staff and volunteers on pre-diabetes risk factors in addition to methods for safely storing fresh produce to ensure quality and safety.

The produce boxes included five to seven different vegetables, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, fennel, kale, pattypan squash, onions, cabbage, and sweet peppers. The fresh produce shares were prepared on the farm and distributed during regular pantry hours via, a contactless drive-thru. The health education texting campaign offered a unique opportunity to provide tailored health education without the need for in-person interaction or the internet.

Farm Fresh connects the dots around challenges and opportunities in rural communities for food-insecure families while providing much-needed income for small-scale fruit and vegetable growers. The program was designed to reach **50 households**; however, with the increase in need due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program expanded and reached **100 households** representing **205 individuals**.

### Participants Reported:

- 100% improved confidence in managing their health
- 97% shared that the fresh produce helped them eat healthier
- 94% shared that the fresh produce helped their entire household eat healthier
- 88% experienced improved food security status
- 74% increased frequency in regular physical activity
- 74% purchased more healthy foods at the grocery store

### KEY PARTNERS

- Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina
- Food Pantry at Jefferson United Methodist Church
- Food Pantry at Ashe Really Cares
- Food Pantry at Ashe Outreach Ministries
- Mountain Roots Farm
- Appalachian State University
- Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture / High Country Food Hub
- Ashe County Health Alliance
- Ashe Memorial Hospital
- Wilkes Community College, Ashe Campus

“Our farm had been considering offering produce shares but did not have the administrative support to work with a hundred families. This program has allowed us to provide fresh produce to these families without an administrative burden.”  
– Farm Partner

“I enjoyed the amazing produce, texts and your efforts. Knowing there were people caring to help was really nice too.”  
– Farm Fresh participant

### Community Outcomes:

- Generated \$17,703.61 in local economic activity
- Food pantries distributed 9,500 pounds of produce
- Established three new markets for local farms to sell their products
- Distributed 47 unique health education text messages
- Distributed 1,012 education handouts

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# SOUTH CAROLINA STATE PROFILES



1 in 9 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**601,000**

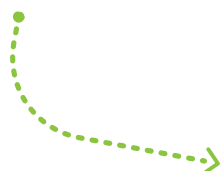
1 in 9 of the state population



## POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

**TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 49**



**15**

TOTAL PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY (PA)  
CHANGES

**33**

TOTAL NUTRITION  
CHANGES

**28,657**

REACH

**TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:**



**4 TOTAL  
POLICY CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Developed physical activity policy to promote wellness



**28 TOTAL  
SYSTEMS CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Improved systems to reach high-risk and/or vulnerable populations
- PA: Increased opportunities for unstructured physical activity



**17 TOTAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Established a new food bank, pantry or distribution site
- PA: Reduce sitting during everyday activities Improved facilities or space for physical activity

**# OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE**

**3**

PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

100% Evidence-based education  
0% Marketing  
33% Community involvement  
33% Staff training

**18**

NUTRITION

50% Evidence-based education  
56% Marketing  
33% Community involvement  
78% Staff training



# SUCCESS STORY

## ADAPTATIONS MADE TO FOODSHARE, A SNAP-ED TOOLKIT INTERVENTION, DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY



FoodShare, developed in South Carolina, is a program rooted in the belief that access to fresh, affordable food should not be limited by where you live or how much you make. The program aims to improve food security and produce consumption through a once or twice monthly bulk produce box available via community locations. Boxes include healthy recipe cards to inspire clients to try something new with the produce that is distributed each month.

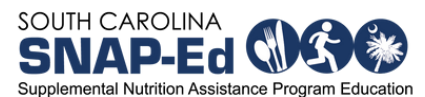
Boxes can be purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or cash. FoodShare also participates in the state's SNAP healthy incentive program, making SNAP boxes \$10 less for SNAP recipients. In 2019, FoodShare was accepted for inclusion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Toolkit as an emerging evidence-based intervention.

During coronavirus (COVID-19), adaptations were made among FoodShare partners in six counties that ensured the continued operation and expansion of the program to help address the increased food insecurity experienced around the state. A SNAP-Ed implementer provided consultation and technical assistance on how to make the adaptations. These strategies primarily included: 1) having a drive-thru option for customers to pick up their boxes, 2) increasing the number of produce box pick up days in a month, 3) limiting the number of volunteers, 4) requiring masks and gloves were worn by staff and volunteers, and 5) expanding the space for sorting the bulk produce and packing the boxes.

Partners experienced a significant increase in the number of customers and a broader recognition of the importance and need for the program among community stakeholders. During COVID-19, **7,278 unique customers** were reached through **37,829 produce boxes**.

### KEY PARTNERS

- University of South Carolina School of Medicine
- Village Farms
- Ruth's Gleaning
- Ace Basin Growers
- Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
- United Way of Kershaw County



“I think FoodShare was a terrific option for people when it all shut down. When the food supply was interrupted, it was amazing to see how we were able to continue to keep the food flowing and do it in a way that people felt safe. So, FoodShare, in my mind, is always a bit of an interrupter in the food system and I just was very pleased with the way we were able to step in that gap when the grocery stores didn't have stuff and people were afraid to go into the stores.”  
– Partner



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# SUCCESS STORY

## GRAB & GROW – SFSP NUTRITION EDUCATION BASED OUTREACH



Traditionally, the Lowcountry Food Bank (LCFB) Nutrition team collaborates with Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meal sites to conduct education-based outreach to children between 6-15 years of age. During these one-hour service episodes, the Nutrition team brings nutrition education materials that further enhance the MyPlate discussion and recipe demonstration that takes place. The recipe demonstration focuses on increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables, meal components in the SFSP meals. The education-based outreach includes activities from the Cooking Matters Chef and Kids toolkit.

Grab & GROW was the name of our summer nutrition education, COVID-19 edition. With camps and gatherings canceled, the LCFB Nutrition team distributed “plant your own salsa garden” nutrition education materials including a tomato plant seedling through non-congregate meal sites, food pantries, and community partners. Materials were coupled with a QR code to view interactive, nutrition, and physical activity videos on LCFB’s YouTube page:

### Video Series:

1. From the Root to the Fruit: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TInklJ09CWE&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5\\_gmDnAe](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TInklJ09CWE&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5_gmDnAe)
2. Get Moving with Your Fruits & Veggies: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2l5h2dSW5g&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5\\_gmDnAe&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2l5h2dSW5g&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5_gmDnAe&index=2)
3. Simple Salsa Fun: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBjLO3oRhhQ&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5\\_gmDnAe&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBjLO3oRhhQ&list=PLK5KQ4F6Eno7ERtJvVy-fcH6O5_gmDnAe&index=3)

The program was an enormous success, reaching **880 children**. During the distribution of materials, children were extremely excited to have the tomato plant to watch grow and then transfer it to the ground. When handed his plant, one child gratefully took the plant and immediately turned on his heel leaving behind all of his meals to run inside to show his family the plant. Others explained how they were going to add it to their gardens with the other vegetables they were growing at home.



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# TENNESSEE STATE PROFILES



1 in 8 people face hunger



# of SNAP Participants:

**903,000**

1 in 8 of the state population



## POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Changes include changes to the physical environment that may alter the way business is done to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Written rules, regulations, and procedures are known as policies and support healthy behavior at the organizational and local level.

**TOTAL PSE CHANGES: 27**

**4**

TOTAL PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY (PA)  
CHANGES

**23**

TOTAL NUTRITION  
CHANGES

**75,795**

REACH

**TOP CHANGES IMPLEMENTED:**



**7 TOTAL  
POLICY CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Developed a healthy retail policy



**6 TOTAL  
SYSTEMS CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Improved menus and recipes (variety, quality, etc.)
- PA: Increased opportunities for unstructured physical activity



**14 TOTAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- Nutrition: Improved in-store displays of food to encourage healthy eating choices
- PA: Increased access to bike and walking paths

**# OF SITES WITH A MULTI-COMPONENT CHANGE**

**3**

PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY

0% Evidence-based education  
33% Marketing  
33% Community involvement  
100% Staff training

**13**

NUTRITION

46% Evidence-based education  
46% Marketing  
69% Community involvement  
100% Staff training

# SUCCESS STORY

## ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY THROUGH FOOD POLICY ACTIONS



Addressing food insecurity became a priority focus of the University of Tennessee Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) programs because of the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19). While the need for SNAP-Ed has always been present, it became more pronounced as COVID-19 turned into an international pandemic. The loss of jobs, social services, and school support put many families at increased risk of hunger.

Knox County, a metropolitan area located at the geographical center of the Great Valley of East Tennessee, was able to respond to meet the growing community needs and support lasting change through collaboration and human connections. The Knox County Food Policy Council is charged with monitoring and evaluating the local food system including the implications for public health related to food costs, availability, and accessibility. The Knox County SNAP-Ed agent has been an active member of this council. In response to the pandemic, an emergency committee was formed to address increased food insecurity issues. The Food Access Committee (FAC) included representatives from over **45 local organizations**. The SNAP-Ed agent was a crucial advocate for including and engaging agencies and organizations working with SNAP-Ed target populations including Latinx and refugee groups.

FAC listened to the stories of the community members' needs, assessed available resources, and identified service gaps related to access to healthy food. FAC quickly realized that emergency food boxes being distributed lacked healthy food choices. In response, they created the Perishables Program that leveraged connections between local food producers to reach the community. Getting fresh produce into the food boxes was only the first step as community feedback indicated that some people did not understand how to prepare some items or lacked basic cooking equipment. To meet these needs, the Knox County SNAP-Ed agent supplemented the food boxes with healthy recipes, food safety and storage tips, knife skills information, and other helpful enhancement items such as measuring cups and cutting boards.

While the pandemic has highlighted institutional inadequacies in food systems, it has also highlighted the strengths of collaborative partnerships that include SNAP-Ed. The Knox County SNAP-Ed agent's active involvement with FAC addressed food insecurity through cross-sector partnerships and community engagement. This resulted in the distribution of fresh produce from local producers along with nutrition information and resources for individuals that needed it the most.

From April to October 2020, FAC distributed **1,350 bags of produce** including SNAP-Ed educational materials and cooking resources to agencies serving Latinx, refugees, and older adults—all groups identified at an increased risk for food insecurity in Knox County during the pandemic.

“

“The reason we were able to be responsive is mostly because we listened to people and didn't just give people what we thought they needed. We let the community help shape our response.”

- Kimberly Pettigrew is the Chair of the Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council and the Food Access Committee

”

FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES  
**UTEXTENSION**  
INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

### KEY PARTNERS

- Centro Hispano
- Bridge Refugee Services
- The Knox County SNAP-Ed
- Nourish Knoxville

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# REFERENCES

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We thank numerous staff from the Southeast Region's (SER) Implementing Agencies who submitted data for the MT5, MT6, LT5, and LT6 indicators to be included in this report. We are grateful for the SER Evaluation Workgroup members who engaged in webinar discussions and provided critical feedback on the methods used in this report. We appreciate the support of The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Southeastern Regional Office, on this project.

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP.  
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