

News Release

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When the Prescription for Good Health is Good Food

SNAP-Ed New York offers Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program to Support Patients and Local Farmers

(Bath, NY) – What is the connection between having access to healthy food and one’s physical health? According to the NYS Prevention Agenda area of Preventing Chronic Disease, food insecurity is an indicator for both poor nutrition and poor health. In the Southern Finger Lakes region, 12.2% of residents struggle with food insecurity, making it difficult to have consistent access to healthy foods and supporting a reliance on quick, cheap, and easy foods. The need for increasing the consumption of healthy foods is clear – in the Finger Lakes Region, only one in seven adults consumes the recommended number of fruits per day, and only one in ten consumes the recommended number of vegetables. Not coincidentally, the rate of overweight or obese adults is 65% across the region. The solution? Food as medicine.

In partnership with Finger Lakes Community Health and local participating vendors, the SNAP-Ed New York Fruit and Vegetable Prescription program focuses on increasing access to affordable and local produce as a solution to preventing and treating chronic diseases – especially those related to obesity – as well as food insecurity.

Starting in 2019 as a pilot program working with the patients of the Finger Lakes Community Health Penn Yan and Bath clinics, the SNAP-Ed New York Fruit and Vegetable Prescription program offered its first virtual session in the fall of 2020. Meeting weekly in an online setting, 14 enrolled patients received virtual nutrition education. After attending each week, participants received educational materials and \$20 in vouchers to redeem at participating vendors for the purchase of fresh, local fruits and vegetables.

“Nobody anticipated a global pandemic that would interfere with our original implementation plans. Nevertheless, the need for the program remained – even increased – as people struggled to eat healthy, move more, and stay well while following social distancing guidelines at home. SNAP-Ed New York – Southern Finger Lakes Region rose to the challenge of Covid-19 by adapting the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription program for virtual learning,” said Justine Cobb, SNAP-Ed New York Project Director.

Over the course of six weeks, participants received education, resources, and support to improve their eating habits, increase their intake of local, fresh fruits and vegetables, and strengthen their commitment to regular physical activity. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, which created a sense of community. In the end, 80% of participants reported eating more fruits and 60% of participants reported eating more vegetables now than they did before attending the nutrition classes. In addition, 60% of participants also reported being able to access more healthy foods following completion of the series than before.

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The local retailers that participated in the program included The Windmill Farm and Craft Market (Penn Yan, NY), Indian Pines Farm Market (Penn Yan, NY), and Dave's Produce (Bath, NY). In total, 75% of the distributed vouchers were redeemed, providing the local retailers with over \$900 in produce sales.

"Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability, and social well-being. The SNAP-Ed New York Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program meets the health and nutritional needs of our community, while also supporting our local farmers and economy. We are fortunate to have the support of Finger Lakes Community Health and the local retailers that make this program possible," commented Tess McKinley, Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County.

SNAP-Ed New York – Southern Finger Lakes Region hopes to expand the program in 2021 to reach even more patients in need of the "food as medicine" model. Planned efforts include adding on new vendors, offering the program year-round, and piloting the program through a school-based clinic.

About Cornell Cooperative Extension & SNAP-Ed New York:

Cornell Cooperative Extension and its partnerships provide programs for Steuben County residents on youth and family development; nutrition, health, and food safety; community and economic vitality; and agricultural sustainability through Cornell based research. Committed to Steuben County, we design programs to meet local needs to enable people to improve their lives and communities. For more information call Cornell Cooperative Extension Steuben County at (607) 664-2300 or visit our website at PutKnowledgeToWork.org.

SNAP-Ed New York is a federally funded evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives. SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education is FREE to all individuals who qualify for and/or receive benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP-Ed teaches people using or eligible for SNAP about good nutrition, how to make their food dollars stretch further and the importance of being physically active. SNAP-Ed New York provides nutrition education lessons, materials and sponsors education events and classes in communities across New York State. Visit www.snapedny.org to find a program in your community.

Locally, SNAP-Ed New York in the Southern Finger Lakes region operates under Cornell Cooperative Extension Steuben County, in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chemung County, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tioga County, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Yates County. The SNAP-Ed New York – Southern Finger Lakes region supports residents of Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, and Yates Counties.

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