Veggies for ME

Project Overview

The ‘Veggies for ME!’ program was designed by USM Muskie School, the Maine Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to promote vegetable consumption among WIC participants and their families. The program was delivered by three WIC agencies (two rural, one urban) to 320 participants. A baseline survey of participants identified the following as major barriers to vegetable consumption:

- Cost of fresh vegetables
- Limited preparation skills
- Inability to manage family likes/dislikes
- Low familiarity with a variety of vegetables

During a one-year program, one of four topics was addressed each quarter: 1. Maximizing food dollars; 2. Vegetable cooking and preparation techniques; 3. Modeling appropriate food behaviors and choices to children and 4. Exploring seasonality and variety in vegetables. The program’s main delivery channel included direct counseling by WIC counselors at regular WIC visits, handouts and mailings.

Findings

Program evaluation was conducted by both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative evaluation was carried out to compare pre/post participant knowledge, skills, and behavior change related to vegetable consumption. For qualitative evaluation, focus group discussions were conducted with 30 participants and 14 WIC counselors after the program was completed. Focus group respondents indicated that they found the program to be enjoyable and helpful to them in making healthy food decisions.

Of the four topics listed in the previous section, participants found learning new cooking and preparation techniques the most useful. They also indicated they.

### In the past year, where did your household buy or get vegetables?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre (%)</th>
<th>Post (%)</th>
<th>P*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Store</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience Store</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Market/Farm Stand</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Garden</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Pantry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How often do you serve vegetables?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre (%)</th>
<th>Post (%)</th>
<th>P*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 or less than 3 times per day</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3 times per day</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 times per day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in Participants’ Responses

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Project Timeline

October 2005-September 2007

Funder(s)

United States Department of Agriculture (cooperative agreement between USM Muskie School of Public Service and Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

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desired additional information about these particular skills.

Both the participants and counselors noted that the counselors did not have enough time to deliver the education component in a comprehensive manner. The participants thought this was detrimental to the program’s success. Many participants suggested group classes or cooking demonstrations instead of one-on-one educational sessions.

Reflections

The needs assessment and pre/post survey results confirmed many of the WIC staff assumptions about the WIC client population. One confirmed assumption was that the recruiting WIC clients and tracking their participation over the course of the program proved to be challenging. This barrier reduced the total number of participants in the post intervention evaluation. To determine the overall success of this program and its methods, future evaluation could focus on determining whether the desired behavior changes are being made as a result of program participation.

Dissemination

Results and analysis from the needs assessment and evaluation of the pilot phase of the project have been presented nationally in poster format. Project findings have also been presented orally to project stakeholders and at professional meetings.