

PRELIMINARY REPORT: CALL-TO-CONVERSATION
A PATH FORWARD FOR AN EFFECTIVE, RELEVANT, AND INCLUSIVE 21ST CENTURY
FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM
27 September 2017

BACKGROUND – WHY A CALL TO CONVERSATION AT THIS TIME

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture (NIFA/USDA), is committed to improving health and reducing hunger and poverty in America through food and nutrition education programming. Poor health disproportionately affects minority and low-income populations. Educational opportunities and resources are limited. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which is funded by NIFA and implemented by Cooperative Extension within the land-grant university system, provides opportunities for low-income families and youth to improve their nutritional health and well-being through evidence-based, hands on, interactive learning. Cooperative Extension employs more than 1,600 paraprofessional, peer educator staff to deliver EFNEP locally, within in all U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

As the nation’s first federal nutrition education program, EFNEP maintains a [proven positive return on investment](#). For instance, studies within individual states have shown health care savings ranging from \$3 to over \$10 for every federal dollar invested in EFNEP. Consistently, annual data shows that more than 90 percent of adult EFNEP participants report improved behaviors following participation in the program. Since 1969, EFNEP has reached 33 million low-income families and youth, and taught on ways to improve their health by improving their nutrition, food safety, and physical activity practices. In 2016, NIFA provided \$67.9 million in EFNEP funding to 76 Land-Grant Universities. Using an evidence-based, interactive approach, EFNEP peer educators worked directly with 118,976 adults, 365,369 children and reached more than 340,000 family members indirectly.

Since EFNEP began, poverty demographics across the U.S. have shifted and the number of people in poverty has grown. Chronic disease associated with nutritional risk factors and health care costs have escalated. USDA’s food assistance portfolio has grown and now includes nutrition education messaging and other strategies in all its programs. The US Dietary Guidelines 2015-2020, encourages collective action – having broad, multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration in which “everyone has a role” to support healthy eating patterns.

EFNEP has experienced two major setbacks in recent years. First, Cooperative Extension has lost about a third of its local footprint – its county based extension faculty.¹ This is significant, since EFNEP is community based, and thus locally supervised. Second, rescission and sequestration effects of the FY 2013 federal appropriation resulted in a disproportionate reduction in EFNEP funding among land-grant universities. Several 1890 institutions saw a

¹ Cooperative Extension System: Trends and Economic Impacts on U.S. Agriculture,” Sun Ling Wang, Choices, 2014. See [submitted articles on the Choices magazine website showing cooperative extension trends and economic impacts on U.S. agriculture.](#)

decrease of more than 20% funding and one experienced a loss of 54%, in contrast to 1862 universities, each of which experienced a 7% reduction in funding.

NIFA and university partners have worked jointly over the past five years to develop policies that support increased program reach while maintaining program integrity, fidelity, and effectiveness. New policies have been established for volunteerism and use of technology (see [the EFNEP Volunteer Policy Resources webpage](#) and [EFNEP Technology Policy Resources webpage](#)), and a new evidence-based food and physical activity questionnaire will be implemented in FY 2018 to assess behavioral change by program participants. A community engagement initiative is also underway. These initial efforts to scale up and strengthen programming will have minimal success without further development, resources, and training.

The convergence of NIFA and USDA's longstanding commitment to the nutritional health and well-being of the population, EFNEP's approaching 50th anniversary, the changing nutrition education environment, and recent years' EFNEP funding challenges has led this "Call-to-Conversation." NIFA is conducting listening sessions to determine a path forward for nutrition education in the 21st Century. NIFA and its partners need to ensure that nutrition education programming [EFNEP] is commensurate with demographic, social, and technological change, and to determine what is essential for continued, and even greater programmatic success. Further, NIFA's place within a new collective action paradigm needs to be clearly elucidated. As one Extension Director observed, "EFNEP has been a strong program in [our state], and across the country, for decades. Looking for ways to sustain that into the future is critical."

PROCESS

Call to Conversation Meeting

On June 14th and 15th, 2017, the University of Missouri, Lincoln University, and NIFA hosted a conversation on EFNEP. Sixty four (64) stakeholders, representing EFNEP's low-income target audience, paraprofessional peer educators, and supervisory staff; program and university leadership; and federal, state, and professional organization partners came together to address the issue: "Roughly 47 million people are below the poverty level in the U.S., which includes 18 percent of families with children and 19 percent of children, ages 0-17. Given that EFNEP reaches about 500,000 adults and youth annually, how might we most efficiently and effectively scale up the program to expand the program's reach while also maintaining its high rate of return, i.e., program impact?"

Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, Director, NIFA, joined the meeting briefly to introduce the charge. He challenged participants to think long-term: "Having nearly 50 years of experience with EFNEP and knowing what we know, if we were to start with a blank slate, what should EFNEP look like in 30 years?"

Participants were divided into six groups, each of which included a mix of extension regions, university types – 1862, 1890, 1994, program size – based on level of EFNEP funding, and participant responsibilities – frontline staff, program and university leadership, and public/private partners. Each group responded to the following questions:

- Who in the target audience would not be served if EFNEP remains the same in 2047 – 30 years from now?
- What do we need to do to reach these audiences – not worrying about resources?
- What barriers and challenges exist for making needed changes, and how might these be overcome?
- What is the role of partners – who are potential partners, why are partnerships important, and what are the mutual benefits in having partnerships?
- What are your recommendations for the future of nutrition education?

Group responses were transcribed, organized, and then evaluated by content analysis.

Additional Input Sought

Following the call-to-conversation meeting, NIFA reached out broadly to university stakeholders through website postings, electronic newsletters, and listserv messages to Extension Directors/Administrators, Family and Consumer Science Leaders, and EFNEP leadership and program staff. Feedback was requested for the same questions that had been previously asked, except for the question on partners, since the additional solicitation was not targeted to partners. Responses were solicited through August 1st. Thirteen responses were received, two of which came from individuals and the remaining 11 came as a combined university response. These responses were analyzed and incorporated into the content analysis.

RESULTS

Who in the target audience would not be served if EFNEP remains the same in 2047 (30 years from now) – i.e. if nothing changes?

Current Target Audience Less Accessible

Much of the current EFNEP audience – low-income families with young children and low income youth and children will not be served, according to most respondents. Groups broadly mentioned included rural and mid-size communities, and isolated populations; Native Americans and audiences served by 1994 land-grant institutions; people from other cultures or who speak other languages – immigrants, migrant workers, and refugees; the working poor; intergenerational families – grandparents and grandchildren; pregnant teens; millennials, tech savvy youth and young adults, as

well as low literacy and technology challenged youth and adults; and people who were formerly incarcerated or transitioning out of incarceration or drug rehabilitation centers.

As the population becomes more diverse, language barriers become even more challenging, particularly since most materials are only published in English and Spanish. Participants cited the need for a variety of curricula resources that could be tailored to meet specific group needs.

“We will continue to struggle to serve our most diverse populations without materials translated into multiple languages. Any support the federal office can provide will help ensure that this happens.”

In general, face-to-face interaction over time with paraprofessional staff was considered essential to program success. However, participants also spoke extensively about the need for combining or “blending” face-to-face with technological approaches. They spoke of younger audiences who are more attuned to technology and want faster results. They also spoke of the working poor – those with multiple jobs or irregular work hours, along with those who lack transportation, as benefiting from increased use of technology. Some cautioned, however, about the limitations of technology with low-income audiences.

“We need to get serious about incorporating technology into our program.” “This generation will still want to know about nutrition and how to save money, etc. but they will want to be able to have this information at their fingertips via technology. Research shows that most limited resource audiences have access to technology (even if it is via a smartphone). People want their information ASAP, which is why distance education and YouTube videos are so popular.”

“If the current requirements of face-to-face contact and the set number of lessons remains; it will be harder to retain [young parents] for the number of direct contact hours. With changes to family dynamics (incarceration, job training requirements, work requirements, etc.), EFNEP is going to have to have some flexibility in delivery.”

Respondents cautioned that without an infusion of funds, the essence of EFNEP will be lost. Rural areas, in particular, will suffer. EFNEP’s ability to innovate, and integrate cutting-edge, forward-thinking strategies, and to provide leadership in advancing nutrition education for low-income populations will be lost.

Who won’t be served?

- Rural and mid-size communities and isolated populations
- Native Americans and audiences served by 1994 Land-Grant Institutions
- People who speak other languages
- The working poor
- Intergenerational families
- Tech savvy youth and young adults
- Low literacy and technologically challenged youth and adults
- People transitioning out of incarceration and drug rehabilitation centers
- People with disabilities
- People with transportation challenges

“Without an infusion of funds, EFNEP will no longer be a flagship program. EFNEP has been recognized nationally, and in [state], as the cornerstone of nutrition education services for low-income audiences. If EFNEP is no longer able to provide a statewide presence or have adequate resources to reach beyond one or two county/city programs, it will become irrelevant... Vulnerable but sparsely populated rural counties will not be served. Efforts would have to be consolidated to high density, high need areas and urban centers with high concentrations of people in poverty.”

“Because of poor people moving out of the cities, we might be reaching even less people than we do now unless we expand our services to neighboring counties. Those poor families that do remain in the city might be too busy working multiple jobs to make ends meet and won’t have time to attend a class.

Participants commented on how historically, the flexibility within EFNEP allowed the program to evolve from one-on-one home visits to hands on engaged, group learning experiences. It needs to continue to evolve and address learning styles, changing social norms, and reflect the current culture. Without new approaches to reaching the new generations of technologically dependent learners, EFNEP will become obsolete. EFNEP will no longer be a leader in integrating successful strategies for working with low-income audiences.

By contrast, with adequate resource allocation, EFNEP can continue to maintain a broad reach, provide services to low-income populations – especially in rural and underserved areas, integrate cutting-edge, forward thinking strategies, and provide leadership in the advancement of nutrition education for low-income populations.

“Innovative approaches for appealing to the technically savvy participants of the future will be possible. Faculty associated with the EFNEP will be able to participate in and contribute to national workgroups, invest time and effort toward innovation and program advances.”

Respondents expressed concern that “many individuals who are currently eligible – e.g. a large fraction of the target population will not be served if there is no change to the program.” It is becoming increasingly difficult to reach such audiences and to provide the amount and type of programming that is optimal for change. Further, by excluding 1994 Land-Grant Institutions from EFNEP funding, EFNEP’s effectiveness with Native American populations is hindered.

Other Audiences

Some respondents suggested expanding the reach of programming to include: adults and seniors without children; children between 0 and 4 years of age; day-care providers; children in institutional care; lower-middle class families, and everyone, not just those who have limited incomes. They expressed concern that seniors are a growing proportion of the population and will be an underserved audience within the next 30 years, and that that others, who are above poverty also struggle within accessing nutritious food for their families. Others observed that basic life skills, such as food preparation, food safety, food budgeting, and nutrition education are not seen as important in secondary education, and so young people are not learning these skills and knowledge in middle

and high schools. Given changing social demographics, some respondents suggested including low-income families without young children.

“Consider making EFNEP available to young adults -- Could EFNEP have a percentage of participants who do not yet have children.”

“[Consider] young adults who drop out of school to take care of the elderly.”

Others who are currently beyond the scope of EFNEP

- Seniors without young children
- Single adults without children
- Day-care providers
- Children in institutional care
- Children between 0 and 4 years
- Non-low-income populations who also struggle
- The general population

What do we need to do to reach these audiences – not worrying about resources?

Respondents began with what they saw as program strengths – what should be maintained or improved upon and what should not be lost. They spoke of “meeting people where they are – at the bridge,” and keeping programming relevant, current, accurate, evidence-based, culturally appropriate, engaging, and visually appealing.

They then spoke to the increasing challenge of programming to such a diverse target audience, and the many cultures and languages that participants bring to the program. They also spoke of diversity of learning needs, skills, and styles.

Balancing technology with face-to-face approaches was seen as essential to future success. Suggestions were given to integrate multiple delivery methods, but not lose all face-to-face connections. Examples given for increasing the use of technology were online classes that could be livestreamed or recorded, live chats, virtual groups, and interactive self-paced learning. Although expanded use of technology was clearly supported, cautions was also raised. These included the likelihood that some participants may not want to use their minutes/data plan on nutrition education, and the need to increase bandwidth in rural areas, develop or hire staff with increased technology use and development skills, find creative ways to teach hands-on skills, such as food preparation through online approaches, and using technology to enhance but not drive program decisions.

How to Better Reach Audiences

- Balance face-to-face and technological approaches
- Retain paraprofessional peer educator model, but allow greater flexibility
- Support professionals along with paraprofessionals
- Engage in broader community approaches – policy, systems, and environmental change
- Commit to research, evaluation, and innovation
- Fund 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions equitably
- Have clear local, state, and national partnerships and expectations

“We need to maintain some personal (face-to-face) connection because the participants benefit from having a personal relationship with an educator who cares about them. We need some type of hybrid program that uses technology and is accessible during irregular

times, but also has a personal touch with some face-to-face contact with a trusted educator. It would be great to have programs using interactive software that are accessible on mobile devices or smart phones.”

“Reducing the number of face-to-face lesson requirements and expanding web-based programming will assist with retention and completion of program participants.”

“EFNEP needs to invest nationally in the development, implementation, and evaluation of on-line, interactive, electronic learning experiences that facilitate knowledge and skill development geared toward behavior change.”

Some respondents recommended intensifying delivery methods – i.e. concentrating and limiting dosage, whereas others recommended more frequent contacts and longer term relationships between paraprofessional educators and participants for longer-term impacts, in-depth learning, and post-graduation follow-up.

Challenges were also noted respecting the paraprofessional peer educator model. These included low salaries, lack of career advancement opportunities, and lack of flexibility in using funds to address emerging issues and opportunities. Respondents suggested the need to adjust pay, protect, and develop a career ladder for paraprofessional staff, and to relax the “60/40 rule,” given the supervisory crisis is building as universities direct at least 60% of funds to paraprofessionals and their support.

“The paraprofessional model requires supervisory vigilance, training and oversight... Our paraprofessionals require timely attention; our staff with statewide program responsibilities are challenged to provide timely oversight.... [Shifting from regional supervisors to] campus based staff to direct supervision of regional paraprofessional staff will impede our ability to participate in and contribute to national workgroups, and to develop and test cutting-edge innovations.”

Respondents believed that ongoing training is needed at all levels of programming given changing demographics of society. Recommendations for training on cultural and language competencies, learning styles, and delivery formats, including evaluation and technology were given.

Some respondents considered volunteers an important resource for identifying people who would qualify and even assist with teaching.

Some respondents suggested expanding programming beyond direct education to policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change – i.e. to take a broader social ecological approach than currently exists, and possibly have all programming nationwide focus on a single policy or environmental change that would make healthier eating by the population the easier choice. However, they also noted that “without supervisory staff to support and implement PSE efforts, EFNEP will be unable to contribute to PSE approaches that are needed to supplement direct education... EFNEP will be left behind.”

“EFNEP should consider innovative PSE approaches to broaden the reach and extend the impact the program. Investigation of approaches and best practices that

supervisors and frontline staff could/should consider must begin now so that the program is positioned to support community or institutional efforts to create healthy, supportive environments for the participants of our program.”

Increased support of research, evaluation, and innovation resonated broadly among respondents as essential to future program success. Respondents cited the need for program implementation research – research that would inform practice and resources used; reflect longitudinal impacts at three months, six months, and multiple year intervals that would show health outcomes and returns on investments; and that would ascertain the impact of different educational formats. They further suggested the need for assessing who is interested but unable to participate in programming, who is eligible but does not know what is available, and what barriers exist for increasing attendance and retention. Suggestions were given for cyclically reviewing guidelines and data to assure effectiveness and impact over time and improving efficiency and accuracy in outcome reporting. Recommendations were also made to devote some resources to programmatic research, data collection and analysis, and program evaluation.

Also mentioned was the need to fund 1994 institutions (tribal colleges), revisit the EFNEP formula to allocate more to 1890 institutions, and to change program eligibility as demographics change.

Some respondents spoke of the need for a comprehensive approach – to have a national strategy across food, nutrition, and other public programs, or to bring the paraprofessional peer-educator community-based model to other federal programs. Some respondents felt that action is needed nationally to brand and market programming, allow funds to be used for innovative marketing, develop resources, provide a clearing house of nutrition education program resources, and model how to work together, then trickle down to states. Others felt a shared federal/state [e.g. university] program oversight and leadership approach is needed. Concerns were raised as to how universities can continue to contribute meaningfully to national workgroups, multistate curricula and evaluation resources, and other national and state program priorities, given current funding constraints.

Community partnerships were recognized as essential to program success. Suggestions given to strengthen and leverage programming included: promoting at worksites, conducting joint family programs (adults and youth together), using schools to find program families and linking to school performance, expanding engagement with the medical community, and working with nurse/family organizations, churches, shelters, refugee centers, immigrant agencies, and other organizations that serve low-income/at risk populations and partnering with the private sector.

Other suggestions were to take a more comprehensive approach at the local level through common messaging, working with primary care providers, registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), public health, hospitals, foundations, faith-based organizations, courts, and public housing for collective impacts; and complementing other types of programs with different learning modules, audiences, and formats.

Incentives were also mentioned, varying from measuring cups, to gift cards, free groceries, and kitchen appliances.

Although most comments focused on how to strengthen or improve existing approaches, some suggestions were made to move programming in a different direction: to have community, not family based programming; celebrate the value of people – neighbors cooking with neighbors and reducing the low-income stigma; have nutrition parties; use single messaging like the private sector; explore population-based delivery, such as social marketing campaigns; and expand eligibility beyond poverty guidelines to truly reflect the cost of living, or allow a certain percentage of participants to be outside of the target population, such as 30% as single adults. A few respondents wanted to expand programming beyond nutrition to job skills training, financial management, and other life skills.

What barriers/challenges exist for making needed changes, and how might these be overcome?

Extensive comments were given on barriers and challenges to programming and suggestions were given on how these might be addressed or overcome. Many of these recommendations built upon previous comments and were quite specific, as noted in the following chart.

Challenge	Why an Issue	Recommendations
Frequently mentioned		
Language and culture	Changing demographic base, communication challenges	Hire more bilingual/multicultural staff and professional staff of various cultures, and knowledge of cultural needs; translate materials – beyond English and Spanish; learn to compromise.
Population	Transient, hard to find or to engage in programming, literacy challenges, changing demographic base, different learning styles and attention spans, technology use; trust issues; time poverty, transportation challenges; neighborhood gentrification	Use blended learning approaches - combining face-to-face with social media, texting, and online technology; address time constraints – online, at home; mobilize classrooms; use short and effective messages; increase emphasis on direct education in collaboration with PSE work. Involve volunteers and interns to do social marketing and find audiences. Be flexible – some participants and peer educators are not comfortable with technology; connections with participants and activities that are used would need to be changed; some participants do not have computers and other electronic devices.
Adoption of new and innovative approaches	Program consistency and integrity	Invest in training and mentoring for both professionals and paraprofessionals; develop national certification program; implement regular schedule for training and professional development; overcome resistance to change through training. Innovation should be ongoing – review and adopt every five years.

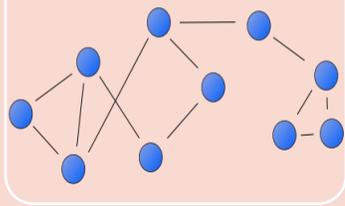
Challenge	Why an Issue	Recommendations
“60/40 rule”	Geographic coverage reduced; supervisors overstretched	Find balance between professional and paraprofessional staffing models; paraprofessionals will need support to overcome challenges.
Rural areas	Internet access; lower reach	Customization to local areas will always be needed.
Paraprofessional turnover	Loss of institutional knowledge and relationship with audiences	Create career ladders and improve pay; partner with community colleges for certification programs; provide consistent training at all levels; experienced staff to mentor newer staff on programming and younger staff to mentor older staff on technology; include apps as part of training methodology.
University practices	hiring and retention – universities don’t understand paraprofessional program; potentially competitive 1862 and 1890 university relationships	Make hiring less intimidating for paraprofessionals; hire staff with new and different skill sets appropriate for new audiences; offer competitive wages; implement certification programs with pay; distribute job posting broadly. Training is needed at every level to provide program context; educate administrators and other university faculty and staff - create more positive partnerships within universities.
Program evaluation and reporting	Strong outcome data is needed to show impact; the program is invisible	Use various methods to tell what we do – quantitative data, videos to tell stories; needs and potential benefits; share success and impacts with partners; bring lawmakers and legislative aides to program sites; have snazzy advocacy; national branding recognition that compliments with Extension and land-grant universities; hire marketing company for specific audiences; have national branding and marketing plan to elevate and reframe the program – crossroads to nutrition and health. Reduce data entry paperwork burden – simplify food recalls and use smartphones, iPads or web-based programs to collect information.
Name recognition and identity	Difficult to distinguish from other federal nutrition education programs, while also maintaining local identity	Reinforce that there is no overlap with other programs – give the human face; come together with similar internal and external groups to understand rules and differentiators in areas of synergy (SNAP-Ed, non-profits, etc.)
Communication	Challenge of consistent communication across all levels – from program leadership to implementation	Involve staff, communities, and participants – adults and youth – to inform program priorities; have statewide group discuss use of nutrition resources to make sure target groups are served; have consistent, clear, and regular communication with partners. Review and evaluate programming on a regular basis for better needs assessment and priority setting;

Challenge	Why an Issue	Recommendations
		<p>have established standards for evidence, clear deadlines and scope, roles, function, audience, and expectations of all partners.</p> <p>Make sure that federal expectations are clearly communicated; have a program coordinator task force review and provide policy recommendations. Keep information current on internet. Collaborate and communicate at all levels.</p> <p>National expertise may be needed for resource development; pool resources across organizations and institutions to create evidence for curricula used by multiple states.</p>
Partners	Conflicting policies and regulations; potential competition, need for more positive relationships beyond the land-grant university system	<p>Jointly promote program impacts across federal and other programs; make programs additive, get rid of silos at different levels – or combine them; establish open communication between partners and competitors; negotiate with partners to achieve common goals and increase collaboration; have Federal memorandums of understanding; use the same message on program materials; collaborate to serve the broader cause for program material development and program impact; engage community leaders and empower collaborators to partner with agencies that serve the same groups.</p> <p>Need a coordinated national nutrition education plan.</p>
Competition – those who market unhealthy foods	Extensive reach, marketing savvy	Use lessons/methods learned from the private sector/food companies.
Funding and legislative/policy restrictions	Funding doesn't increase with inflation; yet program costs are primarily wages/salaries and benefits; increasing administrative costs, lack of political clout to support increased funding; challenge keeping materials up-to-date and tested; location influences who can reach; non parity – 1994 and 1890 institutions; “limited time and staff to write and pilot new	Seek changes in federal funding (Farm Bill) to meet 21 st Century demands; work with Extension Council on Practice (ECOP) and Board on Agriculture to advocate to fully fund at appropriate level; include 1994s; include a separate competitive pot of money to address research needs; allow more flexibility – funding for marketing to audiences; fund development and testing of resources and materials used – important to assuring evidence base and impact.

Challenge	Why an Issue	Recommendations
	curricula, develop online interfaces, etc.”	
Also Mentioned		
Priorities	Federal and local differences	Flexibility is needed to meet both federal and local priorities.
Research	Inability to conduct longitudinal and return on investment research to determine capacity of EFNEP impact, and to build evidence base for new methodologies.	Fund research studies – stipends, compensation, AFRI, NIH partnership, impact evaluation, tracking healthy food purchases, biometric markers and food security; new focused RFAs.
Poverty eligibility	Approaches people from place of weakness	Re-consider eligibility to destigmatize the program – approach from place of strength.
Program reach	Getting harder to access the adult target audience	Mandate nutrition education for agencies that serve the target audience.

Who are potential partners, why are partnerships important, and what are the mutual benefits of working with partners?

Questions about partners were asked at the summit meeting since one third of participants represented other agencies and organizations that had nutrition education interests but were not necessarily associated with EFNEP. Responses reflected the community-based strength of the Cooperative Extension System along with a sense that new and different types of partnership are needed across programs and disciplines locally, within states, and nationally.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES	UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS	ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS
		
<p>CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local agencies/organizations Faith-based communities Worksites/workforce development settings Community gatekeepers – matriarchs, community influencers, social organizations, neighborhood councils English as a second language 	<p>CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Extension programs – 4-H, Master Gardener 1862/1890 universities EFNEP in neighboring states 	<p>CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State agencies – human services, public health departments Other nutrition education stakeholders and programs at all levels (examples – SNAP-Ed, WIC, Cooking Matters, school programs) Federal agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NIFA - FNS

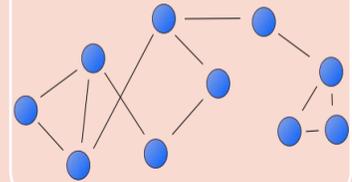
LOCAL COMMUNITIES



UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS



ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS



CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN

- Schools, after school programs, youth serving organizations
- Head Start/childcare providers
- Food pantries/food banks
- Grocery stores, retailers, convenience stores
- Local food hubs – gardens, kitchens, classes
- Farmers markets, agricultural producers
- Low income housing, homeless shelters
- Refugee and immigration centers
- Drug rehabilitation centers
- Transitional housing, court system, juvenile justice

EMERGING AND POTENTIAL

- Health care settings, doctors' offices, medical professionals, hospitals, healthcare community
- Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- RDNs
- Local foundations
- Business partnerships
- Commodity groups
- Non-profit sector

NON-CONVENTIONAL

- Military family readiness
- Board of Education
- Business leaders, community development, financial institutions, technology companies
- Non-government organizations

CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN

EMERGING AND POTENTIAL

- 1994/1862 partnerships

NON-CONVENTIONAL

- Medical schools
- Colleges, community colleges, technical schools, masters technology programs (job preparation)

CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN

- City, county, state, and Federal Governments, elected leaders, decision makers

EMERGING AND POTENTIAL

- CDC, Public Health
- Private foundations and organizations
- Media/TV
- ARS, ERS, NIH – research agencies and other researchers

NON-CONVENTIONAL

- Partnership for a Healthier America; Feeding America
- Professional associations – Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Pharmacy, Nursing
- Food companies/private sector – potential but tricky
- Insurance companies

As previously noted, several respondents expressed a desire to have more broad-based programming, which led to a broader array of suggested partners. Recommended partners who do not directly serve the current target audience were: area agencies in aging, group homes for institutionalized children, early childhood centers and preschools, companies that serve developmentally disabled people, mental health centers, international partners in agriculture, communication, technology, and education, community social justice organizations, and social marketing experts.

Why Partnerships are Important – What are the Perceived Benefits?

Respondents spoke of the considerable value that new and strengthened partnerships can bring to nutrition education programming. The potential positive influence of partnerships can be felt on multiple levels.

The primary benefit identified for program participants was access through referrals and on-site programming. Other noted benefits included gaining skills to improve health, opportunities to model behaviors for participants [parents], graduation certificates that could be used to show skill and expertise for employment, and the development of healthy message apps, continued education, or other learning opportunities to reinforce and extend learning beyond completion of the program.

Who would benefit from enhanced partnerships?

- Program participants
- Nutrition education programming
- Universities/Cooperative Extension
- Other partners

Most noted benefits to programming were increasing audience reach – including reach to non-traditional and less accessible audiences, raising the importance of nutrition and wellness, and increasing the use of technology. Also mentioned were: building grassroots support in rural communities; staying relevant and maximizing program potential and sustainability; leveraging and cost sharing to increase capacity – developing curricula and providing food, facilities, and other resources for learning; extending the understanding of impacts; covering child care, transportation, and other costs that the program cannot provide; recruiting paraprofessional staff; and identifying and addressing research questions associated with programming.

Respondents suggested that Extension and land-grant universities would benefit by more fully utilizing the assets of Extension – by better aligning and collaborating across programs; meeting training needs of 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions; and pooling resources and improving advocacy for all of Extension.

Benefits to potential partners included: expanding and supporting school standards; providing student practicums; having healthier congregations and communities; supporting the deployed through support at home; and providing education at point-of-purchase/food distribution. The extensive local community, state, and multi-state networking and reach of Extension along with its sense of where the target audience would be were also see of great benefit for working with Extension.

Mutual Benefits

By far, the greatest perceived mutual benefit of partnering with others was increased and more seamless access and participation to nutrition education programming and to other programs for which participants are eligible or have needs within communities. Closely following were improved nutrition and health outcomes of participants, and public value benefits: meeting local population health goals, reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, and development of workforce.

Building capacity was also frequently mentioned. Responses included: embedding EFNEP within low-income communities; coordinating and leveraging financial and in-kind resources for program development and evaluation; connecting people to services they need; learning from and trusting each other.

Respondents suggested that there would also be increased synergy as partners complement rather than duplicate services, reinforce learning, create messages that resonate with each other, share resources across audiences, and cooperate, rather than compete at every level of partnership – federal as well as local.

Respondents also reported on the importance of national and local/state partners working together to facilitate consistent program support across states, and the value of technical assistance.

The relationship of research to programming, was considered another potential win-win by respondents. Perceived benefits included: broader access and use of data and research applications; access to research funds; capturing outcomes at the population level – the programmatic level with health metrics; stronger and sustained messaging to increase understanding; connecting non-profits with academic institutions and federal partners; enhancing visibility for broad support of nutrition education; and improved access to the Cooperative Extension network.

Some respondents suggested that coordination and integration of efforts would lead to common goals, common audiences, and that nutrition education would truly become part of communities, as partners sought more comprehensive multi-level, multi-sectoral approaches – i.e. driving PSEs or complementing direct education with PSE approaches for a healthier environment.

At a higher level, some respondents felt that better coordination and integration of resources was needed across organizations, systems, and services as everyone feeds into one system. They suggested that doing so could lead to a platform for education, mutual health benefit goals, links between healthcare and nutrition education, stronger health advocacy, the generation of sustainable food environments, a healthier workforce, and creation of infrastructures that promote safe, walkable communities.

What are the mutual benefits?

- Seamless access and increased participation by participants to personally relevant programs
- Improved nutrition and health outcomes
- Workforce development and productivity
- Increased capacity by coordinating and leveraging financial and other resources, learning from each other, and establishing trust
- Greater synergy through cooperation and collaboration and through reinforced learning and resonating messages
- Shared expertise
- Research – program connections
- A social ecological model that is embedded within communities

For some respondents, partnerships were viewed as a means of expanding the scope of programming. Included were providing life skills, offering micro-loans to encourage financial stability, requiring agencies to pool resources to show impact, marketing and connecting different evaluation systems, and reducing potential fraud.

Based on your comments, what are your recommendations for the future of low-income nutrition education (aka EFNEP)?

Respondents were vocal about keeping the essence of EFNEP – programming which uses an indigenous educator model, targets low-income adults with children and youth, is culturally responsive and retains local relevance, supports the development of life skills, and is embedded in communities. They saw value in programming that is data driven with data that is available and ongoing. They stressed the need for remaining flexible at the national and state level and having national evaluation with common measurement tools across nation to remain relevant and effective. They also noted that states need the ability to continue tailoring messages to their own situations.

Respondents also expressed concern that without change, EFNEP, as it is currently conducted is unsustainable, and that key sectors of the low-income population will not be served. They further shared the importance of partnerships, and working together, to effectively deliver nutrition education within their respective states and territories.

“The allocation for EFNEP in [our state] currently allows us to serve as a key access point to Extension for the low-income populations in several of our larger communities. We do not have enough funding to offer it statewide. We created a jointly administered program with SNAP-Ed in order to expand our reach using an EFNEP-style approach for delivery. In this way, we maximize our EFNEP dollars and provide a superior program for more people.”

“Any nutrition education, food safety, and food preservation [programs] must address these three considerations:

1. Is it available – in close proximity to those who need it?
2. Is it accessible – can the people who need it get to it – transportation, local stores, local education [technological access]?
3. Is it affordable – can the people afford; who pays?”

Recommendations for meeting low-income nutrition education needs thirty years from now – in 2047, fell within nine thematic areas.

1. Experiential and theory based learning

As new learning models are considered, it will be important to maintain a deep commitment to experiential learning, including critical reflection. Learning approaches should have variety, be flexible, and include a broad theoretical perspective for behavior change – e.g. learner-centered, motivation, storytelling, culture, social support, community. “Programming needs to be flexible and nimble within a defined sandbox.” Learning should be based on education theory, such as the adult learning theory and facilitated discussion that are currently used.

2. Evaluation

Data is essential for program improvement and reinforcement. Streamlining data collection will be critical as new measures are adopted. Consider iPad usage during classes to record participant responses directly or creation of an app based data collection system to reduce participant and staff data entry burdens. Consider a dashboard approach so data is more real time and visible.

Evaluation needs to keep pace with changes in methods used and new opportunities, including better evaluation tools for low-literacy and low language users, blended learning evaluation, longitudinal evaluation to inform standard tools and model, the collection of long, intermediate, and short-term data, and national data collection.

Evaluation should include combination of credible evidence and memorable stories. Indicators are needed that show the collective impact of community partners, and EFNEP's social support of community. Collaborative evaluation approaches and measures are needed, which also depict the magic of EFNEP (e.g. social support, community development, quality of life).

“I strongly encourage the continuation of strong evaluation tools to continue to document outcomes. With the changing learning modes, EFNEP may be well served to consider new and innovative approaches while maintaining its integrity as a research- and evidence-based program with personal connections to the adults and children.”

3. Innovation and technology

Innovative approaches are needed – particularly in using technology to expand the reach of face-to-face approaches, meet audience learning needs, and provide distance education opportunities. Such approaches should also be used for staff training and development. Given how quickly technology evolves, constant attention is needed to ensure that the blended learning approaches used will be relevant in 30 years. Additional resources and changes to outreach requirements will be needed as new methods are implemented. Consider employing a national level technology specialist who works with universities to effectively incorporate technology into programming. High speed internet is critical, yet remains a challenge to secure in rural areas and US territories.

“Having options that use interactive technology with a personal touch should allow us to reach more people who can benefit from our nutrition education programs.”

“Young learners are already replacing one-on-one/group learning opportunities with ‘on-line’ interactions. If EFNEP is to be relevant in 30 years, it must make a commitment to invest now in identifying best practices for incorporating electronic learning experiences.

Recommendations for the future of low-income nutrition education

EFNEP is a premiere nutrition education program, which will diminish in program impact, reach, efficiency, and effectiveness, unless critical changes are made. Areas needing attention for future success are:

- Experiential and theory based learning
- Evaluation
- Innovation and technology
- Inclusion and equity in reach and access
- Staffing and program oversight
- Research
- Marketing and branding
- Partnerships and coordination
- Funding/resource allocations

Without a plan to innovate, we risk becoming obsolete and irrelevant. Changes to our program strategies and delivery methods are critical if we are to stay relevant.”

4. Inclusion and equity in reach and access

Programming should extend to all land-grant universities - 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions with consideration of how to build administrative efficiencies, have a level playing field, and equitable funding across the all institutions. How this will be achieved without harming existing programming must be carefully thought through.

“I understand there is interest in providing funds to the 1994 institutions for delivery of EFNEP and I support this concept. My concern lies with how this could be funded. If the current funding is divided amongst more universities, we potentially degrade our existing strong and well-established programs. A cut to our [state] EFNEP capacity funds would severely impact our delivery and audiences reached. An allocation of new funds would be necessary to help start programs from the 1994 institutions.”

Cultural sensitivity is needed in programming, curricula used, and staff employed. Volunteers could be better and more effectively used, including as a leverage for language support. Translational supports are also needed to support the involvement of underserved cultures – those who speak language other than English and Spanish. Funds are needed to support translation of all materials, hire translators where bi-lingual staff are not available, and keep materials and programming current and relevant for reaching our diverse audience. Consider partnering with translation services at the national level for better pricing.

5. Staffing and program oversight

Supervisory structures need to be revised so that paraprofessionals can be most efficient and efficacious. The current requirement that at least 60% of ENFEP funds must be used for paraprofessionals and their support is increasingly difficult to achieve. A better balance between professionals and paraprofessionals is needed to assure adequate program oversight and training, and to build and strengthen community partnerships that facilitate healthier food environments.

“There is likely a point of diminishing returns when the 60/40 proportion is applied to very limited funding. The value of paraprofessional staff and our commitment to the peer teaching model should be retained in any vision of the future. However, there must be recognition that the cost of program implementation has increased (mileage rates, etc.) and this 60/40 proportion is causing programs to make tough staffing decisions, and/or may not be adequate to achieve program objectives.”

Although most respondents spoke to the strengths of using paraprofessional staff, a few raised questions. Some noted that the traditional paraprofessional, as designated by the program, is disappearing and that most applicants have a college degree, whereas others saw this as an artifact of changing university hiring practices, and the difficulties of finding and hiring lay educators. A few respondents observed that using people who are connected to the community, doesn't necessarily mean paraprofessionals. Still others suggested that increased skills will be needed such as technological skills. Either people will need to be hired who have such skills, or an increased commitment to training will be needed.

6. Research

EFNEP has rich data which is underutilized and has considerable research potential. Research is important to program success, reflecting or improving program impacts, and understanding nutrition education's impact on nutritional health and well-being. Research opportunities could include an evaluation of qualitative data, use of big data, rippling effects, documented health outcome/impact evaluation, longitudinal impacts, long term health effects and other outcomes, best management practices, community development implications, return on investment (ROI) calculations and modeling; and utilization of bio-markers in a good, national research study. New and advanced behavioral theories need to be tested, along with new curricula, dose and duration of learning based on knowledge and readiness and evaluation indicators. Dedicated funding for research is needed.

“Steps need to be taken now to highlight the value of the EFNEP program model, impacts that it generates, and the quality of nutrition education that is delivered in order to effect an increase in funding levels. To that end, steps should be taken now to identify funds, outside of program funds, for research that supports nutrition education, PSE work, and other innovations that enhance nutrition education program delivery.

Steps should be taken now to explore best practices for distance /e-learning that could be implemented to address transportation, staffing, and participant preferences for learning.

Steps should be taken now to explore best practices for PSE approaches that are possible with limited supervisory oversight.”

7. Marketing and branding

This needs to be a premier nutrition education program with a comprehensive marketing plan, branding, and a national social media campaign for the target population. Marketing strategies are also needed that could be used throughout the country that are targeted to hard-to-reach populations that are in need.

8. Partnerships and coordination

Nutrition education needs to be embedded in the greater community – within Extension and with private and public organizations. Partnerships will need to collectively evolve to improve reach and relevance. Strategies are needed for improving partnerships and collaboration. These might include gathering program participants' input and conducting five-year systematic reviews on expectations and goals of frontline staff as data to help assure that programming remains relevant to the current environment, and to identify changes that are needed for the direct education model, prioritize and incorporate PSE approaches, and establish a strong supervisory model to support PSE work.

Although Extension has a key role in facilitating programming and coordination at the local level, fully formed and funded partnerships are needed for expansion and integration of partnership work. An effective, strategic national partnership with public and private partners is also needed.

A bottom-up (university) and top-down (federal) shared framework works well for leadership and resource development. Shared resources are also needed for staff training, monitoring accountability, and language materials.

9. Funding/resource allocations

All other recommendations (i.e. recommendations 1-8) can only be achieved through increased program funding. With the loss of 20% of the Extension footprint; and rising costs in salaries, benefits, travel reimbursement and educational materials, let alone efforts to improve program reach and impact, EFNEP is no longer sustainable as currently conducted. Despite efforts to change the trajectory, program reach has declined in recent years. If funding stays static, programming will need to be strategically administered – targeting areas of highest need, and will lose its national presence. Rural populations living in poverty will be underserved. Paraprofessional staff will lack adequate supervision, and efficiencies will be lost in program development, impact, and integrity.

“Between FFY1999 and FFY2017, the number of rural county programs receiving funding in [state] has decreased from 39 to 20 due to the continued decline in buying power with stagnant federal funding. The number of paraprofessionals has also declined from 240 staff (84 FTEs) to 81 staff (54 FTEs) in the same time period... With adequate resource allocation, the 60/40 split will be less of a challenge. We could reach rural and urban audiences now, and grow the caseload if we had adequate funding to support the time/travel costs to cover rural counties, and supervisory support to monitor program quality, provide training and ensure linkages with partner agencies” [from a tier one institution, which receives the highest level of funding]

We need to increase funding; funding is needed for travel to the remote islands (similar to rural audiences being left out) [from several tier seven institutions, which receive the lowest level of funding]

Finally, some recommendations implied fundamental changes to current programming. Content recommendations included: expanding curricula content and use – that the curricula can be used by school teachers and 4-H leaders; taking a food systems approach – the impact of food and nutrition education on agriculture, food waste, climate damage; or take a comprehensive life skills systems approach – health and wellness, parenting, financial management; or provide more issue based education – such as decreasing infant mortality, preventing obesity, and reducing food insecurity, and using WebNEERS in new ways to capture progress with these issues. Participant recommendations varied from redefining priority audiences to only adults, or to youth through partnerships with schools, to broadening programming to all people. Also, mentioned was starting from a place of strength within communities and build from there, rather than the currently used poverty focus. Lastly, recommendations were given to expand reach through culinary nutrition, adding nutrition to other healthy programs; using nutrition education to enhance local food systems, and employ persons with different skill sets – data entry and data analyst.

CONCLUSIONS

No clear consensus emerged from respondents as to what would constitute an “Effective, Relevant, and Inclusive Food and Nutrition Education Program in the 21st Century.” However, certain themes emerged across all questions that were asked.

Unless there are changes to programming, the current target audience will be less accessible – especially rural and mid-size communities, Native Americans, people from other cultures or who

speak other languages, the working poor, intergenerational families, tech savvy youth and young adults, low-literacy and technologically challenged youth and adults, and people transitioning out of incarceration or drug rehabilitation centers. Responses were mixed as to whether programming should reach out to those who may fall between the cracks or should focus on easier to reach audiences.

Innovation and adaptability has been a hallmark of EFNEP and is essential. Combined face-to-face and technology learning strategies are especially needed. Historically, the flexibility within EFNEP allowed the program to evolve from one-on-one home visits to hands on engaged, group learning experiences. Without new approaches to reaching the culturally diverse population and new generations of technologically dependent learners, EFNEP will become obsolete. EFNEP will no longer be a leader in integrating successful strategies for working with low-income audiences. Training will be essential at all levels to assure quality, consistency, and integrity of programming.

New learning strategies must be theoretically-grounded and evidence-based. Data-driven programming that is supported by evaluation and research is also essential. As new learning models are considered, it will be important to maintain a deep commitment to experiential learning based on education theory. Data is essential for program improvement and reinforcement. Evaluation and reporting needs to keep pace with changes to program content and approaches used, and should be streamlined, and yet rich and relevant in the short term and over time. **Funding support for program implementation research is a critical need.**

Greater flexibility is needed with the paraprofessional model to address a local supervisory crisis that is emerging and to support expanded community partnerships and the implementation of policy, system, and environmental (PSE) changes that complement and extend the influence of direct education.

Equity in funding 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions is supported on a high level to more effectively and efficiently reach the target audience. Care must be taken to not upset current program impacts and already challenged Cooperative Extension infrastructures.

Partnerships need to evolve at every level to improve program reach and impact and to achieve the collective action called for in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. Other benefits of partnerships are leveraged resources and shared expertise, enhanced program capacity and synergy, and increased participant access to personally relevant programs and learning opportunities. Although Extension has a key role in facilitating programming and coordination at the local level, strategies are needed for improving coordination, cooperation, and collaboration within and across universities, with existing and potential partners, with NIFA funders, and with other agencies and organizations that engage in nutrition education programming. An effective, strategic national partnership with public and private partners and a coordinated national nutrition education plan may be needed. **Marketing strategies** are also imported to facilitate program reach and to maintain program identity.

Respondents expressed pride in the success and influence of EFNEP over the past half century. Yet, they also voiced concern as to whether it – or any such program – could survive without a serious infusion of funds and corresponding evolution of programming.

NEXT STEPS

In coming weeks, NIFA will form a group of key stakeholders to examine this report and other relevant documentation and provide specific recommendations for a path forward to an effective, relevant, and inclusive 21st Century food and nutrition education program. The majority of members will be selected from among those who participated in the June meeting. This group will:

- Identify and flesh out the critical elements that are essential to a successful and sustainable program;
- Determine how NIFA's food and nutrition programming intersects with and is part of other food and nutrition efforts and what is essential for successful collective action across nutrition education programs; and
- Develop a shared vision and communication strategy that university and other essential partners can embrace.

Ideally, the efforts of this working group will result in a successful, national initiative and facilitate:

- Support and buy-in from all affected stakeholders, with an expanded network of advocates;
- Development of a functional framework that fleshes out the critical elements that are essential to a successful and sustainable food and nutrition education program – one which identifies university and national needs, sets priorities, coordinates efforts and achieves synergies among federal, university, and other key partners;
- Increased investment in low-income food and nutrition education from federal and non-federal sources; and
- The essence of a food and nutrition education program that supports the nutritional health and well-being of low-income populations of the 21st Century through:
 - a greatly expanded reach;
 - maintained high program impacts and positive return on investment;
 - adoption of strategies to meet demographic, social, and technological change; and
 - alignment with other programs for collective nutritional health impacts.

NIFA will provide support and serve as a liaison among stakeholders represented by the working group and other federal agencies, as needed.