Improving Nutrition for Limited-Resource Families

**The Need:** Adult obesity and overweight cost the state of North Carolina $2.14 billion each year in direct medical costs. Families with limited income, especially those with young children, need knowledge to help them provide nutritious meals that help adults and children maintain a healthy weight.

**Serving the Need:** For almost 40 years, the Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), coordinated by North Carolina Cooperative Extension, has worked with limited-resource families on nutrition issues. In six-session courses, EFNEP trainers use hands-on learning activities to teach participants to stretch food dollars, improve eating habits and practice food safety principles.

Educational efforts such as the 4-H EFNEP’s “Professor Popcorn” curriculum are designed especially for youth. The program targets low-income youth, providing them with hands-on learning in simple food preparation along with information about the nutrition needs for their age group.

During the fiscal year Oct. 2005-Sept. 2006, Cooperative Extension’s EFNEP program served the following groups:
- 6,950 program families.
- 12,720 youth.
- 27,707 individuals in program families.
- 6,384 families enrolled in food assistance programs.
- 1,219 additional families, who received food assistance as a result of EFNEP.

**Impact beyond North Carolina:** EFNEP’s follow-up evaluations of participants show that the instruction encourages behavioral changes in managing food budgets and practicing healthy eating and food safety. These changes can lead to healthier lives, with fewer incidents of heart disease, diabetes and obesity-related illnesses. Reduction in such diseases can result in tremendous cost-savings for private health insurance as well as Medicaid and Medicare.

Data from more than 5,200 program graduates indicate that:
- 91 percent improved food resource management practices such as meal planning, price comparison, food stability and grocery list use;
- 94 percent improved nutrition practices such as making healthy food choices, limiting added salt in food and encouraging children to eat breakfast;
- 79 percent report improved food safety practices such as thawing and storing foods properly.

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