



Achieving food security through the Cent\$ible Nutrition program

Food resource management practices taught include planning meals, comparing prices, using grocery lists, providing food for an entire month, and calculating monthly food costs.

Situation:

Food security is defined as having access to an available, adequate, affordable, nutritious, and safe food supply. Approximately 10 percent of Wyoming’s population lives at or below the poverty level. Forty-five percent of Cent\$ible Nutrition participants report lacking enough food to last a month when they enter the program.

The Cent\$ible Nutrition Program (CNP) receives funding to provide nutrition education to people living at or below the poverty level, which is approximately 40 percent of the households in the state. These audience members are not typically reached by traditional Cooperative Extension Service methods due to low self-esteem, lack of transportation, conflicting schedules, and lack of child care. In order to reach them, creative efforts must be used. Twenty-seven CNP educators and seven Family and Consumer Sciences educators* provide lessons to pre-formed groups such as Head Start, WIC, and POWER. They teach one on one in participants’ homes or in small groups. Additionally, news articles, newsletters, and displays provide education.

Impacts

Marketing and recruiting efforts resulted in higher enrollments in both adult and youth programs. Agency collaborations resulted in 1,131 programs being presented, reaching 22,588 contacts with individuals attending one-time lessons. It also resulted in the formation of one new distribution site for TEFAP commodity foods and one county’s SHARE program agreeing to accept food stamps. Efforts to reach minority and underserved populations resulted in enrolling 463 (23 percent) individuals with minority status.

CNP provided training to 380 agencies working with low-income and Title I schools for a total of 10,914 contacts. As a result, 1,119 displays were placed with these agencies and referrals to CNP increased. Enrollment increased this year from 1,655 to 2,013. Youth enrollment increased from 2,831 to 5,027. The move from teaching only five core lessons to teaching the entire curriculum resulted in an increase in the number of lessons. The mean number of lessons taught increased to 8.3 from 7.1 last year. As a result, participants gained greater knowledge and skills in their nutrition practices, food resource management, and food safety.

Nutrition practices improved. Nutrition practices measured included planning menus, reading labels, making healthy food choices, preparing foods without adding salt, and serving

children breakfast. Seven percent of the participants demonstrated acceptable nutrition practices at entry compared with 33 percent at exit.

Fifty-five percent of the participants reported improvement in planning menus, and 68 percent reported improvement in reading labels. Fifty-two percent reported improvement in selecting healthy foods, and 39 percent reporting improvement in leaving out salt when cooking. Forty-one percent reported making improvement in feeding children breakfast daily.

Twenty-four-hour food recalls showed that 92.7 percent of the graduates made a positive change in their inclusion of a food group. Fruit servings increased from 1.2 to 1.9 daily, and vegetable servings increased from 2.6 to 3.0. This nearly equaled the 5-A-Day goal set as a national priority.

Calcium/dairy servings increased from 2 to 2.3 per day. Servings of foods in the “other” group decreased from 21.5 to 16.9. Generally fats and alcohol decreased while dietary fiber increased. There was a shift from people eating too few and too many calories to eating within the normal caloric range.

The mean nutrient adequacy ratio, which is the nutrient intake compared to the recommended dietary allowance (RDA), increased for all nutrients monitored. The goal was 100 percent of the RDA. This included protein (increased from 92 to 96 percent), iron (increased from 78 to 80 percent), calcium (increased from 78 to 79 percent), vitamin A (increased from 69 to 80 percent), vitamin C (increased from 76 to 87 percent), and vitamin B6 (increased from 76 to 84 percent). The mean adequacy ratio for all six nutrients increased from 76 to 84 percent.

Food resource management practices improved. Food resource management practices measured included planning meals (mentioned previously), comparing prices, using grocery lists, providing food for an entire month, and calculating monthly food costs. Twenty-three percent demonstrated acceptable practices at entry compared to 52 percent at exit. Forty-two percent of the participants gained the skills to make their food resources last an entire month. Forty-seven percent reported comparing prices more frequently, and 45 percent reported using a grocery list more often.

Helping families and individuals eat better for less represents one area where CNP excels. One person praised the CNP educator for helping his family find additional food resources through the local food bank and the game and fish department. The majority of personal testimonies about how CNP helped participants revolved around how much money was saved each month. The mean dollars saved per family per month this year equaled \$40.50, which represents \$486 per year per family. This represents \$702,756 in just one year by the 1,446 Wyoming graduates who completed the exit survey.

Youths gained knowledge and skills. A total of 5,027 youths participated in classes in their classroom, in after-school programs, and in summer day camps. Eighty-five percent of 2,193 youths from 107 groups now eat a variety of foods. Sixty-six percent of 2,243 youths from 104 groups increased their knowledge about nutrition. Sixty-six percent of 1,816 youths from 88 groups increased their ability to select low-cost, nutritious foods. Seventy-one percent of 1,976 youths from 94 groups improved their practices in food preparation and safety.

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