

SUCCESS STORY

Fighting Food Insecurity with Nutrition Education and Community Gardening



In Georgia, 1 in 9 people face hunger and 1 in 7 children face hunger. Rural communities are hit harder by hunger in Georgia, and the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation as well. Bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to the tables of Georgian families at no cost provides a source of relief and the opportunity to prepare and consume meals rich in fruits and vegetables. The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) combined Direct Nutrition Education with interventions that improve food access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)-eligible Georgian adults.

The DPH SNAP-Ed Community Garden Initiative improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables in local communities through partnership with community organizations. Garden sites provide the opportunity for community engagement, physical activity, and a sense of ownership of a common space. Located at DPH's Direct Nutrition Education sites, the gardens also increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables for Direct Nutrition Education participants. Some garden sites serve as a space where community members learn about gardening and have access to seedlings and pre-made boxes for home gardening.

In 2022, DPH partnered with 8 community organizations to bring over 9,660 pounds of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables to the tables of more than 3,500 SNAP-eligible households in Georgia. A total of 9 community gardens were constructed and maintained by dedicated community members. Through the efforts of District SNAP-Ed Coordinators, 21 partnerships with local organizations were established and maintained for Direct Nutrition Education. DPH delivered 166 hours of Direct Nutrition Education to 187 SNAP-eligible individuals. Using the Eating Smart, Being Active curriculum, DPH SNAP-Ed Coordinators employed both virtual and in-person modes of instruction in 167 Direct Nutrition Education Sessions.

“We want community members to know that our garden is a safe and open space where they can have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, engage in garden activities, and also learn how to grow their own crops at home and make healthier food choices.”
-Farmer Fredo



KEY PARTNERS

- Friendship Missionary Baptist Church
- Flint River Fresh
- Macon Housing Moving to Success
- Phoebe Sumter Medical Center
- Heros Instillment Academy
- Southern Sky Center for Arts and Culture
- Turnaround Columbus
- Spring Creek Health
- DPH also recognizes its partners that implemented Direct Nutrition Education.

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SUCCESS STORY

Passing the Plate: Cooking Classes Continue



A 6-week Cooking Matters™ Nutrition Education class series was offered to the partnering HealthMPowers early childcare center, Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC). This initiative was conducted with parents whose children attend the ECLC to help increase family engagement. The series consisted of making different healthy recipes and discussing topics such as shopping on a budget, stretching ingredients, and reading food labels.

Analysis of pre- and post- data from ECLC participants showed an increase in those meeting the dietary recommendation of consuming more than one kind of fruit and/or vegetable each day. Participants enjoyed the classes so much, they decided to continue community-led classes for the next three months. Parents and site staff led other ECLC family members in preparing new recipes such as spinach and fruit salad. The continuation of these classes without HealthMPowers' support, demonstrates the commitment of the ECLC community in strengthening the nutritional skills and behaviors of their families.

“It makes me want to read all the labels. I’m always conscious of what I’m feeding the kids thanks to this class.”

“The timely manner that the food was prepared in is great, I want to use some of the things and make it my own.”



“Saving money to make our meals last longer or for multiple days is a big plus to have different ways to make other dishes”

KEY PARTNER

- ECLC Community Learning Center

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SUCCESS STORY

Achieving Health Goals through Produce Prescription Programming



For over six years, Open Hand Atlanta has worked with community partners and healthcare agencies to organize and implement Produce Prescription Programs (PRx). In 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic, Open Hand recognized the critical need to improve food access, nutrition, and health among rural communities in Georgia. The PRx program is a multi-component intervention that aims to alleviate food insecurity, improve healthy dietary and resource management behaviors, and improve health. The PRx program pairs Direct Nutrition Education classes with a weekly produce box valued at \$25 for up to six-months.

During the class, participants come together to cook a healthy meal with the guidance of the instructors, which not only gives participants the opportunity to practice cooking skills but also provides a space to ask questions and engage with one another. Participants who remained engaged with the weekly class continue with the program by picking up produce weekly and attending monthly reunions.

Though food security is the primary target of the intervention, numerous secondary outcomes, including improved energy, mental well-being, and social support have been noted by participants. To date, Open Hand has enrolled nearly 200 participants in South Georgia — providing a critical need for food, support, and knowledge in this often-underserved region.

The intervention also aims to improve physical health, particularly blood pressure, among participants. Over 80% of program participants experienced hypertensive blood pressures at the start of the program; but by six months, more than 1 in 3 participants lowered their blood pressure. For many participants in rural South Georgia, the PRx program is one of few working to improve food access in the area.

“ [Because of the program] my eating changed. I feel a lot better. More energy. More stamina. I just feel better now that I don't eat all that greasy food and fried food. I feel a lot better daily. ”



KEY PARTNERS

- Barnes Healthcare Services
- Tift Regional Medical Center - Southwell
- Leroy Rogers Senior Center

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SUCCESS STORY

FARM Rx: An Innovative Approach for Increasing Access to Fresh Produce



Athens Food As Real Medicine Prescription Program (FARM Rx) is a multi-level direct education and PSE change intervention that has provided produce prescriptions, health screenings, and nutrition education to medically underserved Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)-eligible residents in Athens-Clarke County. Operating since 2017, the FARM Rx program is conducted through partnerships among University of Georgia (UGA) SNAP-Ed, Athens Farmers Market, safety-net clinics, non-profit organizations and other community-based organizations.

During FFY22, UGA SNAP-Ed received the inaugural Bobbi Meeler Sahm Outreach Award from the UGA Office of Public Service and Outreach to support ongoing and new PSE activities. The award provided funds that were used to 1) add a community gardening component to the program with gardening tools, resources, and education, 2) provide transportation support to FARM Rx participants without means to access the Athens Farmers Market for produce prescription redemption and nutrition education sites, and 3) provide participants with cooking equipment.

Based on interest and feasibility, 15 FARM Rx participants were selected to start raised garden beds at home. Crop selection was based on seasonality, ease of maintenance, skill level, and UGA SNAP-Ed Food Talk and Food Talk: Better U recipes. Provided supplies included reusable fabric garden beds, small gardening tools, gloves, soil, soil amendments and seeds. Interested participants who could not start gardens at home were given the opportunity to learn about gardening and receive hands-on experience on-site at the Athens-Clarke County Extension Office raised garden beds.

Out of the 15 participants who started their own gardens, 100% agreed they learned something about gardening, 95% agreed they felt as if gardening would impact their household nutrition, and 95% agreed to continue growing vegetables and herbs at home. Ways to sustain and expand the project are currently being explored and include plans to develop a Community Gardening Toolkit for future cohorts.

“ I noticed most of [the participants] had an interest in vegetables and...in gardening. They just didn't have the resources to do it and they didn't think that it was as accessible as it was.

It was a great experience to see...they were picking up different agricultural methods and techniques along the way and understanding that nutrition had a lot to do with what they were doing...it was great.

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KEY PARTNERS

- Athens Farmers Market
- Wholesome Wave Georgia
- Mercy Health Center
- UGA Extension Athens-Clarke County Team

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