

USDA’s Southern Regional Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Center of Excellence (RNECE) Strengthens Evidence Base for Direct Education and Policy, Systems & Environmental Changes

RNECE’s Southern Region is strengthening the evidence base for *Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More (FFESMM)* – a practice-tested intervention that promotes healthy eating habits and increased physical activity through a series of group nutrition/physical activity education sessions and health-promoting policy, systems and environmental (PSE) changes within faith-based communities. This program is implemented by a nutrition education paraprofessional (generally from EFNEP) in conjunction with a lay leader from the faith-based organization, who connects the lessons to faith teachings. A nutrition professional (generally from SNAP-Ed) provides technical support to the faith community for PSE change. RNECE-South has awarded funding to three universities, in an effort to test program strategies, assess long-term outcomes and evaluate PSE change using the FFESMM intervention. RNECE-South staff are providing standardized training and evaluation tools, including a core set of indicators from the Western Regional Evaluation Framework, to each of the awardees so that results can be compiled across the sites for the basic FFESMM program. Each site has the opportunity to tailor their approach to social media as described below.

The University of Arkansas is assessing the impact of direct education and PSE changes on diet and physical activity among program participants with and without social media support. This work will determine the effectiveness of PSE initiatives in faith-based communities, specifically among low-income families with children.

The University of Florida is assessing the feasibility of implementing the FFESMM intervention by EFNEP paraprofessionals with supporting SNAP-Ed PSE changes. This project includes an online, interactive dashboard and explores whether this addition increases the adoption of healthy eating and physical activity behaviors.

The University of Tennessee is implementing the FFESMM to expand EFNEP and SNAP-Ed reach with faith communities, explore use of social media as a method for participant recruitment and retention and increase the adoption of effective PSE interventions.

In addition to examining the impact of social media strategies on the FFESMM intervention, the Southern Region has also funded another project that’s strengthening the evidence-base of social media interventions with limited-resource audiences.

Social Media Educational Activities Pilot Study

RNECE-South is collaborating with a researcher at Case Western University to identify characteristics of limited-resource social media users to inform the development of additional messaging in support of health promoting behaviors. This initiative is measuring the impact of social media-enhanced nutrition education lessons on health-related behavior changes in comparison with standard nutrition education lessons.

The Southern Region has launched a website – www.rnece-south.org – that serves as a place for SNAP-Ed and EFNEP implementing agencies to learn more about evidence-based programs and collaborate with other agencies. Additionally, webinars introducing the RNECE, providing implementation details for FFESMM, and implementing and evaluation of PSE interventions can be found on their website.