Western Region Nutrition Education Center of Excellence Regional Update-January, 2016

The RNECE-West has a particular focus on serving the Hispanic population, the largest and fastest growing population served by EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs in the NIFA Western Region. The overall goals for the RNECE-West are to provide long-term evaluation of nutrition education programs, develop and promote novel approaches to nutrition education and environmental change, and support healthy behavior change for EFNEP and SNAP-Ed participants. RNECE-West is committed to disseminating research opportunities and findings to the professional nutrition network, including colleagues in the fields of nutrition education and public health. Highlights of two programs follow.

Food Pantry Environment Project-Washington State University

The primary audience for this project is the anti-hunger community of the NIFA Western Region, a highly motivated group concerned about the presence of hunger and poverty in the region. Many within the target audience have either experienced hunger themselves or work closely with families that experience hunger.

This project builds on existing work that many food banks, such as Good Sheppard Food Bank of Maine, the California Department of Public Health, and the Oregon Food Bank, have promoted in various parts of the anti-hunger network. Many of these tools are site-specific and have not been tested for reliability or validity. The RNECE-W food pantry environmental scan (e-scan) project is building on the lessons learned from these assessments and information from leaders in the anti-hunger community. The RNECE-W approach begins by examining existing research literature and developing an interview tool to uncover the best practices in healthy food pantry environments within the NIFA Western Region. The RNECE-W team will conduct interviews to collect the experiences of pantry leaders. These combined experiences will inform a set of guiding strategies for healthy pantry environments in the NIFA Western Region.

In addition, the RNECE-West is currently exploring avenues for e-scan field testing and validation. This tool will be used by food pantry staff, in coordination with EFNEP supervisors and SNAP-Ed managers, to measure and report changes in the food pantry environment. Environmental data and data gathered from USDA food assistance program clients will strengthen the evidence for policy actions that support environmental adaptations making the healthiest choice the easiest choice for food pantry clients. This work will be undertaken in partnership and collaboration with the emergency food network and anti-hunger community.

Evaluation of a novel, low cost, low burden, scalable technology for evaluating EFNEP and SNAP-Ed effectiveness-Utah State University and University of Utah

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate a technology for assessing the *long-term* effectiveness of SNAP-Ed and EFNEP in a novel, inexpensive, and scalable way that does not burden program participants. The study focuses on changes in fruit, vegetable, whole grain, and dairy grocery purchases before and after participation in Utah EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs. It includes assessing the utility of a novel technology that detects changes in grocery purchases, and quantifies expenditures on these foods. The technology is automatic, requiring no effort by the participants, minimizing reporting bias. The analysis is quick, low cost, and promises to scale to any population.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

A grocery retail partner provides data from sales records linked to households via loyalty cards. Data include the Universal Product Codes (UPCs) and Product Look Up codes (PLUs) of items purchased by participating households. This allows for analysis of grocery sales data over any time interval so long-term evaluation will be possible.

The Nutrition Data Mining lab at the Department of Biomedical Informatics at the University of Utah has developed the tool; it assesses grocery household retail food quality directly from sales data and related metadata supplied by grocers. The technology is called the Utah Quality Measurement And Recommender Toolset (QualMART). Using grocery sales data offers several important advantages over traditional recall-based food or diet quality assessment tools: 1) it imposes a low burden on participants – all a participant has to do is provide a loyalty card number; 2) the sales data are objective and collected passively; 3) stores collect these data for their own purposes, so the data are very inexpensive to collect; and 4) the vast majority of retail grocery outlets use scanners, so the approach promises to scale well. To date, only Smith's Food and Drug has confirmed partnership; but it is anticipated that all of Kroger (the nation's largest grocery retail chain) will join the QualMART effort.

A long term objective is to distribute the QualMART software under a license that permits its use for non-profit purposes at no cost. Other EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs in the Western region and across the nation would be able to use it to evaluate their educational programs.

-30-

Other RNECE-W projects are available here: http://wrnece.colostate.edu/?page_id=77

Contact: Joanne Littlefield, RNECE-W Communications Coordinator, Joanne.Littlefield@colostate.edu
  Susan Baker, Co-PI, Colorado State University, Susan.Baker@colostate.edu
  Karen Barale, Co-PI, Washington State University, kbarale@wsu.edu

wrnece.colostate.edu