



# Better Living for Texans

## A Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

*Making a Difference*

### Relevance

In Texas, 17% of households have incomes that are at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL). An estimated one out of seven Texans receives benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. This program helps eligible low-income families buy nutritious food to feed their families. Proper nutrition is important because diet quality has been linked to four of the ten leading causes of death. Research also suggests that the diets of low-income households, including those receiving SNAP benefits and those with children, often lack variety and are typically inadequate in fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, dairy products, and lean meat. Additionally the diets of low-income households tend to be low in fiber, vitamins A and E, folic acid, zinc, calcium, and iron and higher in total fat, saturated fat, and sodium than is currently recommended.

Stretching resources so families have food on the table also presents a challenge for many limited-resource audiences. Data from the 2011 Current Population Survey indicate that more than 18% of Texas households faced challenges in keeping food on the table at least once within a 12-month period (classified as food insecurity). The percentage of Texas households that experience food insecurity continues to be higher than the national average of about 15%.



### Response

The Better Living for Texans (BLT) program is a cooperative endeavor among the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA. BLT was begun by Extension in 1995 and today includes 220 counties – every county in Texas that is served by an Extension county agent in family and consumer sciences.

A component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, BLT provides educational programs to SNAP recipients, applicants, and other approved audiences to help improve their ability to plan and prepare nutritious meals, stretch food dollars, and prepare and store food safely. Incorporating the Walk Across Texas program into BLT provides an opportunity to help the target audience increase their level of physical activity.

BLT is delivered through a variety of teaching methods that reflect audience needs. Teaching methods include: lesson series, single education events, one-to-one consultations, demonstrations, and tours. With the presence of BLT in almost every county in the state, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is poised to reach all areas of Texas, both rural and urban, and increase the likelihood of meeting the nutrition education needs of under-served Texans.

### Results

During fiscal year 2012, county Extension agents reported a total of 1,106,907 educational contacts from adults and youth participating in BLT.

A survey of 1,057 BLT adult graduates from across the state found that BLT participants made meaningful

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION

changes in the frequency that they practiced selected food resource management behaviors. For example:

- The percentage of graduates who planned their meals “always” rose from 22% before BLT to 66% 30 days after the program ended.
- More than 79% were shopping with a list “always” after the program ended, compared to 35% when the program began.
- Nearly 45% of the graduates reported that they “always” compared prices when shopping for food when the program began. However, 30 days after graduating, more than 80% were doing so.

Participants were also asked to estimate how much of their own money they were spending on groceries before and after the BLT program. On average, participants lowered their monthly out-of-pocket food expenses each month by almost \$15, which if maintained and were not due to some other economic hardship, could lead to an annual savings of \$180 per household. The percentage of respondents who ran out of food before the end of the month “always” or “sometimes” fell from 71% to 54% nearly a month after the program ended.

BLT has a history of high customer satisfaction. Results from the survey found that most participants (95%) rated BLT as either “excellent” or “good.” In addition, 92% of respondents indicated that participating in BLT was helping them to feed their families more nutritious meals.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents identified BLT as their first exposure to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, suggesting that this program is enabling Extension to reach audiences that might otherwise not have the opportunity to benefit from Extension education programs.

To learn more about the BLT program, please visit our website (<http://blt.tamu.edu>) or contact program coordinator Jon Perrott ([japerrott@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:japerrott@ag.tamu.edu)).

