

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Oakland County

Oakland County

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More families eat FRESH Michigan produce



Fresh fruit and vegetables available at no cost to participants in the Project FRESH program.

Project FRESH (Farm Resources, Encouraging and Supporting Health) is a partnership between the Oakland County Health Department Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Division and MSU Extension Oakland County.

MSU Extension nutrition instructors working in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) provide nutrition information to WIC participants. Following nutrition lessons the participants receive coupons that are redeemable for fresh Michigan-grown produce available at local farmers' markets.

With the goal of increasing the coupon redemption rate in Oakland County in 2006, MSU Extension nutrition instructors delivered their nutrition lessons at the local farmers' market. Coupons were distributed following the lessons, making it more convenient for participants to use their coupons.

Thirteen thousand (13,000) coupons worth \$26,000 were distributed to 1,300 pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum WIC-eligible mothers.

Providing the nutrition lessons and distributing the coupons right at the farmers market resulted in an increase in the redemption rate from 66 percent in 2005 to 81 percent in 2006.

During the nutrition lessons at the market, the MSU Extension staff recruited participants into the EFNEP program, which provided additional educational opportunities to learn how to select, store and prepare fresh produce, understand the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, adapt food safety and sanitation practices, and how to budget and save money while purchasing fresh produce.

Evaluation data indicate that 94 percent of the EFNEP graduates made positive changes in their food choices. The EFNEP curriculum complements other health programs on health and obesity offered by the Cancer Institute.

Project FRESH is shown to enhance earnings of participating Michigan farmers, increase the number of shoppers at the local farmers' markets and promote healthy eating.



MSU Extension nutrition instructor teaches Project FRESH participants the value of adding fresh produce to their diet.

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.

Young people explore identity in 4-H Hmong Family Program



Hmong art experiences help participants learn about their culture and create talking points for family discussion.

Through input during focus groups over a three-year period, MSU Extension staff gained a clearer understanding of the issues affecting local Hmong families. A common concern among parents and youth was maintaining cross-generational communication within families that are in the process of adapting to the cultural landscape of the U.S.

Hmong adolescents find themselves straddling two cultures and often express concern that their Laos-born parents don't understand the social pressures of American schools. Hmong parents fear that their children don't value their Hmong heritage and that American traditions will cause them to drift away from their families.

To address these issues a pilot program was undertaken with the Hmong community during the summer of 2006.

MSUE used newly-translated Hmong versions of "4-H Folkpatterns" activities to help youth explore their family histories and promote cross-generational communication with parents and other family members.

The program focused on helping families open doors to communication through hands-on activities in Hmong art, crafts, story reading and teambuilding. After being introduced to the activities in group sessions, youth used Hmong Folkpatterns activities at home to find out about their parents' birthplaces, childhood memories and family traditions.

"I felt like somebody cared. There is another Hmong person out there that cares about us."

*-Choua, age 17
Program participant*

According to program coordinator Caroline Vang, "The youth expressed a real appreciation for having a safe environment to express themselves, as well as interact socially and talk about the challenges of being Hmong in a very different culture."

Evidence of the program's positive impact included

- A significant increase in the cross-generational communication, as 82 percent of the participants completed activities that included family dialogue.
- Youth participants were retained in 4-H educational activities after the summer program ended, as 71 percent participated in additional 4-H opportunities within six months of their first experience, and several of the older students are now mentoring younger children.
- A notable increase was documented in cross-cultural dialogue within the neighborhood. Prior to the summer project, the community center served a predominantly Latino audience, with very few Hmong families engaged in activities. Hmong involvement at the center has quadrupled and discussions have begun about inclusive programs that bring Hmong and Latino families together.

"This is the only place around that all the kids can come together and hang out and talk."

- Song, 12 years old



Youth learn teamwork and leadership skills through experiential activities.

The success of the summer Hmong Family Project led to the development of a new Learn & Serve peer-mentoring program called TNT (Teens in Teams).

Selected creative high school students mentor elementary children in small groups. They provide homework help for their mentees, career exploration, community projects, and creative self-expression through arts, games and photography.

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4-H Hmong Family Program
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For more information about any of MSU Extension's innovative programs, visit our web site at www.msue.msu.edu/oakland or call **248-858-0880**.