

Success Story

Creating a Sustainable Garden for Low-Income Seniors in Aroostook County

SUMMARY

In 2017, **Maine SNAP-Ed's** local Nutrition Educator in Houlton partnered with **Market Square Commons**, an elderly, low-income housing facility to increase access to fruits and vegetables. This project was initiated by the educator upon learning that many residents in her nutrition education classes had experience and interest in gardening, but lacked the access and resources needed to continue this healthy activity in their new environment.

The educator collaborated with the housing site staff and the residents to prepare a garden site, and through local donations, **eight raised garden beds** were built and seedlings were planted. In the 2017 growing season, **31 low-income seniors** will have access to fresh, local produce they have grown themselves. This environmental change complements the ongoing nutrition education that provides the Market Square Commons residents with the knowledge and skills needed to make healthier lifestyle choices.



CHALLENGE

Obesity is a growing epidemic across the United States and is associated with increased risk for **chronic diseases** like diabetes. In Maine, 2 out of 3 Maine adults and 41% of Maine children are overweight or obese.

Eating more fruits and vegetables adds nutrients to diets, reduces the risk for chronic disease, and helps manage body weight when consumed as part of overall healthy diet.

Maine SNAP-Ed works with local community coalitions to support sustainable changes that help **reduce the burden of obesity** across Maine.

MAINE



SNAP-Ed

Healthy Eating on a Budget

Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a USDA-funded program that teaches low-income Mainers the knowledge and skills needed to make healthier lifestyle choices.

In 2015, the program began implementing Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change strategies in a variety of local community settings. By making sustainable changes to the environment, Nutrition Educators are fostering healthy behaviors that aim to **reduce the burden of obesity across Maine**.

In 2015, Maine SNAP-Ed PSE efforts reached 2,498 individuals eligible for SNAP and a total of 7,118 Mainers were reached.

In 2017, Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators are helping to establish 10 community gardens across the state, including these raised beds.

SOLUTION

During a nutrition education class at Market Square Commons, the Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator asked her senior participants if they were growing any herbs or vegetables in their homes. Although very interested, the attendees noted too many barriers to incorporating gardening into their daily routines at this housing site. So the educator created a plan to **develop a shared garden**.

Residents raised money through bottle-return drives, and local businesses and residents donated lumber, soil, and seedlings to create **raised beds that are accessible to all residents – including those in wheelchairs and using walkers for support**. The beds are sturdy and located close to a popular common area so that even residents unable to garden can socialize with their neighbors and benefit from the fresh-grown produce.



SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The raised beds at Market Square Commons have been so successful that they are already planning to expand by adding three more garden beds to the common gardening area. Notably, the residents report that the addition of the garden to their living environment has **increased opportunities for both physical activity and socialization**. Going forward, residents plan to add a horseshoe pit to the front of the building, which will increase activity and opportunities for socialization.

The Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator is building on her relationship with the housing site to further opportunities to increase access to local fruits and vegetables. Summer activities include recruiting Houlton seniors to participate in **Maine Harvest Bucks** (through the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives Program) at the local farmers' market adjacent to Market Square Commons. At the market there will be recipe demonstrations with locally grown produce and seedling giveaways paired with tips for storage and other strategies to shop, cook, and eat healthy on a budget – supporting healthy aging for Maine seniors.



PARTNERS in SUCCESS

- Market Square Commons
- CC Realty Management
- Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets
- Local Residents
- Houlton Businesses

"To see tenants coming out of their apartment...mingling, planning, planting, watering, weeding is a beautiful thing! We will be adding to this local garden spot to improve a bit each year. Something this nutrition educator is looking forward to!"

**—Heather McGuire,
Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition
Educator**

For more Success Stories from the Maine SNAP-Ed program, or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit www.mainesnap-ed.org.

Data sources are available upon request by emailing mainesnap-ed@une.edu.

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