

Success Story

Gleaning Fruits and Vegetables from Farms to the Communities of the Midcoast

SUMMARY

In 2016, **Maine SNAP-Ed**, **Access Health**, and **Healthy Lincoln County** worked with community stakeholders and flourishing local food councils to identify ways the community could come together to ensure all residents gain access to healthy foods—specifically, fruits and vegetables. Gleaning—collecting and distributing quality produce from local farms that would otherwise go to waste—was prioritized and Merrymeeting Gleaners was formed.

Nutrition Educators in Sagadahoc and Lincoln counties partnered with their local food security organizations to distribute gleaned produce to high-need sites throughout the Midcoast. At one low-income housing site, Bath Housing, an estimated **150 individuals received nearly 1,000 pounds of free, fresh, local produce** in the summer of 2016. Overall, more than **14,000 pounds of food was distributed to SNAP-eligible recipients** in 2016.



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 an 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, 25 Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators are working on increasing access to local produce through gleaning, community supported agriculture projects, and farmers' markets.

SOLUTION

Gleaning groups, like the Merrymeeting Gleaners, recover food that would otherwise not be picked from farmers' fields and provide an opportunity to change the way the community gains access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Farmers are thrilled to share the surplus of their harvest with underserved community members. In the Midcoast region, Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators leveraged their connections to the community to **establish direct links between the gleaners, farmers, and the sites in need**—like WIC, Head Start, and public housing locations. Nutrition Educators show recipients at these sites how to prepare and store fresh produce and provide easy, healthy recipes to accompany the free produce. And they provide technical support to gleaning teams throughout the year, especially during harvest season.



SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The Midcoast community has created an impressive infrastructure to serve its highest need residents. With the support of Maine SNAP-Ed, the Merrymeeting Gleaners have established **over 15 regular distribution sites** for the 2017 harvest season and the gleaning effort is growing. Thanks to the ground work laid by the Healthy Lincoln County Nutrition Educator, the Lincoln County Gleaners was established and will initiate their first official "glean" during the 2017 harvest.

Nutrition Educators in Sagadahoc and Lincoln counties continue to engage new community members in their local food system and provide technical support to these successful gleaning efforts. With organizations like the thriving Merrymeeting Gleaners, the newly established Lincoln County Gleaners, and long-standing SNAP-Ed partners, the Midcoast region is poised to continue leading the charge to improve food access for its most vulnerable populations.



PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

- Mid Coast Hunger Prevention
- Bath Housing
- Damariscotta Baptist Church
- Lincoln Academy
- The Morris Farm
- Damariscotta River Association
- Merrymeeting Food Council
- FARMS – Farm and Agriculture in Rural Maine Schools

"We distributed 14,000 pounds—that's about a T-Rex worth of food!"

—AmericorpsVISTA volunteer,
Bath Housing

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.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Maine SNAP-Ed is funded by the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is administered by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and implemented statewide by the University of New England (UNE) through contracts with local community coalitions. Maine SNAP-Ed educates low-income families on low cost, healthy eating and active lifestyles.