

# Success Story

## Creating a Sustainable School Teaching Garden in Lewiston

### SUMMARY

In 2015, **Maine SNAP-Ed** and **St. Mary's Nutrition Center** worked with staff from **Montello Elementary School** in Lewiston to build a teaching garden on school property. The goal of this project was to engage students and teachers to utilize the garden for more than just learning about flowers by bringing the classroom outdoors to teach subjects like math and science. The garden is used throughout the school day, after school, and during the summer months by a team of enthusiastic teachers and students. Each year, up to **600 students** are exposed to plant life, gardening practices, and delicious fresh vegetables grown on their own school grounds.



### 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 2016, Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators helped establish seven school gardens across the state, including these raised beds.

## SOLUTION

In 2016, the Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator focused on engaging **summer school** students in **enrichment-based programming** to help teachers address the “summer slide” (learning loss during summer months). On Mondays and Wednesdays she moved classrooms to the garden area for hands-on projects related to garden care and learning how food grows. Summer school teachers were enthusiastic about the program so they asked about **providing garden education during the school year**. As a result, the Nutrition Educator developed a plan to bring individual classrooms out during the academic school year. And things really took off during **after-school programming**, where students could join cooking and gardening clubs to grow and use the garden produce to follow recipes and prepare healthy meals and snacks.



## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Maine SNAP-Ed and St. Mary’s Nutrition Center will continue to provide Montello Elementary School with **evidence-based garden and culinary-enhanced nutrition education programming**. In addition, the Nutrition Educator will continue to work with energized teachers to incorporate gardening and nutrition information into their teaching—including creation of a **teacher training** to increase confidence in utilizing the garden. The Nutrition Educator is teaming up with the local Farm to School Coordinator to offer “**garden bins**” which are resource boxes filled with lesson plans divided by themes (e.g. plant parts, bugs in the garden, etc.).

Plans for 2017 include continuing the garden and cooking club during summer enrichment programs and a teacher workshop day where teachers will learn to conduct lessons in the garden.

## PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

- Montello Elementary Staff
- St. Mary’s Nutrition Center Staff
- Farm to School Planning Grant Coordinator

“Teachers and staff from other local schools are hearing about this and are requesting assistance with revitalizing their school gardens.”  
—Rebecca Duggan, 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](http://www.mainesnap-ed.org).**

Data sources are available upon request by emailing [mainesnap-ed@une.edu](mailto:mainesnap-ed@une.edu).

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