

# Success Story

## Fresh Produce and Recipes Enhance “Senior Boxes” Distributed through Maine’s Commodity Supplemental Food Program

### SUMMARY

The **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** aims to help low-income seniors by enriching their diets with healthy, non-perishable foods. CSFP is a federal program administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the pick-up locations in western Maine, the local Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator worked with a community coalition to enhance the monthly **boxes of pantry staple foods** by adding **fresh produce from local farms**, recipes for healthy meals, and nutrition education materials for over **200 seniors** in the area.



*“The pick-up location is easy for folks to drive right up and get loaded, and they look forward to trying the new recipes every month.”*  
— SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator

### CHALLENGE

Many seniors do not get enough nutrients in their diet. **Almost 1 in 3 low-income Maine seniors face hunger**, and Maine has the 12th highest senior food insecurity rate in the U.S. Older adults may find it difficult to pay for healthy food at the grocery store, and they may also struggle to get to the store because of limited mobility or lack of transportation. **Inadequate nutrition increases the risk of health problems** such as a weak immune system, decreased bone mass, and risk of hospitalization.

# 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 skills to make healthier lifestyle choices. By making sustainable changes to the environment, Nutrition Educators are fostering healthy behaviors that aim to **reduce the burden of obesity across Maine**.

In 2019, six SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators are working to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables for Maine’s seniors through **CSFP, senior farm shares, and gardens at senior living facilities**. These older adults are encouraged to attend free nutrition education classes so that they can stretch their food dollars while preparing healthy meals with the locally grown food they receive.

The **Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF)**

operates the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in all 16 counties. In 2018, CSFP provided monthly food boxes to 9,229 low-income adults (60 years and older). The “Senior Boxes” provide **30 pounds of nutritious food each month** (dried beans, ready-to-eat cereals, and canned meats and vegetables). Boxes are distributed at **community centers, churches, food pantries, warming centers**, and other locations that serve Maine’s older adults.

## SOLUTION

Maine SNAP-Ed's Nutrition Educator worked with two local farms to add fresh produce to CSFP boxes in addition to the non-perishables provided by the DACF via Good Shepherd Food Bank.

There are two ways that the "Senior Boxes" are distributed:

- All **boxes arrive at one site** and are directly given to eligible recipients.
- A housing site coordinator picks up the boxes, and they are **distributed at participating senior housing locations.**

Boxes have included **swiss chard, spinach, beet greens, and apples**, along with recipes that make it easier to cook a healthy meal with the local produce. Seniors also receive the "**Eating Better on a Budget**" **cookbook**, with additional recipes, meal planning ideas, and shopping tips.



## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The ongoing partnerships with farms, along with relationships with local gleaning groups to harvest excess crops, ensures that **fresh produce will continue to be a part of CSFP boxes** in the Rumford area. The River Valley Healthy Communities coalition is also working to secure grants to continue purchases of local fruits and vegetables. Recently, through the partnership with Wayside Food Programs, a **second CSFP pick-up site was established in western Maine**, further increasing access to the "Senior Boxes."

At the state level, the SNAP-Ed program works closely with the Maine DACF to support CSFP and other food access programs, strengthening the collective impact of the agencies and working together to **make it easier for Maine seniors to access and enjoy nutritious, healthy meals.**

*"Fresh fruits and vegetables are a critical component of a healthy diet and really balance out the wholesome staple foods provided through the CSFP program."*

*— Director, Division of Agricultural Resource Development at DACF*

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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