

Success Story

A Garden Grows Community

Thriving Community Garden Increases Access to Local Foods in Oxford County, Maine

SUMMARY

Alan Day Community Garden (ADCG) in Norway, Maine has had a strong core of community members involved in the garden since its creation in 2009. Since 2017, **Maine SNAP-Ed** has partnered with ADCG and community organizations to expand access to locally grown food. Hundreds of **Oxford County residents** have had direct access to local produce through garden plots, the farmers market, community meals, or SNAP-Ed nutrition classes.



"Being at the garden, I discovered I like to eat fresh vegetables and exercise, and my mind and emotions became clearer. Now, I work out, eat healthier, and have a job. I am proud of serving the community."

– Youth Leader

Through this collaboration between ADCG and SNAP-Ed, residents have had increased access to local foods through the following:

- In 2021, the Power of Produce (POP) Club reached 74 youth, and 60 EBT farmers market transactions occurred for SNAP redemption.
- In 2020, 200 people were reached through garden plots and garden activities.
- In 2019, 28 people eligible for SNAP benefits attended the "Plant the Seed" event, 17 youth participated in the Youth Leadership Program cooking curriculum, and approximately 300 people received promotional materials at community events.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The ADCG was founded in 2009 after numerous community meetings to plan for the mission and future of the garden. Since that time, garden staff and community volunteers have expanded the garden to become a **community hub**, including a farmers market and a site for outdoor community education. The garden was primed and ready to further impact community health.

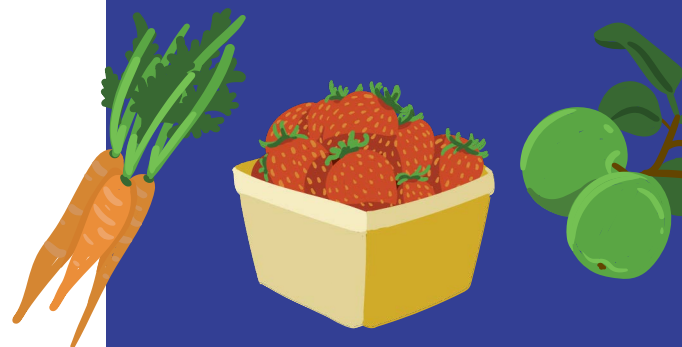


Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a **USDA funded** program that offers nutrition and cooking classes and supports projects that address food and physical activity needs in the community. Trained Nutrition Educators reach Mainers in all 16 counties. Nutrition Educators are integrated into the communities they serve and work where Mainers eat, live, learn, play, shop, and work.

Maine Harvest Bucks (MHB) are nutrition incentives that allow SNAP/EBT shoppers to receive bonus dollars towards the purchase of local fruits and vegetables for every SNAP dollar spent. The incentive program is funded through the USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program and implemented by the **Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets**. Starting in 2017, Maine SNAP-Ed and the Office for Family Independence at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services have supported the use of MHB at farmers markets and food cooperatives.



To improve access to the local foods offered by ADCG and **increase nutrition security**, promoting the garden and its programs was an important next step. In Maine, about 1 in 5 children is food insecure. In Oxford County, 24% of children, or about 1 in 4 children, and 14% of households experience food insecurity. A person or family is considered food insecure when they do not have regular access to food for an active, healthy life because of limited funds to buy groceries.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To support the mission of the ADCG, Maine SNAP-Ed's Nutrition Educator collaborates with the network of community partners supporting the garden to deliver activities that reinforce and complement each other. These efforts include:

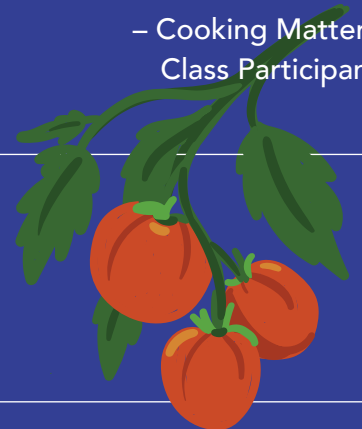
- Teaching **nutrition and cooking classes** for families, kids, and adults at the ADCG, using produce harvested from the garden.
- Promoting SNAP benefits and **Maine Harvest Bucks** at the farmers market and **developing a tracking system** to record the number of shoppers using EBT.
- Starting a **POP Club for kids**, a farmers market program that engages kids to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Creating a six-week cooking curriculum for the **Youth Leadership Program**, a mentoring program for 10- to 18-year-olds that trains future gardeners in **food justice and eating local food**.
- Promoting community garden plots and garden shares to people who receive **SNAP benefits**.
- Promoting **pay-what-you-can Friday night community meals** that attract over 200 community members.
- Providing information about adverse childhood experiences, **racial equity, trauma-informed approaches**, and food justice for inclusion in ADCG's programs and planning.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The mutually beneficial partnership between Maine SNAP-Ed and the ADCG is going into its fifth year. In 2022, the Nutrition Educator's goal is to increase the number of SNAP participants at the garden. As a non-profit organization, ADCG's programs are sustained by successful grants and fundraising. The Nutrition Educator supports these efforts through cross-promotion with education classes and developing local support systems. To advance the **long-term goal of a well-nourished community**, the educator leads a local food forum group, a monthly meeting of food pantries and other organizations working to improve nutrition county wide.

"I really enjoyed taking the family cooking class at Alan Day. It was a wonderful way for my husband and I, and 2 daughters, to meet other families and learn new recipes and cooking hacks. It was a great family bonding experience as well."

– Cooking Matters
Class Participant



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 Office for Family Independence (OFI) at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and implemented statewide by the University of New England (UNE) through contracts with local community organizations. Maine SNAP-Ed educates families experiencing low income on low-cost healthy eating and active lifestyles. Contact mainesnap-ed@une.edu or (207) 221-4560 for more information.

