

Success Story

USDA Program Collaborations Increase Access To Local Produce In Maine

SUMMARY

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs such as the Maine Senior FarmShare Program (MSFP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) are designed to improve access to nutritious foods for adults ages 60 years or



older who are experiencing low income. Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators support these programs by promoting them to eligible participants, either through their direct education programming or policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change strategies. In the summer of 2021, three Maine SNAP-Ed collaborations with other USDA-funded programs successfully...

- ...recruited 23 adults to sign up for MSFP while distributing food to 300 recipients of CSFP.
- ...reached 4,675 Mainers through a blog about storing and preserving summer tomato harvests on RealMaine.com, a program of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.
- ...reached 100 CSFP recipients through a quarterly newsletter.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

USDA programs are valuable assets for Maine communities and provide opportunities for collaboration with SNAP-Ed.

- There are over 100 farms in Maine, across all 16 counties, participating in the MSFP.
- The CSFP provides nutritious foods on a monthly basis to over 8,000 older adults in Maine.

These two programs work to address the food insecurity experienced by Mainers ages 60 years or older. 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. In Maine, 14% of older adults are food insecure. SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators are trained to provide education and address nutrition security by building on community assets to promote the health and wellbeing of all Mainers.



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.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a federal program that provides boxes, also known as Commodity or Senior Boxes, of nutritious USDA foods to older adults with low income, with the goal to improve the health of those receiving the commodity boxes. Over 8,000 older adults in Maine receive CSFP boxes of food monthly. The program is funded by the USDA and administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry which collaborates with organizations across Maine.

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.

USDA COLLABORATIONS

The Nutrition Educator in Piscataquis County collaborated with the MSFP program director and other Nutrition Educators to create a blog titled “Harvest Hints: Holding onto the Tastes of Summer,” which provided tips for storing and preserving tomatoes. The blog was posted on RealMaine.com, part of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, with a goal to connect Mainers with Maine farmers and food producers. The blog was adapted to a newsletter format and distributed in CSFP Senior Food Boxes to ensure wider dissemination – especially for seniors who may lack broadband internet access at home.

In another PSE project by the same Piscataquis County educator, the town of Dexter was a valuable partner, contributing to the successful distribution of quarterly newsletters to CSFP recipients. The newsletters promoted the MSFP and gave tips about growing produce in elevated garden beds, which the town was providing to some CSFP recipients.

A Nutrition Educator in western Maine had success in previous years with her CSFP project in which she worked with local farms to add fresh produce to the monthly commodity boxes. To build off that success and further promote access to fresh local foods, the educator connected with two farms to provide shares and assisted with transporting the shares so the food could be distributed at the CSFP pick-up location. In the summer of 2021, the educator recruited 23 people who received USDA Commodity Boxes to also obtain produce shares from the two partnering farms. New MSFP recipients were also recruited to participate through the educator’s SNAP-Ed nutrition classes.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Community and local agency support are strong assets for sustaining USDA collaborations. The educator in Western Maine successfully engaged new farms that will continue to support CSFP and MSFP services in that region. In Piscataquis County, the educator will continue her project of promoting MSFP and trying to increase participation in the program, including providing suggested recipes for the produce included in the farm shares. This project will also continue to build valuable partnerships with community members and organizations. At the state level, Maine SNAP-Ed supports USDA collaborations through membership in its State Nutrition Action Council (SNAC), which fosters awareness of aligned programming and value-added partnerships.

Maine Senior FarmShare Program

The Maine Senior FarmShare Program (MSFP) provides eligible seniors with low income the opportunity to receive a free share (worth \$50) of fresh, local produce directly from local Maine farmers during the growing season. MSFP is funded through a USDA grant and administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Adults 60 years and older (55 years old or older for Native Americans) who are residents of Maine and meet income requirements are eligible for the program. Maine adults interested in the program can sign-up directly with a participating farm and can contact their local Area Agency on Aging or the MSFP at SeniorFarmShare.AGR@maine.gov for assistance with finding a farm.



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.

