Family Nutrition Program (FNP): Helping Low Resource Families and Youth Make Healthy Choices

The Situation
Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain access to nutritious, safe foods necessary to lead a healthy lifestyle (USDA). According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service, the number of households living with low or very low food security was 14.5% in 2011, one of the highest rates on record. Households with children had almost twice the rate of food insecurity versus childless households. Poverty is a key factor in food insecurity; inadequate resources often lead to reduced overall intake as well as a disproportionate intake of cheap, calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods. Poverty correlates with obesity and associated diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a supportive program for food-insecure families, with 47.5 million Americans receiving benefits in 2012. In North Dakota, an estimated 85,770 people receive SNAP benefits with 24% of those beneficiaries of American Indian descent and 45% of all recipients under the age of 18. To qualify for SNAP, a family must be at 130 percent of the federal poverty level.

Extension Response
The NDSU Extension Service offers Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) through the Family Nutrition Program (FNP) to individuals who are recipients of or eligible for SNAP benefits. Through a series of lessons or one-time programs, FNP educators use evidence-based content to teach participants nutrition-related knowledge and skills. Focus areas include:

- Increased fruit and vegetable consumption
- Increased low-fat dairy consumption
- Balancing healthful food with physical activity
- Getting the most nutrition for the money

Impacts
In program year 2012, FNP provided direct education to 5,057 eligible adults and 11,426 youth across North Dakota. Additionally, indirect education efforts, including nutrition education articles and community events, reached over 59,600 contacts.

FNP participants reported improved nutrition, food safety, and food resource management behaviors following FNP lessons including:

- 73% of youth eat more vegetables daily
- 89% of youth are more willing to try fruits and vegetables of different colors
- 75% of youth choose milk over soda pop
- 94% of youth are more physically active
- 96% of adults adopted at least one habit to spend their food dollars more wisely

Feedback
“Because of (FNP) my daughter is more concerned what she eats and what the whole family eats.” - mother of FNP youth

“When we prepare meals at home, I will add an extra cup of vegetables. Not only is the family increasing their vegetable intake but it is extending the recipe to make it go farther.” - FNP adult

“When planning and shopping for my meals, I am using the Stretching Your Food Dollars materials to help me stay within my food budget.” - FNP adult

“Whether it is learning how to read food labels, simple cooking or keeping our food safe, I always come away learning something new - even at my age, 85.” - FNP senior adult

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