

I recently attended a SNAP-Ed program update where we talked about the role of SNAP-Ed in our communities and how our programs can impact the audiences we work with. It dawned on me that perhaps many folks in Geary County are unfamiliar with SNAP-Ed and the many ways we work to help our residents have knowledge they can use to apply to their daily lives.

What is SNAP-Ed? The Food and Nutrition Service of the US Department of Agriculture provides us with this definition: SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education) is the nutrition promotion and obesity prevention component of SNAP. States provide nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions for low-income people who are eligible for SNAP or other means-tested Federal assistance programs.

Perhaps you are not familiar with what SNAP is. The SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) program in the food subsidy program that was previously called Food Stamps program which began in 1939. It has evolved over time to what we now know as SNAP beginning in 2008 (see insert.)

Who receives SNAP-Ed services? The target audience for SNAP-Ed, specifically SNAP participants and low-income individuals who qualify to receive SNAP benefits or other means-tested federal assistance programs, such as Medicaid or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. It also includes individuals residing in communities with a significant low-income population.

In Kansas, SNAP Education is implemented through K-State Research and Extension in qualifying counties. We work with the Department for Children and Families (DCF), the funding source for these federal funds, to ensure qualifications for these services are being met. Qualifying counties are those counties that have data to support the need for this type of programming (such as Geary County) using a variety of statistics AND have a Family and Consumer Sciences agent on staff with the county's K-State Research and Extension office (that's me.)

Counties are annually required to write a proposal that provides a detailed outline of proposed services and the expenses that are tied to those services. In most counties, this not only includes the resources and materials used, but also includes additional staffing needed to meet the needs of the population being served.

As the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, I create program connections, promote partnerships with area groups and agencies, and supervise the staff that implement these programs. Geary County K-State Research and Extension SNAP-Ed provides services on many levels and many different locations:

Here is a snap-shot of the services provided by Geary County K-State Research and Extension SNAP-Ed staff:

Nutrition Education and Healthy Food Preparation classes at the Geary County Health Department: We offer monthly programs during the school year and weekly programming in the summer. Each program lasts 1.5 - 2 hours and includes hands-on activities to apply the nutrition education participants have received. Interested residents can contact the Geary County WIC if interested in participating in this free nutrition education program designed for all adults - even if they are not a WIC participant.

USD 475 Nutrition Lessons: This year we are working with 1st grade students, 3rd grade students, and students transitioning to middle school. Due to our funding guidelines are required to meet with each group or class with a minimum of 4 lessons. Lessons include a variety of activities and discussions about the MyPlate healthy food guidelines, food safety, and basic healthy food preparation (specifically healthy snacks.). We teach 3rd grade lessons in the fall to avoid the State Assessment schedule that is so demanding of the teachers and students in the spring. Our 1st grade classes occur in the Spring. There are eleven elementary schools in USD 475 that qualify for these two programs.

In the summer, we work with both USD 475 middle school administrators to provide nutrition lessons as part of the district's **Summer Transitions program**. In these lessons, we still reinforce the MyPlate healthy foods guidelines, but we also emphasize specific vitamins needed for a healthy body. We identify the fruits and vegetables that serve as a good source of those nutrients AND emphasize food safety and safe food preparation. Schools with 50% or more of their student population meeting income requirements for free and reduced lunch are qualified for our free programming. We provide the staff, the resources, the food samples, and all other lesson materials using the SNAP-Ed federal funds we are allocated. The schools provide us with access to the classrooms, teachers to support a positive learning environment, and avenues to reach parents with our nutrition resources.

Food Pantry Resources: Bi-monthly, the Geary County Food Pantry receives a food distribution from USDA. Our state SNAP-Ed office provides the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office with nutrition information and healthy recipes that align to the foods being offered in that distribution. Our office provides copies of a healthy foods newsletter distributed to the Food Pantry, Wheels of Hope, and JC Caring Place for distribution to their clients.

In addition to these services, we also are committed to and involved in the work of Live Well Geary County, the Junction City Food Policy Council, the BC/BS Pathways to a Healthy Kansas community grant, USD 475 Wellness Committee, and the Geary Community Hospital Farmer's Market. We work hard to be an advocate for health and wellness and nutrition education throughout our county and communities.

If you want more information about SNAP-Ed in Geary County, feel free to contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!