

USU Extension Grant-Final Report

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Project Title: Food \$ense Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices

Project Beginning Date: April 1, 2017

Project End Date: December 31, 2017

Total Requested Amount: \$8,500.00

Project Summary

Food \$ense developed and implemented the innovative Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices program in twenty-two food pantries in 2017. The Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices is a nudge program that uses traditional marketing strategies including product placement and promotion to increase the selection of targeted foods by pantry clients. The program identifies and promotes foods that are low in sodium, added sugar, trans and saturated fats, and rich with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Funding from the USU Extension Grant were used for the evaluation of the Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices program in six urban food pantries located in Weber, Davis, and Salt Lake counties. Over 450 clients from these food pantries were surveyed on the impact of the Thumbs Up program, the importance of accessing healthy foods in a pantry, and common barriers to making healthy choices. The results of the survey suggest that the Thumbs Up program is effective at making the healthy choice, the easy choice and improving dietary habits of pantry clients and their families.

Project Results

- a) The Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices research was a collaboration between both on and off campus faculty. Extension faculty, as well as faculty from the Nutrition, Dietetics, and Food Science Department were project leaders and helped with the development of the survey tool. One USU graduate and four undergraduate students were involved in all aspects of the research. The resulting manuscripts will be first-authored by the graduate student. County faculty in Weber, Davis, and Salt Lake Counties supported the collection of the surveys at the food pantries where their Food \$ense Nutrition Education Assistants (NEAs) had implemented the Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices program.
- b) **Outputs:** The research conducted with this grant helped identify improvements that could be made to increase the visibility and recognition of the Thumbs Up program. As a result of the findings, banners and grocery cart frames that explain the program are now available for Food \$ense educators to put in the pantries. Several manuscripts and presentations will also be developed to educate other public health professionals about the positive impact of our Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices nudge program. The manuscripts will also be part of the graduate student's thesis.

Impacts: While Thumbs Up is effective at increasing the visibility and selection of healthy choices it does not improve the amount of healthy choices available to clients. To address this issue, the findings of the surveys will be presented to individuals and agencies that have authority over what types of items are donated to individual pantries. The hope is that

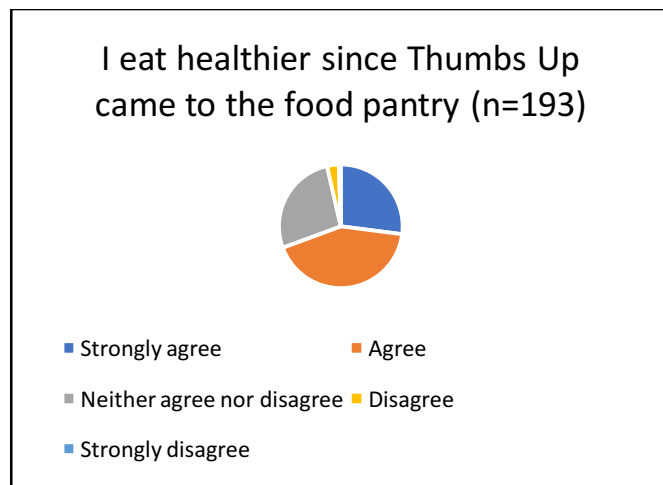
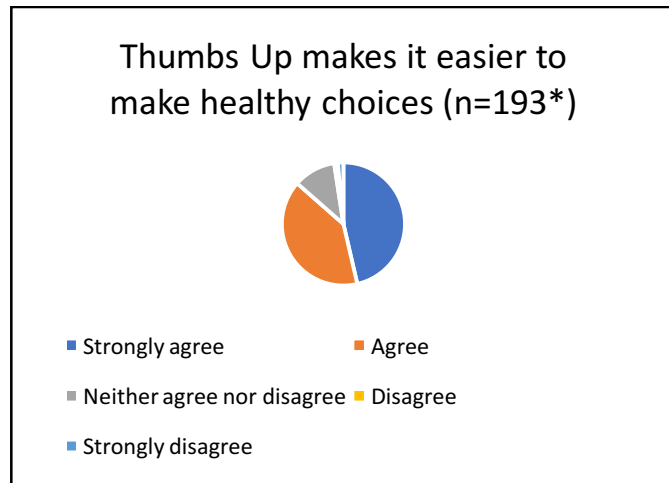
these findings will help drive policy or systems changes that increase the donation of healthy foods so that pantry clients have adequate access to foods that can help improve health through nutrition. The survey findings are also an important part of the evidence base for the program. Having evidence that the program is effective allows us to submit our Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices toolkit for inclusion in the SNAP-Ed toolkit. Interventions in the toolkit are available to be adopted by other SNAP-Ed agencies nationwide.

Outcomes: Food \$ense (SNAP-Ed) confirmed that the Thumbs Up program is effective at reaching its core goals of making it easier to select healthy foods, while also improving dietary habits of pantry clients.

Respondent Demographics (n=457)

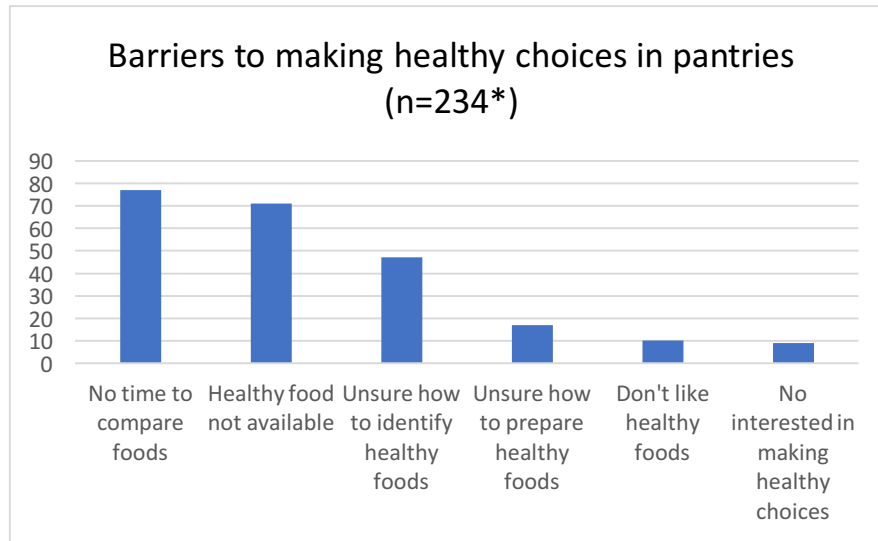
		% of total
Gender	Female	63%
	Male	36%
Age	18-24	5%
	25-34	20%
	35-44	23%
	45-54	22%
	55 or older	28%
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic	56%
	Hispanic	35%
Primary Race	American Indian/American Native	5%
	Asian	2%
	Black	4%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	2%
	White	70%

*Not all percentages will equal 100% due to unanswered questions by respondents.



*Only respondents *familiar* with the Thumbs Up image were asked these questions resulting in smaller sample size than total respondent sample size.

Food Sense (SNAP-Ed) also has a better understanding about the most common barriers to making healthy choices at food pantries. These results will drive future initiatives that aim to improve access to healthy foods at pantries throughout Utah.



*Only respondents *unfamiliar* with the Thumbs Up image were asked these questions resulting in smaller sample size than total respondent sample size.

- c) Effective, low-cost nutrition interventions, such as Thumbs Up that increase access and appeal of healthy foods to low-income audiences is of great interest for many public health programs. Therefore, several manuscripts discussing the results and implications of this research are currently being composed and will be submitted for publication in 2018. Findings will also be submitted for a poster session and/or presentation at the 2018 Utah Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (UAND) annual conference. Finally, **a detailed presentation of the full analysis and implications of the research will be presented via Zoom on Wednesday, January 24th at 10:00am.** The main audience of this presentation will be the statewide Food Sense (SNAP-Ed) program, but others are welcome to participate.
- d) Due to the reported positive impact of the Thumbs Up for Healthy Choices in food pantries, Food Sense (SNAP-Ed) was able to include the program improvements and expansion into the budget of their federal SNAP-Ed funding for FY 2018. The funding requests were approved and the program improvements and expansion have already begun.