**USU EXTENSION GRANTS PROGRAM 2015-2016**

**FINAL REPORT**

**PROJECT LEADER:** Paula Scott, EFNEP State Program Director (A00015313)

**PROJECT TITLE:** USU EFNEP Sodium Reduction and Home Herb Gardening Project

**PROJECT DURATION:** June 1, 2015 – May 30, 2016

**TOTAL REQUESTED AMOUNT:** $10,000

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. CURRICULUM AUGMENTATION - Augment the EFNEP curriculum “Giving Your Body the Best” to include a section on the importance of reducing sodium, 2. SUPPLY EFNEP CLIENTS WITH MATERIALS TO START HOME HERB GARDENS - Each project participant received dried herbs and materials to grow five different fresh herbs: parsley, basil, cilantro, oregano, and dill, 3. NEW RECIPES AND MATERIALS ON COOKING WITH FRESH HERBS - As part of the curriculum augmentation, a series of low sodium recipe ideas utilizing the fresh herbs were added to the current EFNEP recipes and included with the handout on lowering sodium intake.

**PROJECT RESULTS:**

A series of herbs factsheets and handouts on lowering sodium were added to EFNEP curriculum handouts. Handouts on starting and maintaining herb gardens were given with the other gardening supplies to clients who enrolled in project.

Data is based on 50 participants reporting on both entry and exit surveys.

Data from Sodium Behavior Checklist Surveys showed that reading food labels for sodium levels is a significant impact from the project. When clients started lessons (entry), the majority of participants did not (46%), or seldom (26%), read food labels to check sodium levels before purchasing food items. When participants completed lessons (exit), 18% reported reading food labels “Almost Always”; 20% reported reading food labels “Most of the Time”; and 36% reported reading food labels at least “Sometimes”.

The project increased the number of participants purchasing fresh, frozen, or no salt canned vegetables. The majority of participants reported that they “Sometimes” purchase fresh, frozen, or no salt canned vegetables at both entry (30%) and exit (34%). However, data from exit surveys also reported 28% “Most of the Time” and 28% “Almost Always”, purchase fresh, frozen or no salt vegetables.

The majority of participants reported “Almost Always” tasting their food before adding salt at both entry (42%) and exit (56%); however, the data showed improvement with each survey response.

The survey question at the heart of the project asked participants how often they prepared meals using herbs and spices instead of salt. Participants were encouraged to replace salt with herbs and spices for flavoring their food instead of salt. A bottle of dried herb or spice was given to each participant at the beginning (entry) and herb seeds with planting supplies were given at the end (exit) of the lessons. At entry, 20% reported they “Did Not” and 26% reported they seldom used herbs and spices instead of salt. At exit, survey results showed 34% of participants used herbs and spices “Most of the Time”, 26% reported “Almost Always” and 30% reported they used herbs and spices at least “Sometimes”.

The final question on the behavior checklist survey asked participants how often they choose low-sodium versions of processed foods. At entry, the majority participants reported they “Did Not” (36%) or “Seldom” (20%) choose low-sodium versions of processed foods. The data showed improvement with 28% reporting “Most of the Time” and 20% reporting “Almost Always” choosing low-sodium processed foods.

To expand the scope and reach in the initiative promoting the Sodium Reduction and Home Herb Gardening Project, EFNEP partnered with the Utah State University Botanical Center Farmers Market to provide displays educating the public on ideas to reduce sodium in their diet. Herbs factsheets and handouts on lowering sodium were also distributed to market patrons. Promotional products were purchased for market patrons to provide brand exposure and create interest in home gardening.

To generate more interest in the project, due to low project enrollment, promotional products were given as incentives to advertise project.

Despite the challenges of low project participation, project results prove that a public health approach aimed at making it possible for consumers to adhere to an eating pattern with less salt; education and tasty alternatives to sodium is one solution.

Our results, although a small sample study shows that a reduction in salt intake can be achieved by integrating salt reduction education into nutrition education curriculums and empowering people to deliver the salt reduction message to their families.

Creating new dedicated revenue streams that raise funds for specific purposes are an important category of strategies for Utah EFNEP to generate funding for services that improve the health of families and children.