

USU Extension Professor Awarded \$1 Million for Nutrition Education Research

Julene Reese

12/10/2015



The U.S.

Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Food and Nutrition Service recently awarded \$1 million to Carrie Durward, Utah State University Extension nutrition specialist and assistant professor of nutrition, dietetics and food sciences, for research on improving nutrition education for low-income families. The money will fund the first year of a three-year project with an anticipated total award of \$1.6 million.

Funding comes from the USDA's Regional Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Centers of Excellence program, established through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Durward said her study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of USDA's nutrition education efforts through the EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs.

"These programs work to improve healthy food purchasing and dietary behavior in low-income Americans," she said. "The research will improve USDA's ability to create, evaluate and maintain effective nutrition education programs."

Brian Higginbotham, USU Extension associate vice president said the research will lead to more effective educational programs, which in turn will help participants make healthier food and lifestyle choices.

"The end goal is a healthier populace," he said.

Durward said her team looks forward to working with EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs in five states and researchers at the National Cancer Institute as well as with informatics and nutrition researchers at the University of Utah on the project. She said the U of U has a sub-award under the study that applies an innovative technology called QualMART that analyzes grocery food quality directly from grocery sales data.

"We have put together an amazing team to conduct this work, including top nutrition and informatics researchers and nutrition education program directors from five states," she said.

Durward said the research will address one of the most important questions facing nutrition science today – how to accurately and objectively measure what foods people purchase and eat.

"We can't hope to get people to eat healthier if we aren't able to accurately measure what they eat," she said. "Currently, it is difficult to know how well your intervention worked, or if one intervention works better than another one. This research aims to address that problem."

Durward said implementing lifestyle changes will lead to improved health and reduced incidence of disease and disability, reducing costs to individuals and the nation's healthcare system.

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