

**On Road to Healthy Living-
 Mobile Cooking School
 Montgomery County 2016**

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Making a Difference

RELEVANCE:

The need for preventing and combatting the obesity epidemic in Montgomery County has been well documented by research cited by the United Way Healthy Living Alliance (HLA). People can overcome poor nutrition choices and prevent obesity through hands-on education. The “On the Road the Healthy Living” mobile cooking school is designed to teach participants basic cooking skills, reading and modifying recipes, and using simple kitchen tools and appliances to realistically prepare healthy food. Using USDA MyPlate-based menus and whole food choices, participants learn through an experiential model. In Montgomery County 27% of adults are obese and 23% are physically inactive. When looking at obesity and overweight together, a Montgomery County 2011 Community Health Assessment compiled by the Texas Health Institute reported 70% of adults within Montgomery county fall into the combined category. Furthermore, the number of adults in Montgomery County reported as overweight or obese within income populations of \$25,000 a year or less was 84%.



RESPONSE:

Montgomery County United Way/Healthy Living Alliance granted \$15,000 in pilot project funds to create a mobile cooking school in 2014. In late 2015 an additional \$15,000 was granted to continue the development of the project. The “On the Road to Healthy Living” mobile cooking school consists of a series of 3 classes offered at regularly scheduled intervals. Each class includes a food lesson based on USDA’s Dietary Guidelines followed by hands-on preparation and consumption of the food as part of the class. Workstations are supplied with small kitchen appliances and utensils. Recipes selected for classes are nutritious and economical, and most often taken from USDA websites, the BLT/EFNEP Recipe Database, or the “Dinner Tonight” database maintained by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Participants work together to prepare one or more of the recipes from start to finish. When the recipes are completed a group meal is served in a manner to resemble the portions of MyPlate. Discussion of the lesson and constructive conversation about the food, nutrition values, alternatives, and portion sizes is included. Finally, all participants help wash the dishes and clean the cooking areas along with discussion of important food and kitchen safety principles. The Montgomery County Family and Consumer Sciences Committee provide oversight of expenditures, recruitment and implementation of the project.

As a result of the success of the project and as a promised deliverable for the allocated grant funds, an instructor’s guide was in development throughout much of 2016. Working with the Agriculture Communications (AgCom) department of AgriLife Services, Agent Amy Ressler and AgCom staff developed an Instructor’s Guide for the project in an interactive PDF with fillable templates for program materials, sample recipes and fillable recipe templates, and detailed instructions for implementation. The guide will be housed in its own website for easy accessibility and download options.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating

RESULTS:

In 2016, 30 classes were conducted with a total attendance of 360; 123 people (unduplicated attendance number) were impacted. Classes included a combination of one-or-two time presentations (9 classes) and complete 3-lesson series (7 series; 21 classes). Customized pre and post surveys were administered with participants of series. One series was at a youth shelter with no surveys. Results below reflect surveys collected between June 2014 and July 2015 and August 2015 and December 2015. In 2015/16 post surveys were received from approximately 1/3 of participants (66 pre; 28 post).

Positive changes were indicated in almost every area included in the survey:

<i>Behavior/Attitude</i>	<i>2014/15 results</i>	<i>2015/16 results</i>	<i>Cumulative average</i>
Eating fruits and vegetable everyday (increase)	8%	<1%	4%
Feeling confident in preparing fruits and vegetables (increase)	6%	7%	6.5%
Perception/dislike for cooking because too much time involved (decrease)	9%	9%	9%
Confidence in preparing meals from basic ingredients (increase)	8%	13%	10.5%
Perception of cooking as "too much work" (decrease)	13%	4%	8.5%
Understanding how food relates to health (increase)	4%	1%	2.5%
Confidence in preparing meals that follow USDA's MyPlate (increase)	18%	29%	23.5%
Understanding of proper temperatures for food safety (increase)	12%	23%	17.5%
Preference for eating at home rather than fast food or restaurant (increase)	13%	5%	9%
And, perception of ease of preparing food at home (increase)	9%	7%	8%

In 2015/16 results basically everyone in pre and post surveys indicated eating fruits and vegetable every day and understanding how food relates to their health.

Very positive feedback was also included in the post surveys:

Something learned or particularly enjoyed:

- Cooking isn't as difficult as I had assumed
- The open discussion regarding the selection of food, both fresh and canned
- Introduced vegetables that I had never thought of using. Actually liked the options of uncooked items.
- Proper temps for leftovers, refrigerator, and freezer

Changes as a result of participating in the class:

- Use more fruits and vegetables
- Will think more about nutrition
- I watch the expiration dates, sell-by dates, etc.

Suggestions and comments:

- Need more or longer classes
- Grocery shopping, an outing to compare labels and learn to choose fruits and vegetables
- Using a stove sometimes

Partners have included local churches, community and nature centers, community colleges, workplace wellness initiatives, and a youth shelter. The project was utilized as the basis of several award applications and received recognition both on the state level and the regional/national level through the Texas and national Extension Associations of Extension Family and Consumer Sciences with the Family Health and Wellness awards and the Florence Hall awards.

VALUE

Obesity Prevention and Reduction



The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service engages children and adults in programs that teach them how to eat nutritious foods and engage in regular physical activity to promote health and reduce their risk for obesity. The Texas public benefits through a healthier population, reduced health care costs, and increased productivity.

FUTURE PLANS:

This project is currently taught by personnel of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, however, with the development of the Instructor's Guide, the program can be easily duplicated by others and sustained through ongoing efforts. Utilizing remaining grant funds awarded by United Way will ensure continued classes, replenished supplies and provision of added support through staff and Master Wellness volunteer training, increasing program outreach and effectiveness.

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Providing Solutions