

Making a Difference



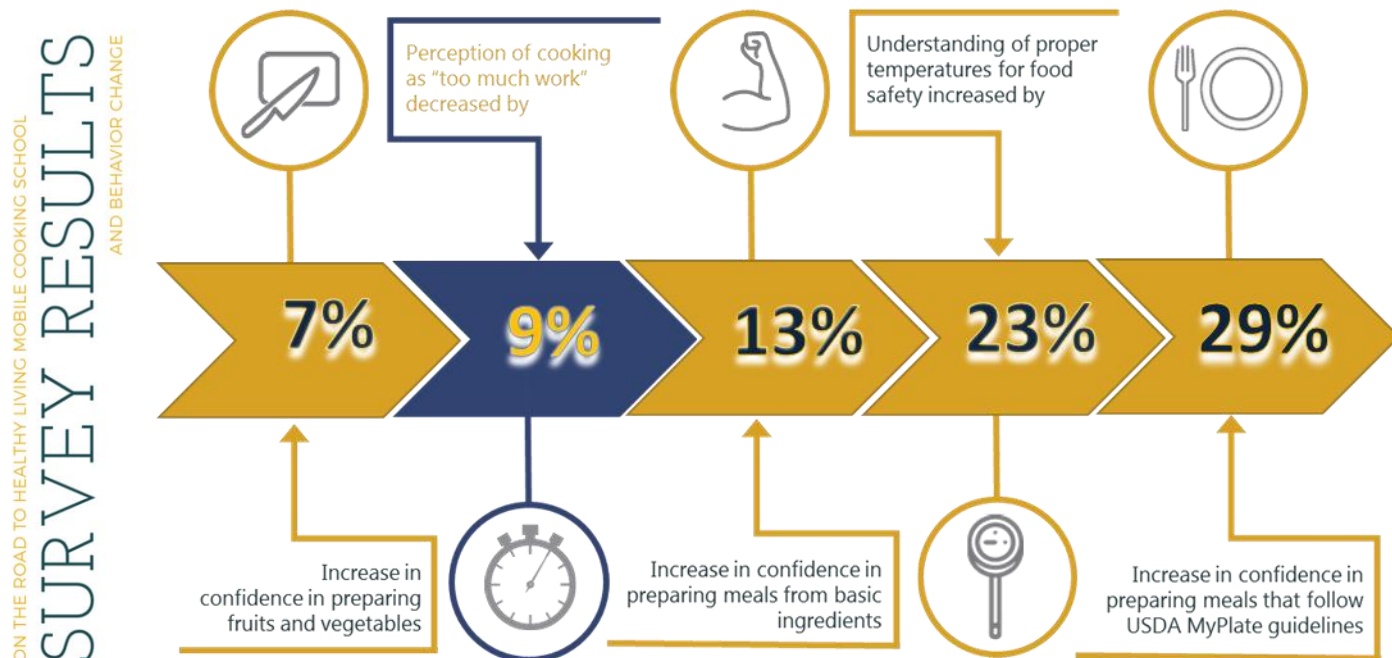
RELEVANCE: The need for preventing and combatting the obesity epidemic in Montgomery County has been well documented by research cited by the United Way Healthy Living Alliance (HLA). People can overcome poor nutrition choices and prevent obesity through hands-on education. In Montgomery County 27% of 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%. 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 healthy food choices, participants learn through an experiential model.

RESPONSE: The “On the Road to Healthy Living” mobile cooking school consists of a series of 1 to 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 or Extension Service websites. 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. Discussions of the lesson and constructive conversation about the food, nutrition values, alternatives, and portion sizes are 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.

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. Because 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 created an interactive PDF with fillable templates for program materials, sample recipes and fillable recipe templates, and detailed instructions for implementation. The guide was finalized in 2017 and a website was created to host and distribute information as well as serving as a location to save and print materials. The project and guide were submitted to NEAFCS for a concurrent session presentation and was the basis of several award nominations.

Also in 2017, the Healthy South Texas initiative designated the Mobile Cooking School as an approved course for meeting program goals. To more effectively evaluate the program efforts collectively across any number of counties implementing the program standardized scan forms for pre-and post-surveys were developed. The forms were tested in Montgomery County with a series implemented in November and December of 2017 and as of December 31 surveys were still under analysis.

RESULTS: In 2017, 17 classes were conducted with a total attendance of 309. Most classes this year were offered by hosts as one-or-two-time presentations. Complete 3-lesson series were limited. Some series were cancelled in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Results are expected to be like those found in 2016 where positive changes were indicated in every area included in the survey including the highlights below:



The “On the Road to Healthy Living Mobile Cooking School” was selected as a featured presentation at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) annual meeting in Omaha, Nebraska on October 17, 2017. A project overview was shared with 80 Extension educators from across the nation in a concurrent session at the meeting. The project also received recognition from NEAFCS including the Family Health & Wellness Award: 1st place National; 1st place Southern Region; 1st place State; the Communications Award – Educational Publications: 1st place National; 1st place Southern Region; 1st place State; and the Communications Award – Educational Curriculum Package: 3rd place National and 2nd place Southern Region; 1st place State.

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.

In July a Web-ex training was conducted for agents in the North and West Regions who were interested in including mobile cooking schools in their annual plans. In December 2017 an in-depth hands-on training was held for agents in the South Region of Texas with 20 attending. A similar training is scheduled in March of 2018 in the Northeast and East Region.

FUTURE PLANS: With the availability of the Instructor’s Guide at www.agrilife.org/mobilecookingschool the program can be easily duplicated and improved upon by others.

In Montgomery County, we will continue to utilize remaining grant funds to ensure continued classes, replenished supplies and provision of added support through staff and Master Wellness Volunteers, increasing program outreach and effectiveness.