

Making a Difference

2020 Leon County Better Living for Texans (BLT) In-depth Summary

Relevance

There are nearly 2,000 recipients in Leon County receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (source: <http://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/records-statistics/data-statistics/supplemental-nutritional-assistance-program-snap-statistics>). Research suggests that SNAP recipients and other limited resource audiences consume diets that are not in agreement with current dietary recommendations, potentially increasing their risk for the development of chronic disease. Food insecurity, obesity, and lack of access to healthy foods are other issues that impact this audience and have strong potential to negatively impact health.

Response

The 2020 program year was unlike any other due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID19) pandemic. Virtual educational efforts were implemented to provide information and resources to help them continue with aspects of their daily lives. Although our educational activities, outcomes and impacts may look different for 2020, we continue our efforts **to help Texans better their lives.**

The BLT Program is a cooperative endeavor among Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA. A component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), BLT offers food and nutrition education to SNAP recipients, applicants, and other low-income audiences to help improve their quality of life.

The overall goals are to help participants increase their consumption and access to fruits and vegetables, be more physically active, improve food security status, and prevent risk factors for chronic disease such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Program efforts included:

- **Fresh Start to a Healthier You (FSHY) Series** – 4-session program focusing on food safety, nutrition and food costs; 7 individuals completed 3 of 4 sessions (4th session cancelled due to COVID); an incentive offered to participants was to provide produce at the conclusion of class, which kept them from having to wait in the distribution line
- **Nutrition Know How newsletter** – monthly issues, in both English and Spanish, provide nutrition information and recipes, and were distributed to 9 food pantries who distribute to more than 400 people; an additional 130 copies were provided for shut-ins
- **Food Pantry Coalition** – representatives of 9 food pantries are involved with this group, which met quarterly to share ideas and plan county-wide food drives
- **Facebook Posts and News Articles** – compiled and posted 66 posts that reached 15,663 individuals through Facebook; compiled and distributed 6 news articles to all 7 local media outlets, reaching an estimated 3,000 individuals

Results

6 of 7 (86%) of *FSHY* program participants completed both the pre- and follow-up surveys. 4 of 6 (66.7%) of participants said this was their first Extension program experience. The mean age of participants was 69.8 years.

When comparing the follow-up and pre-surveys, here's what the participants reported:

Statement	Pre-survey Mean	Follow-up Survey Mean	Percent Change
How many times a day do you eat fruit?	3.17	3.5	10.4%
Each time you eat fruit, how much do you usually eat?	2.67	3.17	18.8%
How many times a day do you eat vegetables?	3.25	4	23.1%
Each time you eat vegetables, how much do you usually eat?	3	3.83	27.7%
How much of your lunch and dinner plates are filled with fruits and vegetables?	3.2	3.8	18.7%
How often do you wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before preparing food?	3.2	3.8	18.7%
How often do you wash your fresh fruits and vegetables before eating or preparing them?	3.6	4.4	22.2%

When asked to identify something they learned, *FSHY* participants reported:

- *Making sure to add fruit or veggies for meals. More milk and yogurt products added.*
- *Holding myself accountable for staying healthy in nutrition, exercising and resting. I want to stay on budget with shopping for food, and stay in the know (educated) about foods. Keyword is budget.*
- *Making more and larger salads and using it as the meal. Experimenting with getting even more vegetables into me!*
- *I am cooking and eating more vegetables each day.*
- *I am trying to remember to wash my hands often.*

Related to the *Nutrition Know How* newsletter, several pantry representatives have expressed great appreciation for the resource they can share with their clients. They have also shared comments from clientele, who report utilizing the information.

The sharing of ideas amongst the Food Pantry Coalition has helped pantries function better, especially during the pandemic. The Leon Co. Food Pantry list/map, created in 2019, continues to enable residents to access food and supplies.


Acknowledgements

Thank you to all local pantries for their service to the community as well as their partnership on program efforts. Much appreciation is extended to Leon County for the use of the meeting space for the *FSHY* classes. And finally, thank you to our local media outlets for publishing news articles.

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VALUE

Better Living for Texans



These nutrition programs teach low-income audiences to prepare nutritious meals, stretch their food resources, improve their food-safety practices, and participate in regular physical activity. This not only improves the quality of life and reduces the risk of chronic disease for participants, but also lowers public health care costs.