

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Marinette and Oconto Counties during fiscal year 2008

Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Marinette and Oconto Counties

Since 1993, the Extension Education Committees of the Marinette and Oconto County Boards have jointly supported the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program. Over this time, the project has developed strong relationships with local agencies that ensure consistent contact with area food stamp-audiences. The use of multiple teaching strategies helps to create access and learning opportunities that would not otherwise exist in our rural, resource poor counties. Education is conducted through home visitation, adult workshops, school classrooms, cooking classes, mailings, and learn-while-you-wait sessions. We also utilize a community garden as a setting to provide nutrition education and as a means to contribute to local food security efforts.

Characteristics of the low income residents in Marinette and Oconto Counties

Demographics of the Counties

The adjoining northeastern Wisconsin counties of Marinette and Oconto rank 3rd and 14th in geographic size among the state's 72 counties. The January 2006 population estimate for Marinette County was 44,543, and 38,690 for Oconto County. According to the 2000 census, both counties are better than 98% white by race. During the first five years of this decade, Oconto County's growth rate of 7.5% was well above both the state and nation, with most occurring in the southern portion, near the metropolitan Green Bay area, while Marinette County has grown by just 1.0% since 2000. Each county contains a number of small rural communities where a steady loss of industry and negative economic growth has created serious hardship for many working families over the last decade.

A significant portion of the population is among the working poor. For example, both counties have average weekly wages below \$499, compared with the Wisconsin average of \$687. Unemployment rates for both counties consistently track above state and national averages. For example, during January of 2007, Marinette County was at 7.5% and Oconto County at 7.2% compared with a state average of 5.5% for that period.

Many area job seekers are required to seek employment outside of their home counties. For example, data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce for January 2007 indicate that the two counties' combined civilian labor force totaled 3,213, while the number of openings posted on Job Net was just 294. Oconto County in particular is a net exporter of workers. According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the county experiences net daily loss of over 6,500 workers to other counties, and of those workers who remain to work in Oconto County, about half are employed in jobs that pay poverty wages, according to a UW-Madison Center on Wisconsin Strategy study.

Food Insecurity in the Counties

There are several indicators that food insecurity is a concern in the two counties. First, records of the total number of individuals served by NEWCAP Inc, the primary provider of food relief in the region, indicate a 139% increase in numbers served from 2001 to 2006, from nearly 90,000 to over 215,400, while over this same period the agency distributed only 19% more food.

Moreover, the total amount of TEFAP food available for distribution by NEWCAP has decreased by 38%, requiring the agency to rely increasingly on donated food to meet demand.

FoodShare participation in Marinette and Oconto Counties has also risen sharply since the beginning of the decade. For example, Oconto County experienced a 130% increase in participation to 1,691 individuals from 2000 to 2006, while in 2005 alone participation in Marinette County rose by 398 participants. A final indicator is a 2002 WIC survey which identified 38% of participating Marinette WIC households and 42% of Oconto WIC households as food insecure.

Nutrition and nutrition education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of Oconto and Marinette Counties

In general terms, the agency staff we have worked with over the past 14 years, as well as our nutrition educator staff, consistently observe and document associations between poverty and poor health among low-income households. The factors that make poverty-poor health connections strong—limited knowledge about how to improve dietary quality, reduced access to and utilization of health care services, and the need to spend a greater relative proportion of total income on food—are consistently evident among our low income populations.

A report by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, entitled Wisconsin County Health Rankings 2005, summarizes the health of each county's population and identifies areas for potential improvement. The report ranks Oconto County 68th and Marinette County 56th among Wisconsin's 72 counties in "Health Behaviors," a category which includes the determinants "overweight and obesity" and "low fruit and vegetable consumption." These low rankings underscore concerns expressed by agency partners that obesity and under-consumption of fruits and vegetables are among the primary nutrition education needs for Food Stamp populations in this area.

Local food pantries stress the need to augment the quality of the food they distribute with more fresh vegetables and education on their importance to diet. Health and Human Services partners support the need for more intensive education to help parents more adequately meet the nutritional needs of their children. To promote self-sufficiency, partners at New View Industries site the need for education for their clients on improving basic cooking skills. Schools in Marinette County have identified poor overall eating habits and dramatic increases in numbers overweight children as primary concerns. The Aging Director in Oconto County sees a need for objective, consistent information on stretching limited dollars to help older citizens meet the challenges associated with aging. Finally, Job Service and CAP Agency partners cite the need to assist low-income families and adults in learning to manage limited financial resources to help improve their overall food security.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

School Day: Education in 3 northern Marinette County Schools, and one in the city of Marinette, on improving diet and increasing activity. 1:1 education to eligible pregnant teens at Marinette HS.

Job Centers: Money For Food taught in Oconto and Marinette.

WIC- LWYW education for parents in Oconto, Oconto Falls, Mountain, Marinette, Crivitz, and Niagara on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, reducing child obesity, and increasing activity. Also, quarterly newsletter sent to WIC clients.

Preschoolers: Education for Head Start children on increasing awareness and intake of fruits and vegetables.

Parents: Occasional presentations at request of UWEX Family Resource Center Coordinator. Centers provide education to low-income families across the county. Education for Head Start parents on increasing awareness and intake of fruits and vegetables.

Gardens: On-site education for learners in New View's Community Tours program, and for food pantry clients. Facilitate access to vegetables grown in the Oconto Community Garden to enhance food security. Information on using vegetables distributed in pantry bags.

Health Clinics: LWYW education in Oconto, Oconto Falls, Mountain, Marinette, Crivitz, and Niagara on fruits and vegetables consumption, reducing child obesity, and increasing activity. Also, quarterly newsletter to clinic clients.

Senior Dining: Group presentations on basics of healthy eating at six Oconto County Sites. Topics: calcium intake through diet, fiber, fluids, Dietary Guidelines. Insert in bi-monthly newsletter. Topics: nutrient density, role of whole grains, and food safety.

Food Pantries: LWYW education at NEWCAP pantries in Oconto and Marinette. Also, occasional LWYW presentations at Salvation Army and St. Vincent DePaul pantries in Marinette. Topics: role of fruits and vegetables, resource management and shopping behavior. Education linked to seasonally fresh fruits and vegetables via Community Garden to pantries.

Disabled Adults: Cooking classes and educational community tours to grocery stores. Oconto Community Garden, food pantries, and other venues to low income DD adults served by New View Industries in Gillett in Oconto County. Group classes provided to Marinette County Community Support Program.

Home Visits: Services in each county in conjunction with our DHFS departments. Referrals from social workers. Topics: basic food preparation, shopping skills, resource management, child feeding skills, and food safety.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

Methods or activities planned to raise awareness of hunger/food insecurity

Marinette and Oconto WNEP will raise awareness of local hunger and food insecurity through reports to the County Ag and Extension Committees. The WNEP Coordinator will share the Hunger Close to Home fact sheet with local stakeholders. Also, Oconto County UW-Extension has marketed a Speaker's Bureau brochure promoting the availability of staff to speak to groups in their various areas of expertise. The WNEP Coordinator is listed as available to speak on local food insecurity. The Oconto Community Garden addresses aspects of local food insecurity. Because it is located on school property, and because nearly all of the produce is donated to the

local pantry, the garden becomes an educational tool to teach students about the need to provide local assistance to address food insecurity. WNEP involvement in the garden project also plays a role in helping residents obtain nutritious, seasonal produce. Finally, discussion has been held with the Marinette County Family Living Educator regarding hosting a Poverty Simulation in the near future.

Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

We plan to work with area school districts to emphasize the importance of breakfast to learning. We also plan to work with school districts—particularly in Oconto County—to encourage enrollment in free or reduced-price school meals by eligible families.

Plans to increase involvement of community groups in efforts to address food insecurity

To compile data and assess the status of food security, we will tailor data already collected by UW-Extension and NEP specialists, and the WIC Program to describe the situation in Oconto and Marinette Counties. This case for the existence of local food insecurity can be further built by collecting data on county food share and food pantry participation rates, unemployment rates, and previously food security surveys conducted by our program.