

# **Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Rock County during fiscal year 2008**

## **Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Rock County**

Low-income families must plan carefully to get the most from their food dollar. If they cannot plan and prepare healthy meals, they are at great risk for nutrition-related conditions such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. That is why the UW-Extension Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) has been teaching practical nutrition and thrifty food shopping habits to young, low-income families in Rock County for more than 30 years. Since 1993, when the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP) was added to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP), the Rock County WNEP has focused on the nutrition education needs of both young families and school-aged children.

In recent years, the program has reached out to the growing Spanish-speaking population in Rock by offering nutrition education to adult students in English language and literacy classes and to Spanish-speaking children in elementary schools and after-school programs. In three years, WNEP educators increased the number of educational contacts with Hispanic adults and children by 433%, from 1,514 in 2003 to 6,564 in 2006.

## **Characteristics of the low income residents in Rock County**

### Demographics of Rock County

The Rock WNEP provides programs primarily in the city of Beloit and in a few areas of Janesville, where most low-income county residents live, according to the 2000 US Census. In Beloit, 12.5% of 35,800 residents live below the poverty level. Among Janesville's 59,500 residents, the poverty rate is 6.5%. In both cities, the highest rate of poverty (36%) is found among single-parent families with young children. The teen birth rate in Rock County is 40% higher than the state average. The Rock WNEP focuses on youth and young families in urban areas: These are the groups at highest risk for poverty and nutritional disease. They are also the groups who would benefit the most in the long-term from learning healthy eating habits.

The low-income urban populations of Rock County are more ethnically diverse than that of the county as a whole. For example, while only 4.6% of the 152,300 residents of Rock County are African American, they account for 15.4% of the low-income, inner-city Beloit population. Only 4.1% of county residents speak Spanish as their native language, but 9.1% of Beloit city residents are Spanish-speakers. Since Hispanic- and African-Americans have a higher risk of heart disease and diabetes than European-Americans, they are in greater need of education and motivation to improve their eating habits.

The Hispanic population of Rock County is young and growing-- in 1999, 19 births were recorded for every 100 Hispanic residents. From 1990 to 2004, the number of births to Hispanic mothers in Rock County rose from 26 to 194, more than a 7-fold increase. In the same period, the number of births to European-American mothers fell by 18%, from 1,960 to 1,643. Births to African American mothers declined about 30%, from 168 to 120. Young African-American women in Beloit are in particular need of prenatal nutrition education because they are more than twice as likely to have low-birth-weight babies as are Hispanic or European-American mothers.

### Food Insecurity in Rock County

In 2005 in Rock County, 9,869 children received Wisconsin FoodShare assistance, or about 24% of the total child population of the county. The number of children in the FoodShare program increased by 116% from 1999 to 2005. On average, 14,013 of the county's schoolchildren participated daily in free or reduced school lunch programs in 2005—a 30% increase since 1999. Every year, more Rock County schools report that 50% or more of their total school enrollment is participating in the free or reduced School Lunch program. Among families with children younger than five years old, 6,424 participated in the WIC Program in 2005. In a 2002 survey, 41% of WIC participants stated that they often felt "food insecurity," or lack of access to a variety of healthy foods. Sixteen percent reported experiencing hunger. Clearly, the young families of Rock County present a large potential audience for nutrition and food money management education. They need to learn every strategy to get the most health benefit from the food assistance they receive. If their children have a healthy diet, behavior problems and learning delays can be prevented.

### **Nutrition and nutrition education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of Rock County**

Aside from the inability to afford a variety of healthy foods, the main nutrition problem of low-income residents of Rock County is the same as that of other county residents: a sedentary lifestyle and a high-fat diet that contribute to obesity, diabetes and heart disease. According to the Department of Health and Family Services Wisconsin Healthy People 2010 Local Data Package (Feb. 2005 Edition), only 19% of all Rock County adults exercise vigorously for at least 20 minutes three times a week. Not surprisingly, the majority (55%) of adults in Rock are either overweight (32%) or obese (23%). Weight is increasingly becoming a problem for low-income children, too. In 2005, 26% of the 416 low-income children aged 3 to 5 years in the Rock-Walworth Head Start Program were overweight. Twenty-one or 5% of those young children had already become obese. Low-income parents need education and support to offer their children a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and opportunities to engage in low-cost physically active recreation. The children themselves need more exposure, in their homes, schools and their communities, to the pleasures of healthy food and physically active pastimes. WNEP surveys of parents of school-age children during 2007 indicate that children do indeed request more fruits and vegetables at home when they participate in WNEP activities in school.

Another practice that may reduce the incidence of childhood obesity in low-income families is breastfeeding infants for the six months of life. However, only about 15% of low-income mothers in WIC breastfeed longer than three months. In contrast, according to the 2001 National Immunization Survey, 51% of all new mothers nationwide are still breastfeeding to some extent when their babies are three months old. The Healthy People 2010 goal is to increase the percentage of mothers still breastfeeding at six months to 50%. According to Rock WIC nutritionists, low-income mothers know that breastfeeding is beneficial; but they need more prenatal preparation and postpartum support in order to feel comfortable and confident about continued breastfeeding.

### **Educational Projects planned for FY08**

**School Day:** In partnership with classroom teachers, WNEP educators will instruct more than 2,200 children aged 5 to 11 who attend the 15 elementary schools in Rock County in which the

enrollment in the free or reduced School Lunch program exceeds 50%. Children aged 5-8 will participate in a series of six one-hour “Nutrition and Literacy” lessons, in which they will listen to a story with a positive nutrition or physical activity message, and taste and discuss a variety of fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. Children aged 9 to 11 will be engaged in “Professor Popcorn” lessons and encouraged to set goals to improve their fruit and vegetable intake and physical activity level. All students will be given newsletters with recipes, nutrition guidelines and physical activity tips to take home to their parents.

WNEP educators will also teach more than 1,300 teens aged 12 to 17 who are enrolled in the two middle schools and selected high school classes in Rock County in which the majority of students are eligible for free or reduced School Lunch. Most of these teens will receive an intensive series of 6 to 10 “Power of Choice” lessons in which they will set their own nutrition and physical activity goals and learn how to read food labels, choose fast foods wisely, recognize reasonable portion sizes, and prepare and taste a variety of fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains. Teens who are also parents or parents-to-be will learn about breastfeeding, food shopping and appropriate child feeding practices. Most teens will explore computer websites to analyze their diets and write newsletters with healthy recipes, nutrition guidelines and money-saving tips to share with their parents and peers.

**Parents:** In partnership with teachers, principals and afterschool coordinators, WNEP educators plan to present at least 10 afterschool “parent night presentations” in low-income schools. At least 200 parents during the school year will attend healthy food demonstrations and discussions about how to encourage their children to have good eating and physical activity habits.

In September, the WNEP will send Community Baby Shower invitations to more than 300 pregnant women enrolled in the WIC Program. In concert with WIC and other local maternal-child health organizations, WNEP staff will present workshops to more than 50 women at the shower on prenatal nutrition, breastfeeding, physical activity during pregnancy, and appropriate child feeding practices. These women will be encouraged to enroll in the EFNEP home visitation program to receive further support for their health goals.

In the five years that WNEP has sponsored the Rock County Community Baby Shower, it has been noted that only about 5% of the shower attendees have been African American: Given that African-American families are at greater risk for obesity, hypertension and low-birth-weight babies, the WNEP will continue its collaboration with the African-American Infant Mortality Coalition to provide at least one health fair a year focused exclusively on the nutrition and health needs of African-American parents and their children.

More than 100 low-income Spanish-speaking parents enrolled in adult education programs will receive 10-12 lessons in nutrition, physical activity, and saving money on food. These adult education students will be reached through the Janesville and Beloit Even Start Programs and the Stateline Literacy Council. In addition, the WNEP staff will engage at least 60 Spanish-speaking parents in walk-by nutrition demonstrations and provide Spanish-language nutrition information at the Annual Latino Community Health Fair in March.

In 2008, in partnership with the Rock County Healthy Living Coalition, the Rock WNEP will obtain additional non-FSNEP funding for the publication and Spanish translation of 3,000 copies of the 36-page UW-Extension *Get Active in Rock County* guide. In simple language, this guide outlines how parents can set physical activity and healthy eating goals for themselves and their children. The bulk of the guide contains addresses and phone numbers of organizations in Rock County that offer low-cost, physically active family fun. WNEP educators will distribute this guide at health fairs, WIC clinics, and school parent nights. Physicians, nurses, and diabetic educators who serve Medicaid-eligible families will be given the guide, along with suggestions on how to use it in patient counseling.

**WIC:** More than 500 pregnant women and parents of young children will become more aware of ways to improve their diet, stretch their food dollar, and become more physically active through newsletters, displays, food demonstrations and interactive discussions and activities presented by WNEP staff at the WIC (Women, Infants and Children Food Supplementation Program) clinics in Janesville and Beloit. WNEP educators will present monthly breastfeeding classes in the WIC clinics as well.

### **Food Security Programming Efforts Planned**

#### Methods planned to raise awareness of hunger/food insecurity

The Rock WNEP coordinator will submit to the local newspapers at least one press release related to food security.

#### Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

Members of the Rock County Hunger Task Force will compile data on the usage of local hunger pantries.

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

The Rock WNEP coordinator will chair two semiannual meetings of the Rock County Hunger Task Force. She will invite at least 15 local community groups to the Oct. 4 Wisconsin Hunger Summit.