USDA’s 2010-2015 Strategic Plan Sets Priorities for Health/Nutrition/Food Security

By Susan Nitzke

USDA’s mission is to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. According to Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, “Over the next 5 years, USDA will use this plan to manage its resources in a way that delivers the best outcomes for everyone affected by its diverse program portfolio.” The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s new strategic plan is organized according to four overarching goals:

- Goal 1: Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, re-populating, and economically thriving
- Goal 2: Ensure our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources
- Goal 3: Help America promote agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security
- Goal 4: Ensure that all of America’s children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals.

UWEX and its nutrition and family living programs is actively involved in specific, planned activities that are directly relevant to all four goals. For example, under goal 1, UWEX programs emphasize increased access to broadband in un-served and underserved areas. Other programs focus on helping communities and businesses to develop and support regional food systems. Similarly, our family living education programs and activities directly support strategic goal 4 to assure safe, nutritious, and balanced meals for children in the U.S. Our programs also dovetail with the Department’s work to fight child obesity and improve access to and quality of meal programs. For example, our work to improve and support school breakfast supports USDA’s efforts to “create national baseline standards for all foods sold in elementary, middle, and high schools to ensure they contribute effectively to a healthy diet” (page 28).

Our educational work also directly supports the USDA aims of doubling the number of Americans who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day from the 2007 baseline rate of 24.4% to the 2015 target rate of 50% (page 29) and we are partners in the efforts to “evaluate nutrition-promotion interventions to implement and sustain evidence-based strategies in communities across the Nation.” The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, MyPyramid and newer USDA initiatives such as the People’s Garden, Farm-to-School, Know your farmer know your food, and Let’s move! are key resources to achieve goal 4 objectives. UWEX will continue its active pursuit of partnerships through state and local extension programs, a notion that is specified in the strategies for goal 4 (page 44).

Implications for Extension Educators: As we plan Extension programs with our office colleagues, program partners, state teams, community coalitions, and other associates, USDA’s strategic plan provides a context for our future efforts.

Community Members Perception of their Food and Physical Activity Environment

By Gayle Coleman

Unhealthy weight continues to be a public health problem in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health efforts are shifting to place a greater emphasis on environment and policy approaches since efforts focused on individuals have not curbed obesity rates. Despite the change in focus, research on the public’s perceptions of the food and physical activity environment is limited.

Maley and colleagues conducted a study to assess community members’ perceptions of the relationship between the social, built and natural environment and their own eating and physical activity behaviors. Twenty-seven adults (three white men, two African-American women and 25 white, non-Hispanic women) who lived or worked in one rural community in upstate New York participated in the study. These adults were from various socioeconomic levels and represented a variety of ages, ranging from 20 to 80 years.

Multiple assessment methods were used to increase dependability and validity of the data. Individual (or one-on-one) interviews with 17 participants provided personal perceptions. Focus groups with 10 participants provided perspectives within a social forum. Twelve participants were split into two groups, one for the food environment and one for the physical activity environment. Both groups completed a community mapping and Photovoice activity to document their environment. Those who participated in the mapping activity were given paper and colored pens and asked to draw a map of their own environment. For example, in the food environment group people were asked to map or list places outside of their home where they ate and obtained food. Those who participated in the Photovoice activity were given a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of whatever they thought was relevant to their own eating and physical activity environment.

Results from all data collection methods revealed three key themes. First, participants saw ownership of obesity as both an individual and collective problem. Second, participants expressed conflict between their desired eating and physical activity behaviors and community values; social activities often involve “unhealthy” food, an abundance of food, and large portion sizes. Third, participants perceived a relationship among the social, natural and built environments. However, physical characteristics, such as the availability of recreational facilities, do not give the complete picture because there may be other factors affecting their use.

The authors concluded that community residents’ perspective of their physical and social environments is a useful tool for tailoring or developing community-based approaches to obesity prevention.

Implications for Extension Educators: Awareness and application of community members’ attitudes and perceptions could help healthy lifestyle coalitions plan and implement successful programs. This information could contribute to behavior changes by individuals, also.

You Might Be Interested ……

There were several wonderful presentations at the recent WiPOD/WiPAN symposium, Linking Research, Community Action and Policy to Prevent Obesity. You can view videos of these presentations by clicking on the title of the presentation at this web site, http://wipod.pediatrics.wisc.edu/lectures/index.html#Linking_Research_Community_Action_and_Policy_to_Prevent_Obesity.

Resources Added to the WNEP Resource Database


Food Sense Newsletter, https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=6064