**Condition Change: UC ANR contributed to improved community health and wellness**

**Issue**

California’s rapid population growth increases pressure on community resources, presenting numerous challenges to health and safety. Adult and childhood obesity is a public health crisis for the state and nation, resulting in a range of negative health consequences. Nearly 30% of California’s youth in grades 9-12 and over 60% of California’s adults are overweight or obese, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Public health experts agree poor nutritional choices, lack of physical activity, school, community, and home environments, income level, and education are all factors in the obesity epidemic.

**Methods**

UC ANR produces new knowledge, tools, programs, and policy-relevant research that contribute to healthy communities.

A UC Agricultural Experiment Station scientist at the UC Berkeley location is addressing the increased need for sustainable environmental practices by investigating the decision-making factors that determine the consumption of sustainable products. Some of the factors being explored include product characteristics (e.g., green, healthy), company performance (e.g., environmental, social, health), and consumer information feedback. Findings will identify frameworks and strategies to influence purchase behaviors in favor of sustainable choices (Dara O'Rourke).

UCCE academics provided oversight, leadership, and guidance in educational programs and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) interventions delivered through the statewide CalFresh Healthy Living – University of California program (CFHL, UC). CFHL, UC programs such as Coordinated Approach to Child Health; Smarter Lunchrooms Movement; Gardens; and School Wellness Policy were conducted to increase healthy choices, food-based gardening, and quality physical activity in early childhood centers, schools, and community environments (Deepa Srivastava; Anna Martin; Chutima Ganthavorn).

UC ANR academics in the Nutrition Policy Institute were involved in the evaluation of University of California nutrition policy implementation, the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act implementation, the USDA Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program nutrition standards, and drinking water (Janice Kao; Lauren Au; Lorrene Ritchie; Christina Hecht).

As a result of UC ANR research and extension, participants learned about and adopted strategies to improve community health and wellness. Outcomes with specific indicators follow.

**Outcomes**

**Partners adopted community-level changes that contribute to improved community health and wellness.**

* CFHL, UC reported statewide Policy, Systems, and Environment (PSE) changes at 397 SNAP-Ed sites, contributing to improved community health and wellness for more than 170,000 people. For example, over 223 program sites in 31 counties made at least one physical activity-related PSE change; more than half of these sites improved the quality of structured physical activity. As a result of CFHL, UC’s Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, partner sites in 2019 conducted 78 cafeteria assessments to encourage the selection of healthy options in cafeterias. More than half of the schools reported increases from their first assessment due to adopting evidence-based, low-cost/-no-cost cafeteria makeover strategies. Finally, 30 CFHL, UC sites statewide adopted or expanded farm-to-table use of fresh or local produce. (CFHL, UC)
  + PSE interventions in Tulare and Kings Counties resulted in 41 nutrition changes, 15 physical activity changes, and three combined nutrition and physical activity changes combined at 37 partnering sites. Furthermore, as part of the PSE interventions, implementation of mechanisms to support sustainability of the changes also occurred. (Deepa Srivastava)
  + CFHL, UC in San Joaquin County implemented PSE change activities adopted by 60 sites. PSE changes focused on improving nutrition, physical activity, food security and food safety through implementation or improvements to garden programs, wellness policies, smarter lunchrooms, and structured physical activity opportunities. (Anna Martin)
  + Riverside County’s CFHL, UC Smarter Lunchrooms Movement measured pre/post scorecards collected from six schools and findings indicated improvement at all six schools, ranging from three to seven point improvements. Examples of improvements include addition of creative names, offering fruit taste test, displaying fruits in attractive bowls, and posting monthly menu in the main office. (Chutima Ganthavorn)

**Science-based information applied to community health and wellness policy and decision-making at local, state, and national levels.**

* Evaluation findings of the campus vending policy, developed by UC ANR and colleagues, confirmed increased access to healthy foods for university students as now seven campuses have health/wellness policy or programs that cover vending machines. Furthermore, six campuses have added language into their vending contracts to include healthy items. These policy changes may improve the access and availability of healthy vending options increases purchasing, and likely consumption, by campus communities. (Janice Kao)
* Findings from studies evaluating the implementation of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act suggest that policy provisions to align school meals with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans were feasible across a wide variety of schools and that schools successfully implemented reimbursable school meal nutrition standards, regardless of school poverty level. (Lauren Au)
* As a result of several collaborative research projects, a UCCE academic informed new improvements in policies and procedures related to the WIC program. Specifically, one longitudinal study will be the first to present findings to policymakers about the potential benefits of extending the age of WIC benefits until children are eligible for school meals. Other studies led to the addition of yogurt to WIC food packages and improvements to programs by showing that WIC nutrition education offered virtually (online) can be as impactful as more traditional in-person classes. (Lorrene Ritchie)
* The NPI study finding that demonstrated that young children on WIC have better diets than those that leave the program and that dietary benefits are derived from foods provided by the WIC program. This research informed Congress on the benefits of continuing to fund WIC. Specifically in California, research findings about differences in food preferences by different race/ethnicity groups supported the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine recommendation for increased flexibility in the WIC food packages. (Lorrene Ritchie and Lauren Au)
* Several policy convenings were led by the NPI Director to share childcare research findings regarding the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program nutrition standards. These convenings helped to increase awareness among USDA and state agencies on how they can best support childcare providers to implement recent policy changes and nutrition standards. (Lorrene Ritchie)
* Policy engagement activities by NPI around improving drinking water safety, access, education and policy in the US led to increased sharing of data-driven information and best practices at federal and state agency levels (including U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Drinking Water, CA Department of Social Services and CA State Water Resources Control Board) as well as to individual federal and state representatives, and contributed to the growing movement for drinking water instead of sugary drinks in the U.S. (Christina Hecht)

These measured outcomes demonstrated learning, action, and policy changes that can lead to improved community health and wellness. Collectively these efforts contribute to the public value of promoting healthy people and communities. However, this work needs to continue as California adult obesity rates have increased over the last few years from 24.2% in 2015 to 25.8% in 2018, according to the CDC.