Selected Highlights from the History of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

- Low-income nutrition education projects piloted in Alabama, Massachusetts, Missouri, Rhode Island, and Texas (1964)
- Congress appropriated and allocated $30M for EFNEP, a national program delivered by 1862 land-grant institutions to improve health and well-being of low-income families (1969)
- Use of program volunteers endorsed (1971)
- First of EFNEP special projects: urban gardening projects in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Houston (1977)
- President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized and USDA provided $10M for an expanded homemaker program for low-income families (1968)
- $48M allocated; youth component added (1970)
- $51M allocated for EFNEP (1980)
- U.S. Territories became eligible to deliver EFNEP (1982)
- Computerized record and reporting system implemented (1986)
- $58.7M allocated for EFNEP (1989)
- National Evaluation and Reporting System (ERS) implemented (1992)
- Core competencies ensuring consistency and efficacy developed for program coordinators (paraprofessionals: 2008; supervisors: 2017) (2001)
- GAO Report recognized EFNEP’s data reporting and tracking as unique among national nutrition education programs (2004)
- $62.5M allocated; 1890 land-grant institutions became eligible to offer EFNEP (2006)
- WebNEERS, a web-based nutrition education, evaluation, and reporting system replaced ERS (2008)
- Major revision of National Program Policy Guidelines; minor updates published later, as needed (2011)
- Social media policy introduced (2014)
- Technology policy published; volunteer policy revised (2017)
EFNEP has made a difference in the lives of rural and urban families in America since 1969, when Congress authorized $30 million for this program. EFNEP represents a federal (USDA/NIFA) state (land-grant university) and local (county) partnership supporting the nutritional security of low-income families. Currently, 76 institutions provide the program nationwide through Cooperative Extension at 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities in all 50 states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia.

Peer educators deliver group and individual nutrition education tailored to the needs of families and the communities in which they live. EFNEP contributes to the personal development of program staff and participants as they gain skills and confidence, which can transfer to other aspects of their lives.

Interactive sessions that support improved behaviors in food safety, food preparation, food resource management and nutrition topics are key to the program’s success. Longitudinal studies show that new behaviors are maintained, and that new skills learned through EFNEP can last a lifetime – and across generations.

EFNEP results in lasting change. Annual data confirms that graduates improve their diets, improve their nutrition practices, stretch their food dollars farther, handle food more safely, and increase their physical activity levels. Education is adapted as group lessons in community settings and for individuals in their homes, as needed. Recent applications include the use of distance learning and social media technologies. The program remains relevant to how people live, learn, work, shop, and play.

EFNEP reaches roughly 500,000 low-income adults and youth each year. At least 80% of families live at or below 100% of poverty, and nearly 70% are minority status. More than 90% of adults improve food intake.