News Column for Week of April 9, 2018

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**Food Assistance Supports Rural and Urban Communities**

With talks underway in the nation’s capital on the 2018 Farm Bill, one of the topics under discussion is SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps. The program is considered the nation’s first line of defense against hunger in communities large and small, and is funded through the farm bill.

“SNAP provides access to healthy food and nutrition education for low-income families and individuals across the U.S. and in Kansas,” said Sandy Procter, extension specialist and assistant professor in Kansas State University’s Department of Food, Nutrition, Dietetics and Health. “It benefits elderly persons, low income persons even if they are working, unemployed households and households with disabled persons. It’s been called ‘the cornerstone of the nation’s nutrition safety net’ and effectively prevents hunger and household food insecurity in Kansas and the U.S.”

With a total federal outlay of $70.8 billion in fiscal year 2016, SNAP accounted for 51 percent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s annual budget, according to a [January, 2018 USDA-Economic Research Service report](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/86924/err-243.pdf?v=43124). About 14 percent of all Americans participated in the program each month in 2016.

[A five-year study](http://www.frac.org/maps/snap-state-map/tables/snap-states-2016-tab2.html) showed that 15.8 percent of all U.S. households in rural areas participate in SNAP, 15.3 percent of households in small towns receive benefits, and 12. 6 percent of U.S. households in larger metropolitan areas participate, according to the Food Research and Action Center, a nonprofit organization focused on poverty-related hunger.

The study also showed that 8.6 percent of households in rural Kansas participate in SNAP, while 11.2 percent of households in small towns receive benefits and 8.6 percent of Kansas households in metropolitan areas participate.

“SNAP benefits are important to communities – big and small, urban and rural,” said Procter, who coordinates the Kansas SNAP Education program.

With a focus on improving the nutritional health of low-income Kansans, she and a team of K-State Research and extension family and consumer science agents, specialists and nutrition educators work with people who qualify for or receive SNAP benefits on such topics as cooking with limited resources, understanding food labels, food safety, meal planning, nutrition and obesity prevention. The program is active in 75 of Kansas’s 105 counties.

Procter said a common misunderstanding about SNAP is that people stay on food assistance for long periods of time, but research shows that 50 percent of all new SNAP recipients will leave the program within nine months as they become more financially stable.

“According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service, each $1 billion of retail generated by SNAP creates $340 million in farm production, $110 million in farm value-added and 3,300 farm jobs,” she said. “Additionally, every $1 billion of SNAP benefits creates 8,900 to 17,900 full-time jobs.”

“I think it is important to know that roughly 80 percent of the Farm Bill is funding for nutrition-related programs,” said Procter, adding that such programs as SNAP, WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and 13 others, are not only important to those who receive the benefits, but also to all communities due to the economic benefits they provide across the U.S.

Locally, under the coordination of Kathy McEwan, Southwind Extension District returns over $120,000 to the local economy through SNAP-Ed grant dollars. This grant provides salary and benefits for 3 full-time nutrition education assistants and funds local programming in the Southwind District for SNAP benefit eligible audiences.

SNAP-Ed nutrition classes are provided and funded for every public school in Allen, Bourbon and Neosho counties, after-school programs, WIC, food pantries, commodity distributions, public housing sites, libraries and community centers to name a few. We are happy to partner with other agencies, churches or organizations where the audience meets the SNAP benefit eligibility requirements. For more information about our local SNAP-Ed programming, contact Kathy at [kmcewan@ksu.edu](mailto:kmcewan@ksu.edu) or 620-365-2242.