

EXTENSION
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

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Hosting preferred food drives has been a successful way SNAP–Ed staff have worked with food pantries in increasing healthy food inventory. Thanks to connections developed through HEAL and Food Pantry Network preferred food drives, mobile food pantries, and healthy food labeling system have helped improve area food pantry inventory.

SNAP-Education Works with Community Partners to Increase Healthy Options at Food Pantries

Food plays a substantial role in health, and impacts whether or not people are able to lead an active, healthy life. By working with multiple coalitions, University of Illinois Extension staff, Kaitlyn Streitmatter and Rebecca Crumrine, are making substantial improvements in the food options available to people in need. They have played important roles in mobile food pantries, preferred food drives, and increased involvement in the greenlight identification and labeling system used at food pantries and food banks.

“Communities with higher rates of food insecurity have been shown to have higher rates of diet related chronic diseases when compared to national rates,” commented Streitmatter, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP–Ed) educator. “Research shows chronic diseases such as diabetes or heart disease is the cause for 7 out of 10 deaths in the U.S., and 66% of families using food pantries for support have to choose between medical needs and purchasing food. We work to better understand this challenge and aim to increase the availability of healthy food to local emergency food partners.”

As members of the HEAL Food System Partners, Streitmatter and Crumrine, SNAP–Ed program coordinator, have played significant roles in the “Greenlight Project.” The project’s aim is to improve the awareness of healthier foods offered to community members using food pantries by applying a greenlight identification and labeling system at both the food pantry and food bank level. Additionally, nutrition education at food pantries, through SNAP–Ed and Food Pantry Network–HOI (FPN–HOI) is provided. Nutrition education provided has included recipe cards, healthy messaging prompts, educational resources, food pantry staff training, and coordination of preferred food drives.

“It is challenging for food pantries to encourage healthier food items because much of their inventory depends on donations. Preferred food drives, healthy bundle boxes, and fresh food drives are a great way for food pantries to ask for donations that are most needed.” stated Streitmatter. “We have assisted pantries in marketing and organizing preferred food drives in addition to connecting community organizations, food banks, and food pantries to hold mobile food pantry distributions. The connections we have developed through HEAL and FPN–HOI have been instrumental in allowing these additional opportunities to happen.”



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

By using research based methods to educate food pantry guests on the healthier food choices, we hope to help make the healthy choice the easy choice.