

EXTENSION
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

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ILLINOIS
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Spanish bilingual EFNEP staff make it possible for U of I Extension programs to reach the growing Hispanic population in Peoria County. Teen cooking classes, summer cooking schools, and adult programs help address the obesity and diabetes health problems prevalent among Hispanic populations.

Nutrition Education Helps the Growing Hispanic Population in Peoria County

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population in Peoria County has more than doubled since the year 2000. In that same time period University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit has hired four Spanish bilingual staff to serve that population better. Three of those four staff are Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) instructors who use their language skills and cultural understanding to bring cooking classes and nutritional education to youth and adults.

Currently, statistics show three out of four Mexican American adults were either overweight or obese. Obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes. Studies of Mexican children at the Mexican/U.S. border show low intake of fruits and vegetable and high consumption of soft drinks and snacks. Since diabetes and obesity are problems in the Hispanic population because of diet and lifestyle, nutrition education classes provided by EFNEP help promote healthier food choices and emphasizes the importance of exercise.

Mari Lopez, Petra Eberle, and Angela Jimenez are part of the nine-person EFNEP team serving Peoria and Tazewell counties. The trio works with traditional EFNEP audiences in addition to programs specifically for Hispanic audiences. The need for more nutrition education in Spanish combined with the ladies' dynamic personalities have created a growing demand for their programs.

Peoria High School, Richwoods High School, and Glen Oak School are benefiting from cooking classes taught in Spanish. The classes include hands-on learning, nutrition education, a combination of recipes inspired by American and Hispanic cultures, and healthy living education. During the summer months, the team provides cooking schools through partnering churches and organizations that reach over 100 bilingual youth.

"EFNEP staff members have heard many positive comments from the students and their teachers in the cooking classes as teens try new recipes and share them with their families," mentioned Margaret Cover EFNEP educator.

One student said, "My family used to only fry fish, but ever since they tasted the baked fish recipe we prepared in the cooking class, we now bake our fish."

Adult programming, such as that which happens at the Friendship House in downtown Peoria, is one of the foundational EFNEP Hispanic programs. Petra

Eberle has been presenting programs there for many years. Not only do families learn how to cook healthier meals, but they also learn to maximize their food dollars. These programs promote healthy nutrition for the participants and additionally positively impact their entire families as they share recipes and new cooking skills.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson, U of I Extension