

impact

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difference in Idaho.

Strengthening community health through fruit and vegetable exploration

AT A GLANCE

A community-based nutrition program enabled over 1,400 people to explore a new fruit or vegetable, demonstrating a highly cost-effective investment in healthy eating behaviors at \$0.35 per person.

The Situation

Despite the many health benefits of fruits and vegetables, most youth in the United States do not consume enough to support optimal health. Adequate fruit and vegetable intake is associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and obesity. National data indicate that only 7.1% of adolescents meet the recommended daily intake for fruit, and just 2.0% meet the recommended intake for vegetables.

Research also suggests that children may need repeated exposure of as many as fifteen times to a new fruit or vegetable before developing a preference for it. Community-based nutrition programs can help address this challenge by creating welcoming environments where children and families have opportunities to taste, explore and experience healthy foods in new ways.

Our Response

From May through August, University of Idaho Extension Eat Smart Idaho and family and consumer sciences Extension educators participated in the Chobani Summer Program in conjunction with school districts' summer feeding programs at local parks in Twin Falls



Children visited the booth to sample local donut peaches during summer park feeding program.

and Jerome. While children and adults received free meals each week, we provided nutrition education and hands-on activities to encourage participants to explore healthy foods, build positive experiences with fruits and vegetables, and increase their willingness to try and enjoy a wider variety of foods. Through interactive activities, participants explored fruits and vegetables in a variety of forms, including fresh, dried, baked and as a dip. These experiences were designed to help make healthy eating more approachable, enjoyable and accessible, supporting positive eating behaviors for lifelong health.

Program Outcomes

This summer, 1,911 children and adults participated in 14 interactive, hands-on nutrition activities, including

seed planting and sugary drink education. A highlight of the program was the fruit and vegetable taste testing booth, where 1,484 participants had the opportunity to taste and explore a variety of fruit and vegetables prepared in different ways.

The results were remarkable:

- 95% of participants sampled a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- 93% reported that they liked the food they tried.
- 87% reported they would eat them again.

Table 1. Results from the fruit and vegetable taste testings.

Food Item	Number of participants tried the item	Percentage of participants liked it (%)	Percentage of participants would eat again (%)
Popcorn	106	92%	89%
Strawberries	136	99%	93%
Blueberries	135	96%	88%
Dates	185	80%	59%
Rainbow carrots	119	97%	83%
Golden Kiwi	266	97%	93%
Donut Peaches	170	93%	95%
Tomatillo salsa	109	88%	85%
Pumpkin Bread	181	98%	97%

These results demonstrate the power of providing positive, hands-on experiences with healthy foods. A \$486 investment in fruits and vegetables resulted in 1,407 (95%) children and adults trying a new fruit or vegetable. The program achieved this outcome at a cost of just \$0.35 per person, demonstrating a highly efficient investment in building healthy eating behaviors. By giving children and families this opportunity to taste something new in an engaging and supportive environment, we helped turn curiosity into willingness and willingness into the potential for healthier dietary choices over time.

The Future

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with community partners through summer feeding programs to promote the benefits of healthy foods and create more opportunities for children and families to explore, taste and enjoy fruits and vegetables.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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