University of Nevada Cooperative Extension health and nutrition programs have secured nearly $1 million in federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP-Ed) grants for 2010.

The $977,963 from the federal program will go to 12 statewide programs that help low-income Nevada families make healthier choices when buying groceries. In 2009, more than 10,000 Nevadans benefitted from SNAP-Ed programs.

“For years we’ve heard calls for people on nutritional assistance programs to make better food choices,” said Cooperative Extension Nutrition Specialist Mary Wilson. “That’s what we do. We provide educational programs to help families make healthier decisions.”

SNAP-Ed is a federal/state partnership that supports nutrition education for persons eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, helped put food on the table for some 31 million people per month in 2009. In Nevada, SNAP programming helped more than 200,000 people in low-income households with electronic benefits they use like cash at most grocery stores. SNAP helps needy households and those making the transition from welfare to work.

The goal of SNAP-Ed is to provide educational and social marketing programs that increase the likelihood that people eligible for SNAP will be more physically active and make healthy food choices within a limited budget.

The 12 Cooperative Extension health and nutrition programs reach a variety of audiences, from pregnant and breastfeeding women to school-age children and families with young children. Programs such as Cooperative Extension’s “All 4 Kids” encourage preschoolers to choose healthier snacks and to “get moving!” during TV commercials.

“All 12 programs are different in the audiences they address,” Wilson said. “We reach out to elementary school students, middle school students, preschool students, single moms and struggling parents. The audiences are vast.”

The grants could not have come at a better time. State officials say that from January 2008 to October 2009, there was a 79 percent increase in Nevadans receiving assistance from the federal SNAP program.
Wilson said statewide surveys illustrated a need for SNAP-ed programming.

“We conducted needs assessments in order to understand the funding needed to provide nutrition education to low-income audiences,” Wilson said. “A lot of these programs wouldn’t exist without this funding.”

Wilson said a brighter Nevada tomorrow starts with healthy steps today.

“A little prevention goes a long way,” Wilson said. “Helping people stay healthier is a great investment in our future. Our programs help families make better food selections so their children grow up healthier and stronger so we—as taxpayers—won’t pay for health-care costs later on.”

Nutrition assistance is available to low-wage, unemployed or part-time workers; recipients of welfare or other public assistance payments; the elderly; the disabled; and the homeless.

For more information on SNAP-Ed, visit the State of Nevada Web site at: http://dwss.nv.gov or enroll at (800) 992-0900.

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Cooperative Extension health and nutrition programs:

**All 4 Kids** — The new program focuses on low-income preschoolers in Clark County and promotes healthy eating and physical activity. The pilot program conducted last year reached nearly 300 children, and evaluations showed that 80 percent consumed healthy snacks such as fruit and vegetables more often after taking the class. Their motor skills also improved as a result of the dances they learned.

**Calcium, It’s Not Just Milk** — The ongoing program targets low-income, middle-school-aged students in Washoe and Clark counties and encourages consumption of low-fat, calcium-rich foods. Through classroom lessons and in-school activities, the number of students who could identify calcium-rich food increased from 8 percent to 70 percent. The program reached nearly 2,000 students in Clark County alone.

**Chefs for Kids** — in collaboration with American Culinary Federation Chefs, Chefs for Kids targets high-risk schools primarily in Clark County and promotes lifelong, healthy lifestyles that researchers say will lower their risk for heart disease and other chronic illnesses. Second-graders at 12 high-need schools learn about healthy food combinations, and a video series is shown to first-graders at 24 high-needs sites.

**Eat Smart, Live Strong** — The fledgling program is designed to improve fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity among seniors, many of whom are low-income, hungry or need nutrition-related assistance. The program will include classes on growing herbs and small vegetables in window pots, food safety tips, healthy recipes using commodity foods, and has already resulted in a widely distributed fact sheet in large type explaining expiration dates on perishable food items.

**Food for Health and Soul/Cocinando Delicioso Y Saludable** — This six-session class teaches families how to modify their favorite recipes by decreasing sugar, fat and salt and increasing fiber, thereby decreasing their risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

**Mom’s Special Gift** — An educational program encouraging breastfeeding. MSG helps hundreds of new low-income predominantly minority mothers each year.

**Niks & Knacks** — An afterschool program teaching good nutrition, specializing in afterschool snacks.

**Nutrition in the Garden** — Classes are conducted for third-, fourth- and fifth-graders at a Washoe County charter school with a high percentage of Hispanic students. The students grow and eat their own food, and parents serve as garden volunteers. This year the program is expanded to a public elementary school.

**Team Nutrition Smart Choices** — Now in its 10th year, the goal of this ongoing program is to increase both teachers’ and students’ awareness of healthy diet, with emphasis on eating more vegetables and fruits. In-service presentations reached 128 teachers, and 73 classes reached 1,956 students last year—a 225 percent increase over the previous year.

**Veggies for Kids** — The program helps American Indian students in the second and third grades choose more vegetables, incorporating traditional Native American cuisine. It also provides an introduction to plant growing and engages parents through take-home assignments and newsletters. The program is delivered in Washoe and Mineral counties.

**Small Steps 4 Big Changes** — This new program addresses the problem of childhood obesity by focusing on healthy eating from each food group, incorporating easy-to-fix snacks and encouraging physical activity.