Cooperative Extension assists Nevadans in food deserts

More than 150,000 rural and urban Nevadans live in low-income food deserts, where healthy food such as fruits and vegetables are scarce. This often results in diets high in sugar, fats and sodium—and consequently—increased rates of various diseases and conditions. Here are two examples of how Cooperative Extension is addressing these issues by providing educational programs and ways to help the community grow their own nutritious foods.

Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program: The Hoop House Project

The Hoop House Project began in 2012 to address the lack of nutritious foods available in many northern Nevada tribal communities. The program, led by Cooperative Extension’s Tribal Coordinator Randy Emm, Hoop House Coordinator Reggie Premo and Community-Based Educator Victor Williams, helps construct hoop houses and provides training on how to use them to grow food. Besides providing food, the project provides opportunities for social interactions and growing traditional Native American food. Since 2012, the program has provided 30 hoop houses and training at 10 reservations. Program partners include Barrick Gold Corporation, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Strike Force Initiative, tribal volunteers, schools and local agencies on the reservations.

“We knew what we wanted, but we weren’t
We are so excited because we did grow things. That was our expectation—to get enough to help the community out.”

—Cherry Knight, environmental specialist for the South Fork tribe

Veggies for Kids

Veggies for Kids encourages kindergarteners to third-graders in low-income rural Nevada communities to increase their physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables by providing a garden, hoop house and hands-on gardening activities at their schools. Extension Educator and Program Director Staci Emm ’96 (journalism) helped establish the program in 2000 at three schools on reservations to help Native American children. The program now also includes three schools targeting Hispanic students, and has a cultural component with classes taught in Paiute or Spanish and exposure to Native American or Hispanic foods. Program partners include the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education, and Natural Resource Conservation Services; and Owyhee, Natchez, Schurz, Hawthorne, Yerington and Smith Valley Elementary Schools.  

Veggies for Kids Instructor Judy Halterman plants vegetables in a hoop house with kindergarteners and first-graders at Yerington Elementary School.

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