

COOPERATIVE
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SERVICE



College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment

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EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE *Changing Lives*



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When you support Extension, youth are introduced to a variety of foods, increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and are physically active to reduce the risk of childhood obesity.



LEAP lessons are taught in daycares, preschools, and elementary classrooms such as this Russell County Head Start class. LEAP reaches over 22,000 children each year. As a result, youth are willing to taste and eat a variety of foods.

Extension LEAPs to Instill Reading, Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Habits in Kentucky Youth to Combat Childhood Obesity

Literacy Eating and Activity for Primary (LEAP) Youth Health is an evidence-based curriculum that uses storybooks, taste-testing, and activities to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, and reading among preschool and elementary youth.



The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service reached over 208,000 families in 2014 with information about accessing healthy food. Furthermore, more than 132,000 Kentucky youth gained knowledge about eating more healthy foods, and 49% reported eating increased amounts of healthy foods.

Kentucky Extension Reporting System, 2014.

Children are particularly interested in stories that describe their own daily lives, such as eating, playing sports, being active and family mealtime. Research conducted in Head Start preschool classes found that children are more willing to taste a newly introduced vegetable if they have heard a story in which the main character had a positive preference for the food (Byrne & Nitzke, 2002).

LEAP Extension staff and volunteers read books that focus on preparing and eating healthy foods or being physically active to motivate children to adopt positive behaviors for a lifetime. The program includes taste-testing, hands-on activities, physical play, and parent newsletters. In addition, nutrition information, kid-friendly recipes, and resources are provided. A strong emphasis is placed on gardening, interaction among family generations, and diverse cultures.

In **Hopkins County**, the LEAP recipes became very popular with elementary students. The school food service director allowed the students to vote for their favorite LEAP recipe that was then incorporated in the school menus. The winner was yogurt with blueberries and granola.

In **Russell County**, the LEAP program was used in fourteen classrooms, reaching 244 children between the ages of three to five years. Because of the program, 98% of the children tasted a fruit or vegetable, and 46% reported tasting one or more fruits or vegetables for the first time. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the children indicated that they would like to try one of the fruits or vegetables again at home. At the conclusion of the program, 68% of the children were able to name benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, and 66% of the children were able to name benefits of physical activity. Seventy-four percent (74%) were able to name foods that grow in a garden.

The LEAP program is available through the UK Cooperative Extension Service (CES) Nutrition



*The agent and program assistant in **Casey County** have students prepare healthy snacks. Children are more likely to try a new food if they help prepare the recipe.*



Summer provides an opportunity for the youth to grow the vegetables that they have read about in LEAP books.

Education Program (NEP). The program educates participants to acquire knowledge, improve skills, and change behavior necessary to achieve improved health and well-being.