



## EFNEP: Investing in Healthier Lives, Reducing Obesity, and Saving Health Care Costs

**P**ublic health officials are sounding the alarm about America's growing obesity epidemic. Recent studies have found that nearly 65 percent of adults are overweight or obese, and both children and adults are consuming significantly more calories today than they did 30 years ago.

The personal costs of this epidemic include reduced longevity due to increases in heart disease, hypertension, stroke, some types of cancer, and diabetes. The societal costs are immense and growing: Annual obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the United States are estimated at \$75 billion in 2003 dollars, nearly \$39 billion of which is financed by Medicare and Medicaid.

### EFNEP: A PROVEN SOLUTION

Among the best tools yet developed to fight obesity is the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) operated by the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. In nearly 800 counties in all 50 states and the U.S. territories, EFNEP combats obesity by attacking nutritional illiteracy among low-income populations. Through the program, individuals and families learn to improve their diets and increase physical activity. It also helps eliminate societal barriers to healthier choices.

Studies show that people who run out of food or miss meals because they cannot afford them are among the most obese. EFNEP reaches these "high-risk" individuals through tried and true lessons and activities taught in peer-to-peer fashion by paraprofessionals and volunteers, many of whom are EFNEP graduates.

Approximately 600,000 people each year (roughly 75 percent of whom are children) participate in the EFNEP program, gaining new skills in food preparation, storage, safety and sanitation. They learn how to make wiser food choices and better manage their food budgets and related resources such as Food Stamps. Youth topics may also include fitness, avoidance of substance abuse, and other health-related issues.

### IRREFUTABLE RESULTS

EFNEP's evaluation and reporting system showed that among program graduates in 2003:

- 88%** improved nutrition practices such as making healthy food choices and reading labels;
- 84%** improved food resource practices such as meal planning and budgeting;
- 67%** improved food safety practices such as storing and thawing foods properly;
- 53%** now offer five fruits and vegetables to their families each day;
- 46%** now routinely use low-fat milk instead of regular fat milk; and
- 44%** of participants run out of food less often than they did before they participated in EFNEP.

### A SOLID RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Studies in several states found that for every dollar invested in EFNEP, health care costs were reduced by \$10.64 in Virginia; \$8.82 in a group of Midwestern states; \$8.03 in Iowa; and \$3.63 in Oregon. Universally, every state shows a positive benefit for participants.

### NASULGC'S PRIORITY REQUEST FOR FY 2006

Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program. . . . . \$65.0 m

In addition to sustaining the delivery of EFNEP to the many people who rely on it, increased funding is critical for the inclusion of 1890 land-grant institutions.

