



Banking on Better Health: California Association of Food Banks' Nutrition Education Program

A CASE STUDY REPORT

Barbara MckNelly, M.S.,
Jessica Bartholow, M.A.,
Terry Garner, M.A.,
Stephanie Nishio, M.P.H., R.D.

For the *Network for a Healthy California*
California Department of Public Health
Sacramento, CA
February 2009



Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. Background and Overview of the Project	2
III. Barriers to Fruit and Vegetable Consumption	4
IV. Nutrition Education Strategies	5
V. Observations on Promising Strategies	11
VI. Partnerships	14
VII. Impact of CAFB’s Nutrition Education Demonstration Project	16
VIII. Recommendations	19
IX. Conclusion	24
Attachment A: CAFB’s FFY09 nutrition education subcontracting agencies	25
Acknowledgements	26

List of Figures and Tables

Map: Map of counties with participating agencies	3
Table 1: Growth in CAFB’s Nutrition Education Project	3
Box 1: Education Materials Resource Center	4
Box 2: Popular Education: Use of Skits and Theater	8
Box 3: Take a Step to Health	8
Box 4: FSNE Allowable Community Venues	11
Box 5: Mother Infant Child Harvest Program (MICH)	15
Box 6: Educating Others	16
Box 7: <i>Communities of Excellence</i> : Food banks and emergency food outlets	18

"Food banks are the newest frontier for nutrition education". — participant at California Association of Food Banks nutrition education coordinator meeting

Our low income community has been enthusiastic about participating in the [Network] programs we have held. This is the first time our Food Bank has been able to obtain & disburse so much free information about the benefits of good nutrition. We know that when people are well informed, they are better equipped to fight for improved nutrition and more food security. — Imperial Valley Food Bank

I. Introduction

Food banks in California play a critical role in offsetting hunger, as people in need can go to them and their nonprofit partners to immediately receive a bag or box of food. Food banks receive food from state and federally funded food distribution programs, as well as food drives, private donations, and grants that allow them to purchase specific foods in order to meet their clients' needs. Together, there are approximately 60 food banks in California that supply an estimated 5,000 nonprofit community-based agencies, such as food pantries, with more than 200 million pounds of food annually. With the help of tens of thousands of volunteers, the community-based agencies then distribute the food to more than two million hungry and food insecure individuals each year in California.¹

In addition to making sure food is distributed to hungry and food insecure households, food banks in California are also taking steps to ensure the food that is distributed is healthier.

- Many food banks are participating in food distributions that provide low income households with fresh produce. For example, The California Association of Food Banks' (CAFB)'s *Farm to Family Program* and California Emergency Foodlink's *Donate Don't Dump* have developed statewide produce networks that distribute fresh, nutritious produce to California families who live at or below the poverty line. *Farm to Family* acquires fresh produce directly from growers and packers and on the following day delivers, with the help of California Emergency Foodlink, to food banks all across the state. *Farm to Family* distributed 63 million pounds of fresh produce in 2008. In some cases, food banks have mobile pantries and mobile produce distributions that take food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, to where the people who need that food are located.
- Some food banks have banned sodas and no longer distribute them to food pantries/closets or clients. Many food banks request healthier donations from donors and have created suggestion lists.
- Others are incorporating a variety of education strategies into their activities for clients, and in some cases for their donors and boards of directors, regarding healthy food and healthy lifestyle options.
- In 2007, food banks and food pantries funded by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, launched a new strategy group to address the need for nutrition education and healthy food policies for California's food banks and to collect promising practices from within the state. This group is convened by chairperson, Michael Flood of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.

CAFB, with 45 member food banks, represents a strong, coordinated and large-scale infrastructure

¹ California Association of Food Banks. What is a food bank? Available at <http://www.cafoodbanks.org/what.htm>.

with outreach to low-income residents in 56 of California's 58 counties. Participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) has enabled CAFB subcontracting agencies to expand and augment their nutrition education activities and has also reportedly influenced food banks to change their internal policies regarding food.

The purpose of this case study is to document the experience of CAFB's *Network for a Healthy California (Network)* nutrition education project in order to:

- profile the variety of nutrition education strategies being used;
- highlight accomplishments and factors that contribute to their achievement;
- generate recommendations for future collaboration and discover possible areas for project strengthening; and,
- improve prospects for replication.

The case study draws upon several sources including regular project documents such as CAFB's progress reports and an on-line survey completed by representatives of the participating food banks, as well as site visits and in-depth interviews with staff of three food banks. The principal intended audience is persons who are associated with CAFB's nutrition education project. A secondary audience is the larger community of persons interested in the barriers faced by food bank clients, the promotion of healthy eating practices and physical activity among food bank clients, promising nutrition education strategies, challenges faced and recommendations for future activities.

II. Background and Overview of the Project

Participating in this program has brought into focus the need for a nutritional aspect to the work we do. Specifically it's helped us get people more excited about trying to eat better.

– Redwood Empire Food Bank

Established in 1996, the mission of the *Network* is to create innovative partnerships so that low-income Californians are enabled to adopt healthy eating and physical activity patterns as part of a healthy lifestyle. The *Network* facilitates the efforts of a wide range of organizations to promote healthy eating and physical activity by increasing access to tested social marketing interventions, fostering partnerships, stimulating community development initiatives, and encouraging new interventions by Local Incentive Awardees (LIAs). Principal funding for the *Network* is made possible by in-kind contributions from local governments and school districts that qualify for Federal Financial Participation reimbursement dollars from the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly named the Food Stamp Program, for nutrition, education. Throughout this report, we will use the terms that were current at the time of this work, namely the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE).

Founded in 1995, CAFB's mission "is to provide a unified voice among food banks to maximize their ability to build a well nourished California".² CAFB focuses on supporting its 46 member food banks, increasing the visibility of hunger and its solutions, sharing food resources and influencing public policy. In California, food banks have a tremendous range in size and scope — some are very small, rural

² This description is drawn from the California Association of Food Banks website. <http://www.cafoodbanks.org/about.htm>

operations, while others are very large facilities that store and distribute many millions of pounds of food each year.³

The majority of *Network* local contractors have been public entities such as school districts, local health departments, city governments and/or parks and recreation departments. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2004, CAFB became one of only two organizations to pilot test Non-Profit Incentive Awards (NIA). This project’s overall goal is to improve the quality and nutritive value of food consumed by people with incomes under 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) by (1) providing nutrition education and cooking or food preparation demonstrations with people with low incomes or the emergency food providers serving them at qualifying locations; (2) distributing age and culturally appropriate nutrition education materials; (3) conducting nutrition education and food tastings at produce distribution or tailgate sites; (4) educating the food bank community about nutrition education and healthy eating; and, (5) participating in a broader community of nutrition educators in California and their respective regions.

In the demonstration project’s first year (FFY 2004), eight of CAFB’s members participated in the *Network’s* nutrition education project (see Table 1). Currently, CAFB has nutrition education subcontractors operating in 15 counties statewide. CAFB identified more than \$200,000 in FFY 2004 for general nutrition education and physical activity promotion referred to as “state share”. This amount was eligible for the FSNE federal participation reimbursement. CDPH allocates 50% the federal reimbursement to participating subcontractors and retains 50% of the reimbursement to support related state costs, including a contract with CAFB to administer the matching funds, materials, meetings and other administrative oversight.

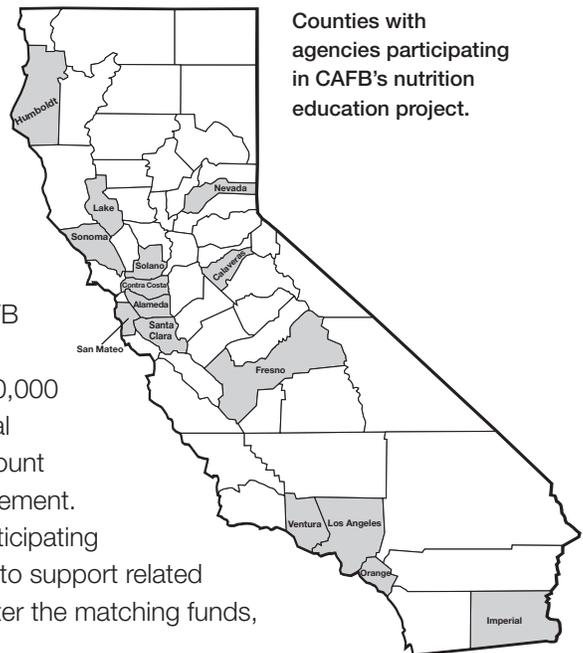


Table 1: Growth in CAFB’s Nutrition Education Project

	Actual FFY 2004	Actual FFY 2005	Actual FFY 2006	Actual FFY 2007	Budgeted FFY 2008
Subcontractors “State Share” [non-federal dollars]	\$214,694	\$251,045	\$531,129	\$677,465	\$934,802
# of food bank or local agency subcontractors	8	9	15	14	14

Varying greatly in size and scale, the 14 participating food banks represent a tremendous infrastructure. *Attachment A* lists CAFB’s nutrition education subcontracting agencies and the counties in which they operate. In some cases, the food banks already had considerable experience with nutrition education, for example Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties (see Box 1).

³ While the term *food bank* is often used to refer to agencies providing food directly to low-income individuals and families, food banks actually provide food to other community-based entities such as food closets, food pantries, shelters and youth organizations that in turn provide food directly to those seeking assistance.

Box 1: Education Materials Resource Center:

Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties (SHFB) is a large food bank serving 328 agencies with 1,051 distribution sites and an average of 176,731 people each month. SHFB has 34 years of commitment to nutrition education and considerable institutional expertise and investment. For example, a Nutrition Resource Center with a tremendous range of educational materials and videos in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Japanese, Russian, Chinese, Korean, and Tagalog are made available to all partner agencies. The center also includes a digital video editing station. The Food Bank’s Community Nutrition Program Manager is a talented videographer who has worked with a variety of local organizations to create educational videos for use with clients.



Photos: Resource Center at the Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo and Santa Clara

III. Barriers to Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Nutrition education program coordinators participating in CAFB’s program were asked: *what do you and others at your organization, who provide nutrition education find to be the top three barriers for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among your low-income clientele?* Representatives from six of the participating local agencies responded.

- **Cost and Availability:** The two most common barriers mentioned by five of the six program representatives were cost and availability. Respondents mentioned the high cost of buying fresh fruits and vegetables and the fact that produce “was not filling”. Some specifically mentioned not only the cost of food but also the cost of transportation to get food. Program respondents also frequently mentioned that fruits and vegetables were often not readily available in the neighborhood or rural area.
- **Other Barriers:** While the other identified barriers were mentioned less often, most have the potential to be addressed, at least in part, through education efforts.
 - **Preparation barriers:** Three of the six program respondents mentioned barriers related to preparation, either that fruit or vegetables required “too much time to prepare” or were “too much trouble to prepare” or people lacked “knowledge of preparation”.

- **Lack of familiarity/cultural barriers:** Two respondents identified either cultural barriers or lack of familiarity as barriers to increasing food bank clients' fruit and vegetable consumption.
- **Perishability:** One of the six respondents identified the perishability of fresh produce as a barrier.
- **Saturation:** One of six respondents felt that food bank clients become "saturated" with a particular food item because it is distributed by all the emergency food banks. So, clients need simple, innovative recipes for how to use these foods.
- **Taste:** One of six respondents believed "taste" was a barrier to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption because food bank clients were used to less healthy and more flavorful foods.
- **Peer pressure:** One of six respondents emphasized, at least for children, "peer pressure", since others' reactions have a very strong influence on the success of education efforts.
- **Too few public forums:** One respondent believed another barrier was the lack of public forums on proper nutrition.

The food banks participating in CAFB's nutrition education program offer their clients, and their communities, services that typically aim to simultaneously address a number of these barriers.

IV. Nutrition Education Strategies

We try to keep our messages simple and achievable, recognizing that many 'healthy' foods (low salt, low sugar, organic, etc.) are out of the price range for the people we serve. We also encourage discussion and the sharing of tips by the people we serve since they are the experts at living on a fixed budget. — Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

The agencies participating in CAFB's demonstration project employ a wide range of nutrition education strategies at food distributions and in the communities they serve. From popular education skits engaging women standing in a produce distribution line to providing education materials to seniors at "brown bag" food distributions, food bank clients are being exposed to the importance of healthy diet and physical activity. This section summarizes the major strategies CAFB's nutrition education subcontracting agencies are using to integrate nutrition education into existing food bank operations and FSNE-eligible sites in their communities. Agency representatives were also asked to identify what nutrition education strategies they believe are most effective, as well as what aspect(s) of their work is/are most exciting or promising.

NUTRITION EDUCATION AND FOOD DISTRIBUTIONS

The food banks and their member agencies incorporate nutrition education into their existing food distribution programs.

With seniors you will always have someone in the group who has knowledge so you can also draw from them. — Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank

Senior Brown Bag Program

The *Senior Brown Bag* Program provides surplus and donated fruits, vegetables, and other items to people at least 60 years old whose incomes are at or below 100% of the SSI/SSP income limits

for blind individuals or couples living independently. It is estimated that more than a quarter of a million pounds of food is distributed in California through this program.⁴ Most of CAFB's nutrition education subcontractors provide nutrition education through this program.



For example:

- Alameda County Community Food Bank adds nutrition education materials to seniors' food bags to promote foods rich in the nutrients that seniors may not be getting enough of in their diets. The food bank staff and volunteers also promote a discussion format with the materials by asking people what they might have learned or how the materials could be improved.
- The nutrition educators, working for Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo and Santa Clara (SHFB), visit a number of program sites, including the *Senior Brown Bag* and lunch programs, *Family Harvest*, and *Kids NOW* backpack sites to provide nutrition education presentations and to answer questions. The nutrition educators also accompany the *Mobile Pantry* and *Produce Mobile* to distribute nutrition education materials. Although the focus is on general nutrition education topics and behaviors, the educators also take a proactive approach to the control of chronic diseases. One creative technique is for trained educators to offer blood pressure monitoring to seniors. This helps to grab their attention and increase their interest in other health and nutrition materials being offered at the table. These materials are often in a variety of different languages to suit their needs.
- The Redwood Empire Food Bank in Sonoma County also adds recipes that have ingredients included in the *Brown Bag* distributions, as well as materials explaining nutrition benefits and nutrition tips. In response to the low utilization of the senior farmers' market coupon program, they have added farmers' market coupons in addition to education materials.

MOBILE PRODUCE DISTRIBUTIONS

Our Mobile Pantry Program is what really excites us and the community. We are the only agency in Fresno that provides nutrition education and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables together!! Other agencies give out information or hold a meeting of 'stake-holders' to discuss the topic of nutrition. We are really excited that we are able to not only talk about nutrition but distribute the fresh product.

– Community Food Bank (Fresno County)

Most of the food banks participating in CAFB's nutrition education program are also participating in CAFB's *Farm to Family* Program. Through a combination of grants and contributions from member food banks, CAFB is able to acquire produce that is distributed to food banks throughout the state. Many food banks are incorporating nutrition education into their mobile pantries or mobile produce distributions that take food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, to community sites.

⁴ California Department of Aging. 2006-2007 Aging Services Data Report. Available at: http://www.aging.state.ca.us/html/whatsnew/Aging_Services_Data_Report.pdf.



Photo: Redwood Empire Food Bank's Megan Furth Harvest Pantry

- Redwood Empire Food Bank offers a mobile food and produce distribution called the *Harvest Pantry*. The program was developed in response to a Roseland Clinic study that documented higher than national average rates of anemia among children under five years of age in the county. A task force including clinic, food bank, county health department and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) staff was formed to develop a nutrition education curriculum to accompany the distribution that incorporates iron rich or fortified foods. The lessons were further augmented by the Harvest Pantry staff coordinator who has a background in popular education and theater (see Box 2). Weekly, the Harvest Pantry serves eight community sites, apartment complexes, a church, a Head Start program, etc., with only one considered “English speaking”. Approximately 80 families participate per site and while there is a waiting list, an estimated 640 families, overall, receive food and education through the program.
- Los Angeles Regional Foodbank has a large, converted beverage truck used for the Rapid Food Distribution Program which is referred to as a “*Farmers’ Market on Wheels.*” The truck’s sides roll-up to provide ready access to the produce selection. The Rapid Food Distribution truck travels to food pantries on days they are open to provide clients with produce and recipes. The produce is pre-packaged based on agencies’ request, and education materials are selected by the food bank’s nutritionist. The program distributes between 400,000 – 600,000 pounds of fresh produce per month.
- The Food Bank of Calaveras County provides mobile produce distributions in this very rural and geographically diverse county one time per month. Approximately, 185 families attend the distributions. Various nutrition education activities are conducted with clients as they wait in line (see Box 3).

Box 2: Popular Education: Use of Skits and Theater

More than 50 women, many with their young children in strollers or holding their mother's hand, watch a skit being put on by the Redwood Empire Food Bank program coordinator and several *promotoras de salud* who, like the audience, are mothers participating in the Healthy Pantry Program. The parking lot is transformed into a "supermarket". A "child" played by a *promotora* begs her "mother" to buy a box of sugary cereal and she throws a temper tantrum when her "mother" instead selects a more healthy option. Other women from the distribution line are invited to play the role of the "mom". The program coordinator asks, "*What strategies can you use when this happens to you?*" The mothers call out suggestions such as "buy both cereals and mix them" and "know what you are going to get before you go to the store and just get those things."

The idea for the skit came from discussions with the women enrolled in the program of what makes it hard to eat healthy food. The discussions generated a list with many factors such as healthy foods being expensive or not available. But, when asked what was the main reason, many women identified the fact that their kids don't want to eat healthy foods. Clients were asked to share tips they use to get their kids to eat healthy together with recipes they use. *Network* nutrition education reinforcement items (NERI) were awarded to those who submit recipes and tips. The program coordinator works with the *promotoras de salud* volunteers to develop lessons that have also included songs and puppets to address other topics such as the importance of family meal time and physical activity.

Box 3: Take a Step to Health

Over a one-year period, Food Bank of Calaveras County staff participated in a coalition of health oriented agencies to develop a series of nutrition education packets. Three different plastic folder/carryalls have been assembled with a variety of nutrition information, incentive items and a behavior change "contract". Each has a large font label indicating the change the individual is "contracting" to make:

1. *I will reduce the amount of sugar and/or fat in my diet.*
2. *I will increase the amount of fruit/vegetables and whole grains in my diet.*
3. *I will increase my physical activity.*

When people sign their contract, they agree to be contacted again in three months time to see how they are doing. Packets are available in English and Russian.

- Much of the nutrition education, such as fliers, provided by the Community Food Bank in Fresno, is linked to their mobile produce pantry program. Given clients' need for produce, the food bank decided to by-pass local agencies and bring produce directly to clients. Originally, they established produce markets in set locations such as parking lots. This was later transformed into a mobile program with several visits per week to community sites such as senior centers, Head Start, and WIC clinics, to distribute approximately 1,000 pounds of fresh produce per week.

CAFB's *Farm to Family* program has seen steady growth and increasing popularity. In 2007, the program distributed 38 million pounds of fresh produce through 45 member food banks as compared to 22 million pounds in 2005, a 73 percent increase in two years. During 2007, more pounds of food were distributed to food bank clients in California through CAFB's *Farm to Family* program than by USDA's Emergency Food Assistance Program. In 2008, over 63 million pounds of fresh produce was

distributed through the program. In declining order based on quantity, the following produce is most frequently distributed through *Farm to Family*: potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, cabbage, tomatoes, mixed produce, stone fruit, watermelons, zucchini, oranges, bananas, green beans, assorted fruit, pineapples, corn on the cob, winter squash, pears, cucumbers, onions, eggplant, and carrots. CAFB and the *Network* are working further refine the nutrition education materials, strategies and evaluation approaches for the produce distribution sites.



Photo: Imperial Valley Food Bank Produce Distribution

NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Our greatest satisfaction has come from working with the school children. They are so excited about tasting new fruits and veggies and are enthusiastic about teaching their parents or grandparents. Their excitement is contagious and makes us work even harder to have a positive impact in our underserved county.

– Imperial Valley Food Bank

Most of the participating food banks are providing nutrition education through their programs specifically designed for children. Several food banks are also operating *Kids Café* programs where they provide free meals and snacks to low income children through a variety of existing after school programs in the children's communities.⁵ Others are participating in *Feeding America's Backpack Program* that give children at schools in low-income communities a bag full of child-friendly foods on Fridays so that they will be well nourished for their return to school on Monday. For example:



Photo: Children participating in food bank afterschool and child nutrition programs.

- Redwood Empire Food Bank implements a *Kids Café* afterschool snack program for 7 to 13-year-olds at four community sites (Boys & Girls Clubs, parks and recreation sites). Volunteers present the education sessions, and the food bank provides all the education materials. They also implement a *Cool Schools* program with approximately 700 students at six low-resource schools. The food bank provides lessons, education materials, recipes and ingredients for food tastings at the after school sites.
- Alameda County Community Food Bank provides nutrition education both at school and afterschool programs to children 5 to 12 years of age. The education includes activities pertaining to USDA's MyPyramid, "25 ways to get fruit and vegetables," and physical activity promotion.
- The Community Food Bank in Fresno County provides nutrition education to students from kindergarten through sixth grade at their *Kids Café* program and for preschoolers at Head Start sites. The nutrition education program coordinator commented that she believes the education at

⁵ Feeding America Kids Café. Available at: http://www.secondharvest.org/how_we_work/programs_we_support/kids_cafe.html.

the *Kids Café* sites is especially effective because the setting offers the opportunity to learn much more than, for example, at a food distribution.

- Imperial Valley Food Bank works with third graders at three low resource elementary schools encouraging fruit and vegetables for good health. They typically visit the school for two to two-and-a-half hours and organize a variety of activities for groups of approximately 20 students. Students go home with a bag of education materials and reinforcement items. The food bank also provides nutrition education that includes puppet shows and taste testing at two preschools. In the summer, they work with 8 to 12 year olds at a summer school day camp. Nutrition education focuses on topics such as healthy foods to eat in the desert heat such as watermelon and water instead of soda.
- Los Angeles Regional Food Bank provides nutrition education including nutrition oriented games at afterschool snack programs involving 500 children per day.
- The nutrition educator working with the Human Resources Council Food Bank in Calaveras County works with a Head Start program as one of her community sites. One activity the kids were especially excited about was an eggplant taste test. The nutrition educator had also prepared eggplant seedlings so these could be distributed to the participating families at the same time.

OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED SITES

In addition to food distribution sites, CAFB's nutrition education subcontracting agencies are providing nutrition education at additional qualifying low-income community venues such as schools, grocery stores, farmers' markets, temporary shelters and preschools. (See Box 4. Allowable Food Stamp Nutrition Education Community Venues).

- **Health Fairs/Festivals/Organized Sporting Events:** During the second half of FFY 2007, the 13 reporting agencies reached over 11,600 FSNE-eligible people at qualifying health fairs, festivals and sporting events.
- **Community Forums:** During this same reporting period, CAFB partners provided nutrition education at over 60 qualifying community forums reaching approximately 2,000 people.
- **Farmers' Markets:** Food for People in Humboldt County provides nutrition education at FSNE-eligible farmers' markets. Overall, CAFB's nutrition education subcontractors reported conducting education at 33 farmers' market events, in qualified low-income census tracts, reaching approximately 1,370 people between April and September, 2007.
- **Grocery Stores:** Nutrition education and promotional events were also held at 18 qualifying grocery store sites reaching just over 150 people in 2007.
- **Migrant Farmworker Camps:** Several of CAFB nutrition education partners began providing nutrition education at migrant farmworker camps in 2008.

Box 4. FSNE Allowable Community Venues

FSNE funding is solely for food stamp participants, likely or potentially eligible low-income people with household incomes at or below 185% Federal Poverty Level (FPL). As described in USDA's FSNE Plan Guidance, audiences for FSNE include the following categories:

- **Certified eligibles:** Includes persons currently participating in or applying for the Food Stamp Program or residing in a FSP household.
- **Likely eligibles by income and location:** Persons who are not certified eligibles but who have gross incomes \leq 130% FPL such as persons referred by WIC, Medicaid or Child Nutrition Programs. Persons receiving FSNE at FSP/TANF offices, public housing or at food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens in conjunction with the distribution of foods to needy persons at these sites.
- **Potentially eligible by site/location:** Persons at venues when it can be documented that the location/venue serves generally low-income persons where at least 50% of persons have gross incomes \leq 185% FPL such as a) census tract areas where at least 50% of persons have gross incomes \leq 185% FPL, b) schools where at least 50% of children receive free and reduced priced meals, and c) stores either located in eligible census tracts or having average monthly FSP redemptions of \$50,000 or more. CAFB contractors receive a list of all qualifying schools and census tracts at the beginning of each fiscal year.

V. Observations on Promising Strategies

The nutrition program coordinators and educators shared many observations about the type of nutrition education materials and strategies they were finding worked best. While there was not always full agreement on the value of particular strategies, the opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned was a benefit of participating in CAFB's program that was repeatedly mentioned.

EFFECTIVE EDUCATION MATERIALS

There was general agreement among program coordinators and educators that "good" or "effective" nutrition education materials were ones that were eye catching and highly readable with practical information, recipes and strategies. According to the program coordinators:

- *Large print, brief messages in colorful, reader-friendly format are most effective since many of our clients have low literacy or poor eyesight and are not eager readers.* – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- *Brochures with general information and menus. Messages are simple and short with recipes and suggestions for activities. Fact Sheets - Compilation of information for easy access.* – Inland Valley Food Bank
- *Keep it simple: 4th to 8th grade reading level. Do not overwhelm your audience with handouts; keep it to three or fewer handouts. Don't use lots of technical terms, that is speak their 'language'. Be realistic.* – Alameda County Community Food Bank

But one educator also shared a caution,

- *The information must be clear, but you don't want to gear down the materials. People want to learn. There are practical, simple ways of adding healthy food. If you are having Ramen Noodles, add a cut up carrot.*
– Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)



As mentioned above, educators also select materials that complement the food being distributed.

- *Recipes are tailored to what is in the commodity bag each month. We look for simple recipes with a minimum of ingredients that include fruits and vegetables.* – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- *We try to promote the use of free and low cost Food Bank foods (giving them recipes and showing them how to cook those foods). We use warehouse foods for our nutrition workshops that our clients have access to at the agencies.* – Alameda County Community Food Bank
- *Education on how to make canned food healthier e.g. rinse canned vegetables to get rid of some of sodium* – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

The nutrition educators also look for strategies that will generate people's interest and engagement.

- *Materials that catch someone's interest. Visual. Start a dialogue and then go on to something else.*
– Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)
- *We are fortunate to have a staff member with a degree in early childhood education. She has limitless ideas about the best ways to influence young children and to help them change eating habits. She designs much of our handouts, plans appropriate games that the kids love, teaches the rest of us what to do, and keeps all of us at the Imperial Valley Food Bank excited about what we are doing.* – Imperial Valley Food Bank
- *Simplification of the messaging with recommendations regarding target audiences for specific messages would help us focus. There is so much to share that we frequently lose our audiences as we move from label reading to portion size to phytochemicals to food groups.* – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

Taste tests were specifically mentioned by several, but not all, program respondents as an effective activity.

- *I like to use taste tests. People really "get it" when there is a taste test.* – Human Resources Council Food Bank in Calaveras County
- *Taste tests work well. It is important to expose kids to fruits and vegetables because it can lead to kids requesting their parents to buy the fruits and vegetables they've tried.* – Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo
- *We have tried taste testing, but we do not feel it is worth the added effort.* – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

Several educators also mentioned the value of videos as education tools. As mentioned earlier, the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo's nutrition educator has worked with various organizations and young people to create educational videos (see Box 1).

- *Videos are also effective to teach because some people learn better with visual presentations. It can include the same basic information as a brochure, but in different format.* – Imperial Valley Food Bank
- *An approach I'm excited about is videos. A generic video can be dubbed into different languages to reach people in different language groups. It is also an education material that can be created and given to member agencies to help them with their education efforts. Videos can be shown at shelters, workshops, etc. to use videos you have to get people to sit down but it can also be used together with a live presentation.* – Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara & San Mateo

Program coordinators and the food bank clients also valued the nutrition education reinforcement items (NERI) that have been available through the *Network*.

- *Tangible and useable items like, lunch box coolers, water bottles, canvas tote bags, kitchen items. These all work because they are reusable and enjoyable for the clients.* – Community Food Bank (Fresno County)
- *Access to NERI items are useful for the nutrition education activities and food bank uses them in many ways.* – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

At the California Association of Food Bank's request, a specific reinforcement item, a produce bag, was developed for use with CAFB's *Farm to Family* program and member agencies produce distributions. Unfortunately, the produce bag and many other *Network* reinforcement items are currently under State agency moratorium and cannot be distributed to CAFB and its member agencies.⁶ While in use, the produce bags were helpful in distributing produce, as well as, carrying a message that promoted fruit and vegetable consumption. The produce was more attractive to food banks' member agencies and was easier for clients to transport (see cover photo). Additionally, they kept produce fresh better than donated bags used by most food banks.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Some of the program coordinators identified the programs that afforded the opportunity for sustained interaction with clients as among their most effective.

- *The classes or community events [such as produce distributions] that have weekly education are our most effective strategies. Because of the consistency, seeing the same people each week, a relationship can be built.* – Redwood Empire Food Bank
- *Our Kids Café is one of our most effective strategies because there is an opportunity to learn much more in that setting.* – Community Food Bank (Fresno County)

⁶ As part of the Department's continuing efforts to minimize lead hazards and based upon recommendations of the Department of Toxic Substances Control and program guidance from CDPH January 28, 2008, promotional items distributed by CDPH programs will require testing for lead if the items meet any of the following criteria: (1) Items intended for children under age 6 years; (2) Items with components small enough to be ingested by children; (3) Items that contact food or beverages; (4) Items with paints or coatings; and, (5) Items with vinyl components. CDPH will also continue the moratorium on metal items. Policies and procedures are being developed that will provide details on how such items will be tested.

Program coordinators' comments also highlight the importance of relevancy and integrating their education efforts with their other services to address clients' immediate resource limitations.

- *Interaction, immediacy, relevancy – tackling issues is a matter of relevance.* – Redwood Empire Food Bank
- *Our mobile pantry is one of our most effective strategies because of the distribution of healthy foods.* – Community Food Bank (Fresno County)
- *We strive to get as much donated food as possible. We solicit help from our business partners to support our nutrition outreach programs. We are seeing small but effective responses.* – Imperial Valley Food Bank
- *We are focusing on changing forces to improve the quality of donations to the Food Bank.* – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)



VI. Partnerships

What I love best is the collaboration. For example with our Cool Schools program we are reaching children and using food banking skills and partnering with people who have the skills to provide the education. – Redwood Empire Food Bank

We have built partnership with local health coalitions, hospitals, state agencies such as WIC, our agencies and schools. – Community Food Bank (Fresno County)

Creating partnerships was another effective strategy mentioned by the participating food banks for strengthening their nutrition education programs. Food bank administrators and program directors are typically very skilled at creating community partnerships to make their programs work. Operations very much depend upon community volunteers who are committed to the food banks' goals and who are willing to donate their time. The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano uses partnerships to improve their program in a variety of ways.

We look for appropriate materials from other organizations because copying and printing materials in color is beyond our budget. We work with UC Cooperative Extension and Solano County Nutrition Services to offer workshops to train agency volunteers. We receive display materials in Solano County that are developed by their dietetic interns. We distribute a newsletter developed and printed by Solano County Nutrition Services. – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo has a partnership with San Jose State University's Nutrition Department. Community nutrition students undertake internships with the Food Bank to provide nutrition education at several food distribution sites. The Food Bank also convenes a Nutrition Advisory Committee that meets quarterly and includes representatives from the University of California Cooperative Extension, the County Health Department, WIC and Senior Nutrition of Santa Clara. The meetings provide a forum to discuss Food Bank issues as well as solicit additional nutrition and health expertise for the Food Bank programs. The meetings also foster dialogue toward the exchange of local nutrition and health trends.

The director of the Human Resources Council (HRC) in Calaveras County emphasized that, especially in rural areas, partnership and collaboration are essential. HRC has several strong collaborations, each with particular benefits. They share nutrition education materials with UC Davis Cooperative Extension to ensure they are providing reinforcing messages and they also coordinate with their nutrition education staff to ensure coverage at the various mobile food distribution sites and community events. UC Cooperative Extension, like WIC, another of the food bank's partners, has encouraged the food bank to give more attention to the nutritional quality of the foods they are distributing. HRC also collaborates closely with their county's WIC program.



Photo: Nutrition educator with the HRC food bank in Calaveras County at a community site

With other funding, HRC staff also traveled to Washington, DC to testify to the US Congress about their experience pilot testing a fresh fruit and vegetable \$5 voucher program for WIC moms. The pilot was instrumental in showing that such vouchers would be successful and in supporting the nationwide reformulation of the WIC Food Package occurring in FFY 2009 (see Box 5). HRC was also a member of the Connecting Hands Collaborative. One of this collaborative's projects was a series of pledge oriented educational packets (see Box 3).

Urban based food banks also had developed strong networks. The nutrition educator with the Alameda County Community Food Bank explained,

"We partner with Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative, Bay Area Regional Nutrition Network and California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, 5 a Day, Alameda County Public Health, and Oakland Unified School District. I have created a strong network of people with these organizations as well as with others who attend these meetings on a regular basis. We exchange nutrition education materials, names and numbers, help each other with workshops and fairs, etc."

Box 5: Mother Infant Child Harvest (MICH) Program, Calaveras County

The county-wide First Five Program provided support to HRC in collaboration with *Mother Lode WIC* to increase access to and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables through a voucher program. WIC moms were given \$5 vouchers each month for purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at grocery stores throughout the county. The program was considered to be very successful with redemption rates of 88%; a higher rate than even some WIC commodities and higher than the farmers' market voucher program.

HRC staff attributes the program's success to: (1) upfront work with retailers so that they understood the program and were enthusiastic about it; (2) with WIC clients, they emphasized that the client herself would have a choice; the voucher was referred to as a "gift certificate" and many clients used it to try new fruits and vegetables and even in some cases let children pick what they want to try; and, (3) the nutrition education done with the WIC moms. Currently, the MICH program focuses on children in the 0 to 5 age group, although the food bank would like to see it expanded to older age groups.

Several food banks such as Alameda County Community Food Bank also play an important training role for their member agencies by hosting their own conferences and trainings (see Box 6).

Box 6: Educating Others

Several food banks offer nutrition conferences and/or trainings for its member agencies, including food pantries and soup kitchens. Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) hosts an annual nutrition conference, Banking on Good Nutrition, for their member agencies. Conferences include smaller break-out sessions where participants are able to learn about various topics, ranging from making healthier beverage choices to local physical activity venues. Most of the attendees work or volunteer at ACCFB's member agencies. As these people also choose the foods their agency will distribute in the community, it is expected that the sessions will result in the selection of healthier foods and greater encouragement of clients to also make healthier choices. Additionally, ACCFB models healthy eating at the conference by having all attendees participate in a food demonstration and providing healthy meals that feature fresh fruits and vegetables.

The local agencies also appreciate the resources, ideas and networking opportunities that result from their CAFB membership and *Network* participation. For example,

- *We like the contact and collaboration with other food banks. Our questions get answered and we also have access to great networking opportunities. The resource is the group. Because of our partnership with CAFB we also had the opportunity to join the Network. This gave us the resources to hire a full-time nutrition educator. We also like attending the Network conference. There are so many nutrition resources and at the conference we are able to find out about various resources that are available.* – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)
- *It has guided me, funded us, given us important information to pass on to our clients, and the program managers have given excellent support when necessary.* – Alameda County Community Food Bank

While several of the participating food banks had constructive feedback and recommendations about *Network* policies and requirements (see recommendations section), general appreciation was expressed for the nutrition materials that could be accessed through the *Network* such as in the comment below.

The materials are helpful – no cost, professional, looks nice and has the message on it. We are proud to be part of a statewide effort. – Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo

VII. Impact of CAFB's Nutrition Education Demonstration Project

People do want to be healthy. They are seeing the news about obesity/overweight. People want better health for their children and themselves. There is hope. – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

Program coordinators described how participating in CAFB's nutrition education program had impacted the nutrition education clients were receiving and how it affects the food banks' emphasis on nutrition. Most commonly, participating agency staff described how participating in the program had allowed them to expand and improve the nutrition education they were providing.

- *Participation in this project has increased our efforts and enthusiasm with regard to sharing nutrition education materials with the people we come in contact with; the people we serve receive information more frequently.* – Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- *We've been able to introduce people to foods they didn't know they liked (coconut, jicama, kiwi) and share the idea that just because you are low-income doesn't mean you can't still eat healthy. People are surprised. They get new ideas and new ways of cooking. We are able to give fun ideas to make healthy eating accessible for people with low incomes.* – Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

In a few cases, participating food banks, such as the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano and Inland Empire Food Bank, are attempting to measure client impacts through questionnaires or pre and post surveys conducted with classes. However, most often client impacts are anecdotal.

- *When I walk on the campuses of elementary, junior high and high schoolers, I see the evidence of NERI. When children or seniors see us around town (not working) they remember us, 'the 5 a Day Lady' is what they say!! They tell me 'I am eating more fruits!' or 'I tried that kiwi' ... We know that we are making a difference!!!* – Community Food Bank (Fresno County)
- *Often in the workshops, people raise their hands and have the correct answer to nutrition questions before I have taught them anything. That is inspiring. Something good is happening out there.* – Alameda County Community Food Bank
- *Time will tell how effective our work is — we are just beginning. However, the feedback we have received has been extremely positive, and we are proud of our work. We are changing attitudes about the importance of proper nutrition. We hope to see a reduction in childhood obesity in Imperial County, but it is too early to know those results. So far the only thing we can prove is that our staff is on fire to improve people's nutrition. We think it is working.* – Imperial Valley Food Bank

IMPACT ON THE FOOD BANK(S)

The [Network] program has made us look at our own operations and has caused us to stop accepting unhealthy donations like cola drinks. We have become aware of the vital importance of proper nutrition and work hard to acquire and distribute foods found on the Food Pyramid. – Imperial Valley Food Bank

Several of the participating food banks also commented that the increased emphasis on nutrition education had led to other changes at the food banks that made healthy eating for clients, in general, a higher priority. Certainly, the issue of the nutritional value of emergency food is a topic that is receiving greater attention and action within the food banking community in general. However, several participating agencies mentioned that the CAFB nutrition education program helped to catalyze or build support for a greater attention to nutritional quality in the food they distribute.

- *Everyone is more aware of the need to provide nutritious items. We analyze our inventory regularly and take steps to increase nutritionally dense components. Our board has asked us to educate member agencies on the connection between soda and child overweight and is suggesting we educate the companies producing calorie-only food about the problems their products create as well.* — Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- *The staff and volunteers show interest in nutrition and health. The management team is interested*

in bringing in healthier foods so we can pass them on to the community. — Alameda County Community Food Bank

- *Currently, nearly a half of what Redwood Empire Food Bank distributes is produce. Healthy food is now a message and a goal. The first thing we did when we got the CNN [Network] grant was ban soda.* — Redwood Empire Food Bank
- *List of requested foods has changed. Now, we want sugar-free/lower sugar cereals, high protein foods, etc.* — Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

Food bank representatives also explain the institutional and economic challenges presented by these types of healthy changes, as well as the potential rewards.

- *The situation is the food bank has a small amount of money and a lot of people who need their help. Food banks are similar to a low-income family wanting/needing to stretch their food dollar. But, importance of food quality has increased over the years. Giving clients 'junk food' is treating them like "junk people". People must have healthy foods to be productive and contributing members of the community.* — Human Resources Council Food Bank (Calaveras County)

Interestingly, one of the participating food banks credited their increased focus on nutrition with increased funding support.

- *A major highlight was a 40% increase in our United Way support. For years we have asked for more money, but only this year when we were able to show our 'new' work to promote better nutrition have we had success. Our community is sensitive to the problems our low-income children face, and when we talk about our work with nutrition education, we are finding enthusiastic donors.* — Imperial Valley Food Bank

Box 7: Communities of Excellence—Food bank(s) and emergency food outlets

The *Networks Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX³)* is a program planning approach that examines lower-income communities in relation to a variety of obesity prevention community indicators and assets. CX³ defines what a community should “look like” in order to help prevent chronic diseases related to overweight and obesity. One of CX³'s 12 Neighborhood Environment indicators is “*Food banks and emergency food outlets actively provide and promote high quality fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods*”. The CX³ survey assesses the foods that food banks and emergency food outlets provide (fruits and vegetables, other healthy foods, unhealthy foods) as well as their policies, and programs related to healthy food. Local health departments pilot tested this survey in Alameda, Kern, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, and Riverside at 5 food banks (4 were CAFB members). Examples of some of the findings were: food banks in 3 of the 5 counties provided fresh produce every day, and the other two only a few times a month or twice a month; in 4 of 5 counties the food bank provided soda either never, rarely, or once a month; in 2 counties the food bank had no nutrition education program and the same 2 did not try to purchase foods low in salt, fat and hydrogenated oils. Conversely, 2 food banks were notable in terms of their efforts to evaluate the nutritional value of distributed foods and promote healthy eating among clients through nutritional education and promotional efforts such as tips for food preparation and newsletters. The local health departments planned to use the survey results to identify actions that could be taken at the local level to further support healthy eating environments.

VIII. Recommendations

The food banks and local agencies participating in CAFB's nutrition education program provide their clients with a tremendous range of nutrition education opportunities. At each of the participating agencies, staff commitment, skill, and enthusiasm are evident and truly impressive. For food banks the importance of healthy eating and physical activity are issues of growing concern and priority.

Several of the food banks described plans to expand their nutrition education activities or expressed a desire to augment the number of nutrition professionals on staff. Food banks are also working hard to increase the healthy food donations that they “get and give,” and some mentioned a specific desire to see improvement in the nutritional quality of food available for purchase through the United State's Department of Agriculture's Emergency Food Assistance Program, e.g. toward “healthy fruits and vegetables instead of chocolate pudding and instant dehydrated potatoes”.

This case study also helped identify recommendations for strengthening the project, especially in terms of sharing, networking and training opportunities, nutrition education materials and strategies, policies, reporting requirements and evaluation options.

Recommendation 1: Continue and augment sharing, networking, and training opportunities for participating food banks.

Nutrition education staff of participating agencies expressed an appreciation for the sharing and networking opportunities provided through CAFB's *Network* project. Individuals' comments indicated these opportunities should continue, and specific approaches were suggested. Some comments included:

- *We would welcome opportunities to learn from our cohorts. We have no desire to reinvent any wheels and appreciate the face-to-face meetings with our food banks.*
- *Have food banks share more of their resources with one another.*
- *Create a website to share information and resources among California food banks*
- *Develop a binder of materials that would be searchable by topic.*
- *High quality, color, bilingual materials designed for populations with low literacy that inspire people to try preparing new foods with California fruits and vegetables would be most welcome.*
- *We would like to have an easily-accessible contact person to answer questions and to keep us informed – sort of our own, on-call professional.*
- *Opportunities to have more training.*

Although CAFB plans each year to organize an annual meeting for the nutrition education coordinators, lack of funding has prevented this from happening every year. While increasing the frequency of these meetings is an option, once relationships are built, as suggested there are other avenues such as web sites and possibly a listserv for sharing materials within the group. Sharing existing materials would be



Squash ready for distribution

especially important for education approaches such as recipes for the common commodity foods that are specific to participating food banks.

Because many of the participating food banks are providing nutrition education through programs that offer the opportunity for repeat contacts with the same audience, there is also the potential to utilize materials which engage clients in a manner more focused on behavior change than information distribution through, for example, sequenced lessons, ongoing dialogue, skills development, social support and problem solving.

Other *Network* contractors and the *Fruit, Vegetable, and Physical Activity Campaigns and Programs* have also developed materials that the food banks might consider incorporating into their programs. For example, most of the food banks are implementing child-focused programs and should be made aware of the variety of resources available through the *Network*.

- **Children’s Power Play! Campaign:** The comments of several participating food banks indicate that at least some are already using *Power Play!* materials that are designed for students in the 4th and 5th grade. However, one food bank commented that they had had difficulties ordering these materials.
- **After School Resource Program:** Given the increased attention to using after school programs as a venue for nutrition oriented education, the *Network* has contracted with the Center for Collaborative Solutions (CCS) to provide technical assistance and resources to after school programs at qualifying school sites. With *Network* and Packard Foundation support, CCS has developed a guide called “Developing Exemplary Practices in Nutrition and Physical Activity in Afterschool Programs” available on their website (www.ccscenter.org). More opportunities for diffusing these approaches are needed.
- **Harvest of the Month (HOTM) – Growing Healthy Children Tool Kit:** After several years of varied local implementations, HOTM has been introduced and made available statewide. The toolkit features 12 California grown fruits and vegetables, one for each month, and is comprised of four key elements: Educator Newsletters, Family Newsletters, Menu Slicks and Press Release Templates. Especially for food banks that are already convinced of the benefits of taste-testing opportunities, HOTM could be adapted to *Kids Café* or other educational settings.

Other *Network*-sponsored materials that might be of interest to food bank members are those developed by the *African American Campaign*, *Latino Campaign*, and particularly the *Retail Program*. Over the last year, the *Network* has also developed two educational DVDs, one for use in food stamp offices and another included in mailings to low-income households. These DVDs might be of interest to food banks who have the capability to play videos in waiting rooms or resource areas or who are currently using videos in their education efforts with adults.

In addition, for food banks conducting classes with adults, the USDA released a four-session nutrition education curriculum designed for food stamp recipients called “Loving Your Family and Feeding Their Future”. The curriculum also includes an educator’s guide and various handouts available in Spanish and English.

Network and CAFB staff should determine the approach for sharing these materials that would be most convenient for participating food banks. Program coordinators might appreciate being sent

hard copies of each of the major educational resources with the opportunity to order more. *Network* representative(s) could also be invited to profile specific education materials at a CAFB-organized meeting.

The *Network* also sponsors statewide trainings and collaborative groups that can be a resource for member agencies. For example, a number of state-sponsored trainings are held on a variety of topics from youth engagement, to the “art of training”, media spokesperson training, and community health leadership training. One of the participating food banks specifically expressed an interest in additional financial training for staff working with this aspect of the program and/or a training on “How to Stretch Your Program Dollar”. The *Network* does provide periodic financial trainings, and has begun to offer others on sustainability, and it would be important to ensure CAFB subcontracting agencies are aware of these opportunities and budget for attending them.

In addition, the state is divided into 11 *Regional Networks* that also provide trainings and collaborative meetings. While food bank staff are pressed for time, these *Regional Networks* can be another source of inspiration, resources and partnership. Some food banks such as Alameda County Community Food Bank have been very active in the *Network’s* Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative.

Recommendation 2: Continue to augment nutrition education materials and determine whether the *Network’s* distribution mechanism could better serve the needs of food banks with large member networks.

Because food banks and their member agencies provide education to such a diverse range of clients, they require materials for a great diversity of ethnic/language groups and all age groups from preschool to senior citizens. Several food banks expressed a desire to expand their educational efforts with specific food bank clients – such as Native American populations, farmworkers, teens – and increase their language capacity, with materials in additional language such as Vietnamese, especially for seniors, and Tagalog. One food bank requested additional nutrition education materials that address nutrition topics beyond fruits and vegetables. While they appreciated the importance of increased fruit and vegetable consumption, they felt other nutrition issues should also be addressed. Again, *Network* and CAFB staff should develop a strategy for responding to these requests for additional topics and languages. A simple online survey might be done to determine what additional needs for topics, languages and age groups are shared by multiple subcontracting agencies.

One food bank representative expressed an interest in nutrition education for their board and staff. Another expressed the opinion that their organization would be more successful providing effective nutrition education if their food bank had a more “aggressive” worksite wellness policy and encouraged physical activity breaks in the workplace.

The *Network’s* *Worksite Program* and its resources such as the *California Fit Business Kit* and *Take Action! Employee Wellness Program* might also be of interest. The purpose of the *Worksite Program* is to empower low-wage workers to consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and enjoy physical activity every day. The *Worksite* materials might be useful for ideas for the food banks’ own worksite wellness programs.

Some participating food banks, especially the larger agencies, requested “more”, especially bilingual materials, in terms of volume and assistance with their distribution. As explained by the program coordinator with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano:

Nutrition education falls through the cracks whenever there is a shortfall in volunteers, personnel or time. Any help we could get in streamlining the delivery of printed information and posters to food pantries or programs would enhance the dissemination of the message. We do not have the staff or the funding to disseminate materials to all of our 80-plus food pantries and 50 food distribution sites regularly. ...facilitating their distribution through UPS or the mail system would be of great benefit.

The *Network* currently has an online material ordering system for contractors. However, very few contractors are similar to CAFB with a statewide coordinating agency working with over a dozen subcontractors which in turn have a network of hundreds of member agencies. *Network* materials must also be rationed since the amount of product available to CAFB is less than the number of people served by even one of their nutrition education contractors. Whether, and how, materials could be directly sent to food bank member agencies is an area that *Network* and CAFB staff should explore.

Recommendation 3: *Network*, CAFB and participating food bank staff will need to work together to adjust to the new statewide policies governing nutrition education reinforcement items (NERI).

As previously described, the California Department of Public Health's policies governing the distribution of nutrition education reinforcement items, which are based upon recommendations from the Department of Toxic Substances Control and more recently by national concerns about a variety of chemicals or contaminants in consumer products, especially those for children or used with food, have been impacted by CDPH's initial efforts to minimize lead hazards. Access to NERI was a benefit of participating in the *Network* that was widely valued by the participating food banks. *Network* and CAFB staff will need to continue to work together to adjust to the new statewide policies. In addition, as policies for new NERI are further defined, there is an opportunity for staff with the *Network*, CAFB and participating agencies to suggest additional items that would work well in food bank venues and with food bank clients. For example, one of the participating agencies expressed a desire for more materials such as sandwich boards and nutrition curriculum that is geared to outdoor use.

Recommendation 4: Engage USDA in dialogue regarding how the current Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) policy regarding volunteer time, and potentially donated food, hinders the food banks from growing their nutrition education program.

Many of the participating food banks would like to hire a nutritionist or additional nutrition education personnel, but they are constrained by their ability to "grow" their programs. Interestingly, one of the factors that constrain food banks' efforts is the fact that they depend on volunteers' time and donated items to carry out their work. FSNE operates as a reimbursement program for actual allowable expenses and FSNE policy does not allow volunteer time, or donated items, used for nutrition education to "count" toward contractors' allowable expenses. For example, teacher time spent conducting nutrition education at a FSNE-qualified school setting and a taste-testing using purchased food would be eligible for federal reimbursement. But, similar nutrition education provided by food bank volunteers or taste tests using donated foods are not be reimbursable.

While the rationale for these policies is clear, the implications to food banks for maintaining and growing their FSNE programs are likely underappreciated. Because food banks and their member agencies are ideal agencies for reaching the intended FSNE audience, the *Network* should engage in dialogue with USDA, CDSS and CAFB to consider how the current policies adversely affect food banks and whether

any allowance or adjustment is possible to allow food banks to capture volunteer hours toward state share.

Recommendation 5: Look for opportunities for streamlining programmatic reporting.

The *Network's* reporting requirements, activity tracking, and financial documentation requirements are an issue for several of the participating food banks. Staff of one food bank stated that the *Network's* reporting requirements were “25,000 times worse than other funding sources”. While this agency was relatively new to the program and they were finding the task getting easier over time, one of their challenges was that the *Network* requires a lot of different types of information that are not available from one source. Mid-year changes in the tracking methodology also caused confusion.

Because FSNE is a federal program with very specific guidelines, there is, at this time, no flexibility in certain aspects of the reporting requirements. However, the *Network* and CAFB staff should work with member food banks to identify opportunities for streamlining, simplifying and/or automating, wherever possible. For example, CAFB and *Network* staff recently revised the program reporting forms so that they solely focused on the food banks' nutrition education scope of work while, at the same time, providing information required by the *Network*-wide reporting system for all contractors. However, there are likely other opportunities for streamlining. For example, one of the food banks explained that their member agencies do not like to submit session sign-in sheets because they include individuals' names. Since names are not necessary, and arguably are not desirable to maintain, there are other more acceptable methods for tracking program services.

Over the next two years, the *Network*, like all FSNE funded programs, will need to report according to USDA's new and uniform Education Administration Reporting System (EARS). The *Network* is currently considering how the new reporting requirements will impact the existing system. *Network* and CAFB staff will need to jointly explore how changes can best be implemented in a manner that both meets the reporting requirements and participating agencies' circumstances.

Recommendation 6: Improve Outcome/Impact Evaluation.

As with many multi-faceted educational programs, assessing the impact of the food banks' education efforts is challenging. From their interactions, health educators believe the nutrition education activities are valued by clients and staff and are making a difference. As documented by this case study report, participating food banks are already making organizational changes with the potential for long-term positive behavioral and community impact through a variety of different approaches, e.g., institutional and environmental changes such as increasing distribution of healthy foods as well as direct nutrition education with food bank clients. However, without systematic assessment, it is difficult to know how much difference the education is making. One promising option that is being considered would be to evaluate the nutrition education being provided at produce distributions.

While the focus of the FSNE-funded efforts is certainly the impact of the education, the food banks offer the opportunity to test the potential of education when it is incorporated into programs that also increase clients' immediate access to healthy foods. Evaluation of the nutrition education efforts should also incorporate the larger food bank context and the types of institutional and environmental changes that are being made.

IX. Conclusion

The food banks and local agencies participating in CAFB's nutrition education program provide their clients with a tremendous range of nutrition education opportunities. Commitment, skill and enthusiasm are truly impressive and evident among participating food bank staff. For food banks and their member agencies, the importance of healthy eating and physical activity are issues of growing concern and priority.

CAFB and its member agencies represent a strong, coordinated and large scale infrastructure with tremendous outreach to low-income residents ideal for achieving the *Network's* goals. Through non-FSNE funding and strategic partnerships, CAFB has also greatly increased FSNE-eligible Californians' access to fresh produce which, of course, reinforces and supports their FSNE-funded education efforts. CAFB and the *Network* should continue to work together to identify specific trainings, materials, systems changes as well as collaborations with other *Network* contractors that will further support CAFB member agencies efforts and success.

A limitation of this case study was that it was completed before the current economic downturn or recession that was widely recognized in the fall of 2008. The critical role CAFB and its member agencies play in community food security and health has only heightened with the increased demand for their services. Through their multiple and reinforcing programs — such as, produce distribution, food stamp outreach and nutrition education — food banks continue to innovate how best to meet their clients' immediate needs, as well as, contribute to their longer-term food security and health.

Attachment A: List of the California Association of Food Bank's (CAFB) Food Stamp Nutrition Education subcontractors and the counties in which they operate—FFY 2009

Agency	County
1. Alameda County Community Food Bank	Alameda
2. Human Resources Council	Calaveras
3. Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano	Contra Costa and Solano
4. Community Food Bank	Fresno
5. Fresno Metro Ministry	Fresno
6. Food For People	Humboldt
7. Imperial Valley Food Bank	Imperial
8. Lake County Community Action Agency	Lake
9. Los Angeles Regional Food Bank	Los Angeles
10. Food Bank of Nevada County	Nevada
11. Community Action Partnership Orange County	Orange
12. Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties	San Mateo and Santa Clara
13. Redwood Empire Food Bank	Sonoma
14. FOOD Share, Inc.	Ventura

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their appreciation to California Association of Food Banks' (CAFB) member food banks for sharing their experience and insight. Special thanks to Billie Westernoff and Bonnie Acosta of Human Resources Council Food Bank in Calaveras County, Gail Atkins and Tonya Osinkosky of Redwood Empire Food Bank, Alan Roth and Susan Takalo of Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties for graciously hosting site visits and allowing the authors to observe nutrition education activities.

This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health, *Network for a Healthy California*, with funding from the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program). These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. In California, food stamps provide assistance to low-income households, and can help buy nutritious foods for better health. For food stamp information, call 877-847-3663. For important nutrition information visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

The views expressed in this case study are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the California Department of Public Health, collaborating organizations or funders.

