

Virginia Family Nutrition Program

Annual Report Overview



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INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Family Nutrition Program is a program within Virginia Cooperative Extension that extends the land-grant education and outreach mission of Virginia Tech by offering a comprehensive collection of resources, educational programs, and services across the Commonwealth to improve the health of families. The motto of the Virginia Family Nutrition Program is *Eat Smart, Move More*.

The Virginia Family Nutrition Program has a specific focus of addressing food security and the prevention of costly chronic diseases. Our commitment to finding real solutions for our communities is showcased through a variety of programs and initiatives that impact community health.

The Virginia Family Nutrition Program has a long 50-year history of improving the lives of seniors, families, and children across Virginia.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Virginia Family Nutrition Program offers different approaches to achieve its goals to *Eat Smart, Move More*, based on communities' and partners' needs:



Educational programs to empower individuals to make steps to improve health



Resources and assistance to partners to promote healthy eating and movement



Community-based initiatives to increase the availability of affordable, nutritious foods

PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- Schools
- Faith-based organizations
- Senior centers
- Farmers markets
- Free clinics
- WIC
- Food pantries

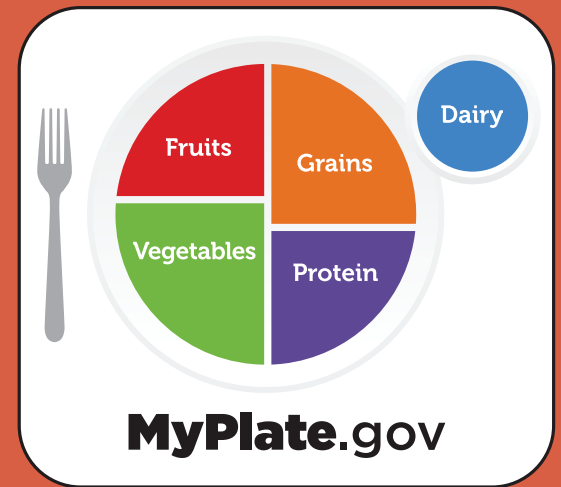


This report highlights some, not all, of our successes and achievements from 2024.



PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH SUPPORT A HEALTHY FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

When children eat well and are physically active, academic achievement and productivity improves. The Virginia Family Nutrition Program offers educational programs for children, 3 to 19 years old, at eligible schools and afterschool programs across Virginia. The hands-on and interactive programs are designed to help children learn skills to eat healthier, based on MyPlate, and to get excited about moving and being physically active. The Virginia Family Nutrition Program also provides resources and technical assistance to teachers to encourage healthy eating and physical activity in their classrooms and schools.

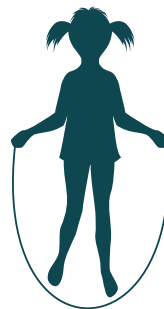


93% of youth in grades 3-5 improved their knowledge or skills to choose foods consistent with federal dietary guidelines

38% of youth in grades 3-5 ate more vegetables

40% of youth in grades 6-8 did more muscle-toning activities

A total of **21,811** youth participated in educational programs in 2024. Youth participants reported they were eating more vegetables and being more physically active, among other impacts.



A total of **8,298** youth were reached through other initiatives and partnerships, including adding physical activities into the school day or during classroom instruction and increasing healthy beverage options.



“I went to lunch between classes. The owner of the restaurant came over to ask how my salad was. I told her I was in between classes at the local elementary school. She asked what I did and I told her. She had two daughters that went to that school and the one came home telling her about the different books on fruit and vegetables this lady was reading to them. She also told her mom about the different fruits and vegetables they were trying. I smiled and said I was that ‘lady.’ She grinned and said thank you for so much for taking the time to teach our children about something that will last them a lifetime.”

- Virginia Family Nutrition Program Educator



Lesson 3: Reduce Added Sugars and Sodium

Reduce Added Sugars and Sodium

Sodium Adds Up

Sodium adds up. Healthy people should limit their sodium intake to **2,300 mg/day**.

- Top slice of bread: 200 mg
- 1 teaspoon mustard: 120 mg
- 1 leaf of lettuce: 2 mg
- 1 slice of cheese: 310 mg
- 6 thin slices of turkey: 690 mg
- Bottom slice of bread: 200 mg

Total = 1,522 mg per whole sandwich

- Cheese pizza (2 small slices) = 1,000 mg
- Potato chips (1 cup) = 310 mg
- Fat-free cream of chicken soup (1 can) = 2,300 mg

Watch for Added Sugars!


Added Sugar Content in Popular Beverages

- 1 bottle (16 oz) = 52 g of sugar
- 1 teaspoon of sugar = 4 g of sugar

= 13 x

Limit added sugars

- Women: >25 grams/day
- Men: >36 grams/day

Healthy Eating and Staying Active as We Age 



“I learned how to read the nutritional labels, how to plan a shopping list, also that I actually like to eat whole wheat pasta. We also learned how to make smoothies, 1 pot lasagna, and a great pumpkin dip.”

– Virginia Family Nutrition Program Participant

“I take you with me when I go shopping, you are sitting on my shoulder saying make sure you read the label and ingredients list.”

– Virginia Family Nutrition Program Participant about a Family Nutrition Program

“I love learning from the different cultures and people I work with. It has been very rewarding when participants come to me and say, ‘Thank you for the classes. I’ve been eating better, or my health has improved because I’ve been more active.’”

– Virginia Family Nutrition Program Educator

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS HELP STRETCH FOOD DOLLARS AND REDUCE RISK OF CHRONIC DISEASE

With the goal of addressing food insecurity, the Virginia Family Nutrition Program focuses on offering educational programs to persons with low incomes who are at highest risk – *parents (or caregivers) of younger children and seniors*. Programs are offered at a wide range of settings, including community centers, faith-based organizations, senior centers, and emergency food assistance sites. The programs focus on skill development and goal setting. Topics include: food resource management to stretch food dollars; nutrition content focused on nutrients of public health concern and chronic disease prevention, such as: increasing fruit and vegetable intake; decreasing sodium and saturated fat; and improving functional movement.



In 2024, **2,993** adults participated in educational programs offered as part of a series. Significant improvements were noted in food resource management, food availability, healthy eating, and physical activity.

- 96%** of participants improved one or more indicators of diet quality
- 95%** of participants improved in one or more indicators of food resource management
- 78%** of participants improved in one or more
- 50%** improved in one or more food security indicators



THE “FREE FRIDGE” PROVIDES FOOD TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Located within the Meadowbrook Public Library in Shawsville, the Free Fridge is a community refrigerator and nutrition assistance program stocked with a variety of fresh food (often locally sourced) free for individuals to take as they need. It is made possible with a partnership of Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Eastmont Community Foundation, Shawsville Ruritan Club, Red Sun Farms, and the Virginia Family Nutrition Program. The library is an ideal location, based on extensive traffic from local community members; it is also located across the street from a store, where many clients purchase groceries, although they do not offer fresh produce. Library staff have been creative, passionate, and flexible about the project.

The Meadowbrook Community library has been a great location and partner to initiate and operationalize the project. Plans to expand Free Fridge to other communities, especially in low food access areas are being considered. Because the library model has been so successful, expansion may occur through new library partnerships, but would be context specific and not limited to libraries.



FREE FRIDGE AT MEADOWBROOK LIBRARY



Free Fridge now serves approximately 80 families each week.



PROGRAMS BUILD TRUST WITH TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

According to the Indian Health Service, American Indians continue to disproportionately experience disease burden and have lower life expectancy than the general population. In Virginia, there are seven federally-recognized tribal organizations -

- Pamunkey
- Chickahominy
- Chickahominy - Eastern Division
- Upper Mattaponi
- Rappahannock
- Nansemond
- Monacan



Tia Powell, Coordinator of Indigenous Initiatives, and Liz Hayes, Educator, Chickahominy Health Fair

In 2024, Virginia SNAP-Ed secured formal partnerships with **3** different tribal organizations.

A total of **51** tribal members participated in educational programs, ranging from children under 5 years old to elder community members.



GROWING THE CAPACITY OF VIRGINIA'S FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers market initiatives continue to be a large effort within the Virginia Family Nutrition Program to support local farmers. Taste tests, cooking demos, and nutrition mini-lessons at farmers markets are employed to help increase food preference and nutrition knowledge pertinent to fresh fruits and vegetables available at the farmers market and improve skills in preparing simple meals and snacks using products found at the farmers markets.

The Virginia Family Nutrition Program also supports farmers markets, in partnership with the Virginia Farmers Market Association (VAFMA) and others within Virginia Cooperative Extension, to offer the Market Manager Certification Course. The Market Manager Certification Course is conducted each January through April via video conferencing, and averages 40 market managers each year. Topics are taught by content experts such as experienced market managers, state agency staff, and emergency management professionals.



A total of 128 Farmers Market Managers have obtained certificates for completion, representing Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Washington, DC.

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“I think it should be a requirement for Virginia farmers markets to have managers who are certified in some fashion in order to operate. I would recommend the course to anyone who is a manager who hasn't taken it; as well as anyone considering managing a farmers market.”

- Farmers Market Manager

“I had zero experience and now I'm confident enough to say I can do this.”

- Farmers Market Manager

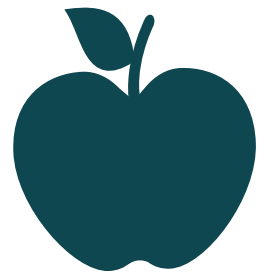


GARDENS-TO-GO BRING FOOD HOME

2024 marked the 5th year of the Gardens-to-Go container gardening program within the Virginia Family Nutrition Program to increase self reliance. Originally the program was created in response to the sudden increase of food insecurity in Virginia due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related job losses. The Virginia Family Nutrition Program quickly responded to these new needs with an increase in garden programming for both youth and adults in low-income communities at partner sites such as schools, food pantries, and clinics. The program proves to be extremely popular with community partners, with the potential for growth in the future. Parents, teachers, and school administrators consistently express their appreciation about the vision and impact of caring for plants and greater awareness of food and nutrition through Gardens-to-Go.

A total of 38 grants were funded in 2024, reaching 1,000 individuals.

The total number of partnerships forged through this program was 24. Partners included food pantries, low-income housing communities, senior centers, schools, and farmers markets.



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“We bought some buckets and planted more vegetables, which saved on groceries once they started producing.”

- Garden to Go Participant

“I had zero experience and now I’m confident enough to say I can do this.”

- Garden to Go Youth Participant



AN ONLINE TRAINING HELPS FOOD PANTRIES AND FOOD BANKS MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Food pantries and food banks are crucial food access points for Virginians experiencing food insecurity. The Federation of Virginia Food Banks is the largest hunger-relief network in Virginia, supporting seven different regional Virginia and Washington, DC food banks through partnerships, resources, data sharing, and awareness campaigns. The Federation of Virginia Food Banks has been a strong ally with the Virginia Family Nutrition Program. With Federation peers, the Virginia Family Nutrition Program and Virginia food bank collaborators created The Learning Center, an online, asynchronous training platform for food pantry staff and volunteers, in 2024. The goal is for this educational program to help train staff and volunteers on a variety of topics, such as volunteer management, food safety, and the nutrition basics to ensure consistency across food pantries and to build capacity too.

At the close of 2024, 14 of 20 courses were completed. The online training modules have the potential of having tremendous reach, given the coverage area of the Federation of Virginia Food Banks.



THANK YOU!

**We appreciate
your partnership.**

