Oregon State University Extension Service

CULTIVATING THE NEXT SEASON

Leadership lessons in preserving impact and growing the future of nutrition education in Oregon in the post-SNAP-Ed era

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Family & Community Health team pictured in Mayin 2025 before the elimination of the S NAP-Ed program.

BACKGROUND

For more than 30 years, Oregon has delivered nutrition and physical activity education through the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). When SNAP-Ed funding was eliminated with the passage of H.R. 1 in July 2025, we made a deliberate decision to use our remaining carryover funds not simply to conclude the program, but to invest in its future legacy. Our goal was to maximize the long-term impact of these resources by strengthening access to nutrition education and healthy living tools for low-income Oregonians for years to come.

EQUIPPING PARTNERS TO SUSTAIN NUTRITION EDUCATION

With an eye toward the future, we invested in a long-term strategy to sustain awareness and use of our signature resource, Food Hero (FoodHeor.org). We partnered with a marketing firm to promote FoodHero.org beyond the SNAP-Ed funding period. The project included the development of a Food Hero Partner Engagement Campaign and a Partner Resource Hub. Together, these resources provide OSU Extension staff and community partners with a sustainable, year-round communication system, customizable marketing materials, and a centralized location for accessing tools, resources, and partner support.

By equipping partners with effective outreach materials and ongoing support, we strengthened their ability to continue sharing trusted nutrition education resources and extending the reach of Food Hero in communities across Oregon for years to come.

EXPANDING FUTURE REACH THROUGH POLICY, SYSTEM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

We provided each of the six Health Extension regional teams with funding to support Innovative Bridge Funding projects. Each region developed a proposal designed to sustain SNAP-Ed priorities through policy, systems, and environmental approaches with the potential for long-term community impact. As a result:

- More than 70 volunteers, community partners, staff members, and community leaders were trained to deliver nutrition education, food preservation, food utilization, and physical activity programs.
- More than 160 schools received garden-enhanced nutrition education kits and support for strengthening connections with local farms.
- More than 50 food pantries and nonprofit organizations received toolkits to support cooking demonstrations, food preservation education, and recipe tasting activities.

By investing SNAP-Ed resources in training, volunteer development, and community toolkits, we created infrastructure that will continue to reach SNAP-eligible audiences well beyond the funding period. These investments strengthen local capacity and support ongoing efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity for years to come.

EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to equipping partners with resources and training, we wanted to ensure that SNAP-Ed funded materials would continue reaching priority audiences long after the program ended. To accomplish this, we coordinated statewide distribution efforts through trusted partner organizations, enabling nutrition education resources to remain accessible to individuals and families across Oregon. Materials were provided in both English and Spanish to maximize accessibility and reach.

- **Oregon Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** received 7,500 copies each of seven Food Hero Monthlies for distribution across all 36 Oregon counties, creating a potential future reach of more than 52,000 individuals.
- **Oregon Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB)** sites statewide (102 locations) received 100 copies each of six Food Hero Monthlies, along with food preservation brochures, resulting in a potential reach of more than 102,000 individuals.
- **Oregon Department of Human Services** offices statewide (104 locations) received 100 copies each of 12 Food Hero Monthlies, creating a potential future reach of more than 104,000 individuals.
- **Oregon Harvest for Schools** partners received 2,000 copies of seven Food Hero resources designed to encourage the selection and consumption of Oregon-grown produce, with an estimated future reach of 14,000 individuals.

Through these strategic partnerships, we extended the life and impact of SNAP-Ed investments by placing high-quality nutrition education materials directly into the hands of organizations that regularly serve Oregon families. Collectively, these distribution efforts are expected to reach nearly 275,000 Oregonians, helping to promote healthy eating and food resource management for years to come.



LEADERSHIP LESSONS DURING THE TRANSITION

- **Future-Focused Framing Motivated the Team**
  During a large and difficult transition, we learned that shifting the conversation from closure to future possibilities was invaluable for our team. Reframing the situation around what could be built next created space for hope, innovation, and strategic planning. While it took time, this approach helped our remaining team regain a sense of purpose and direction, ultimately leading to several significant innovations.
- **Initial Communications Matter**
  Communication during a crisis is critical because it shapes perceptions about the future. In our case, some of our early messaging created misunderstandings that required substantial effort to correct later.
  For example, we communicated about the sunset of the SNAP-Ed program but did not clearly explain that many resources, including FoodHero.org, would continue. As a result, many stakeholders assumed that these resources would also be discontinued.
  We subsequently invested considerable time and effort in communicating what the future would look like and reassuring partners and communities about the continuity of key resources. One important lesson we learned is that once people form an expectation about what will happen, changing that perception can be difficult.
- **Slow, careful planning enables fast implementation**
  Drawing on Coach John Wooden's advice to "Be quick, but don't hurry," we approached the transition with deliberate and thoughtful planning. We carefully considered how to maximize the impact of our remaining SNAP-Ed funding, focusing on preserving valuable resources and extending their reach through volunteers and community partners.
  We also gave regional teams ample time to develop initiatives that would have the greatest long-term impact. This thoughtful planning allowed projects to be implemented efficiently while increasing the likelihood that they would remain sustainable and continue serving communities for years to come.

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