Strategies to Sustain Community Nutrition Education Program in California

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Background

The CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California (CFHL, UC), a SNAP-Ed state implementing agency in California, serves limited resource populations by providing evidence-based nutrition, physical activity and garden-enhanced nutrition education aligned with policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) approaches that promote healthy eating and active living. Educators based in 34 counties deliver lessons, support the implementation of PSE change strategies, and train and support schools and community-based organizations through the University of California Cooperative Extension.

In July 2025, H.R. 1—the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*—ended mandatory federal funding for SNAP-Ed after the FY 2025 grant period. CFHL, UC received authorization to use unspent FY 2025 funds during FY 2026, creating a limited carry-forward period to wind down the program responsibly by 9/30/2026.

The loss of SNAP-Ed funding creates a substantial gap in Imperial and Riverside Counties, where 14 full-time CFHL staff have served 59 sites and approximately 41,000 individuals. Without continued support, communities risk losing access to practical nutrition knowledge, food resource management education, and healthy eating and active living community programs, and the PSE supports that help sustain positive behavior change and reduce diet-related disease risk. This transition underscores the urgent need to identify alternative funding, strengthen partnerships, and engage volunteers or other extenders who can help meet ongoing community needs and sustain nutrition education beyond program closure.

Objective

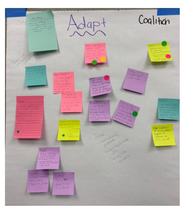
To explore and identify strategies for sustaining community-based nutrition education during the CFHL transition year. In collaboration with the CFHL, UC State Office, remaining educators, community partners, and UCCE colleagues, this project will identify viable partnership and funding opportunities; develop adaptable approaches for program delivery; and preserve accessible education resources that can support communities as the program sunsets.

Process and Progress

Step 1: Identify Needs, Capacity, and Priorities:
In the Fall of 2025, a needs assessment based on key informant interviews with CFHL, UCCE county staff identified training and resources vital to support sustained partner-driven direct education. I joined direct education workgroup as a co-lead, we have quarterly follow-up calls with counties continue to identify evolving needs. Program activity data were also reviewed to determine the most widely used curricula with schools and community partners.

Keep evidence-based curricula and training accessible.
- Public-facing training materials
- Curriculum and delivery-method training
- Peer mentoring and teaching support
- Open-access resource website







Step 2: Map Community Assets and Opportunities:
Identify assets that could support continued programming potential delivery and funding partners, including community schools, after-school programs, Blue Zones, community health workers, family resource centers, community centers, teachers, local offices of education, community benefit programs, and foundations.

Outreach, presentations, and exploratory conversations were conducted with:
- Riverside and Imperial County Office of Education
- CDFA Farm to School Network
- Community Schools
- Blue Zones in Riverside County
- Imperial County Ag Benefit grant office
- Head Start sites



Step 3: Develop Sustainability Strategies
As part of Community Nutrition and Health Strategic Planning committee, program team lead, and future nutrition workgroup member, I collaborated with CFHL State Office, Community Nutrition and Health unit, other ANR statewide program such as 4-H, Master Gardener, and Master Food Preserver programs, and County Directors to develop state and local post-funding program sustainable plan, statewide program strategic plan, future nutrition proposal and program team plan of work.

- Integrating nutrition education into existing UC ANR programs and delivery systems
- Establishing short- and long-term actions for statewide and local program continuity






Reflection

Rather than focusing on measurable outcomes, I trust the process of collaboration, relationship-building, and strategic exploration. Although no single strategy can replace SNAP-Ed funding, I am confident in our team, my colleagues, and my community who cares the public health and equity of getting nutrition education and access to healthy living.

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