



NUTRITION IN A BOX

Community Impact Report: Florida

UF | IFAS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



slice & spice
dinner time is family time

Walmart *org

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Introduction

In 2018, a UF study in Alachua County, FL developed pre-packaged meal kits to address food security and access issues. The data showed positive impacts on dietary behaviors as well as improved social/emotional outcomes like perceived stress and suggested that low-income families are receptive to alternative options for procuring healthy meals, such as pre-packaged meal kits.

Researchers at UF received a grant from the Walmart Foundation, titled Nutrition in a Box, to continue this important research and improve the health and well-being of families across Florida. The Slice and Spice meal kit program was modified based on feedback from the pilot program, local community partners, and members of the intended audience.

Slice and Spice

The meal kits, branded as Slice and Spice, were prepared by partner public high schools' Culinary Arts Career and Technical Education programs or a nonprofit to continue to keep costs low and serve families with low income locally, and some ingredients were grown by partner public high schools' agriscience program. COVID-19 and the food shortages that followed significantly impacted the cost and availability of some ingredients.

Families received meal kits weekly for six weeks. Each meal kit contained three nutritious recipes (meat, seafood, or vegetarian) that served four people. Participants received, at no cost, all ingredients to prepare the meals, recipe cards, cooking tools, and a weekly nutrition handout.

Program Eligibility

Participants were English-speaking adults who prepared most of the meals in a household with at least one child under 18 years old and were eligible for public assistance programs, such as SNAP, WIC, TANF, etc.

Priorities

- 1 Develop a healthy meal kit intervention
- 2 Increase fresh food access
- 3 Increase fruit and vegetable intake
- 4 Increase frequency of cooking meals at home
- 5 Engage 400 high school students
- 6 Evaluate the effects of a healthy meal kit intervention on food security and dietary behaviors
- 7 Develop a toolkit with guidance for establishing a community-based meal kit program

Community Partnerships

To help develop tailored and sustainable interventions, the study team collected feedback from potential participants and established local steering committees with community leaders from Alachua, Putnam, and Orange counties. Local partners included:

- o Public School Districts
- o Food Security Organizations
 - Epic Cure, Hawthorne Area Resource Center, Second Harvest, 4Roots, West Orange Christian Service Center
- o Headstart
- o Local Government
 - Putnam County Extension, City of Hawthorne, Orange County Extension
- o Religious Organization
 - Catholic Charities, Mt Carmel Baptist Church, Heart of Putnam/Putnam Christian Service Center, New Hope Missionary Baptist Church

SLICE AND SPICE IN FLORIDA

CHALLENGES



2,772,939 residents were below the poverty line in 2020¹

100% of study participants were SNAP-eligible.



2,252,050 residents are food insecure in 2020²

65% of study participants were food insecure at enrollment.



82% eat fewer than five fruits and veggies per day¹

68% of study participants ate fewer than five servings at enrollment

PROGRAM REACH



133 adults participated
83% completed the program



588 participant household members reached
276 adults and 312 children

9,828

meals produced locally with 8,520 distributed to participants
11,793.6 pounds of food with 10,224 pounds distributed to participants

PROGRAM OUTCOMES



32% increased frequency of cooking meals together as a family



28% increased frequency of eating meals together as a family



57% improved fruit intake



57% improved vegetable intake



380 high school students engaged

60% improved food security status

65% reported lower perceived stress

47% reported improved subjective social status in the community, and **47%** in society



94% were satisfied with the meal kits.



99% of SNAP/EBT benefit recipients would use their food assistance benefits on meal kits.

Sources: ¹Florida Health Charts ²Feeding America

STORIES SHARED



“ I had a good time preparing this meal with my little one it gave us a time to spend time together. I enjoyed watching his face as he helped prepare meal that we all were going to eat. I'm enjoying this family time together it's a very good experience prior to this we pretty much didn't spend any time together in the kitchen. Well I'm really glad for this experience and I thank you guys and I hope we can continue sharing these wonderful cooking experiences. ”

46, Palatka

“

We had a great time preparing the meals. I really like the easy of preparing and convenience of the meal preps. My kids enjoyed trying out new foods that they had never tasted. Because of the cost of foods, I can't afford meal preps, I have to shop for foods with in my budget. With everyone different schedules it is hard for us to prepare or eat meals together most of the time. Overall it was a great experience for me and my family to be a part of this experiment. Thanks to UF food program.

64, Gainesville



“

Kids have never liked helping with dinner, however this meal kit has made it very easy for them to do. Because all the spices are packed individually and labeled, it makes it so easy for the kids to follow. This has been the best thing to happen to family time!

31, Ocoee

“

The experience with the meal kit was really good. It made it pretty fast to cook the meal also the meal was healthy and tasted really good. My daughter who is not a big fan of veggies actually liked the veggies in the meal. Since it did not take long to make this healthy meal we all was able to sit at the table and eat together. I made the Stir Fry Vegetables and Beef.

34, Palatka



“

We LOVE it! We cooked it, took our bike ride to a park, and ate picnic-style, a bit too spicy for my daughter but perfect for the rest of us. Totally new for us was the pasta/veggies cooking together technique.

49, Ocoee

“

Cooking is a great skill to have at any age because children absorb so much around them that they're kind of like a sponge. It can be knowledge that they will carry with them into their adult years, or even make a career out of it. My children like being able to take part in prepping, measuring, and mixing. It is also a bonding experience and the perfect time to converse with my children. Time spent together they will look back on especially time spent in the kitchen just like I from my childhood.

28, Gainesville

