

Husky Nutrition Programs

ANNUAL REPORT – FISCAL YEAR 2017



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Our Mission

Husky Nutrition Programs engage Connecticut residents in highest need in food, nutrition, and physical activity programming, policy development, and research.

About Us

Husky Nutrition Programs was founded at the University of Connecticut in 1994. Over two decades later, our programs continue to evolve, addressing the root causes of obesity and other nutrition-related, health concerns in a comprehensive, multilevel manner that serves low-income individuals of all ages throughout Connecticut. Supported by UConn Health and CT DSS with funds from USDA Food and Nutrition Services, we educate individuals receiving, or eligible to receive, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits wherever they are - at schools, early childcare settings, farmers markets, grocery stores, senior centers, and right in their own homes via our online platforms - thereby making healthy lifestyle skills practical and easy-to-implement.

Our team of Registered Dietitians, UConn students, health educators, and social media specialists provides expertise to community partners throughout Connecticut, so that residents have access to current, accurate health and nutrition information. Additionally, we support policy initiatives and curricula development, addressing challenging issues such as food insecurity, obesity, and even literacy, in novel ways. Always honing our skills and expanding our reach, we welcome new partners and collaborators in order to maximize resources and improve health outcomes in our state.



Fiscal Year 2017 Highlights

Throughout Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, *Husky Nutrition Programs (HNP)* continued our focus on reducing obesity and chronic disease through direct education, social marketing, policy change efforts, and mentoring activities. Our programs fell under three strategy areas as follows:

Community Nutrition Education & Policy Development



We educated children, parents, and early childcare center providers on food, nutrition, and physical activity practices and policies known to combat childhood obesity. Utilizing our innovative *Husky Reads*, *Little City Sprouts* (a partner program with Hartford Food System), and *Husky Nutrition On-the-Go* programs, we continued efforts to decrease child obesity and improve community health.

Healthy Food Purchasing



Through our *Husky Smart Shopping* program, our Registered Dietitians conducted food demonstrations, grocery store tours, and taught low-income residents how to make the most economical and healthy food and beverage purchases at the places where they shop.

Online Health & Nutrition Education



The *SNAP4CT.org* online platform of website, eNewsletter, and social media outlets delivered readily accessible communications promoting easy recipes, area resources, and nutrition and lifestyle activities to all Connecticut residents.

HNP fulfilled and surpassed the goals around these strategies throughout the year. By completing **1,361 direct education sessions** in Connecticut municipalities with high SNAP enrollment, we were able to reach **8,357 SNAP participants**. Throughout the year, educators made **23,770** personal contacts with individuals, connecting with them on average three times each. Our nutrition education focused on promoting a healthy diet, enhancing cooking skills, increasing physical activity, decreasing sugar sweetened beverage consumption, and promoting healthful, economical food purchases. Our team educated participants at early care and education centers, low-income and elderly housing, food stores, farmers markets, public schools, libraries, community health/WIC centers, and health fairs.

On a daily basis, *HNP* shared educational messages online through the www.SNAP4CT.org website, blog, and eNewsletter, along with accompanying social media outlets of [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#) (@SNAP4CT). These dynamic platforms led to **268,225 online interactions**. Website visitors came

from **156 of the 169 towns of CT**, with the largest concentration of visitors coming from Tier 1 towns (areas possessing the greatest SNAP-Eligible population).

HNP grew our Facebook presence from 312 to **515 fans**, and utilized that vehicle to share healthy recipes, cooking videos, and nutrition tips, as well as, free, healthy community activities such as Summer Meals programs, farmers markets, and exercise programs. An interactive farmers market map was implemented into the website and shared on the social media outlets to educate on the value of using SNAP at local farmers markets, while also promoting the consumption of fruits and vegetables. In addition, we posted **34 new blog topics**, utilizing plain language and photographs to convey nutrition and health messaging. These blogs were delivered as an eNewsletter, with **subscribers growing from 662 to 852**. Two free cookbooks were also developed to help promote healthy recipes and increase eNewsletter readership. Our “*Ask a Nutritionist*” feature remained viable with 34 visitors requesting personalized answers to their nutrition questions, and general inquiries receiving infographics on popular nutrition topics.

Throughout the year, the *HNP* team collaborated with over **200 community partners** including FoodShare, Husky Sport, CT Department of Public Health, Burgdorf Community Center, Hartford Food System, and CT farmers markets throughout the state, to provide nutrition education, social media assistance, web page creation, policy development, curricula support, and more. In addition, to ensure that SNAP-Ed services were delivered and dispersed effectively, a mobile-friendly calendar was accessible to all Connecticut SNAP-Ed contractors through the www.SNAP4CT.org website.



Serving Connecticut

The primary goal of CT’s SNAP-Education is to teach low-income individuals throughout the state how to make the healthiest, most economical food and lifestyle choices possible. Reaching such a large and ever-growing population with limited staff and resources is a challenge that we consider carefully. With offices based in Farmington, Hartford, and Storrs, and utilizing a highly experienced and responsive team, for the past two decades we have focused our efforts on communities that include the highest number of SNAP recipients. These communities, with which we have a long-standing history of involvement, include the Cities of Hartford and New Britain, and the Ledge Light Health District in southeastern CT (Groton/New London).

In 2015, the Northern section of Hartford was designated as one of the 22 Promise Zone communities (a national initiative by HUD to revitalize impoverished areas). As such,

we have been an active supporter of this underserved population. This FY 2017 we continued to offer community nutrition education services, while also assisting other partners working in that area. In addition, where our budget permitted, and where we were not duplicating the efforts of other SNAP-Ed contractors, we provided outreach in New Haven and Bridgeport.

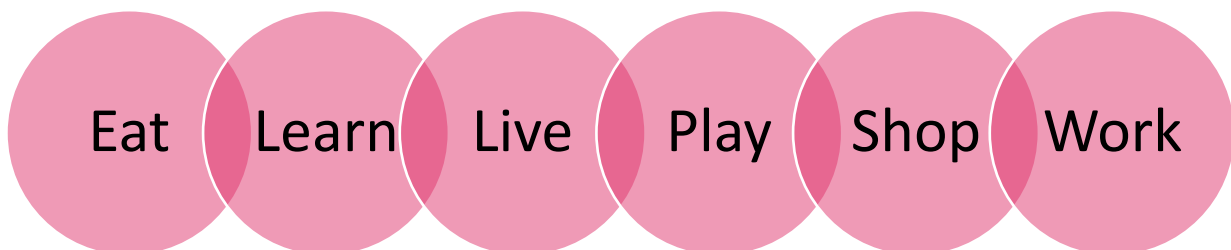
Our efforts focus on depth and breadth, with a strong emphasis on promoting health policy improvements and educational mentorship in tandem with our direct education initiatives. While our in-person education targets communities with the greatest need, in FY 2017 we were able to deliver educational messaging to 156 of Connecticut's 169 municipalities through our innovative, cost-effective, online platform.



Specialized Education for All Populations

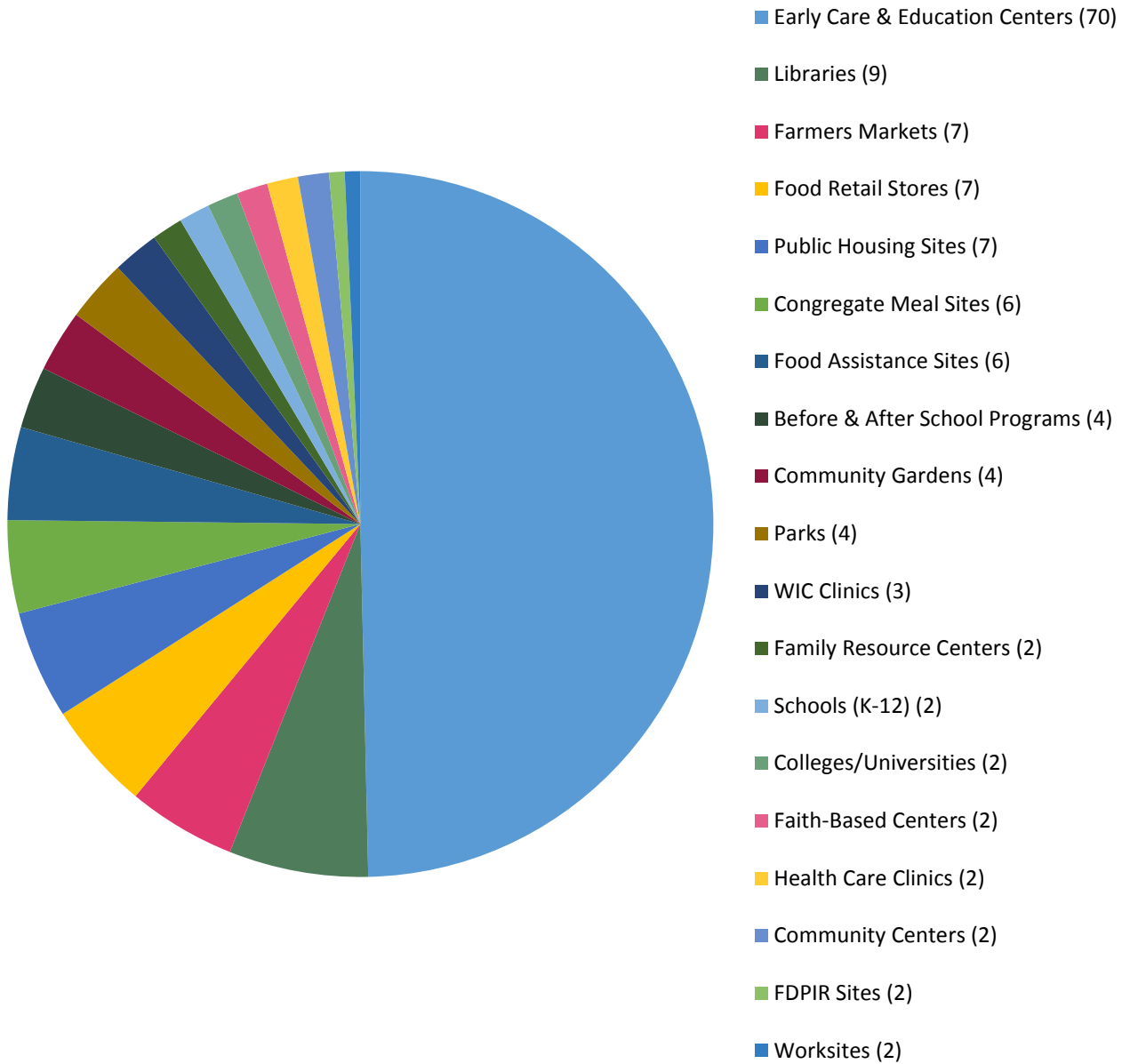
Husky Nutrition Program's current initiatives are comprehensive enough to reach nearly every age range. However, due to the defined nature of our three strategies, and the unique needs of partner agencies and outside funders, we adjust our efforts to the particular audience we serve. For instance, during FY 2017 we provided in-person education to preschool-aged children and their caregivers in nine Connecticut municipalities. Education was also provided to children and adults in five additional towns through health fairs. Likewise, *HNP* nutrition educators provided eight educational sessions at North End and South End Senior Centers, reaching 255 older adults. That program was funded by the City of Hartford's Elderly Nutrition Program, which serves low-income seniors living in the city.

True to the guidelines established by the USDA's SNAP-Education program, we work to educate individuals at the places where they:



To this end we have conducted our nutrition programs in a wide variety of settings as indicated below:

Husky Nutrition Program FY 2017 Nutrition Education Sites



Supporting a Love of Reading & Health



Husky Reads is one of HNP's most innovative and enduring programs. Modeled after the nationally recognized *Reach Out and Read* program, since 1998 this literacy-based intervention has combined the benefits of reading with the basics of good nutrition in a format that children love.

The series of 10, 30-minute lessons cover MyPlate nutritional messages encouraging preschool children to consume more fruits and vegetables. Children are read a nutrition-focused book, while also being offered a healthy snack and activity, thereby reinforcing a child's enthusiasm for nutritious choices. The program typically takes place in early care and education centers in under-served urban areas, but is also offered at libraries and WIC clinics.

UConn students teach the *Husky Reads* curriculum as part of a service-learning course (EKIN 1160 and NUSC 1161); making it as meaningful to those new educators as it is to the children they are teaching. Working in small teams, undergraduate students deliver prepared lesson plans to an enthusiastic audience. This enables them to advance their

own knowledge of nutrition, while also exposing them to classroom management and presentation skills.

“Husky Reads was definitely a highlight of my senior year! Week by week you are able to see how much children remember from the lessons and it’s a great feeling watching their minds grow. In return, the preschoolers teach you the important lessons in life that adults often forget. They remind you to laugh, be silly, and begin each day with a fresh start. I recommend service learning courses to all UConn students.”

Ashley, Former
Husky Reads Student

For more on *Husky Reads* please visit: www.PublicHealth.UConn.edu



Service-Learning for a Healthier Connecticut

The University of Connecticut enriches the student experience through a variety of service-learning programs. Such efforts give depth and meaning to a student’s education by providing hands-on experience and career exploration. Likewise, service-learning initiatives greatly benefit the state, as UConn students give back to the community by sharing their knowledge and passion with others in a cost-effective manner. *HNP* manages several service-learning initiatives including the *Husky Scholars* program in the summer and the *Husky Nutrition 1 (NUSC 3171)* undergraduate course throughout the school year.

The *Husky Scholars* program is a paid internship in which UConn students from a variety of backgrounds provide community nutrition education to low-income individuals. Utilizing developed lessons plans and message boards, along with their own ingenuity, students learn simple techniques for conveying USDA nutrition messages focused around MyPlate themes, with an emphasis on fruits and vegetables and decreasing the intake of sugar sweetened beverages. They deliver education at farmers markets, health fairs, and community centers, while also assisting with www.SNAP4CT.org website and social media projects and promotion. In FY 2017, *Husky Scholars* delivered three programs at a Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) food distribution location at the New Covenant United Methodist Church in East Hartford. Reaching 40 CSFP-participants, they provided education and food samples, along with a food demonstration highlighting new ways to incorporate and prepare foods included in their CSFP box.



Students in the *Husky Nutrition 1 (NUSC 3171)* course learn to deliver effective nutrition and health messages to caregivers in low-income communities. This is accomplished through a mix of in-class education focused on lesson planning and cultural competence, teamed with supervised experiential learning. Students develop confidence and aptitude by delivering nutrition education to parents and caregivers of

preschool-aged children. The primary focus of their nutrition messaging is on reducing children’s intake of sugar sweetened beverages, an effort that has been associated with better oral health and lower rates of obesity. In 2017, *HNP* welcomed Heli Roy, Ph.D., MBA, RD as the new instructor for this program. Dr. Roy has an extensive background in SNAP-Education making her an excellent resource to students and community partners.

HNP’s service-learning initiatives focus on populations with the greatest health risks. As one example, through work with UConn’s Office of Public Engagement’s Cities Collaborative, our students have supported *Invest Health* in our state’s capital. Likewise, *HNP* collaborates with numerous area agencies serving low-income (SNAP-Ed Eligible) individuals who desire the educational services provided by the students in our programs. In this way, we expose students to the reality of health disparities and poverty in CT, which often sparks their interest in being part of the solution.



Planting Seeds – Training the Trainers

In order to maximize our impact in Harford and New Britain, *Husky Nutrition Programs* has initiated and delivered workshops and technical assistance to Early Care & Education (ECE) centers and agencies in those areas. In FY 2017, these efforts affected the over 15,000 children and caregivers served by those facilities.

In Hartford, the School Readiness Council and the Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation (DFCYR) sponsored a series of six workshops with 68 of the 69 licensed programs in the city participating. With the initial series complete, *HNP* will continue to provide one or two topic workshops per year as requested by the Council. In New Britain, all programs receiving school readiness funding participate. In FY 2017, *HNP* offered an orientation and follow-up workshop, and we are committed to supporting the program going forward.

For over 15 years, *HNP* has supported the CT Department of Social Services, Unit on Aging. In FY 2017, we delivered two training sessions to 35 nutrition educators. The training sessions covered important topics including malnutrition in older adults, the new food label and how it impacts older adults, evidence-based programs and nutrition, and creative meal options for congregate meal sites.



Monitoring Obesity Rates Reveals Progress in Hartford

Husky Nutrition Programs and UConn Health's *Programs in Public Health and Health Policy* collect and analyze data on preschool child weight in order to monitor the effectiveness of our initiatives in Hartford and New Britain. In Hartford, every four years our team collects child weight data on a randomly selected and statistically significant sample of children in the city. Between 2012 and 2016, the mean child Body Mass Index (BMI) dropped by four percentile points and the percent of children overweight or obese decreased from 37% to 32% during the same period. The efforts to monitor child weight surveillance were coordinated with Mayor Bronin's office and the Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation (DFCYR). Both organizations are strong supporters of *HNP's* work in nutrition education and ECE policy development. In a press conference on September 27, 2017, Dr. Ann Ferris, Director of *Husky Nutrition Programs* presented the details of the 2016 report, alongside these partners. The story was featured in the Hartford Courant, in UConn Today, and on Fox 61 News. [See 2016 report at: <http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/assets/hartfordbmi2016.pdf>]



UConn Health's *Programs in Public Health and Health Policy* has a separate contract with the City of New Britain to use Power Schools' data to monitor changes in weight for all children enrolled in the system. Data collected between 2012 and 2016 suggest a downward trend similar to that observed in Hartford, but children obese at age four are 10 times more likely to be obese at age 10, making early nutrition interventions imperative. [See 2016 report at: http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/assets/newbritainreport_16.pdf]



Little City Sprouts – Unearthing a Love of Food

The urban landscape of Hartford does not lend itself to the open, green space that encourages gardening. As such, many children growing up in the city have limited exposure to where real, wholesome food comes from. Given that harsh reality, alongside the previous findings of UConn Health’s *HNP* and the City of Hartford’s 2012 BMI surveillance which indicated that 37% of Hartford preschool children were overweight or obese, it was clear that the city needed to promote healthier outcomes for its littlest residents. [See 2012 report: http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/assets/hartfordobesityreport_web.pdf]



As such, in 2015, *Little City Sprouts (LCS)* was born. Delivered in partnership with Hartford Food System and the City of Hartford DFCYR, the program provides year-round gardening and nutrition education to 2-to 5-year-old preschoolers in Hartford Early Care & Education centers. Through creative, hands-on lessons, the children learn

basic nutrition and cooking skills, while also getting to grow their own fruits and vegetables in container gardens.

Unlike the gardens, the children’s enthusiasm for the program can’t be contained. One of the Center’s teachers explained: “When she [Tilly Story, Program Coordinator] walks in the classroom, [the kids shout] “Miss Tilly’s heeere!” They’re banging on the window for her.” Tilly also acknowledges the enthusiasm in the children, explaining that they are eager to dig in the dirt and even share what they have learned with their family members.

Over the past two years, *Little City Sprouts* has become an innovative and well-received solution to a challenging problem. In FY 2017, *LCS* reached 468 children at 7 ECEs in Hartford. The actual impact on the extended family members whose little ones are excited to share what they know about vegetables and gardening is bound to grow.

For more on *Little City Sprouts*, please visit: www.HartfordFood.org



Good Nutrition Begins at Home

The *Husky Nutrition Programs* team understands that good nutritional habits and education can have a ripple effect. That is one of the drivers behind our *Husky Nutrition On-the-Go, “Healthy Beverage Series.”* This evidence-based program targets the parents and caregivers of preschoolers, with the understanding that healthy habits start at home and in the classroom based on how adults model and encourage behaviors. An added benefit of this style of education is that it ultimately impacts everyone within the preschool, and also all of the members within the households of the children enrolled at the preschools.

The program focuses on reducing sugary beverage consumption, limiting consumption of fruit juice to the recommendations issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and promoting greater water intake as both the healthiest and most economical choice. In addition to the “*Healthy Beverage Series,*” in FY 2017, *HNP* delivered 14 individual educational sessions on a variety of nutrition-related topics which reached 620 SNAP participants at health fairs and community sites including faith-based organizations, public schools, and housing sites.



Promoting Smart Shopping with Hands-On Education

Healthy eating begins with healthy food purchasing. This is the premise behind one of *Husky Nutrition Programs'* core strategies, the *Husky Smart Shopping (HSS)* program. Through this far-reaching initiative, *HNP's* Registered Dietitians and health educators deliver interactive nutrition education at retail food stores, WIC clinics, public housing sites, and at farmers markets that accept WIC and EBT. In FY 2017, the *HSS* program exceeded targeted goals through 114 direct education sessions to 2,659 SNAP participants.

These sessions were completed in collaboration with a variety of Connecticut grocery stores including ShopRite stores in East Hartford, Manchester, and Bristol; the Price Chopper store in Middletown; Stop & Shop stores in Hartford and Old Saybrook; and a C-Town store in Hartford. The C-Town program, which incorporates live food demonstrations of healthy and affordable recipes and food samplings with shoppers, was conducted in support of the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program that had been awarded to Wholesome Wave and Hartford Food System. The emphasis of FINI is to encourage the purchase of fruits and vegetables among SNAP recipients.

Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is a vital focus of direct nutrition education, as the research around the health benefits of those food groups is so substantial. In addition, shopper education focuses on understanding USDA MyPlate messages including how to read food labels; how to identify whole grains, low-fat dairy foods and lean proteins; and how to compare unit prices to get the best value.

HNP is grateful for an ongoing partnership with the Community Health Network of CT, Inc., whereby *HNP* Registered Dietitians delivered grocery store tours and educational sessions following the *Cooking Matters at the Store* and *Shopping Matters* curricula. Through this program SNAP participants are offered education, as well as gift cards to be used in the grocery store. This combined effort enables participants to buy healthy foods immediately after receiving education. Post education interviews reveal that participants enthusiastically purchase suggested items and learn new pieces of information that they can utilize in future shopping visits. The curriculum is similar to other *Husky Smart Shopping* programs, however, in many cases RDs also enhance the educational activities with food demonstrations showing participants how to prepare healthy meals that are appealing, flavorful, and affordable.

For SNAP participants who are unable to attend nutritional sessions due to travel or physical limitations, *HNP* has developed "virtual grocery store tours." These online tours provide key concepts via video that can be accessed by visiting the www.SNAP4CT.org website and [YouTube Channel](#).



Encouraging Healthy, Fresh Food at Farmers Markets

Farmers markets are a powerful asset in encouraging low-income residents to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. This is particularly important in neighborhoods where residents have limited access to large grocery stores and fresh produce. As such, throughout the FY 2017 growing season (spring into fall), *Husky Nutrition Programs* provided nutrition education at Connecticut farmers markets where SNAP/EBT and/or WIC benefits were accepted.



On a weekly basis, *HNP* Dietitians and nutrition educators, including UConn students in the *Husky Scholars* program, provided education and produce-based recipes at farmers markets in cities with the highest need for SNAP-Education. The majority of these sessions were focused in Hartford, with nine programs delivered at the North End Farmers Market and 11 programs delivered at Billings Forge Market. In collaboration with Field of Greens and the Ledge Light Health district, six programs were held at Washington Park Market in Groton, while sessions were also provided at the Community Garden in Middletown, in the Fair Haven section

of New Haven, and at the Bridgeport Farmers Market Collaborative

At these markets, educators interacted with shoppers using display boards and activities in order to inform them on the basics of MyPlate, food safety, calcium and healthy snacks, family mealtime, along with various topics related to selecting healthy produce. Where permitted, food demonstrations were also used to engage participants.

In addition, shoppers were offered healthy, budget-friendly recipes (in English and Spanish), as well as, healthy incentive items such as shopping totes, fruit and vegetable brushes, and more, all with the www.SNAP4CT.org website noted so that they could remember how to access nutrition resources online. Postcards containing the web address were provided for the same reason.

To assess the efficacy of this program, *HNP* conducted a survey of farmers market shoppers who received education at the Billings Forge and North End farmers markets in Hartford, and the Washington Park Market in Groton. Of the 78 shoppers surveyed, 29 reported receiving SNAP or WIC. Of those 29 participants the following information was reported:

- 79.5% would use SNAP, WIC, double value or other dollar value coupons at market
- 96.5% learned something useful at the nutrition education table, specifically:

- 82.7% learned useful produce preparation ideas and,
- 65.5% intended to make the recipe [that was featured]
- 58.6% reported that they will buy 3 or more types of vegetables at the market, while 51.7% reported that they will buy 3 or more different types of fruit at the market on the day surveyed
- 72.4% reported that they usually eat 2 or more vegetables often or always at their main meal daily



Promoting Farmers Markets Online

Farmers markets tend to have limited budgets that do not enable extensive marketing or outreach to area residents. To assist in alleviating this challenge, *Husky Nutrition Programs* developed an interactive farmers market map in spring of 2017 to highlight Connecticut farmers markets by location. Expanding upon the CT Department of Agriculture’s annual farmers market list, the online, interactive map detailed market locations, hours, contact information, and whether SNAP/EBT benefits were accepted (as well as, if those benefits were doubled when that information was available).

This informational resource was available on www.SNAP4CT.org in desktop and mobile versions. Exposure to that map was enhanced through a Google AdWords campaign targeting Connecticut residents in Tier 1 towns. Additionally, the map(s) were promoted through SNAP4CT’s social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), leading them to be accessed via 4566 desktop pageviews and 455 mobile pageviews.

Social media outlets were also used to promote a variety of individual farmers markets, particularly those that doubled or tripled SNAP benefits. Facebook events and Twitter postings were created on behalf of area farmers markets, providing them with greater exposure.

Likewise, online resources (web pages and videos) depicting the value of farmers markets and the affordable, healthy produce they provide were developed, implemented into www.SNAP4CT.org, and shared through social media. Finally, in collaboration with FoodShare, HNP shared and promoted a video on Facebook and through our website, which explained how easy it is to use SNAP benefits at area markets. That action increased online exposure across our combined internet audiences. According to Facebook metrics, that amounted to approximately 5,933 SNAP-Eligible individuals reached (those who saw the post) and 202 SNAP-Eligible individuals engaged (those who liked the video or clicked on it).



Nutrition Information Around the Clock

Husky Nutrition Programs connects all of its initiatives through the www.SNAP4CT.org website, blog, and eNewsletter, along with accompanying social media outlets of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest (@SNAP4CT). Through these online platforms, we provide a variety of wellness resources, which increase potential learning and engagement opportunities for SNAP participants throughout the state, while also supporting other community agencies serving the SNAP population. In FY 2017 website visitors came from 156 of the 169 towns of CT (as well as from around the world), with the largest concentration of visitors coming from the Tier 1 towns.

During FY 2017, HNP expanded efforts in the social media arena because it is such an efficient and cost-effective way to deliver simple information to our target audience. Upon ramping up efforts in the spring, we increased our Facebook fans by 65% (from 312 to 515), and utilized that platform to share healthy recipes, cooking videos, and nutrition tips, as well as, free, healthy community events such as Summer Meals activities, farmers markets, and exercise programs. To maximize our resources, we routinely shared material from the USDA, the Produce for Better Health Foundations' *Fruits & Veggies More Matters*® campaign, and other SNAP-Ed programs on our social media outlets. We also posted 34 new blog topics, utilizing plain language and photographs to convey nutrition and health messaging. HNP shared these blogs through

an eNewsletter, with subscribers growing 28.7% (from 662 to 852.) The most popular blog topics included; “*How to Use Plain Cereal (in new ways),*” “*Oven Free Recipes,*” and “*How to Use Fruits & Veggies that Are About to Go Bad.*”

To promote our healthy recipes and increase eNewsletter subscriptions and readership, HNP developed two, seasonal cookbooks (*Outdoor Recipe Cookbook* and *Fall Recipe Cookbook*) that subscribers could download or view on their digital devices. We also continued to expand our large online recipe collection by adding PDFs that included recipe information in English and Spanish. A variety of community partners requested and used these print-ready recipes to support their nutrition education initiatives. Our “*Ask a Nutritionist*” feature assisted 34 visitors with personalized answers to their nutrition questions, and general inquiries receiving infographics on popular nutrition topics such as *Heart Healthy Diet, Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Intake, Kid-Friendly Zone, Quick and Easy Meals,* and *Decreasing Added Sugar.*

Delivering SNAP-Education content online 24 hours per day/ 7 days per week, minimizes the time and expense of travel for participants and staff, making it exceptionally convenient. As our online audience continues to grow, our technically proficient team is able to respond to its educational needs quickly. The built-in ability to track metrics makes it possible to determine which efforts are most successful in engaging visitors and partners in expanding our efforts in the future.

SNAP4CT.org’s Impact in FY 2017

- 🍷 **268,225** Online Interactions
- 🍷 **56,779** Worldwide Pageviews
- 🍷 **29,251** Connecticut Pageviews
- 🍷 **852** eNewsletter Subscribers
- 🍷 **205,527** Facebook Impressions
- 🍷 **2,047** Instagram Engagements
- 🍷 **237** CT YouTube Video Views

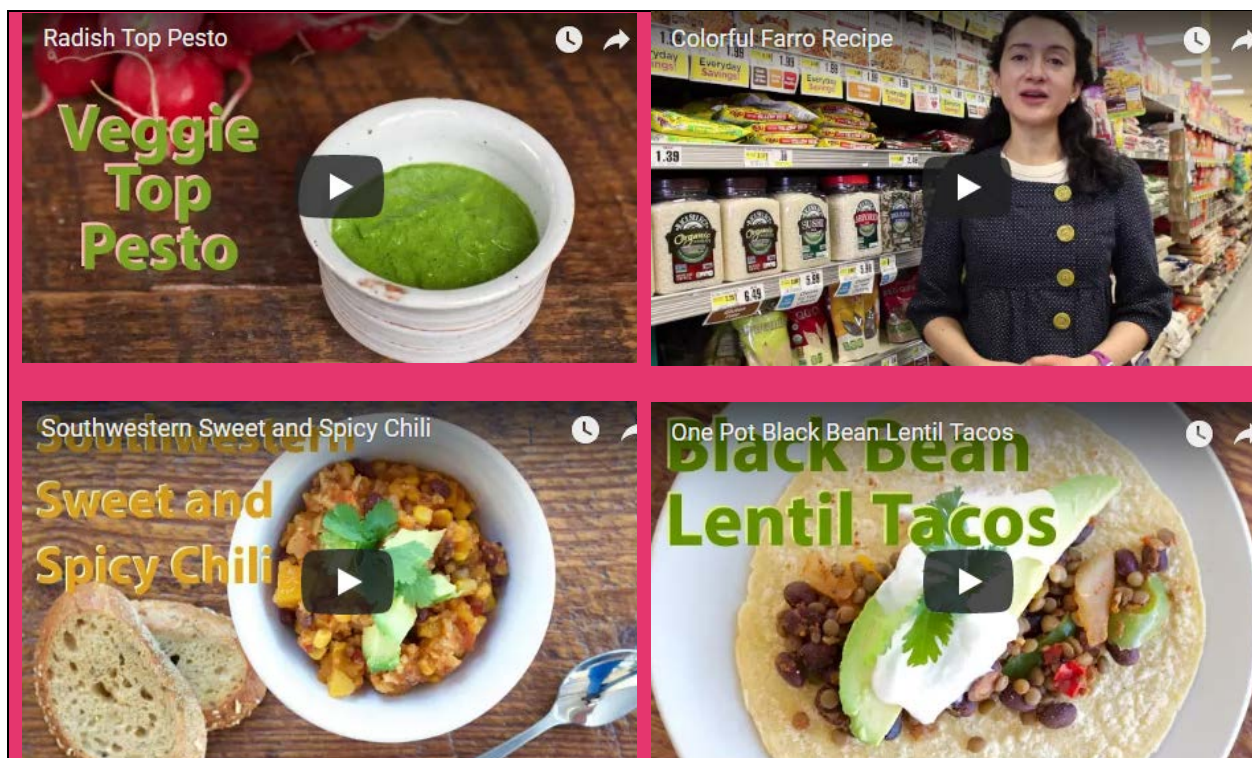


Making Healthy Living Easier Through Video

During 2017, the value of video marketing continued to expand as consumers seemed to like the convenience and speed at which information was conveyed. Facebook began featuring video content over traditional image text, and YouTube continued to serve as the second most popular search engine (following Google.com). A 2017 report from Animoto indicated that, “84 percent of consumers say they watch social video content on mobile devices.” [SOURCE: Forbes.com]

Given these trends, in FY 2017 our creative team developed 17 new videos. We added these videos to our [YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...), integrated them into www.SNAP4CT.org, and shared them on Facebook and Twitter. Given that recipe videos received the most engagement (a term indicating that content was viewed, liked, or shared), we focused predominantly on their creation. Our 12 recipe videos took recipes that we had tested and posted online and broke them down into easy-to-follow steps. We also developed two healthy tips videos on *How to Regrow Greens* and *How to Save Greens*. Finally, as a way to interact with our audience regularly, we filmed 5 monthly overview videos explaining what topics we would be covering on our blog and in social media that month.

SNAP4CT.org’s Most Popular Recipe Videos in FY 2017



[Click image to view the videos online.]



Monitoring and Refining Our Reach

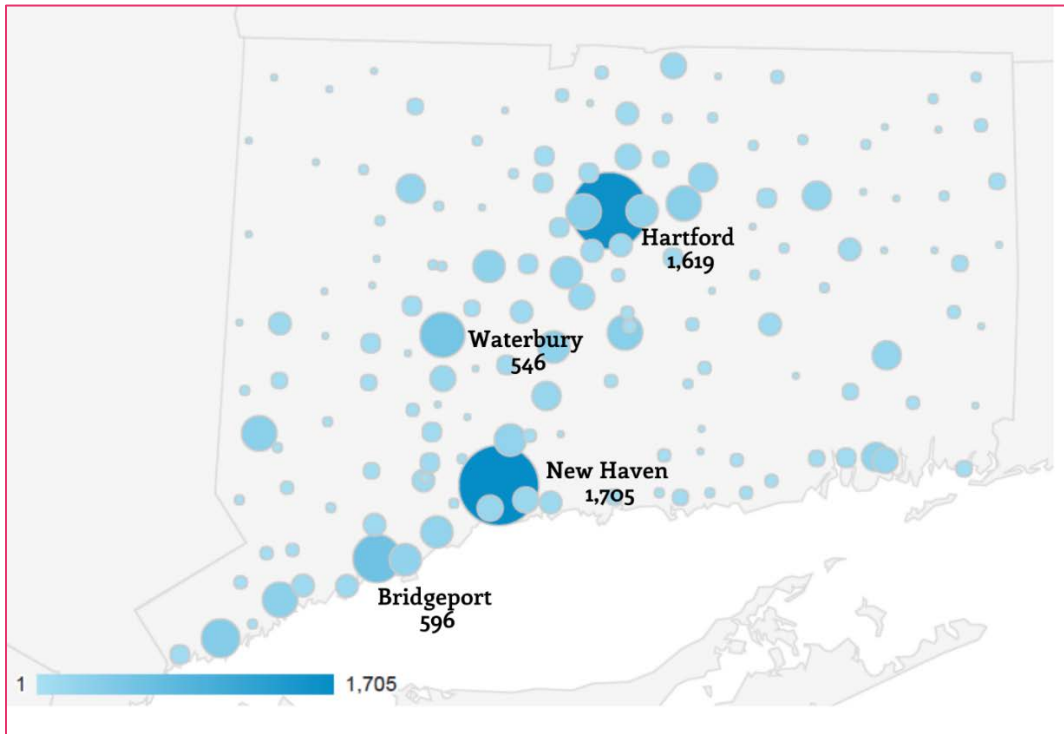
The ability to target content and monitor results is a powerful benefit of utilizing the internet to deliver education. After filling a vacant Web Marketing position in April 2017, *Husky Nutrition Programs* explored online marketing to enhance the reach of our programs to our SNAP-Eligible population. Utilizing Google AdWords and Facebook Ad campaigns, as well as, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) techniques, we steadily increased our website traffic and social media engagement from month-to-month.

A Google AdWords campaign was run from 6/15/17 – 8/21/17 that increased website traffic by more than 14 times over the prior monthly average. Given changes in Facebook delivery, it became necessary to boost nutrition education posts in order to be seen by followers. Facebook ads, post boosts, and event promotions were delivered to a defined audience based on location and income with an emphasis on Tier 1 towns. Over the course of FY 2017, SNAP4CT's Facebook fans increased by 65% (from 312 to 515).

HNP staff carefully assessed web and social media traffic with reporting conducted on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Through industry standard tools such as Google Analytics, HootSuite, and metrics within each social media platform, we were able to determine which website and social media content was most popular and engaging, therefore enabling us to consistently refocus and realign our efforts to maximize our time and minimize our spending. We were also able to observe growth in Tier 1 communities where we did not previously have a prominent on-ground presence (namely the highest SNAP-Eligible population cities of New Haven and Bridgeport).

Although www.SNAP4CT.org receives worldwide traffic (21,434 users, 56,779 pageviews), upon filtering for Connecticut residents the website brought in 12,607 users who viewed 29,251 pages on the site. The most popular content tended to be pages customized for CT-DSS, which assisted visitors in finding local office information, while also guiding them to recipe information on the site.

SNAP4CT.org Website Traffic by Visitor Location – FY 2017



www.SNAP4CT.org visitors came from 156 of the 169 towns of CT, with the largest concentration of visitors coming from the Tier 1 towns of New Haven, Hartford, Bridgeport, and Waterbury.



A New Look to Better Serve Our Audience

When SNAP4CT.org first launched in 2015, we were focused on establishing a wealth of quality, online content quickly. After assessing the website and online platform in early summer of 2017, we realized that we had strong content, but our branding and logo needed to be refreshed so that it provided a clearer message for our audience.

Through research, we determined that our target population favored brighter, bolder colors. As such, we chose a vivid pink to incorporate that element. We also focused on a neutral sage green similar to what we had been using, since green is often used to convey a sense of good health. A beet icon was added to depict our emphasis on vegetables and our support of Connecticut farmers markets. The tagline, “Eat Well. Spend Less.” was incorporated into the design to indicate that eating a healthful, budget-friendly diet was part of our mission and a focus that is relatable to our target audience.

We surveyed our online audience using Survey Monkey and Facebook Polls, and also contacted partner organizations to request their input as to which of 4 designs was their favorite. The final logo design was selected based on those surveys, along with the logo's readability and the ease in which it could be utilized across all of our social media platforms. This final logo, which was incorporated in early September, more clearly spells out our website name, which we believe in time will lead to greater recognition of our site as a resource for SNAP participants.



Our Bolder New Look!



Lending our Skills to Connecticut Partners

The primary focus of *Husky Nutrition Programs* is to deliver health and nutrition education and information to our target audience, SNAP-Eligible individuals of all ages throughout Connecticut. However, we would never be able to reach such a large population without the assistance of other health and community organizations.

These partner organizations provide us access to our population, while also supporting our educational efforts in a manner that is mutually beneficial. We are grateful for the support we receive, and in turn aim to use our greatest strengths including health and nutrition expertise, coupled with online marketing and content creation to assist partner organizations whenever possible.

Some examples of partner projects include:

- Collaborating with **Hartford Food System** to bring the *Little City Sprouts* program to Hartford children
- Serving on the **Hartford Food Policy Advisory Commission** to support and shape policies and practices related to nutrition in low-income populations
- Displaying educational bulletin boards in prominent locations in the **Burgdorf Community Center** highlighting seasonal produce, local farmers markets, and promoting the www.SNAP4CT.org website for recipes and tips
- Designing web pages detailing information on **community farms** when those groups lack a strong online presence or would like to increase their reach, including the **Burgdorf Community Garden, Reservoir Community Farm in Bridgeport, and Green Village Initiative** in Bridgeport
- Presenting to community agencies such as the **Immunization Action Panel of West Haven** on the resources and recipes available on www.SNAP4CT.org
- Managing a [Free Health Events in CT Calendar](#) that features community events focused on nutrition and physical activities from libraries, city programs, and more
- Attending **health fairs** where we can share nutrition education, resources, and information on our online platform www.SNAP4CT.org
- Providing nutrition education and activities, along with social media promotion for the Summer Meals program managed by **FoodShare**, the leading food distribution agency in Northern CT
- Actively participating in **Invest Health**, alongside a large coalition of public, private, and UConn-based agencies focused on the food environment in Hartford
- Coordinating programs with the over 75 early childcare programs and their sponsors that are participating in the **School Readiness Council(s) in Hartford and New Britain**
- Developing alternate approaches to track population and individual BMI changes in children from birth to five in CT, through funding from and collaboration with the **Children's Health and Development Institute (CHDI)**
- Creating, promoting, and sharing online Facebook events and posts to expand the social media reach of organizations such as **Connecticut Farmers Markets**, and other area agencies such as FoodShare, ShopRite, CitySeed, Connecticut Food Bank, and more.

Connecticut Collaboration in SNAP-Education

Husky Nutrition Programs is also pleased to support our fellow Connecticut SNAP-Education contractors and our leadership in the CT Department of Social Services (CT-DSS). For several years, www.SNAP4CT.org has housed an online calendar where contractors can individually input their SNAP-Ed events. This easily updated tool displays all of the SNAP-Ed events held across the state, thereby ensuring adequate coverage of our population and preventing program overlap. SNAP participants are also able to access that [SNAP-Ed Events Calendar](#) via cell phone, tablet, or computer.

In addition, we have customized a page on www.SNAP4CT.org that assists visitors in finding pertinent CT-DSS contact information, including office locations throughout the state and the recommended web links and phone numbers applicable for receiving and updating SNAP benefits, along with emergency food services should that be applicable. The page also drives visitors to our most popular health content, so that they can receive the SNAP-Education they may need.

HNP is always enthusiastic to participate in trainings and collaboration with UConn’s *Husky Sport*, a SNAP-Ed contractor. In FY 2017, we provided two training sessions to their nutrition educators. In January 2017, the *HNP* team participated in an interactive session on “*Creating a Community Conversation*” featuring tools and perspectives on engaging community members and partners. The *HNP* team provided a second training session on August 25, 2017. This session included tips on using MyPlate in educating 3rd and 4th graders, an overview of the www.SNAP4CT.org web platforms, and 3 stations which included interactive cooking demonstrations. In addition, *HNP* sponsored an AmeriCorps - Public Allies intern (Mercedes MacAlpine) for one year. Ms. MacAlpine assisted us with social media promotion and educational events, while also working with *Husky Sport* on culturally appropriate, health education and activities for the children they serve.



Finally, throughout FY 2017 *HNP* continued our long-standing partnership and support of programs initiated by the CT Department of Public Health (CT-DPH). *HNP* participated on the Early Childcare Nutrition and Physical Activity Planning Team, an outgrowth of which led to assistance with CT-DPH’s “*Water First for Your Thirst*” campaign. *HNP* provided CT-DPH with the logo and tagline for the program. These items had previously been successfully used by *HNP* on incentive items, reusable water

bottles, and Sippy cups in support of our “*Healthy Beverage Series*” which had been in existence since 2013. To further enhance CT-DPH’s program, *HNP* set up a custom URL (www.DrinkWaterCT.org) and web page with simple content reinforcing the importance of water consumption and decreasing sugar intake. In addition, *HNP* leadership provided evaluation services, as well as supported the Enhanced Funding Activities, increasing peer and professional support for breastfeeding for the CT-DPH, CDC-funded 1305 program (SHAPE).



Husky Nutrition Programs thanks all of our community partners and funders for a successful FY 2017. We look forward to serving our Connecticut community in FY 2018 and beyond.



Looking Ahead...

Fiscal Year 2017 marked the completion of the 2nd year of a 3-year cycle with our USDA SNAP-Education grant. As *Husky Nutrition Programs* heads into our final year of that cycle, we are focused on evaluating critical components of our strategic plan, and shaping our future plans to best serve our population. We value the many partners who have contributed to our successes and we welcome input and further collaboration with current and new partners throughout Connecticut. Please visit the links and sources on the page that follows to contact us and learn more about our work.

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