



CA&ES
Outlo

How science
sheds light on the
human experience

The
LABORATORY
of **LIFE**

Promoting healthy lifestyle choices

A FEDERAL PROGRAM

managed by UC Davis is combating America's obesity epidemic by helping provide nutrition education to California's low-income families. The University of California Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (UC-FSNEP) collaborates with various government agencies to deliver the science-based nutrition information that people need to make healthy food and lifestyle choices.

One program that partners with UC-FSNEP and Cooperative Extension is called Kick Off Riverside, which educates middle school students about nutrition, health, and fitness. In Riverside County, nearly one-third of youth ages 10 to 14 are either overweight, obese, or are at risk of being overweight. These students face a high risk of developing obesity-related disorders in early adulthood.

To improve health and well-being, Kick Off Riverside involves both students and their families at four middle schools in the Alford Unified School District. Educators meet with students and families once a month for an evening nutrition talk and family exercise time led by local fitness instructors. During school, physical education teachers deliver the EatFit curriculum, which was developed at UC Davis to provide information on the value of fruits and vegetables, exercise, budget management, and avoidance of fatty foods. EatFit (<http://eatfit.ucdavis.edu>) also encourages students to analyze their own diets and set personal eating and fitness goals.

"EatFit has helped me take care of my body by helping me realize that some of the things I eat are unhealthy," said seventh-grader Amalia Castorena. "It helped me realize that if I want to be healthy

CHUTIMA GANTHAVORN/UC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



Students at Villegas Middle School in Riverside follow exercises as part of an outreach program that educates families about the value of fitness and healthy eating.

COURTESY



Youth cooking classes are part of the nutrition education provided by programs that partner with UC-FSNEP.

the rest of my life, I have to learn healthy habits now."

At Loma Vista Middle School in Riverside, testing before and after participation in the EatFit program

showed that 85 percent of students increased their knowledge of nutrition and fitness. In addition, more than half the students reported they now make better food choices and are more physically active.

Kick Off Riverside, led by the Riverside Medical Clinic Foundation, is one of many programs that operate in collaboration with UC-FSNEP to improve the health and well-being of people living below the poverty line. UC-FSNEP served 200,000 Californians in 36 counties last year, primarily through county Cooperative Extension offices.

"Our major goal is to work with food stamp eligible populations to empower them to make healthier dietary choices," said David Ginsburg, who became director of UC-FSNEP in 2008. "We provide a vital link between the university, the county extension offices, and California's underserved communities." — R.D.