

Poor Nutrition and Health Concerns in Low-Income Population

- An estimated one out of every six Texans (17%) lives in poverty, compared to the national average of 14%.
- Diet quality has been linked to four of the 10 leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.
- Research suggests that individuals who live in poverty consume diets that are not in agreement with current recommendations.

AgriLife Extension’s Response

- The *Better Living for Texans* (BLT) program was initiated in 1995 as a cooperative endeavor comprising the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the BLT program works with low-income individuals and families—particularly SNAP recipients and applicants—and helps them learn how to prepare nutritious meals and stretch their food resources through the adoption of targeted management practices, such as comparing food prices and shopping with a list.
- BLT also delivers educational programs to help participants improve their food safety behaviors and adopt the habit of regular physical activity.
- Educational programs are delivered through a variety of teaching methods, depending on audience needs, including lesson series, single-concept classes, demonstrations, and tours.



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- In 2015, BLT conducted 5,023 education sessions, resulting in more than 528,000 educational and other contacts with the targeted audience.

Economic Impacts

- The 2015 BLT program evaluations found that the percentage of participants who regularly filled at least one-half of their plate with vegetables and/or fruit rose from 36% before participating in the program to 50% after participation.
- Monthly out-of-pocket food expenses reported by participants were significantly lower 30 days after the program (\$244 before the program vs. \$217 at follow-up).
- The percentage of participants who reported “never” running out of food before the end of the month improved, from 26% before program participation to 51% one month after the program.
- 1,493 participants completed *Walk Across Texas* (WAT), an eight-week AgriLife Extension program designed to help participants increase their physical activity. Average walking distances per person increased from 26.7 miles at the beginning to 29.9 miles (an increase of 3.2 miles).
- For the 3,982 participants who could be contacted one month after the BLT program ended, the average monthly savings on grocery expenditures per household totaled \$27. The total annual savings for these respondents was estimated at \$1.2 million.
- Broader benefits of the program come from improved dietary intake, increased physical activity, and improved food safety practices in the home. These benefits include reduced risk of chronic disease and foodborne illness, reduced indigent health care costs, and improved quality of life.