Broome County
Let’s Eat New York! Identifying Strategies To Address Food Insecurity and Promote Improved Health Outcomes

The Challenge
According to U.S. Census data (2013), 47 percent of children in the City of Binghamton live in poverty compared with 22 percent statewide and 67 percent of school-age children are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Recently, the USDA Economic Research Service reported that children in 9.4 percent of U.S. households are food insecure (September 2015). In Broome County, the food insecurity rate for children is 24 percent.

According to the NYS Department of Health, 17 percent of New Yorkers under the age of 18 are obese and nearly 33 percent are overweight. The Broome County health department reports that there are growing numbers of the county’s residents suffering from obesity and diabetes, due in large part to poor diet and lack of access to healthy, nutrient-rich foods.

According to the USDA’s Food Environment Atlas, poverty, food deserts, and food swamps (i.e., areas with an overabundance of unhealthy foods and lack of access to healthy options) are all too prevalent in Broome County, particularly in economically stressed areas of Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott. Currently, 70 percent of the students at Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School in Binghamton qualify for free school meals. Over 50 percent of these students are classified as overweight or obese. The economic impact of negative health outcomes associated with childhood obesity is frightening — New York state already spends over $4 billion on obesity-related illnesses.

Broome County pays a high price for hunger — medical problems, learning disabilities, and emotional distress, just to name a few. When children live in households without access to nutrient-rich foods and are chronically malnourished, their ability to learn is severely compromised. Their future job preparedness is jeopardized or vanishes and the trap of generational poverty grows.

CCE Broome’s Expertise and Programs
CCE of Broome County (CCE Broome) is working on a broad array of programs and initiatives to address these urgent public health and economic development issues. CCE Broome has an experienced staff of nutrition, youth development, and agriculture/market educators experienced and actively engaged on numerous community projects and initiatives with a broad network of community partners and collaborators.

Soon a vibrant, on-site regional farmers’ market at CCE Broome will provide year-round access to healthy, affordable, and nutritious foods, fresh from the farms throughout the region. In addition to the farmers’ market, CCE Broome will soon operate an on-site Taste New York market and one-stop agriculture development center on their campus in Binghamton. The farmers’ market will provide a myriad of opportunities for over 40 farmers, growers, and producers to sell their products and work with CCE and regional agriculture teams to expand growing capacity and access the venture center. A commercial production kitchen at the farmers’ market will support farmers in manufacturing and
preserving products for resale. A state-of-the-art classroom at the farmers’ market will provide workshops on:

- business planning, market development exploration, market channel assessment, agritourism, and sales;
- hydroponics and controlled-environment agriculture (CEA);
- raising and production-based livestock, poultry, growing fruits, vegetables and hops;
- product development, marketing, and distribution;
- connecting producers to Cornell University, NYS Agriculture and Markets, USDA, and other agencies through distance learning to foster the next generation of farmers and agricultural practitioners;
- Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) certification;
- food safety training for growers and food system career development; and
- agriculture workforce training: a partnership with the NYS Department of Labor and NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to ensure a pipeline for a future agricultural workforce.

Together, these projects will form a food innovation cluster and small-scale food hub for the Southern Tier to:

- identify and work with local farmers to increase crop production;
- provide education for small scale food manufacturing and food safety;
- identify organizations/institutions to purchase local products or sell at local farmers’ market, regional markets, and local grocery stores; and
- serve as distribution location.

CCE Broome’s EFNEP and Eat Smart New York (ESNY) are aimed at increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, decreasing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, and encouraging healthy lifestyles among low-income residents of Broome County. Other CCE programs and initiatives include:

- Fresh Sites: a CSA Initiative to bring local foods to SNAP participants
- Healthy Lifestyle Coalition, a community initiative to provide programs that address nutrition, cooking, food access, physical activity, community engagement and youth development in economically stressed areas
- Child Hunger Task Force, supported by the county executive’s office and led by Broome-Tioga BOCES, Broome County Health Department, and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier to address the problem of child hunger in Broome County through collaboration, education, awareness, and advocacy
- Farmers’ market recipe demonstrations
- CCE Broome’s on-site CHOW (Community Hunger Outreach Warehouse) Food Pantry where educators conduct cooking and food demos during CHOW Bus deliveries
- Food Safety Certification and Serv Safe classes geared to food service careers
- Farm-to-school programs where educators use theater and puppetry to teach the importance of eating locally
- Afterschool programs focused on nutrition and physical exercise; aimed at Medicare or insurance eligible children and families
The challenge ahead is how all these human and built capital resources can be used to stimulate food access and positively impact health outcomes. How can CCE Broome’s multidisciplinary programs be more effectively integrated within the food system to transform food insecurity into food security? What strategies can be applied to transform today’s school-age children into tomorrow’s locavores? How can CCE Broome’s resources be applied to food insecurity, accessibility and improved public health outcomes?

A New Approach
Through Let’s Eat New York! CCE Broome proposes an interdisciplinary, community-based approach to examining Broome County’s food systems and what can be done to stimulate food access. Using a research-based, community-wide effort, the project will explore strategies for increasing access to local produce among residents of Broome County living in economically stressed areas of Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott while simultaneously increasing the demand for healthy and nutritious foods throughout the county.

Student Participation
CCE Broome’s nutrition, youth development, and agriculture/market educators are committed to working closely with Cornell faculty and students on this project. CCE Broome will facilitate partnerships and collaborations for the student/faculty team through their well-established relationships with the Broome County Health Department and the Broome County Farm Bureau.

Through the Broome County Health Department, students involved in the project will join the Child Hunger Task Force and Healthy Lifestyles Coalition. The health department will facilitate these working partnerships. We envision possible student-led, focus groups and participatory action research projects.

Through its partnership with the Farm Bureau, CCE Broome serves as a hub for agricultural entrepreneurship and economic development. CCE Broome spearheaded the annual Broome County Farm Trail and Legislative Ag Tours so both the public and legislative representatives could more fully understand the economic impact of the agricultural community. Broome County Farm Bureau will work with the Engaged Cornell students to explore strategies for helping the public understand food systems and what can be done to more effectively address food insecurity.

We fully anticipate that the students will bring a fresh perspective to the issues facing these community groups and be able to research strategies that can be used to address food insecurity, improve food access and identify opportunities to improve Broome County’s food system. Options for student engagement include:

- analyzing Broome County’s food systems to better understand how to improve food access
- examining the food hub and identifying strategies for more efficient delivery/access from “farm to table”
- examining options for food distribution so that “day-old” foods from area restaurants and grocery stores can be distributed through food banks and food pantries
identifying potential strategies for growing indoors with controlled atmospheric storage so that produce can be available year-round

Potential student research questions include:

- How can CCE Broome’s nutrition, youth development, and agriculture/market programs be better integrated to ensure a holistic, integrated approach and maximize opportunities in Broome County’s food systems to addressing food insecurity?
- To what extent and in what ways are CCE Broome’s programs helping to address childhood obesity and other chronic diseases in Broome County?
- To what extent and in what ways can the regional farmers’ market help to meet the needs of low-income individuals and impact food insecurity?
- What do low-income families want? What can CCE Broome’s educators do to influence behavioral changes in purchasing patterns, home preparation, and food choices?
- What can be done to maximize food access among the food insecure households in Broome County?

The knowledge about food systems generated through Let's Eat New York! will benefit CCE statewide as strategies to increase food access and promote food security are identified for replication statewide.

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