

Across the state of Georgia, many youth lack proper diet-related knowledge, as there are very few state-issued resources for proper youth nutrition and cooking programming. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension is working to combat this issue across the state, by providing a new set of youth-targeted, cooking curriculum to communities.

Two researchers at the University of Georgia are currently working on creating this new cooking-related curriculum and training materials for Extension employees across Georgia to utilize in their communities.

Courtney Brown, Extension 4-H healthy living specialist, and Alison Berg, assistant professor and state Extension nutrition and health specialist, wanted to gain a better understanding of what programming was already being implemented across the state of Georgia and how they could help to provide resources and curriculum for those programs.

Through their research, Brown and Berg found that over half the counties in Georgia offer some type of youth, cooking programming. Topics offered vary from MyPlate nutrition to hands-on cooking classes. Additionally, they discovered that almost three-fourths of the people who are offering such programming in their communities are in some way related to Georgia 4-H.

“[The] information [gathered from the research] will inform our efforts around curriculum selection, development, training and grant support,” Brown said.

Furthermore, Brown and Berg learned that programming across the state is most commonly taught and created by Extension agents or 4-H volunteers with little to no formal training in the areas they are teaching.

“The results of this study helped us identify barriers and support youth, hands-on, cooking programs delivered by UGA Extension,” Brown said.

Some of the main barriers preventing counties from offering such programming are a lack of resources, materials, curriculum and training. While Extension employees can share materials and personal curriculum amongst themselves informally, there is no official way for these employees and volunteers to share materials, therefore making it hard for some counties to receive any cooking-related curriculum at all.

Roberta Pepper, Catoosa County 4-H program assistant, said, “We [Extension employees] could greatly benefit from a curriculum for hands-on cooking classes. Knowing where to start and how to help a student progress in the cooking/baking adventure would be great. It's often hard to know what skill or recipe to try next that will help someone continue to grow their skills.”

Brown and Berg are working to create a set of state-wide, cooking curriculum to help ensure the quality and uniformity of the information presented to youth across Georgia. Additionally, they are working to increase the number of training programs offered to employees and volunteers teaching the curricula, Brown stated.

The new curriculum and training materials for the programming will be available to every 4-H program and Extension office across the state, Brown said. The curriculum sets will include lessons, materials and resources on food and equipment safety, basic nutrition, MyPlate, cooking skills and Georgia agricultural connections topics, Brown said. The sets will also provide those teaching the topics with additional resources and online training opportunities to help them better understand the topics they are teaching.

The materials produced will help counties who have not previously offered the programming to offer it in the future, and it will support counties already offering the programming. This in turn will allow for more youth across the state of Georgia to have access to cooking and nutrition-related programming.

“Everyone has to eat!” said Brittani Lee, Cobb County 4-H agent. “Why not learn how to cook in a fun way, while knowing you are gaining the correct skills?”