



# Tampa Bay Network To End Hunger



## Summary

The Tampa Bay Network to End Hunger (the Network) secured a Nutrition Coordinator, faculty member from the University of South Florida and a USF student assistant to develop, facilitate and evaluate the *Taste It* program. The program ran successfully from December 2014 thru May 2015. A total of 12 *Taste It* programs were delivered to over 100 recipients at food pantries, a young mother's program and senior meal sites.



*A Taste It demonstration for Meals on Wheels participants*

## Project Goals

- Increase awareness of healthy eating by providing point-of-service, nutrition education to food insecure individuals
- Increase the donation and distribution of healthy foods

## Challenge

The goals of this project were aimed at addressing food insecurity and obesity among food-insecure individuals. Food insecurity occurs in households that have limited access to sufficient safe and nutritionally adequate food without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging or stealing. In 2010, 17.2 million Americans experienced food insecurity, one of the highest levels recorded since 1995 (USDA 2012). In Hillsborough County, an estimated 17% of families experience food insecurity (Feeding America, 2014). This crisis highlights the importance of the emergency food system in the United States, including food banks. Food banks are the foundation of the US emergency food system and serve as central collection centers for canned, fresh, and frozen food and beverage donations. These items are distributed to food-insecure households through partner agencies such as soup kitchens and food pantries.

Although the primary mission of food banks is to alleviate hunger, the rise in obesity and diet-related diseases among food-insecure individuals has increased the need to actively promote more nutritious products. There is clear evidence that food-insecure individuals are more likely to suffer from nutritionally deficient diets compared with people who are food secure despite adequate caloric intake. Additionally, there is growing evidence of a paradoxical syndemic relationship between food insecurity and obesity (Crawford and Webb, 2011). This suggests that food insecurity in the United States is not just about too few calories but a lack of healthful caloric intake and adequate nutrition. The paradigm shift to emphasize the distribution of healthy products at food banks has the potential to address both food insecurity and obesity in vulnerable populations. This also presents a new opportunity for anti-hunger advocates and nutrition advocates to work together toward a common goal.



### Tampa Bay Network to End Hunger

Caitlyn Peacock  
Project Coordinator  
727.488.1860  
caitlyn.peacock@networktoendhunger.org  
http://networktoendhunger.org

Rosy Bailey  
Nutrition Coordinator  
rosy@inseasonpro.com



### University of South Florida College of Public Health

Lauri Wright, PhD.  
Assistant Professor  
813.974.8261  
lwright10@health.usf.edu

Ila Jones, MPH  
Student Assistant



### Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County

Walter W Niles, MPA  
Manager, Office of Health  
Equity  
walter.niles@flhealth.gov

Allison Marron, MPH, CHES  
Community Engagement  
Coordinator  
allison.marron@flhealth.gov

Hugh Pruitt  
Contract Manager  
hugh.pruitt@flhealth.gov

## Solution

*Taste It* is a point-of-service nutrition program that provides condensed nutrition education to food-insecure individuals visiting a food pantry, in conjunction with a food demonstration and tasting of a low-cost, healthy recipe using ingredients provided in the food basket received. The foods sampled are then given to participants to take home. At each session, the impact of the *Taste It* point-of-service program on participants' nutrition knowledge and self-efficacy was evaluated through participant surveys.

In addition, a *Healthy Food Drive Toolkit* was developed and is available on the Network's website. Developed to help organizations conduct food drives that encourage healthy foods, it also serves as a call to action to consider the recipients' health when donating food. The kit includes a background on the hunger-health connection, a list of healthy items to donate, a poster to advertise food drives and an email template to advertise food drives.

## Results

*Taste It* was well received by participants and staff, and successfully impacted participants' confidence (82%) and intent to make healthier food choices (81%). When the site supported a dedicated nutrition lesson, the nutrition knowledge scores were high (79%). In sites that were rushed or didn't have space to provide a dedicated nutrition lesson, nutrition knowledge scores were lower (28%).

The *Healthy Food Drive Toolkit* was evaluated favorably by participating agencies. As of May 2015, the toolkit has been utilized for three food drives. Prior to developing the toolkit, food drives averaged 31% of their donation that met the healthy food guidelines. In food drives that used the *Healthy Food Drive Toolkit*, the percentage of healthy food donated was measured at 42%.

## Sustaining Success

To sustain the *Taste It* program, a full time Nutrition Coordinator and additional portable cooking supplies would be required. The Network has applied for several grants in hopes of sustaining the *Taste It* program, and was recently funded for continuation at senior meal sites. Discussions are under way with the University of Florida's Extension Services to incorporate *Taste It* into their currently funded *Cooking Matters* program provided throughout the state. The *Healthy Food Drive Toolkit* is self-sustaining, as materials are available on the Network's website. Continued marketing by Network partners about the availability of these materials will help increase awareness and participation in Healthy Food Drives.

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**Web Site:** hillsborough.floridahealth.gov

*The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or DOH-Hillsborough.*

### Citations:

- Crawford PB and Webb KL. Unraveling the paradox of concurrent food insecurity and obesity. *Am J Prev Med* 2011;40(2):274-275.
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