

Health Equity Showcase, February 2019

What's the project?

The Healthy Food Safe Food Project aimed to advance health equity by increasing access to healthy, safe food, especially for people who have the least access and greatest barriers to access, by addressing tension points and conflicting objectives among food access and food safety professionals that hinder equitable food access initiatives.

Why is it important?

When food access and food safety staff don't collaborate those impacted most are often those also most impacted by structural racism, bias and other systemic inequities. Overly burdensome and inflexible regulations or regulations administered in a harsh disrespectful manner can disrupt and diminish the creative, collaborative problem solving needed to address the obesity epidemic, which disproportionately impacts communities that have historically been subject to trauma and inequity.

Project title: Healthy Food Safe Food Project

How did you accomplish it? Who were your partners?

U of M Extension and OSHII, with the help of multiples partners, conducted an evaluation to develop of plan of action to make healthy foods accessible while maintaining food safety. The purpose was to identify: 1. Food safety rules, regulations, and policies that help and hinder Minnesotans from making healthy food choices, 2. Efforts to both ensure food safety and make it easier for Minnesotans to choose healthy foods, and 3. Training and resources for food access and food safety to collaborate.

Lessons Learned

Diverse stakeholders expressed that food safety rules, regulations and policies are important and essential but also complicated and can be confusing.

When we understand each other, we can work together as friends to solve the complex structural and systemic problems that create inequities.

Both Food Safety and Food Access can be achieved with an outcome of each making the other stronger.

Results and Next Steps

The most significant change was people who had more adversarial or contentious relationships became colleagues and formed friendships. Food access and food safety people are now working together to ensure all Minnesotans have access to both safe and healthy food. The other impact is that the project resulted in a tool kit that is designed to be a catalyst for interdisciplinary collaborative problem solving among tribal nations, food protection staff, local public health, Extension, state agencies and all the parties involved in efforts to improve the food supply in Minnesota.

The Healthy Food Safe Food resources and tool kit are available through Extension and the Minnesota Food Charter Network. However, there is no program or directive to sustain and support implementation. Unfortunately, OSHII eliminated the funding for the project implementation but the toolkit is still relevant and would be effective if implementation were re-initiated.

Team Members

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Healthy Food, Safe Food, Healthy Future for Minnesota