



California Association of  
Nutrition Network  
Activists

October 6, 2005  
Oakland, CA

Good Morning. My name is Melody Steeples, and I'm here representing CANNACT - the California Association of Nutrition Network Activists. We are an emerging membership association representing the interests of California's FSNE providers and the low income clients we serve.

I believe we all share a vision where making healthy food choices and being physically active is easy to do and the normative behavior. California has been making good headway in this direction, due in large part to FSNE funding. Thanks to FSNE funding:

- low income Californians who have been part of FSNE activities are eating more servings of fruits and vegetables than their unexposed counterparts;
- vending machines in public places around the state are now offering healthier choices;
- jurisdictions around the state are seeking ways to be more pedestrian and bicycle friendly;
- food stamp recipients can use their EBT food stamp benefits to shop at farmers markets in many communities around California;
- more low income families are applying for food stamps because they've learned that food stamp benefits could enable them to buy more fruits and vegetables and other healthful foods; and
- many more California schools with high numbers of low income students became early adopters of junk food restrictions on their campuses.

We were pleased to see that the USDA's new *Food Stamp Nutrition Education Guiding Principles* encourages "behavior change models that include intervention strategies at individual, organizational /institutional and societal levels. FNS recognizes the potential impact of environmental factors, including institution policy, neighborhood design, food access and advertising on eating and physical activity behaviors."

But we were very disappointed to see that the USDA has established new policy that such activities are "beyond the scope" of FSNE. It is these very activities that have allowed California's FSNE projects to achieve its noteworthy results.

An affiliated of the California WIC  
Association

Melody Steeples, MPH, RD  
Acting Director

(925) 323-1932

1107 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Ste. 625  
Sacramento, CA 95814-3608

We are looking forward to working with the USDA, committed stakeholders, and our Congressional representatives on the Farm Bill-- and other legislative vehicles -- to achieve both nutrition assistance and nutrition policy that bring us closer to our vision. We are planning to work toward:

- Codification of program regulations to ensure FSNE can reach all those families in low-income communities that might be eligible for Food Stamps.



California Association of  
Nutrition Network  
Activists

- Including certified, likely and potentially-eligible Food Stamp households, defined as those with incomes up to 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), in FSNE-allowable activities.
- Authorizing local FSNE programs to make effective use of evidence-based approaches to target low-income populations including community development, policy, systems, and environmental change, and media advocacy, public relations, marketing and promotion – as well as traditional education.
- Enabling local FSNE programs to work in many different community locations that reach high proportions of FSNE-eligible persons where they live, work and play, and where food and physical activity decisions are made. Nearly two-thirds of FSNE-eligible adults live outside low-income census tracts that currently qualify for FSNE.
- Removing administrative “silos” that exist between USDA nutrition programs, which hampers efficient and creative nutrition education efforts that partner with and complement federal food program outreach. This targeted approach enhances the potential for positive behavior change and should be encouraged, not prohibited.
- Enabling programs to implement comprehensive FSNE programs that include effective physical activity and community food security interventions, as well as those for healthy eating, and address the community barriers that FSNE-eligible population faces in making healthy choices.
- Redirection of commodity support payments to create a retail-based mechanism to provide participants in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) with monetary incentives to purchase health-promoting foods such as minimally-processed fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain products, potentially increasing the purchasing power of food stamp benefits by over 50%.

In an age where calories are cheap, but good nutrition remains relatively expensive, all levels of government need to respond in a way that supports the most vulnerable in our society to achieve optimal nutrition and prevent diet-related disease. We must move away from this depression-era notion that “it’s too expensive” to ensure good nutrition for all Americans, and recognize that the opposite is true – it’s too expensive to ignore the increasing dominance of a junk food culture and the ill-health it breeds.

Sincerely,

An affiliated of the California WIC  
Association

Melody Steeples, MPH, RD  
Acting Director

(925) 323-1932

1107 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Ste. 625  
Sacramento, CA 95814–3608

Melody W. Steeples, MPH, RD  
Acting Director

California Association of Nutrition Network Activists (CANNACT)