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TOPIC: Effectiveness of Selected Ongoing Research, Extension, and Education Programs in California

Good morning. Today I will be describing a number of ongoing programs in California that promote the well-being of families. These programs include nutrition, welfare reform, and financial literacy for teens and are the result of cooperation among Experiment Station Researchers, campus faculty, and county extension advisors.

Nutrition: Scientists in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at UC Davis are finding solutions to problems of infant and maternal nutrition. They are researching how to create infant formula similar to breast milk and its proteins that prohibit intestinal and respiratory disease. Rice plants have been genetically modified to carry a human gene for a milk protein called lactoferrin. The goal is to use the modified rice as the basis for a new infant formula that is similar to mother's milk.

Other research impacts and findings from nutrition include:

- A proper diet may reduce pregnancy complications and birth defects.**
- A study of young children in the Women and Infant Children federal program revealed a startling fact: 13 percent had anemia and 22 percent had iron deficiency despite efforts to provide the right foods and advice.**
- Infants, young children and pregnant or nursing women are especially at high risk for zinc deficiency because they have increased needs for this essential nutrition.**

The Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley is involved in a number of exciting research and educational programs that relate to children and weight, obesity, determinants of energy imbalance, and healthy eating and childhood overweight prevention. The increasing prevalence of childhood obesity, especially among low-income ethnic population has been well-documented in California. At greatest risk are African American, Hispanic, and Native American children, with obesity prevalence rate of 12.4%, 15.6%, and 14.7% respectively. The work of this Center has resulted in:

The five state WIC child obesity intervention project demonstrated it was feasible to intervene to prevent child overweight in the WIC setting.

Mother's overweight is associated with levels of food insecurity, but preschool children of food insecure mothers are not at risk for greater overweight.

Children and Weight: What Communities Can Do is a systems and environmental change project with the goal of facilitating the availability of nutritious diets to, and healthier food choices, by food stamp program participants. A resource kit, based on research conducted at the Center, has been developed and distributed throughout California and the nation that emphasizes the importance of making changes to create environments that foster healthy eating and physical activity patterns. Community coalitions have been formed in many communities. The Child Overweight Prevention Community Coalitions have been shown to be effective and sustainable and the leaders of these coalitions are viewed as community "resources and experts in child obesity prevention."

Welfare Reform Research

Another UC study reveals some low-income families aren't getting services intended to help them. Rural low-income families are not taking full advantage of support and assistance programs that are known to improve families' financial situations and increase children's well being.

The California study, which is part in a 15-state study, known as NC-223, looks at the impact of welfare reform in rural America. California participation is funded by the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. USDA and the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program are funding the 15-state data analysis. As part of the study, participants are surveyed annually about income, work status, money management, health care, nutrition, food security and transportation.

In California, 40 mostly Latino low-income families in Madera and Kern counties are being tracked over the course of three years. Latino families were the focus in California to give them a voice as Latinos are underrepresented in most nationwide studies.

The study is beginning to reveal surprising effects of poverty. Some people don't have enough money to get groceries at the end of the month, yet we're seeing an increase in overweight and obesity in children and adults. We're not sure about the relationship, but we're starting to believe if people don't always have access to food, when it is available, they eat too much. This issue is being investigated by the Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley.

The first year, researchers found that 75% of the California families eligible for food stamps were not enrolled in the program. Just 19% of the eligible Latino families used food stamps. More than 36% of the Latino children had no health insurance coverage.

When asked about the types of food eaten in the household, using a Food Security Module created by the USDA, 5% were considered food insecure with hunger, 25% were food insecure without hunger, 22.5% were marginally food secure, and not quite half (47.5%) of the California rural families included in the study were food secure.

Based on the findings of this study, CA UCCE instituted an educational program to inform families about their eligibility for the EIC. Data from the second year of the study indicate that more of the eligible families are taking advantage of these programs.

In some cases, the researchers have found ironies in a family's money management strategy. Financial decisions are often made on emotions and without counsel. A family might need transportation and buy a brand new car. They will have huge car payments, but live three families to an apartment.

Each year, the researchers are providing helpful information to participating families, such as toll-free numbers for government programs, budgeting manuals, nutrition guides, etc. In Madera County, a nutrition and parenting skills seminar was offered to research participants.

Just being part of the study is having a positive impact on the lives of some participants. One woman, the first year of the study, said she wanted to go to school, but didn't have a driver's license. By the second year, she had a license, job training and was working as a certified nurse assistant. What made the difference, she related to the interviewer, was being asked at the end of the survey what she would like to see happen in the next three years. She told the interviewer, 'If it wasn't for you asking me what my dreams were, I probably wouldn't have given it much thought.'"

The project's second-year data is currently being analyzed and the third and final round of interviews are being conducted. At the completion of the project, the California statistics will be combined with information from the other states to give decision-makers an idea how policies and programs affect the lives of low-income rural Americans.

Financial Literacy for Youth

Teenagers have access to and spend a great deal of money each year, yet research indicates that their financial literacy is low. On a national financial literacy test for teens, the 12th grade

survey respondents answered only 50% of the questions correctly. In California, only 47% of the questions were answered correctly. A major factor in these low scores is the way personal finance material is presented to students. To find out how students want to learn about financial matters and what they want to learn about, a group of researchers as part of a University of California Cooperative Extension project surveyed teens in California. The data have been used to develop educational materials with "teen appeal." The workgroup is currently in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of these materials. Based on pretest and posttest surveys, preliminary analyses indicate that the materials are being used to successfully engage and educate teenagers. For example, after being involved with the program, respondents reported talking more frequently with their families about their use of money, the importance of savings, family finances and how the family's money should be spent.

The teens also reported thinking more about saving money for the future. This finding was supported by an increase in the number who saved some money (74% before versus 90% after the program). In terms of shopping, they reported comparing prices more often and waiting to buy, reducing impulse buying. The financial skills were especially relevant when it came to buying and maintaining a car. Most reported an increased awareness about ways to save money on car insurance costs, such as drivers' education, having good grades, not getting traffic tickets and being added to their parents' insurance policy.

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