



Groups join to draft hunger policy

Health survey caused concern about 'food gap' in Adams County.

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A lot of people in Adams County are concerned about food. And some of these groups are getting together to figure out a policy and how to make sure everyone has access to nutritious, affordable food.

These groups, which include the Campus Kitchen Project, call themselves the Adams County Food Policy Initiative. Along with Gettysburg College, they include the United Way, the Penn State Cooperative Extension, Healthy Adams County and the Adams County Local Foods Network.

Much of the idea for a need for some sort of food policy to be in place came from a Healthy Adams County community health assessment conducted last year, according to Kathy Gaskin, the organization's president.

Adams County faces some serious problems - much like the rest of the country. The poor have little access to nutritious food, which is linked in part to an obesity rate some consider overwhelming.

The survey and other sources found some statistics highlighting the links between affordability and health that concern members of the policy initiative.

Nearly 30 percent of adults in the county are obese. About 39 percent of children in kindergarten through sixth grade in the county are considered to be overweight or obese. Broken down by income, the greatest statistical percentage of obese people

are from households making between \$10,000 and \$19,999.

The average percentage of students in the county in the free- and reduced-lunch programs is 27.84 percent.

And with the state of the economy, there's a greater risk of a growing "food gap," the term used for the balance of affordability and nutritious foods, Gaskin said.

"Food pantries are seeing a 30 percent increase in people using them," she said. "It's not just the low-income or the poor. We're seeing some middle-class people now. People who have lost their jobs now find themselves in a dilemma."

Donations are about the same, but the need has gone up, she said.

One piece of good news the group is focusing on comes from Adams County's strong agricultural base. Local, nutritious food is produced right here.

Farmers and farm groups are part of the policy council as well as a group called the Adams County Local Foods Network. The group believes one way to close this "food gap" is through agriculture.

Many farmers participating in Adams County's farmers' markets donate what's left at the end of the day to the Campus Kitchen Project.

And the group of about 60 is trying to find more ways to get local agriculture to those in need, said network founder Audrey Hess. One way is to encourage farmers and home gardeners to plant an extra row, which they plan on donating to those in need.

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the great, local foods produced right here in the county and those of us who need to eat," Hess said.

In addition to getting the healthy food to those in need, the group just wants local people to know where they can easily access local food. They keep a running list on their Web site of farmers' markets and local stands around the county. It's being updated now, but the list of places for local produce can be found online at adamscountylocalfoods.wetpaint.com.

The key to solving many of the health and some of the economic problems in the county comes from food, she said.

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