



# Better Living for Texans

<http://blt.tamu.edu>

## Relevance

In Texas, 17% of households have incomes that are at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL). More than 3.5 million Texans participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. This program helps eligible low-income families buy nutritious food to feed their families.

Proper nutrition is important because diet quality has been linked to four of the ten leading causes of death. Research also suggests that the diets of low-income households, including those receiving SNAP benefits and those with children, often lack variety and are typically inadequate in fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, dairy products, and lean meat. Additionally the diets of low-income households tend to be low in fiber, vitamins A and E, folic acid, zinc, calcium, and iron and higher in total fat, saturated fat, and sodium than is currently recommended.

Stretching resources so families have food on the table also presents a challenge for many limited-resource audiences. Data from the 2009 Current Population Survey indicate that as many as 17% of Texas households faced challenges in keeping food on the table at least once within a 12-month period (classified as food insecurity).



The percentage of Texas households that experience food insecurity continues to be higher than the national average of about 15%.

## Response

The Better Living for Texans (BLT) program is a cooperative endeavor among the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA. BLT has been implemented by Extension since 1995 and today includes every county in Texas that is served by a county Extension agent for Family and Consumer Sciences.

A component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, BLT provides educational programs to SNAP recipients, applicants, and other approved audiences to help improve their ability to plan and prepare nutritious meals, stretch food dollars, and prepare and store food safely. Incorporating the Walk Across Texas program into BLT provides an opportunity to help the target audience increase their level of physical activity.

BLT is delivered through a variety of teaching methods that reflect audience needs. Teaching methods include: lesson series, single education events, one-to-one consultations, demonstrations, and tours. With the presence of BLT in almost every county in the state, Texas AgriLife Extension Service is poised to reach all areas of Texas, both rural and urban, and increase the likelihood of meeting the nutrition education needs of under-served Texans.

## Results

During fiscal year 2010, county Extension agents reported a total of 1,009,411 educational contacts from adults and youth participating in BLT.

A survey of 1,636 BLT adult graduates from across the state found that BLT participants made meaningful changes in the frequency that they practiced selected food resource management behaviors. For example:

- The percentage of graduates who planned their meals “always” rose from 24% before BLT to 60% 30 days after the program ended.
- More than 74% were shopping with a list after the program ended, compared to 34% when the program began.
- Almost 47% of the graduates reported that they “always” compared prices when shopping for food when the program began. However, 30 days after graduating, more than 80% were doing so.

Participants were also asked to estimate how much of their own money they were spending on groceries before and after the BLT program. On average, participants lowered their monthly out-of-pocket food expenses each month by \$28, which if maintained and were not due to some other economic hardship, could lead to an annual savings of \$336 per household.

BLT has a history of high customer satisfaction. Results from the survey found that most participants (96%) rated BLT as either “excellent” or “good.” In addition, 88% of respondents indicated that participating in BLT was helping them to feed their families more nutritious meals.

More than two-thirds (71%) of respondents identified BLT as their first exposure to Texas AgriLife Extension Service, suggesting that this program is enabling Extension to reach audiences that might otherwise not have the opportunity to benefit from Extension education programs.

To learn more about other impacts the BLT program made during 2010, please visit our website.

