

STRENGTHENING OKLAHOMA FAMILIES

Family and Consumer Science News

Food and nutrition security continue to be problematic

The terms food security, nutrition security and hunger are often used interchangeably. Although the strategies to address these issues are connected, there are important differences that should be understood.

Food security is defined as a household in which all members at all times can access enough food for an active, healthy life. Some households may achieve this by purchasing enough food. Others, however, are considered food secure because they use food pantries, the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) and other food assistance resources.

Nutrition security is food quality, and the USDA defines it as all people in a household having regular and equitable access to healthy, safe and affordable foods that are essential to optimal health and well-being.

While some households are food secure, they can be nutrition insecure. They have access to enough food to keep them full, but the food lacks the necessary balance of vitamins and minerals required for healthy living.

Oklahoma has some of the worst food insecurity statistics in the country. More than 15% of households are food insecure, said Candy Gabel state coordinator for [Oklahoma State University Extension's Community Nutrition Education Programs](#).



“About 15.4 Oklahoma households are food insecure. This places us as one of only seven states that has a food insecurity rate higher than the national average of 13.5%,” she said. “More than 1.2 million Oklahomans live in low-income communities that have low access to nutritious food. While you might think that happens only in rural areas, research indicates over 1 million of them live in urban communities while 187,000 are located in rural areas.”

Why is food and nutrition insecurity a concern? Hunger is connected to higher poverty rates and costs Oklahoma more than \$1.4 billion each year through increased illness and decreased academic achievement. Food insecurity increases chronic illnesses, including diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and kidney disease.

Moreover, food-insecure children in Oklahoma are more likely to have lower reading and math scores and increased behavior and social problems. Food insecurity can also impact high school graduation rates.

“Food insecurity weakens the labor force, decreases educational attainment, and increases healthcare costs in Oklahoma,” she said. “And while food insecurity and

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poverty aren't the same, they are related. Other factors that are associated with the lack of access to adequate, nutritious food include higher unemployment, lower household assets and some demographic characteristics."

Some rural communities are food deserts, meaning a quarter of the town's population lives more than 10 miles from a grocery store. Those areas may have convenience stores, but the food sold there is typically much more expensive and doesn't offer the variety needed for a healthy diet. In addition, these areas have fewer charitable food service options than urban areas.

Gabel said nearly 80% of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participants are children, elderly or disabled. In 2023, more than 900,000 Oklahomans relied on SNAP at some point during the year to meet their basic nutritional needs. Senior citizens sometimes have to choose between buying food or paying for medical care and prescriptions. In addition, about two-thirds of Oklahoma public school students participate in the free or reduced-price meal program.

"It's important for citizens to use the donated food/food pantries, private dollars, and state and federal resources to be able to put nutritious food on the table," she said. "Contact the [county OSU Extension office](#) to learn more about the valuable resources available in your area. OSU Extension's Community Nutrition Education Programs can help empower limited-resource Oklahomans to improve their nutrition to help improve their quality of life."

Crunchy Vegetable Wraps

Ingredients:

1. 4 Tablespoons low-fat cream cheese
2. ½ teaspoon ranch seasoning mix
3. 2 whole wheat tortillas
4. ¼ cup broccoli, chopped
5. ¼ cup carrots, grated
6. ¼ cup zucchini, cut into strips
7. ¼ cup yellow summer squash, cut into strips
8. ½ tomato, diced
9. ⅓ cup green bell pepper, seeded and diced
10. 2 Tablespoons chives, chopped fine



Directions:

1. In a small bowl, stir ranch seasoning into cream cheese, chill.
2. Wash and prepare vegetables.
3. Spread cream cheese mixture onto flour tortilla, staying one inch from edge.
4. Sprinkle vegetables and chives over cream cheese mixture. Roll tortilla tightly.
5. Repeat steps 4 and 5 for the second tortilla.
6. Chill for 1-2 hours before serving (the wrap will hold its shape better).
7. With a sharp knife slice into circles and serve.
8. Store leftovers in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to four days.

Nutrition Information:

Serving Size (½ a wrap), Calories: 100, Total Fat: 4g, Saturated Fat: 2g, Cholesterol: 10mg, Sodium: 260mg, Total Carbohydrates: 13g, Fiber: 1g, includes 0g Added Sugars, Protein: 4g, Calcium: 2%, Iron: 0%, Potassium: 4%

Source: [Nebraska Extension/UNL Food](#)

Tax season is prime time for scammers

Tax season has arrived and with that comes another opportunity for scammers to take your money. Awareness of scammers' unscrupulous schemes can help keep taxpayers from becoming victims.

While scammers work year-round, tax season is prime time for them, said [Mengya Wang, Oklahoma State University Extension](#) finance specialist.



“Although anyone can get scammed, older people tend to be more vulnerable, along with individuals new to paying taxes,” she said. “Scammers often use a sense of urgency, making people feel rushed into making a decision they might not otherwise. Your best line of defense is to remember the [Internal Revenue Service](#) will not call, text or email you. Any form of communication in these manners is not legitimate. The IRS communicates only through the U.S. Postal Service.”

A popular scam involves answering a phone call in which the caller indicates the taxpayer owes money that must be paid immediately to avoid being arrested or fined. The scammer then asks for bank account information to withdraw the payment.

Another ploy claims the IRS recalculated the tax return and the taxpayer is owed money. In this case, the caller asks to confirm bank accounts so the refund can be deposited.

Wang said taxpayers should also be aware of fraudulent tax preparers.

“If they offer an unusually low rate or base the rate on a percentage of the tax return, be cautious,” she said. “Other red flags include guaranteeing a large refund without fully reviewing your financial situation, asking you to sign a blank tax form or requesting fees to be paid upfront in cash – especially if they don’t provide a receipt.”

To help prevent being scammed, Wang suggests filing taxes as early as possible. This will help avoid the last-minute rush to finish everything by the April 15 filing deadline.

Some taxpayers may discover during the tax-filing process that their identity has been stolen. If this happens, file an [Identity Theft Affidavit](#). This form alerts the IRS that someone has filed taxes using your information. Be sure to check with the credit reporting agencies and put a freeze on your credit.

The IRS offers legitimate sources for taxpayers to get help filing taxes. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs offer free help for qualifying taxpayers. [More information on these programs](#) is available online.

“No matter what time of year, consumers who are tempted to take action due to a phone call, text message or an email, take a pause,” Wang said. “Nothing is so urgent a decision must be made in that moment. Call someone and get a second opinion. Once you step back and consider everything, it’s much easier to see the whole picture and determine it was likely a scam. That little bit of extra time can save you money and protect your assets.”

April is National Pecan Month

Here are some pecan facts:

As far back as 1600 BC Fossils of pecan seeds and leaves were formed near the banks of the Rio Grande.

In the 1500's Native Americans relied on wild pecans for medicinal purposes.

In 1886 the first recipe for Pecan Pie was published. Pecans are a naturally gluten free food.

To protect the pecan's rich oils and buttery taste, do not store shelled pecans at room temperature. For best quality, always keep your shelled pecans in the refrigerator.

Source: [American Pecans](#)

Family & Consumer Sciences helps communities, families, youth and individuals address issues of health, wealth and well-being through research-based Extension education and programs that are proven to work.



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Celebrate Spring – National Picnic Day

National Picnic Day is celebrated on April 23. Enjoy this day by having a picnic outside with your child(ren). If the weather does not cooperate have a picnic on your living room floor! Here are a few picnic tips:

- Pack all necessary items in a picnic basket, cooler (with ice) or container. Have plenty of water, trash bags, and a blanket to sit on. Bring items to wash hands: soap, paper towels or wet wipes.
- Bring along some entertainment such as balls, music or games.
- Don't forget the sunscreen, fun glasses and hats.
- Be sure to keep hot food hot and cold food cold to prevent food borne illness. Don't let food set out for more than two hours or one hour under really hot temperatures.
- Small individual bottles of water make packing easier – no cups to pack.
- Keep it simple; take non-perishable foods or foods that don't require utensils - children love finger foods.
- Remember to keep your picnic location as clean as you found it so use the trash bags that were packed.

Source: [Nebraska Extension](#)

Strengthening Oklahoma Families is a bi-monthly publication of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. The information given herein is supplied with the understanding no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Cooperative Extension is implied.

Dates to Remember

March

21 – OHCE Craft Day
25 – NE District Meeting, Guthrie OK

April

9 – OHCE Executive Meeting
18 – Office Closed, Good Friday
23 – Spring Council

May

4 -10 – OHCE Week
23 – OHCE Craft Day

June

11 – OHCE Executive Meeting
20 – OHCE Craft Day

Wagoner County OHCE Groups

In-Towners

2nd Tuesday of the Month, 10 a.m.
Yorkshire Village, Wagoner

Shahan

3rd Wednesday of the Month, 10 a.m.
Wagoner County Fair Building

Starlight

1st Thursday of the month, 7 p.m.
Individual homes

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