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Food Hero: Helpful messages for healthy eating

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SOURCE:

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CORVALLIS, Ore. – The newly updated Food Hero website (foodhero.org) is an online resource for people who want to eat healthy meals, and it is the center of the Oregon State University Extension Service Food Hero campaign.

"The idea is to use the Internet to connect with people and offer them tools for healthy eating," said Lauren Tobey, OSU nutrition specialist. "Right now, there are things they can do to make healthy, kid-friendly meals for their families."

Food Hero is a research-based social marketing campaign aimed at parents who use the Internet and have kids under the age of 18 living in their homes, Tobey said. "Our secondary population is the children in the families."

The goal is simple: show parents and their kids how easy it is to eat more fruits and vegetables, whether fresh, frozen or canned. The website provides recipes, tips and tools on how to prepare meals that are low cost, simple and fast. The entire site is in both English and Spanish.

"A long-term goal is that foodhero.org becomes the WebMD of healthy eating," Tobey said.

Fourteen OSU county Extension offices in Harney, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Linn/Benton, Marion/Polk/Yamhill, Multnomah, Tillamook, Umatilla/Morrow and Washington are participating and have aprons, table covers, community posters, postcards and cookbooks to use in their communities.

Billboards and grocery store displays point to the Food Hero website for tools

on what families can do immediately to make healthy food choices. In Multnomah County bus shelters and benches, as well as movie theaters pilot the how-to-eat-well information because the county has the largest population in the state using SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the Food Stamp program).

The idea for Food Hero came in 2009 after OSU surveyed Oregon people eligible for SNAP. Results showed that although 81 percent of those surveyed said they wanted to serve more balanced meals, they tended to not eat recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables. In addition, the largest percentage of those surveyed (47 percent) want to find healthy food choice information online.

"A diet rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of chronic disease, such as some types of cancer, heart disease and stroke. It also can help people maintain a healthy weight," Tobey said.

The Food Hero campaign is funded through the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Oregon Department of Human Services and OSU Extension.

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