

GO LOCAL HEALTHY FOODS PROMOTION IN POHNPEI, MICRONESIA

Program has potential to reduce the economic and health effects of a shift to imported food

Public Health Problem

- Obesity and diabetes are serious problems in the Federated States of Micronesia but a large survey of Micronesians identified no cases of diabetes before residents shifted their food intake to cheaper, imported foods such as rice and refined flour and away from eating local bananas, taro, breadfruit, panadanus, and other local staple foods.
- Attitudes of residents about local foods hindered consumption. For example, some said that taro, a nutrient-rich native food, is “just starch” implying that it had no value and perhaps contributing to the adopted preference for imported white rice and refined flour products.

Program

- The *Go Local* program initiated by the non-profit, non-governmental organization, Island Food Community of Pohnpei, one of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia, promotes growing and use of local foods and heightened awareness of their “CHEEF” benefits: **C**ulture, **H**ealth, **E**nvironment, **E**conomics, and **F**ood security.
- Involvement by many groups and agencies including agriculture, health and education agencies; church, youth, community and women’s groups; and local media and business facilitates the promotion of local foods. Some funding was provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through their IMMPaCt program supporting global nutrition interventions and to the island’s diabetes prevention and control program.
- Communication and educational methods include workshops, radio, newspapers, email, posters, billboards, newsletters, recipes, postage stamps, post cards, bumper stickers, and a Proclamation by the Governor proclaiming locally grown Karat as the State Banana of Pohnpei. A *Going Yellow* video with the “Let’s Go Local” theme song promotes this native fruit. Efforts to encourage small-scale processing of local foods were also initiated.

Impact

- After two years of promotion of local foods which contain health-promoting fiber, vitamins and minerals, imported rice consumption decreased and local banana and taro consumption increased in this population.
- Growing, harvesting and preparing local food provides physical activity benefits and promotes self reliance.
- Buying locally-grown food strengthens the local economy, supports family farming, safeguards health, and protects the environment - as well as providing exceptionally fresh and tasty food.
- One community resident says, “I tell you it is a very effective program, when we have our special gatherings, we now have local food dishes and we say “Go local!”

Contact

Dr. Lois Engelberger
Island Food Community of Pohnpei
www.islandfood.org

Adelino Lorens
Pohnpei Agriculture of
the Office of Economic Affairs

Robina Anson
Pohnpei State Dept.
of Health