The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

FFORC
Food · Fitness · Opportunity
Research Collaborative

2025 ANNUAL REPORT













1700 M.L.K. Jr Blvd, CB #7426
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

foodfitnessopportunity.org

Instagram: @unc_fforc
YouTube: @unc_fforc
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/unc-fforc
Bluesky: @unc-fforc.bsky.social

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | NC SNAP-ED | CAROLINA HUNGER INITIATIVE | FFORC Food · Fitness · Opportunity Research Collaborative

The UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention's Food, Fitness and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC) aims to build economic security, improve health outcomes and contribute to community-based research to address those affected by inequity in North Carolina.

We do this through nutrition education and community-designed programs, working alongside local community partners to increase access to nutritious food, opportunities for physical activity, and community well-being.

17 Towns with Community-based Projects

23 Collaborating Community Partners

OUR TEAMS

Community-Based Programs

Our community-based programs are designed and driven by communities. We enjoy working with local partners to make changes to policies, systems, and environments to address socioeconomic barriers and improve community health. This work is primarily led by the **Food, Fitness, and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC).**

Child Nutrition Project

The Child Nutrition Project, led by the Carolina Hunger Initiative, focuses on increasing access to healthy foods for kids and their families. This work is primarily led by the **Carolina Hunger Initiative (CHI).**

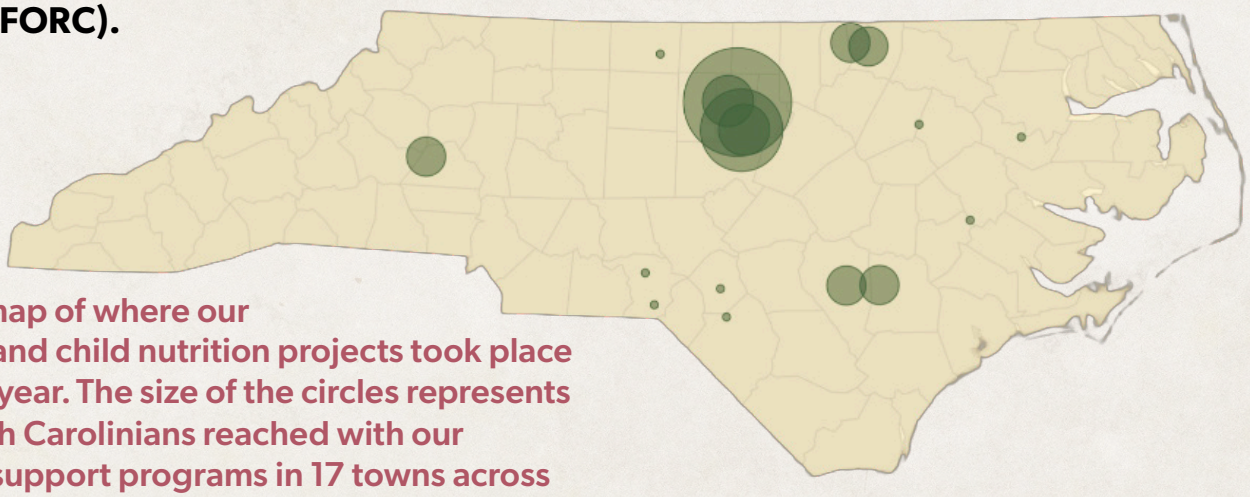


image: Above is a map of where our community-based and child nutrition projects took place the 2024-25 fiscal year. The size of the circles represents the number of North Carolinians reached with our programming. We support programs in 17 towns across North Carolina and provide free nutrition education resources and online classes statewide!

PROJECT UPDATES

A note from our Director, Molly De Marco:

It's been a year of change and resilience for our country and our team. Our FFORC team's main source of funding for fifteen years, via the SNAP-Ed program administered by the US Department of Agriculture, was eliminated by the new federal administration. You'll see highlighted in this 2025 annual report, we have still carried out much community-based research and programming while we seek other funding sources to fill the gap and allow us to continue with our community-based healthy eating and active living work. From digging in the dirt to connecting people with bikes to ride, we have been busy. In addition to a transition in our funding, we have had transitions in our team. After ten years with FFORC, Rev. William Kearney retired in September. We were lucky to have his guidance and stead presence. We also graduated a number of students. We are so proud of them and excited to see what they do next.



We look forward to what we will do, together, in 2026 and are thankful for our many partners who make this work possible.

Molly De Marco

Community Gardens

We work alongside community partners to grow and harvest healthy foods while promoting local economies and creating economic opportunities for small farmers.

FFORC successfully maintained 13 community gardens, with 8 participating in the 2nd iteration of our new Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) program.

39,406 Pounds of fresh produce harvested

2,611 Community members received fresh produce

327 Volunteers across all garden programs

Participatory Grantmaking Process

PGM is designed to cede decision-making power to those closest to the work and allows our community partners to make the decisions as to how funds are allocated across the projects. In our second iteration, we applied the feedback we received from community partners and lessons we learned from the first process to better tailor this process to those invited to apply. In this iteration, we changed the proposal structure from video to recorded PowerPoint to **reduce technical skill required and support digital skill development**, restructured the Q&A process to allow for **more peer networking**, and assigned a member of our team to each partner to **support with proposal development and presentation creation.**

Through implementation of this process, we have seen remarkable outcomes with our partners:

- **Enhanced creativity i**n proposed community health initiatives
- **Strengthened local partnerships** through peer learning and resource sharing
- **Increased transferable skills** in proposal development and project management
- **Reinforced community resilience** through direct empowerment of local decision-makers





images: PGM community partners and FFORC team members at the End-of-Year PGM celebration, an opportunity to network and share accomplishments and lessons learned from community programming, following the first PGM iteration, in October 2024 at Coharie Tribal Center.

PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

Below are some highlights of the creative projects and impacts of our community partners who participated in this year's PGM process.



image: Coharie (Sampson Co) installed a high tunnel at their tribal center to extend their growing season





image: Green Duke (Warren Co) utilized a high tunnel, with the goal of producing and distributing 10,000 pounds of produce





image: Little Bud Thorbs (Lenior Co) committed to extend the growing season and increase the harvest through enrollment in an agriculture course and the addition of high tunnels





image: Mineral Springs (Richmond Co) developed a partnership with the local elementary school, to construct a walking path around the garden perimeter (pictured left), providing a much-needed space for exercise to the local community

Communities on the move

COTM addresses barriers to active living by building residents' capacity to become leaders and change agents and creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. The COTM initiative encompasses several separate but complementary projects, including The Fairview Community Garden, Fairview Youth in Action Internship, Educational Workshops, and Women on the Move.



image: Speed hump installed in Fairview neighborhood due to efforts made by Youth in Action interns

In 2025, approximately 1,385 residents of Hillsborough's Fairview neighborhood were impacted by environmental and programmatic changes supporting active living, plus direct participation from youth interns, gardeners, and Women on the Move participants.

1,385
Hillsborough residents reached

Traffic Calming Workshops

In 2025, our COTM team facilitated three Traffic Calming Workshops (Educational Workshops) with over 55 community members in attendance. We also worked with community members to advocate for multiple community amenities. For example, we supported our community partners to advocate with Orange County Parks and Recreation staff to obtain portable soccer goals for Fairview Park.



image: New stop sign recently installed in Fairview neighborhood due to efforts made by Youth in Action interns

Communities on the move

Youth in Action

During the 2024-2025 school year, eight interns and two youth coordinators—both alumni of the Fairview Youth in Action (FYIA) internship program—created and advocated for three research projects, including improving street safety, creating more vibrant public spaces, and more inclusive parks. As a result of their efforts, the Town of Hillsborough installed speed bumps and stop signs on Rainey Avenue (shown on pg. 5), a key collector street in the neighborhood, to calm traffic.



image: Fairview Youth in Action workshop with Orange County Arts Commission



image: YIA intern Stephanie spearheaded the Little Library project in Fairview. She shares her updates during Walk Fairview Day.

Several improvements were made to the Dorothy N. Johnson Community Center, including a new bus shelter, community kitchen, native landscaping, and a little free library. Additionally, we developed partnerships with Orange County government to advocate for trail improvements and a proposed soccer field at Fairview Park.



image: Tree planting ceremony at Dorothy N. Johnson Community Center to commemorate Arbor Day

COMMUNITIES on the MOVE

WALK FAIRVIEW DAY

Our FYIA interns led our 5th Annual Walk Fairview Day on August 9th with over 75 attendees again this year!



image: Attendees on the guided walking tour of the Fairview neighborhood, tour designed by YIA interns.

Bike helmets, school supplies were given away, and everyone enjoyed a meal.



image: Walk Fairview Day attendees enjoy event activities



image: YIA interns Izel (left) and Asia (right) share their research project on community center usage

This year's intern-led projects focused on **inclusive parks, vibrant places, public art and healthy food access,** which they showcased during the walk.



image: YIA interns Naviyah (left) and Natalie (right) share their research project on public art

Community-Designed Programs

Community-designed programs are initiatives developed and shaped by community members to address their specific needs, challenges, and aspirations. These projects emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and local knowledge, ensuring the solutions are relevant and sustainable. FFORC supports three: Striving to Thrive, Golden Journeys, and Women on the Move!

This year, we evaluated these programs to determine how well participants are meeting various nutrition, physical activity, and other programmatically relevant guidelines. Those findings have been included under each program's update.

STRIVING TO THRIVE

Located in Duplin County, Diversity Nurtures Achievement (DNA) Community Youth Center is a safe haven for the greater Duplin County area, providing support for local youth, their families, and the greater community.



image: DNA intends to turn this structure into a greenhouse to further opportunities to educate their youth participants and increase their community garden reach

Striving to Thrive's evaluation assessed nutrition, physical activity, and other healthy behavior knowledge and behavior change among youth participants and the parent's perception of the program's impact on their youth.

Of the **35 elementary-aged youth** who participated, they reported engaging in the following healthy behaviors "most days" or "every day":

- **62%** consume fruit
- **54%** consume vegetables
- **100%** engage in physical activity
- **83%** drink water

89% report trying new foods when offered at least "some days" or more frequently.

Of the **15 parents** who participated, representing 21 youth participants, **100%** **"Agree" or "Strongly Agree"** that program participation has improved or increased their child(ren)'s:

- Willingness to taste both fruits and vegetables
- Physical activity levels
- Understanding of food production

GOLDEN JOURNEYS

Golden Journeys is a wellness program dedicated to providing culturally-focused nutrition and health education to primarily older, mixed-income Black women in Warren County.



image: Golden Journeys participants and program facilitators

COMMUNITY-DESIGNED PROGRAMS

Golden Journeys' evaluation assessed nutrition and physical activity knowledge and behavior change.

14 participants reported they:

- **Eat a variety** of fruits and vegetables, but find it difficult to meet daily recommendation
- **Exercise** an average of **3 days**/week

Key barriers to preparing cultural foods include: limited recipe knowledge, ingredient accessibility challenges, lack of cooking confidence, time constraints, and ingredient cost.

Top cited barriers to increasing physical activity include: pain/injury, lack of free time, and concerns about safe environments.

WOMEN ON THE MOVE

Women on the Move (WOTM) is a collaboration with Fairview Community Watch to offer physical activity opportunities and nutrition classes to women in the Fairview Community.

Women on the Move's evaluation assessed physical activity knowledge and behavior change.

Of the 20 participants that responded:

- **All** report being at least "somewhat confident" in their ability to **maintain a regular fitness routine,** with **over half reporting "confident"** or **"very confident"**
- **80%** engage in **strength training** at least **1 day** per week.



image: Fitness instructor Emily (pictured in blue tee) leading WOTM participants in wall strength exercises.

327

Minutes of physical activity

- **85%** complete **at least 2 days** per week of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity **cardiovascular exercise.**

WARREN COUNTY FARMERS MARKET

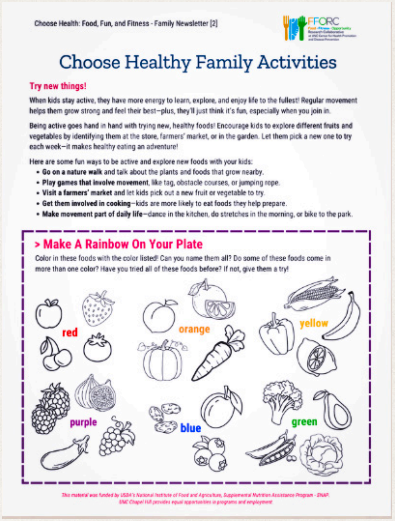


The Warren County Farmers Market (WCFM), held at the Warren County Health Department (544 W. Ridgeway St., Warrenton), features locally grown produce, locally raised meat, eggs, food demonstrations, baked goods, plants, flowers, body care products, handmade crafts, and more!

The Warren County Food Policy Council (WCFPC) partners with local organizations to advocate for environmental and agricultural improvements and opportunities. Beginning in 2024, FFORC, the WCFPC, and the WCFM partnered to support the expansion of programs offered at the Market, including the implementation of the Double Bucks program.

This year, surveys were distributed to gather feedback and better cater the market to the local community. **Here are some of the findings of the 22 surveys collected:**

- The market has **reach beyond its zip code**, with **about 40%** come from surrounding zip codes.
- **Over 90% use SNAP, EBT, Double Up Buck or Senior Vouchers.**
- Respondents mention the difference the market has made in their life, health, and community: providing **fresh foods** and produce, an **opportunity to be social**, meeting new people and reconnecting with old friends, and seeing a **difference in their health** and the health of their **family**.


Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness - Family Newsletter [2]

Choose Healthy Family Activities

Try new things!

When kids stay active, they have more energy to learn, explore, and enjoy life to the fullest! Regular movement helps them grow strong and feel their best—plus, they'll just think it's fun, especially when you join in.

Being active goes hand in hand with trying new, healthy foods! Encourage kids to explore different fruits and vegetables by identifying them at the store, farmers' market, or in the garden. Let them pick a new one to try each week—it makes healthy eating an adventure!

Here are some fun ways to be active and explore new foods with your kids:

- **Go on a nature walk** and talk about the plants and foods that grow nearby.
- **Play games that involve movement**, like tag, obstacle courses, or jumping rope.
- **Visit a farmers' market** and let kids pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try.
- **Get them involved in cooking**—kids are more likely to eat foods they help prepare.
- **Make movement part of daily life**—dance in the kitchen, do stretches in the morning, or bike to the park.

> Make A Rainbow On Your Plate

Color in these foods with the color listed! Can you name them all? Do some of these foods come in more than one color? Have you tried all of these foods before? If not, give them a try!

red orange yellow purple blue green

This material was funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - (SNAP. UNC Chapel Hill provides equal opportunities in programs and employment

image: Family Friendly newsletters were distributed, providing education, recipes and fun activities.

"Thanks for vouchers and double bucks. I could eat vegetables I love but can't always afford."

"Please continue. A great outing experience for seniors and all!"

"It helps my family with food. It helps us with good health too."

"The people are such a joy smiling faces, and always helpful."

Fresh food is better for you. I can tell a difference in my health."

"Every time is unique experience."



image: WCFM was highlighted on CBS17 My Carolina news segment on May 31, 2025 to discuss its opening day and the benefits of market expansion to diverse audiences and increasing accessibilty to more families.

506

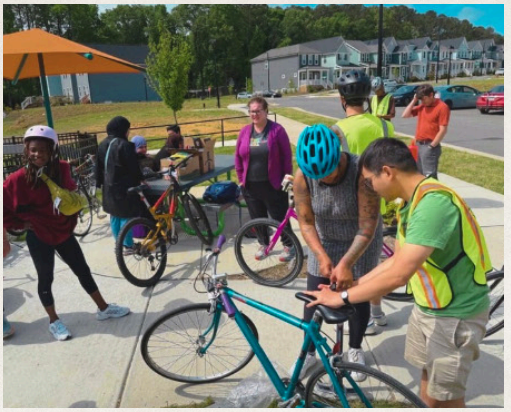
Seniors & families benefited from Double Up Food Bucks Incentives

$12,200

Redeemed Double Up Food Bucks & POP Bucks Incentives

PUBLIC TRANSIT INITIATIVE

In partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, FFORC was awarded a Triangle Transportation Choices Equity and Inclusion grant from the Central Pines Regional Council with funds from the United States Department of Transportation's Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program. This program is working to create transportation networks that support everyone's needs.





Through our active travel initiative with Habitat for Humanity, we have been working to get people excited about getting from place to place actively. In three Orange Co communities, Rogers Road, Efland-Cheeks and Weavers Grove, we have been able to connect 15 people with a bike and repair several more.

Weave Your Way
WEAVERS GROVE

At community events, there were bike blender demonstrations, generating refreshing smoothies and including all ages into active living opportunities.

We partnered with Chapel Hill Transit on community bus rides and to help people practice putting a bike on a bike rack on a bus.





We have also partnered with Fleet Feet, River Mill Cycles, Breakthrough Physical Therapy as well as the Town of Chapel Hill to connect more people with ways to live actively.

SNAP-ED FUNDING UPDATE

On July 4th, 2025, the federal budget bill passed known as the "Big Beautiful Bill", which includes the elimination of funding for SNAP-Ed. This is a devastating blow to our work and to the communities we serve. Stripping funding from programs that directly support the health and wellbeing of families and individuals who are already navigating systemic barriers is not a budget decision, but a moral failure. UNC FFORC has received SNAP-Ed funding for 15 years and depended on this funding to support vital community-driven initiatives, including:

- **Healthy eating projects like our community gardens and the participatory grantmaking process**
- **Active living efforts such as Communities on the Move, Fairview Youth in Action, Women on the Move, and active transportation activities**
- **Culturally tailored programs through Golden Journeys and Diversity Nurtures Achievement**
- **Support for local food systems and farmers markets**

Right now, we have funding to operate our current programs through September 30, 2026. We are focused on finishing out this year strong while also planning for the future and exploring alternative ways to sustain this important work. Together with our partners, we are actively seeking new funding opportunities, but filling the funding gap left by SNAP-Ed will be impossible. We are proud of the work we have done together, over the years, to improve the lives of North Carolinians. We couldn't have accomplished all of this without our partners and we thank you.

The communities we serve did not create this crisis but are being made to bear the consequences of it. **It's important, now more than ever, to work toward creating healthy, active, and connected communities. We know that SNAP-Ed makes North Carolina healthier. We are proud of the work we have done and the lives we have changed for the better.**

In community,
- the FFORC Team

THANK YOU REVEREND KEARNEY!



This fall, we celebrated the retirement and incredible contributions of our dear friend and colleague, Reverend William Kearney. For more than 18 years, Rev. K has been Molly De Marco's trusted community research partner, and for the past decade, a valued member of our FFORC team.

We wish him all the best in this next chapter!

Congratulations to our graduating students!



We celebrate the graduations of many students who have contributed countless hours and dedication to our team and community partners. Pictured is doctoral student, Dr. Ximena Perez-Velazco, who dedicated five years to our team.

We wish her great success in the journey ahead!

Graduate Students

Evan Ayers
Aidan Moyer

Undergraduate Students

Emile Charles
Max Feldman

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

FFORC
Food · Fitness · Opportunity
Research Collaborative

THE POWER OF A COMMUNITY LIES IN ITS VARIETY AND THE UNITED EFFORTS OF ALL ITS PEOPLE.



We strive to make a place where everyone, no matter their origin or views, can gather to exchange ideas, learn, and develop.