

FMNP Educator Spotlight: Yvonne Bravo



Can you tell me about your roles and positions within Cornell Cooperative Extension?

I work as an Extension Associate for the Nutrition and Health Program in New York City Cooperative Extension. Another one of my roles is being a program coordinator for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Education Program [in New York City]. I'm also part of the EFNEP program, and I'm part of a training team that trains community nutrition educators to work in the field. We typically do at least one or two runs of the training program called Navigating for Success, a 3 to 4 month program that trains new hires to become teachers and facilitators in their community.

How long have you been providing Farmers' Market Nutrition Program education?

Well, indirectly, quite some time, but directly, now that I'm in the position, since 2016. So about six years.

Do you like to add any personal touches to lesson curriculum that you think helps get your messages across to people?

I like to add a little bit of how I personally like to prepare foods at home. People want to know how you're actually cooking at home, and you kind of want to be a model in that way. For example, you don't only want to say, "Eat kale," but you're not even touching it at home. And of course that's not in our curriculum, but that's how we can be good resources when we show empathy, when we ask questions, when we show that we deal with the same issues, and we're doing something to face it as well.

How would you attract more people to your table, and how do you keep them engaged when you're at the market?

We train our staff and volunteers to be very engaging and welcoming. It makes such a difference when you hear, "Hi welcome to the market! Today

we're doing this recipe. Would you like to try it?" That kind of personable touch is why people actually like coming and buying at farmers' markets. Also, we tend to have lots of volunteers that speak Spanish or Chinese, and that makes such a difference because imagine you're in a market, you're not comfortable with English, and then someone says, "Buenos días," or "Ni Hao," or something like that. It makes a big difference to families. Sometimes you hear they express themselves even more in another language when they know that you're there to help them in that language as well.

What would you say is important for other educators to know about Farmers' Market Nutrition Program education, and what advice would you give an educator?

One is that we get better at public speaking and we get the rewards of actually helping people directly. The second thing is you can actually market to people, and you can take your materials as an educator and offer nutrition workshops. You're not losing out when you're working at farmers' markets, you're actually winning on all sides. You're helping the community, you're helping people directly, and you're actually finding people that might want to take a nutrition workshop.

What is your philosophy for community nutrition education, and how does that come through in your approaches to nutrition education?

We want to have research-based education. There is just so much out there: Google, YouTube, Instagram, and people actually know how to look for it. If they want to find out about any kind of disease, they know where to look. But most of the time, those search engines come up with websites that are not trustworthy, and people have different agendas or they're trying to sell you something or convince you to adopt a certain lifestyle. So first of all, my approach with community nutrition is that everything that we say or provide has to be based on science and has to be based on research.

The main idea when you're doing community nutrition is not to make it seem like it's hard to eat healthy, but actually give people tools, skills and easy ways for them to cook more with fruits and vegetables. It shouldn't be so hard to decipher a lesson or a message from us. The simpler, the better. Because at the end of the day, what you want to do is motivate behavior change. Like I said, you want to engage people, ask them open-ended questions, and when you've heard them, then you can share these research based messages and also make sure that you're also providing the most you can with technical skills.

Special thanks to Yvonne Bravo for her time and insights, and Cole Hempel for conducting the interview. Please note that the perspectives presented in these interviews do not necessarily reflect the positions of FMNP, Cornell University, and/or Cornell Cooperative Extension. To find more information about the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Cornell Cooperative Extension FMNP Outreach visit <https://www.human.cornell.edu/dns/fmnp>.