CCE FMNP Educator Spotlight: Lucille Tang
The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) has begun an ongoing series of educator spotlights aimed at recognizing educators and the amazing work they do, and sharing some of their practical advice to other educators. We are continuing the series with Lucille Tang.

Lucille is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, the FMNP educator at Cornell Cooperative Extension in Livingston County and contract Dietitian supporting the Senior Nutrition Program at Livingston County's Office for the Aging. Read about how Lucille breaks down the complex problem of food systems and food insecurity, her approach towards farmers’ market education, her definitions of success, and her interesting philosophy on community nutrition education.

Read the full interview with Lucille below!
Can you tell me your name and your position within Cornell Cooperative Extension?

My name is Lucille Tang, and I'm currently the nutrition educator for Livingston County. I am also contracted with the New York State Office for the Aging to provide support for their senior nutrition program as a registered dietitian. My role is a bit unique when it comes to the Farmers Market Nutrition Program because I not only provide education at the markets, but I'm also assisting with distribution of FMNP vouchers through the Office for the Aging. I have constant contact with the Office for the Aging clients as well, so I actually visit all of the congregate meal sites once a month and provide nutrition counseling to seniors who request it through the Office for the Aging.

What drives you to continue with your work, especially community nutrition education?

In Livingston County, we have agriculture as our number one market, but we have no supermarket in Mount Morris. So there's really high levels of food insecurity, even though there's agriculture everywhere. There seems to be a really big disconnect between what the food system is producing versus what people need to have a healthy, sustainable, equitable diet. The sustainability in our current food system is something that I'm often frustrated by, but I'm also motivated to change something about this. Something else that motivates me is that I see food as an avenue to connect people, and I find that to be inspiring, beautiful and compelling to continue reaching for those experiences, not only for myself, but to connect community members to those really great experiences.

In terms of education for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, what would you say is the most engaging lesson or topic that consumers like learning about, and why do you think that is?
I only teach one lesson, which is the Produce Spotlight, and that is because I'm making the assumption that people going to the market care about what produce is available, and providing education on what they're currently interested in is the best way to get people excited. However, I haven't tried to provide education on any other topics at the market, so I can't tell you one's better than the other because I've always just kept doing the same thing. I also change the recipes to make sure that I include what's available at the market that day.

What are some popular samples or recipes among customers?

Customers will eat anything as long as it smells good and you're presenting it in a way that's appealing. When I present, I'm very casual and take a lot of the pressure off of the participant, and I find they'll pretty much try most things. So it's about being persistent, open, and welcoming. Those are the qualities you have to have in order to attract people. Also, instead of picking what makes customers excited, I pick what farmers are excited about when it comes to the produce, because they're the ones sourcing it. Even if a customer wanted an out of season strawberry rhubarb salad, I can't do that in fall. It's about what farmers are able to produce in the current weather conditions and seasonality.

How do you attract more people to your table and how do you keep them engaged?

First, having an elevator speech is really important. So what are the three things, and if you're just starting out - one thing, that you want people to leave with and put that into a really small bite. For me, it's where the food came from, how easy it is to prepare, and, if they are interested, then I start talking about the Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Number two is the food smells good. Nature is your helper here because every time I cook, I have an aromatic that's blowing all of
those smells everywhere and attracting people to my table. I often cook with garlic, onions, and garlic scapes because people are like, “Oh, that smells good,” and that piques their interest. Also the vendors will tell people, “If you don't know how to use it, look, she's making it!” Lastly, putting yourself in a prime visible location is key.

**When you go to a farmers’ market and you set up your tent, what is your main goal, and what does a successful day look like for you?**

I want to make people happy, not just the participants, but also if the vendors think I did a good job, that means I did a good job. I care a lot about my relationship with the vendors because I'm going to see them every week or every month. I may not see the customer every month, but I'm going to see the vendors every month. Also, I like when participants give me feedback, whether it be positive or negative; I actually thrive on negative feedback because that means they care enough and they think I'm approachable enough to say something negative about the food I'm making. That means they're also critically thinking about how they can make this recipe on their own better for themselves. A success is not, “Oh, I liked it,” and they get the recipe. Success is, “This might not be the best for me, but I can change it to make it good for me and I will buy the product.” Success is also when the vendors come back to me and say, “We sold out.”

**I'd like to hear more about your philosophy for community nutrition education and how that comes through in your approaches to nutritional education.**

I'm a registered dietitian that's very food focused and very health-at-every-size focused. I'm very equity focused as well. So what do those three things mean? If you look at a spectrum, one side is nutrient focused and the other side is food focused. Nutrient-focused material is
talking about specific vitamins and minerals that you get from food, whereas food focused is talking about food, meal patterns, food groups, stuff like that. So when I provide education, I often focus more on culinary techniques, methods to get nutrition into their body, rather than all of the nutrients in a specific product. Also disclaimer, I am not saying that this is the right way to do things, it's just the way I approach education and ways I found success with education. The second one was health-at-every-size. If one side of the spectrum has an obesity prevention focus, the other side is a health-at-every-size focus. Obesity prevention is usually programs whose main outcome or goal is weight reduction or decreased caloric intake or increased exercise. I'm more health-at-every-size, meaning that I care a lot about encouraging meal patterns that support people at every size. I often don't use language regarding caloric intake or subtracting or adding certain foods. It also aligns well with my food focused mentality because the idea is if you're eating more fruits and vegetables, your caloric density is going down and your nutrient density is going up, so you might get the same outcomes as an obesity prevention program if you just encourage more fruits and vegetables. I've seen a lot of blaming and shaming from other people, and also people doing it to themselves, when people are very obesity focused. That's why I'm very healthy-at-every-size focused, because I care more about quality of life than that number on the scale. And then equity focus is the third one, which is the idea that I want to make things as accessible as possible. I provide education, it's very simple, but I give people options to incorporate different stuff. I keep it as simple and baseline as possible because I care a lot about equity and inclusion. I'd rather include as many people as possible.

Special thanks to Lucille Tang 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.