



CHILD HUNGER  
DECREASED

**33%**

**KIDS** HAD

MORE:  
FRUITS & VEGGIES  
ENERGY  
FINANCIAL SECURITY

# A HEALTHY SUMMER and BEYOND

The Summer EBT for Children program report for policymakers, advocacy organizations, and stakeholders to better understand the impact the pilot had on low income families in Oregon.



PARTNERS FOR A HUNGER-FREE OREGON

AMY WOEHLING



# Our Better Future

Our *better future* is here.

Our better future is sitting, learning, growing, and exploring. Our better future is feeling safe and protected. Our better future is practicing healthy eating and physical activity.

Our better future is *thriving*...for nine months out of the year.

To support *our better future* means to make learning, growth, exploration, security, and healthy eating into lifelong habits for all. The **Summer EBT for Children** makes that better future a *reality*.

*"Kids certainly don't have any reason to go hungry just because they're not in school."*

*Amithyst, Lebanon County*  
SEBTC Participant

# Executive Summary

The Summer EBT for Children program **reduced hunger by 33%**. Total food expenditure and fruit and vegetable consumption for families increased. Financial barriers to access were reduced and even eliminated. Families spent less on unhealthy items with long shelf-lives because of the stable support they were receiving all summer long. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables meant children were able to keep up the healthy eating routines they were learning in school - promoting the development of these routines into lifelong habits.

With more nutritious foods being eaten than cheaper processed items, families witnessed **better overall health during the summer** and enjoyed more opportunities to be physically active outside. Kids had the energy, the health, and the conveniency of the SEBTC program to make lunches and

snacks on-the-go and experience summer as a time for genuine growth and exploration.

SEBTC families were **happier** - less stress, tension, and worry over the summer months from the chronic strain on food budgets while incomes remained constant. This emotional balance was created by significant improvements to household's financial stability. With consistent support for food budgets during months otherwise riddled with nutritional or financial deficits, families were better able to meet other financial obligations - continuing the **positive cycle of physical, emotional, and mental health**. Furthermore, this strengthened sense of financial security protected low income families from the debilitating effects of unanticipated costs that such families are usually one paycheck away from devastation.

Finally, SEBTC participants reported feeling a stronger tie to their communities because it meant **communal support**. Families voiced a sense of care and connection for the people and places that made it possible. Households actively sought ways to give back. Whether that meant shopping at local farmers markets, bringing extra snacks into classrooms for schools that needed help, or taking in a stranger facing homelessness - an overwhelming majority expressed their recognition of the program and the benefits it provided their family as a way to bring communities even closer.

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*"I was really excited when I got it this summer. It was a lot of help and so I decided to call you guys back and thank you for it."*

Chancy, Malheur County  
SEBTC Participant

*All quotes, unless otherwise noted, were shared with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon from SEBTC participants across the state.*

*Noted findings from initial reports are in reference to the USDA Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Third Implementation Year Report*

# Introduction

## Overview of Summer EBT for Children Pilot - Oregon

During the 2014-2015 school year, **318,498** students were eligible for Oregon's Free/Reduced-Price school lunch program. Last summer **only 18%** had access to a Summer Food Service Program (No Kid Hungry, 2015). *"Households with school-age children have a higher prevalence of food insecurity in the summer, and rates of food insecurity were greater in States with fewer SFSP and summertime NSLP meals"* (Nord and Romig 2006). This gap in coverage contributes to the **34%** (Murray, 2015) increase in summer hunger among children.

In order to close this gap and alleviate the risks associated with heightened food insecurity - such as, *"health, psychosocial and behavioral problems, and poorer nutritional status"*,

Oregon's Department of Education and Department of Human Services received a grant from the USDA to begin a Summer EBT for Children pilot program in 2011. The demonstration was to test others ways of ensuring that children from low income families had access to adequate nutrition while school was not in session.

The project was studied extensively through the summer of 2013. The findings indicate that **hunger among children decreased 33%** for SEBTC-participating households.

in 2015

**48,000** kids  
got Summer EBT  
in Oregon.

*"It's hardest to work when you have small children and are paying for child care.*

*For the SEBTC assistance to be available for those who have to work and pay for care, it takes the stress off."*

Anonymous, Wallowa County

Through Oregon's SNAP-Hybrid model, eligible families were matched to the state's **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** database, identified as either new or current participants, and were sent notification of SEBTC benefits. If a household was already receiving SNAP they were then informed of the additional benefits that would be added to their card during the summer months. New families were sent an Oregon Trail SNAP card with SEBTC-only benefits loaded each month over the summer. Through this model, researchers reported **Oregon consistently achieving some of the highest redemption of benefits** (USDA, 2013) over all other demonstration sites.

In addition to the dramatic reduction of children facing hunger, the USDA report showed an overall **"increase in total food expenditures"**. Not only were families purchasing more food but researchers found that "children in households with SEBTC

ate **more servings of fruits and vegetables**, whole grains, dairy foods, and less added sugars from sugar-sweetened beverages."

With summer hunger decreasing and healthy eating increasing, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon set out to better understand what this data actually meant for the **48,000** low income children in the 23 counties who received SEBTC benefits during the summer 2015.

After thorough review of the three published reports by the USDA, school districts that participated in the Summer EBT pilot from 2015 were contacted for outreach. Individual schools helped identify SEBTC households by sending flyers home with all of their students. Interested families completed a brief survey to confirm previous SEBTC participation before being contacted to schedule an indepth interview.

Turning a focus on those most-impacted by the pilot program **provided a wealth of knowledge** that helped paint a more holistic picture of the SEBTC. Through collective analysis, a thread of emergent themes began to weave together each story, and reveal a larger impact than the initial quantitative research was able to capture. The stories and experiences that families shared provide depth for understanding the influence this program had on the health status of low income children; especially for rural portions of Oregon. Their collective voice reveals the impact that it had on working families and their ability to provide healthy choices for their children while looking forward to a prosperous future

***where everyone is healthy and thriving.***

# A Healthy Summer for All

## Capacity for Equity

**1 in 6** Oregonians are facing poverty. Poverty is experienced to a greater degree for minority groups across the state - **38.5% of African Americans, 28.1% of Native American, and 26.4% of Latino** populations are living in poverty. Not only do these disparities exist along racial lines, but also geographical areas around the state. Several SEBTC households who shared their experience with the program lived in counties that have nearly **30%** of the population facing poverty.

Hunger disproportionately takes root in communities who face insurmountable social and economic barriers. The Summer EBT for Children program has the capacity to remove these barriers and serve as one **tool to promote racial and social equity** within the state of Oregon. The following report highlights the several barriers that this program was able to reduce or eliminate for low income populations in the state. With conscientious planning and focused inclusion of minority and rural populations specifically, the SEBTC program has the capacity to be a step towards a more equitable state and a **better future for all.**

*“The best way to support children that are hungry would be to support programs like this.”*

SEBTC

Jennifer, Jefferson County  
SEBTC Participant

# Health & Well-being

## Food Access

SEBTC families attribute the **increase in fruit and vegetable consumption** to the reduction, or in some cases, the removal of financial barriers to access. All the households interviewed knew which foods were crucial for their children to eat in order to grow and lead healthy lives. The two additional meals and snacks that low income families had to provide when school was out exacerbated their food budgets, thus restricting their ability to purchase these more expensive options.

**Several households reported their food budgets nearly doubling over the summer** to ensure that enough food was available, let alone healthy food. For most, this meant choosing the cheaper, more unhealthy option over the costly, nutritious items that provided optimal health for their children.

Most SEBTC families shared their strategies for stretching every last penny during the summer. From creative couponing to buying in bulk, families still had to forego the

healthy foods they wanted their children to be eating. Therefore, when the additional Summer EBT funds were made available, most families reported spending the money on the items that they were



used to doing without - **fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains**. These staples that their children were provided while in school were now accessible throughout the summer.

*Fresh fruit and vegetable consumption increased because the financial barrier to access was being lifted for most families.*

A more unsung collective experience that SEBTC participants shared was the reduction in highly processed foods that they purchased out of necessity. This resulted from the **consistent, reliable, and accessible SEBTC system** that helped guarantee financial access to fresh foods all summer long.

For a state with such bountiful summers, it was a sardonic juxtaposition to hear how low income Oregonian families depended on annual storing habits during the most plentiful months of the year. For these households who relied on the two healthy meals and snacks their children received during the school year, **summer meant significant strain** on an already tight budget. SEBTC families shared how providing the more costly fresh options for their children was nearly impossible during the summer.

Prior to SEBTC, the months preceding summer vacation became a critical time for families to store food items that were cheaper and more **unhealthy** but had a longer shelf-life during the months their children would be eating all their meals and snacks at home. Families expressed the duress they felt in storing items like ramen noodles, canned goods, and cereals as they past the aisles of baskets brimming with seasonally-rich fruits and vegetables.

**With the SEBTC, families could now afford the trade-off** between cheaper, processed goods and the more costly, but nutritiously-necessary items that they preferred their children continue to eat.



## Amy Knight, Lebanon County

For Amy and her 13 and 9 year old daughters the **SEBTC program meant stability with enough healthy foods.**

As a single parent working two minimum wage jobs while taking college classes, each summer meant uncertainty: would she be able to afford enough food for her daughters who couldn't access a summer meals site? She talked about previous summers when the girls were building-up an appetite doing a few of their favorite things like playing soccer and swimming.

**“There were months where I would skip meals to make sure that they had enough to eat. Sometimes even my oldest would have to wait to eat until her little sister was full; then she would eat, and then I would eat. *That’s no way to live - for a child or for anybody.* Unfortunately, that’s how most families who are at the poverty level live because the money’s not there to live any other way.”**

For several other families like Amy's, the **SEBTC program provided another way to live.**

**"I've never had the luxury of *not* being on food stamps. So, fruits and vegetables used to be those things I had to let go. Now, I could budget enough with the [SEBTC] money to get the fresh veggies and the fresh fruit, and they'd be gobbled-up in days."**

## **Food Access Conclusion**

- The Summer EBT for Children program **increased fruit and vegetable** consumption by reducing and/or eliminating the financial barriers of access.
- With **barriers removed** and the consistency of funds for families who relied on the free/reduced-price lunches at school, the SEBTC also decreased the incentive families had towards buying nutritionally-void food items because of their long-lasting shelf life.
- Together, these factors **increased the opportunity** for low income families, and specifically children, to choose healthy foods all summer long.

## Physical Activity

With less processed foods and more fruit and vegetable consumption, some SEBTC families noticed a change in the physical health and activity levels of their children by the time school began in the fall. Having nourishing meals and snacks more readily available served as a safeguard against a slide in health that many low income students experience over the summer months. SEBTC children were not only able to eat better, but they were able



to get enough food for the increased energy requirements that most outdoor summer activities demand. With such consistency, SEBTC parents and guardians said they were able to encourage this physical activity without the worry of next week's meals. In addition, these

households also believed that they were better able to maintain the level of nutrients their child was used to receiving with school meals, thus promoting consistent health year round.

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***"SEBTC helped because they were better able to eat the healthy foods they need to be active and have energy."***

SEBTC Participant, Wallowa County

A more indirect effect SEBTC funding had on increasing physical exercise was due to the **flexibility and conveniency** of the program itself.

With many households having caretakers who worked multiple jobs, the schedule for summer food service programs was not conducive for consistent access to meals most days of the week.

For many who shared their story, transportation to and from the sites was the most challenging factor. With the extensive network of Oregon SNAP retailers, SEBTC households were able to **ensure summer meals** and snacks were accessible when a SFSP was not.

Families remarked on how they could make ready-to-go snacks, provide water, and pack lunches to take with them when they wanted to do more time-consuming, high-energy activities outside - like swimming or hiking. Every household wanted the chance to promote their child being more physically active, and **the consistency and accessibility** of the SEBTC program enabled them to do so.

**SUMMER + EBT**  
Families had more opportunities to be physically active!

**GROCERIES**  
More food could be provided to meet increased energy needs

**FRUITS & VEGGIES**  
Families could access to nutritious foods to stay healthy all summer

**FLEXIBLE FOOD**  
On-to-go lunches and snacks could be made at home

**Better physical health for the summer and beyond!**

## Rebecca Sanchez, Wallowa County

For Rebecca and her granddaughter Samantha, the **SEBTC program meant stability and health.**



Rebecca is the legal guardian of her 9 year old granddaughter Samantha, who like most children her age looks forward to summer being a time of endless opportunities to be outdoors...

...for Rebecca, each summer meant another year of growth

and another year that Samantha needed even more food than the last.

She talked about living in a small tourist town and the struggles that come along with it; jobs being the biggest concern.

**“Around here, jobs are hard to come by. Everything is hard to come by. I had a little work cleaning houses when business with my dad was slow. I hurt my foot earlier in the year and had to work with the injury because my insurance wouldn’t cover the surgery.**

**Now I’m not working at all, so [SEBTC] was helpful with having my grandbaby to feed. It’s a tremendous help for kids around here. A lot of kids hardly have anything. When I can, I buy boxes of snacks here and there for Samantha to share with her class during snack time. We pick out different things like fruit, and it helps them out. Having extra on the EBT [card] helped us also because Samantha is eating so much more I worried I’d have to tell her to stop eating so much; and she’s not heavy or anything. She just has a lot of energy.”**

With confounding health issues and her granddaughter's increasing energy needs, Rebecca couldn't always depend on the summer feeding sites. Between the uncertainty of days that she felt well and days they had to travel out of town for groceries, her story revealed the **stability** she was able to rely on with the SEBTC and ensuring good health for Samantha.

**"I've cared for her since she was born, but she came to live with me when she was four. And you know what? I think she deserves *everything.*"**

### **Physical Activity Conclusion**

- The SEBTC program provided the **support** Rebecca needed in order to provide everything that Samantha needed to thrive.
- It enabled families to embrace more opportunities to be **physically active** because of the consistent and flexible structure the program inhabits and that low income households were able to tailor purchases to best fit the needs of their children.
- More **healthy food** at home fostered healthy physical activity for children all summer long.

## Emotional Stability

Every SEBTC household reported their financial situation either remaining the same or *decreasing* over the summer months. The families who shared that they earned less over the summer most often worked for the school district in their area and had the additional hurdle of being out of work when school ended.

With stagnant earnings and the sudden increased demand on food budgets, low income families and *children faced obstacles* for maintaining physical and emotional health.

The families who shared their SEBTC story recalled feeling an immense amount of stress and tension as the reality of financial obligations approached with the coming summer months.

More money would need to go towards providing enough food to meet their children's nutritional requirements and high energy needs that summer activities demand, while earnings remained the same (or decreasing for some).

Households collectively acknowledged that *food budgets were the most malleable* of their financial obligations, incentivizing parents and guardians to purchase the cheaper food options. Rent payments, utility bills, gas (especially in rural communities) were absolute necessities that could not be negotiated. This coercion behind summer budgeting elicited *high rates of frustration, helplessness, and stress* among the working families that shared their stories.

*"It was a relief. A little stress relief to have [SEBTC] around and be able to feed the kids"*

*Brenda Alvarez, Umatilla County  
SEBTC Participant*

SEBTC was felt by most as a relief from the apprehension and disquiet families felt with the coming end of every school year. The program's reliability afforded SEBTC households the peace of mind that they would be able to provide nutritious food, optimal health, and emotional security for their children.

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For a Lane County resident and her four children, the SEBTC meant a worry-free summer and start to the school year:

“When you have four kiddos in school and they're on free/reduced lunch, having them home for the summer puts a huge burden on the grocery bill. As a mom, it's a hard thing to have hungry kids. I got more emotional doing this interview than I thought I would, but just remembering the summertime and feeding my kids...as a busy mom it's very difficult and a **little help goes a long way**. This was the first summer I got the program, and being able to purchase more food, more nutritious foods did take off a lot of stress worrying about where the money was coming from for other bills.”

She went on to say that not only was her household more emotionally stable during the summer because of this increased access to healthy foods, but also that being able to eat well on a consistent basis reduced the amount of stress her kids had at the start of the school year:



“It’s a relief to be able to provide for your kids, and in providing healthy foods I’m able to take off some stress from learning when they’re back in school. It’s a small start but being able to provide for them just makes everybody happier.”

## Emotional Stability Conclusion

- Through the removal of barriers to healthier foods and consistently providing summer budget support, the SEBTC program inadvertently improved the emotional health status of parents, guardians, and children.
- Households didn’t stress over the need to stash processed foods, choose a less healthy option, or go without.
- SEBTC transformed summer from being a three month battle against hunger into a time of creativity, growth, and exploration.



## Healthy Eating Habits

Oregon committed to **improved nutrition standards** and elimination of lunch copays. Therefore, SEBTC households expressed overwhelming approval for the meals their children received in school. One mother recalled the difficulty she had in getting her 5 year old to **try new fruits and vegetables**. It wasn't until he began his Headstart program and was able to choose his own fruits and vegetables every morning did he then start expressing interest in those same items at home. The standards school breakfast, lunch, and snacks adhere to **promote healthy eating habits for children** nine months out of the year. The SEBTC benefits ensured that low income children had the opportunity to seamlessly reinforce these habits into the summer and beyond.

As shared by several Nutrition and Food Service Directors from school districts across the state, the **basis for creating these healthy habits** was rooted in **access, choice, and routine**. What was learned and practiced in school went on to develop healthy eating habits for life:

**Cindy Badger, Food Director**

Brookings-Harbor School District

“In my three years as Food Director I’ve personally witnessed a change in the **healthy eating habits** of our students. Elementary students love picking and choosing from the salad bar; using creative ways to make healthy salads is so “grown-up” for them. After Christmas break I could not keep up with the majority of students piling on the vegetables and fruits - it was as if they missed it. Promoting healthy eating habits in school is huge for students and their futures. It’s a daily routine now that will stay with them.”

The disruption for making healthy choices most households noted in previous summers inhibited their children from fully establishing school nutrition routines into habits. Alleviating financial barriers to fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains during the summer allowed SEBTC households to **ingrain these routines and augment the habits** their children were practicing in school. One mother in Jefferson County believed so firmly in the ability of routines to **cultivate lifelong habits**, that in the summertime she continued to feed her children at the regular times they ate lunch and snack during the school year. **Access** creates the opportunity. **Choice** garners individual buy-in. **Routine** transforms learning into a habitual response. The SEBTC provided this foundation for thousands of low income children and their families.

## *A Healthy Classroom, Summer, and Beyond*

One such family shared their story from a rural pocket of Lane County. The nearest supermarket is 45 minutes away and local jobs are hard to find. The mother worked for the school district and each summer was “laid-off”. Their family’s income fell from two full-time paychecks to one. She described their springtime process of stocking-up on non-perishables and prioritizing bills in preparation of the upcoming hit to their household income.

*“You have to plan and save. **Food sometimes comes last** because you know you have electric and water bills for these next three months; and you know you need gas to even go get the food. It's easy to go through the money that you think you could save for food.*

*Since I don't get paid until the end of September, sometimes I'm paying double bills because it got a little harder to keep up by the third summer month. So it sure is handy to have [SEBTC] come when it comes, have a plan, shop smart, and get the most out of the money for your child and your family.”*

This past year came with an additional surprise - her youngest had hoped this summer could be different. Battling self-esteem issues due to their weight, they wanted to try out what they had learned in a health class at school with the hopes of becoming physically fit and healthy this summer. **“Most of the food that I was used to buying them, like frozen pizza, macaroni and cheese, [they] didn't want to eat that anymore.”** With their financial situation remaining the same, she had little confidence in being able to purchase the more expensive fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein foods that her child had learned were the basis of a nutritious diet.

Then she received the SEBTC card in the mail...

"Since this card came for [my child], I used it specifically for them. It was a new thing for me because they hadn't eaten that way before. **They chose to eat healthy** and continued it longer than I thought they would. It was successful! They lost weight and now want fruit all the time. They chose to have vegetables too, and they're not even a vegetable person!"

So, when they ask me "**Can I have some lettuce, spinach leaves, or broccoli?**" who wants to say no I can't afford that! I took it seriously and decided that this SEBTC money was sent for my child and I had to get them what they needed.

"It was perfect. Just getting this little extra helped ensure that if my child says, "**Mom, I'm running out of yogurt or peanut butter, or bananas**" I could get them."

For this and so many other families, the **SEBTC** program meant the opportunity to transform the healthy ideas learned and practiced in school into a new way of living for the summer and beyond.

**“They had a body image that they wanted to change. They worked hard and exercised, but the *nutrition* was the main thing. There was more *purpose* this time for them to get into shape.”**

## Healthy Habits Conclusion

- All children should be able to act on this purpose
  - The purpose of eating healthy in school
  - The purpose of eating healthy at home
  - The purpose of maintaining these habits for a lifetime of good health.
- The SEBTC program complements the value of nutrition and routines that school meals provide all year
- Allows low income households to extend these practices into the summer and beyond.

# Financial Security

## Financial Obligations

As previously noted, the SEBTC program **increased the access** low income families had to healthy nutritious foods, thus reducing their food insecurity and promoting better overall health. Reducing the stress and worry that was associated with not being able to provide enough food and/or nutritionally adequate food for their children also led to an improvement in the emotional stability of SEBTC participating households. The underlying factor of both is due to the **increased financial security** that families reported having throughout the summer because of the support they received to mitigate the devastating impact that the absence of school meals had on their food budgets.

Locating additional resources to help assuage this impact was a challenge that every SEBTC family reported. Most households admitted that **food was the one budget that had to absorb most of the impact** and would be calculated only after all other bills were paid. Still for other households this remaining balance would not be enough to purchase basic groceries. They explained how the following month would mean a different bill left unpaid in order to make up for the insufficient quantity of food. Each month families were left choosing which deficit to fill - outstanding bills or empty cupboards.



2015 SEBTC Participants

The SEBTC program provided **relief** from choosing between basic necessities. More financial flexibility led to the better overall financial status so many families reported experiencing.

For families like Brenda's and her household of 5, **the SEBTC program meant a source of financial security** for her husband and three boys:

**“It’s about a \$200-\$300 difference between our budget during the school year and during the summer. I know [SEBTC] isn’t there to help you pay your bills, but it did. It helped us as far as buying more food for the kids and having a different variety. It helped us financially be able to spend a little bit extra on gas, school supplies, and things that the kids needed throughout the summer.”**

**Brenda Alvarez, Umatilla County**

## **Unexpected Financial Burdens**

As more experiences were shared, the stronger the collective sentiment surrounding **financial security** grew. Most families spoke only of the planned expenses that SEBTC helped them afford with a little more ease. However, some households shared experiences around **unforeseen expenditures** that they would never have been able to afford if it wasn’t for the consistent summer benefits that they could apply towards purchasing enough nutritious foods for their children, despite circumstantial hardships.

## Jennifer Miller, Jefferson County



Jennifer was adamant about the underlying **safety net** this program had in protecting low income families against unavoidable budgetary constraints. She lives with her husband and four children in rural Jefferson County. They have one car, which her husband takes to work everyday, and no access to a summer feeding site.

For Jennifer's family, the **SEBTC program** meant **financial assurance** that grocery money would be there.

"Even just the little bit they provided this summer helped quite a bit. We have a big family and a lot of times there is just not enough money. You end up paying all of your bills and then you're like oh wait, we still have to feed everybody.

The day I got [the card] in the mail I was just telling my husband that I had to go find food for the kids because we were out of everything. I had everybody in the car and about \$20 in my account that I could spend on food. I told myself it was better than nothing. On my way out, I stopped at the mailbox and there it was. I read everything closely, called to set it up, and the money was there. It was almost like fate.

But then my mom got sick and I was having to drive to be with her at the hospital in Bend. So all of a sudden, [SEBTC] helped because otherwise I wouldn't have had money for gas and food if we didn't get it. It really did help. It's a long trip and that's a lot of gas money; by the time I get there I'd need something to eat and sometimes a place to stay overnight. So all of a sudden there was a lot of costs that aren't normal life costs getting added to the weight of living in a small community."

## Financial Security Conclusion

- The SEBTC program initialized better financial security among low income households by creating a system in which sustainable budgetary decisions could be made
- Ensured healthy food was available for their children.
- In some cases, it lessened the debilitating effects that unexpected financial challenges create for families living paycheck to paycheck.

# Community Care

## Supportive Communities

In a resounding voice, SEBTC participating families echoed each other in saying that this **program represents their idea of a supportive community**. Despite the challenges in securing nutritionally adequate foods, economic instability, stress and uncertainty, families shared strong feelings of appreciation for where they lived, and sense of gratitude and responsibility to those towns and cities.

### Lori Cook, Deschutes County

Lori began sharing her SEBTC story for her and her three children by saying *“Anything I can do that’s going to help other parents, I’m all for it. There’s a lot of families out there **struggling to make ends meet**. So, if I can give my information on the program and that’s going to help somebody else down the line, then I’m very happy to do that.”*

Community care also looked like supporting local farmers: *“I actually was able to use [SEBTC] at farmers markets. There’s a local one that’s up every summer. I’ve always used them because their fruits and vegetables are really **fresh**. They’re right off the farm that’s close to us and I just really like that. **Keeping things local** is a really big thing for me.”*

## Amithyst, Lebanon County

Other participants shared the idea that a community should mirror what you want for your children their future. The SEBTC program, for them, was a program that was available to support families in need. She hopes that her three children can see that and beyond.

**“I hope that they don’t take things for granted - that they know they have to work for what they need and not just rely on programs like these. But, I hope that they know if something happens programs like [SEBTC] would be there to catch them.”**

Amithyst is showing her idea of **community care** within her own home. Her husband is a general manager at a retail store where he had an employee facing homelessness. Despite having three children of their own and only one paycheck, Amithyst’s family open their doors to this person experiencing extreme poverty. In the most humblest of responses, she explained that this is just **what communities do**.

For families like Amithyst’s and Lori’s, the **SEBTC program** meant a **provisional support** to develop strong communities now and even healthier ones in the future.



# Conclusion

The Summer EBT for Children program reduced very low food security among children by **33%**. Researchers gathered data that showed increases in total food expenditure and fruit and vegetable consumption. In speaking with several participating experts of the program, an indepth analysis was able to be created in order to better understand the aforementioned results and any implicit qualitative effects that could not be measured during the initial study.

After thorough interviews with SEBTC participants, the Department of Human Services SEBTC Program Manager, and several School Nutrition and Food Directors across the state, a more holistic deduction of the program's impact could be established. **Fruit, vegetable, and whole grain consumption increased** due to significant alleviation of financial barriers to access. With increased access and consumption, families reported a **decrease in their purchasing of unhealthy items** with long shelf-lives due to the additional and consistent financial support they received each summer month. With improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables families stated that they were better able to **match the nutrition levels** their children had access to during the school year. Lessons around healthy eating and practiced routines in school were now able to be fortified and reinforced all summer long. Without the usual summer disruption in eating patterns, these healthy routines were able to better **transform into lifelong habits** among SEBTC participants.

With more nutrient-dense foods being consumed and a decrease in highly-processed items, families witnessed a **positive increase in opportunities** to be more physically active. The increase in physical activity was directly related to a reported state of better overall health, and the flexibility the SEBTC program afforded families to create snacks on-the-go for outdoor activities that required food and water to meet energy needs. A contributing factor of overall health was an increase in positive emotional states of mind. SEBTC households reported less stress, tension, and worry over the summer months that were usually a result of the heightened strain on food budgets while incomes remained constant; or in some cases even decreased.

In addition to positive reports of increased overall health and well-being, households participating in the Summer EBT for Children program noted significant improvements to their financial stability. With consistent support to their food budgets during months that they usually experienced deficits (nutritionally or financially), families reported being better able to meet other financial obligations - leading to further **reduction in stress**; financial obligations most often referenced were, but not limited to: gas/transportation, rent, utility bills, general household necessities, school supplies. This increased financial security **protected low income families** from the debilitating effects of unanticipated expenditures, thus prompting greater emotional ease that families who live paycheck to paycheck are usually forced to forgo.

Finally, SEBTC participants reported feeling a **stronger tie to their communities**. For them, the program represented a provisional system of support for those in need, and with it comes a great sense of appreciation for the people and places that make it possible. Whether this appreciation meant shopping at **local farmers markets**, bringing extra snacks into classrooms for schools in impoverished districts, or taking in a stranger facing homelessness - an overwhelming majority expressed their recognition of the program and the benefits it provided their family as a way to bring communities even closer.

