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Title: Total Quality Management as a Means of Ensuring Excellence in EFNEP & FSNE

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Abstract: Total Quality Management is a system to embed an “awareness of quality in organizational processes” by involving all members of an organization in continuous improvement of services. Faculty and staff at Cornell University providing leadership to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) have developed a system of Total Quality Management that involves an iterative process of data collection with a feedback loop designed to identify and solve problems as they occur and, simultaneously, identify best practices that can be shared broadly, leading to overall program improvement. The goal is to support county staff in providing excellent program delivery through skill development. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected to provide an overall assessment of county programming and management. Data include program outputs and participant outcomes generated through the Nutrition Education Evaluation and Reporting System 5 (NEERS5), as well as findings from an on-going systematic program review conducted through county visits. Visits involve county Cooperative Extension staff at all levels, state and regional Cooperative Extension staff, and state food stamp office staff. The goal is to visit all counties routinely (every 2-3 years) and, additionally, to visit any county needing technical assistance. Need for technical assistance is suggested by NEERS5 data indicating a problem with output or outcomes, or by site visits and other communications indicating problems with program management and/or delivery. Findings are routinely reported back to local staff—quarterly for NEERS5 data and following each site visit. Local staff then have the opportunity to address issues, supported by regional and state staff. Strengths identified provide an opportunity for reinforcement as well as an expansion of best practices to other counties. Weaknesses identified allow for targeted training for staff on a local, regional, or statewide basis. A number of standard trainings have been developed to cover frequently encountered gaps. Overall, this process has led to improvements in communication between campus and county, consistency of application of policies and procedures, quality of NEERS5 data, and consistency of outcomes.

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