

OSU's CNEP program gleans top USDA honors

By Donald Stotts and Trisha Gedon

Oklahoma State University's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources caught the hearts and minds of a nation this year by addressing the very basic need of hunger among financially stressed families.

University officials, the state of Oklahoma, and government leaders in Washington, D.C., honored OSU's Community Nutritional Education Program (CNEP) for its Gleaning Project — a cooperative program between the division and local Oklahoma grocery stores — on three different occasions during 2000.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman publicly recognized the Gleaning Project in June, citing the ability of project participants to develop and implement, "a viable way to feed hungry rural Oklahomans, while simultaneously teaching nutrition guidelines, using formerly wasted resources, and lessening environmental problems."

Glickman presented USDA's most prestigious honor — the Secretary's Honor Award — to OSU Gleaning Project leader Lani Vasconcellos at a ceremony in the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center in the nation's capital.

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Vasconcellos was CNEP area coordinator prior to accepting her current position as Southeast District family and consumer sciences specialist with the



Nutrition education assistants from Pittsburg County load donated food from a participating Wal-Mart store into a van for distribution to families

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES).

A group of nutrition education assistants (NEAs) from six counties shares the award with Vasconcellos. Included are Jo Rhodes, Becky Smith,

and Lynn Snow of Pontotoc County; Brenda Russell and Amanda Sprouse of Bryan County; Anna Hightower, Johnston County; Rose Anne Newton of Carter County; Rhonda Whitsett and Marshall County; and Linda Eaton of Murray County.

Smith, a NEA for four years, takes pride in helping families gain a greater understanding of nutrition.

"I enjoy the opportunities to meet new people," Smith says. "We develop a real friendship after working with them."

NEAs pick up produce at local cooperating grocery stores and take the fruits and vegetables to participating CNEP families during weekly in-home visits. NEAs provide hands-on experiences in food safety and preparation, meal planning, food storage and preservation, and ways to stretch available food dollars while following proper nutritional guidelines.

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OSU president James Halligan, left, presents Lani Vasconcellos with the Celebrate State Award for work conducted by her and her associates in the Community Nutritional Education Project (CNEP). Vasconcellos also received an award from U. S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman on behalf of CNEP. Standing behind Vasconcellos are Sam Curl, dean and director of DASNR, and David Foster, associate director of OCES.



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mally would end up in landfills,” Vasconcellos says. “Now it’s being used to help Oklahoma families.”

OSU President James Halligan journeyed to Sulphur to present Vasconcellos and the NEAs with the Celebrate State Award in September. The project also was presented the OCES’s Outstanding Group Award earlier in the year.

Grocers participating in the Gleaning Project were honored at a series of public receptions that took place from August through November, hosted by local OCES county offices.

“This is a living, growing program that is providing numerous benefits,” says Sarah Miracle, CNEP area coordinator. “We added a program in Madill this fall, and local grocers have been so forthcoming that we are now able to donate foodstuffs to crisis centers as well, using that venue to educate the public on proper nutrition and other family and consumer science issues.”

Miracle says it is a program certainly worthy of local, state, and national recognition, given all that it has accomplished and its continuing, even more widespread success.

“I feel honored and humbled for the recognition, because I feel like we were simply doing our jobs. This certainly has been a cooperative effort. I want to point out that it took the whole team and our partners to make this program what it is,” Vasconcellos says.

The CNEP program web site can be reached at <http://fcs.okstate.edu/cnep> ▲