

Healthy Farmer

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Let's Move!

Many farm kids don't get the exercise that previous generations got on the farm. It is no longer a guarantee that farm kids will burn off the calories they eat. A new federal initiative called "Let's Move" is aimed at curbing the rising rates of childhood obesity and the associated health complications. First Lady Michelle Obama introduced the initiative, called "Let's Move." It includes plans of action and resources for families and schools to encourage participants to make healthier food choices and more active physical activity choices. The website: <http://www.letsmove.gov>, is updated frequently and is filled with suggestions and resources to "raise a healthier generation of kids."

This nationwide effort, as well as many other current initiatives, are increasingly important as families, communities and schools look for ways to address high childhood obesity rates. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2003—2006 survey data show the prevalence of obesity: Ages 2-5: 12.4%; ages 6-11: 17.0%; ages 12-19: 17.6%. Although the rate of increase has slowed since the 1999-2002 survey, the prevalence of obesity among children is still much higher than in the original 1976-1980 survey which showed: ages 2-5: 5%; ages 6-11: 6.5%; ages 12-19: 5%.¹

The "let's move" website highlights the future complications: "Obesity rates tripled in the past 30 years, a trend that means, for the first time in our history, American children may face a shorter expected lifespan than their parents."

The Let's Move initiative provides many resources for families, schools and communities to help get started in a healthier lifestyle. The website focuses on four areas: Healthy Choices, Healthier Schools, Physical Activity and Accessible and Affordable Healthy Food. Inside each of these areas there are many practical ideas that can be used by anyone and also places for suggestions from other readers. For instance, in the physical activity section some suggestions include, "walk or bike to your children's sporting events," and "take the family to the mall and tell them no one can go into a store until they've walked around the whole mall." And to reduce screen time, "keep the t.v. and computer out of your child's bedroom."

Even though there is snow still piled up outside and the temperatures are barely in the double digits, there are still small steps that families and communities can take to help children get moving and to make healthy food choices that will stick with them for life.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/prevalence.html>



Did you know...

The new Food Environment Atlas can show how your state or county compares to others in many 90 areas of food environment including, access to a grocery store, diabetes and obesity rates and recreation and fitness centers. This website is found at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/FoodAtlas/>. It is developed and maintained by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For instance, it is possible to map the number of fast food restaurants per 1,000 people. The highest ratio is located in Colorado's rural San Juan County which has four fast food restaurants and eight full service restaurants for a population base of 558 persons (year 2000). (Thanks to [Daily Yonder](#) for this tip!)

And finally, some fun farmer observations about this winter from Mike's desk:

Yup, there are some good things for farm people about this winter.

We won't have to talk about the winter of 1936 or 1881 as the worst ever anymore.

Farm neighbors move the snow off the roads because the county and state road crews can't get to it.

Farm neighbors get to show off their big equipment while moving snow.

It makes us rethink who we can really count on when the going gets tough.

It's okay if we don't show up at church.

Country church goes on.

32 is a magic number—the last time we saw 32 degrees F was in November last year; it's Feb. 22, 2010 as I write this, so we can brag about surviving the longest, coldest, and probably the snowiest winter (the data isn't in yet) in Iowa on record.

Coyote hunters love it.

You get to spend more family time, whether outdoors or in the house, and it is more meaningful because of the adversity.

Ice fishers love it.

Cross-country skiers love it.

The ground under the snow is heating up from below and absorbing as much moisture as it can.

Those of us who burn wood in our stoves and fireplaces have plenty of fuel from downed trees and limbs from ice-storms.

Washington DC didn't get along as well as the rest of us in the bad weather—but what else is new?

A lot of temperature-sensitive pests for crops and livestock are succumbing to the cold.

We learn to appreciate who and what is most important in life.

Livestock and wildlife know how to survive.

We learn lessons of survival.

