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## **Nine New Research Grants to Enhance Food Security and Dietary Quality in Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs**

### ***RIDGE Program Announces 2017 Grant Awards***

**Boston/Hartford, Conn.** – With support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Program at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and the University of Connecticut focuses on economic research aimed at enhancing food security and dietary quality for low-income Americans through the nation’s nutrition assistance programs. For the 2017 cycle, the program announces nine research grant awards, reflecting a wide range of nutrition assistance program topics.

“Providing food is about more than just delivery logistics,” said RIDGE program director Parke Wilde, associate professor at the Friedman School at Tufts. “These nine research projects help answer critical economic questions about program operations, food retail, household choices, and much more. The goal is to strengthen the research base to improve real-world impacts.”

Five grants are for faculty research (up to \$50,000 each):

- Marianne Bitler, Ph.D. *Is Food Assistance Like Cash for Retailers?* University of California, Davis. Area of focus: WIC, SNAP.
- Erica Kenney, ScD, MPH. *Understanding the impact of changes to the Child and Adult Care Food Program on food expenditures, food quality, and young children’s dietary intake in urban family child care homes.* Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Area of focus: CNP (CACFP).
- Marianne Page, Ph.D. *Multi-generational Effects of Prenatal and Early Life Access to SNAP.* University of California, Davis. Area of focus: SNAP.

- Eric Rimm, ScD. *The impact of the monthly SNAP issuance cycle on sugar-sweetened beverage purchasing and implications for policy change*. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Area of focus: SNAP.
- Michah Rothbart, Ph.D., M. Phil, M.P.A. *Does Universal Free School Meals Reduce Childhood Obesity?* Maxwell School, Syracuse University. Area of focus: CNP (NSLP, SBP).

One grant is for postdoctoral research (up to \$30,000):

- Emmanuel Drabo, Ph.D. *Does SNAP Discourage Claiming Disability Insurance Benefits?* Stanford University. Area of focus: SNAP.

Three grants are for Ph.D. research (up to \$15,000):

- Seungyeon Cho, Ph.D. candidate. *The Effects of Disability, SNAP Participation and Changes in Benefits on Food Insecurity*. Texas A&M, Texas AgriLife Research. Area of focus: SNAP.
- Grace Melo, Ph.D. candidate. *Food Choices of SNAP and WIC Participants at Convenience Stores and Supermarkets*. University of Georgia. Dissertation project. Area of focus: WIC, SNAP.
- Naisi Zhao, Ph.D. candidate. *Organizational Readiness for Knowledge Translation and WIC Participation*. Tufts University School of Medicine. Area of focus: WIC.

Several projects relate to current program changes and policy dilemmas. “For example,” said RIDGE co-director Tatiana Andreyeva of the University of Connecticut, “we will learn about the impact of important upcoming changes to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and about the impact of nutrition assistance on disability insurance benefits.” Other projects draw insight into program effects from historical policy changes and innovations.

The RIDGE program issued the request for proposals in early 2017. Applicants were invited to submit short concept letters in early spring, and selected applicants were invited to submit full proposals in late spring. All full proposals were reviewed by two external reviewers and by the program directors at the University of Connecticut and Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University (with two recusals, in cases where a proposal originated with one of these two universities). Award decisions were based on these reviews and input from USDA’s Economic Research Service and Food and Nutrition Service.

“The pool of proposals was terrific,” Wilde said. “We had the painful task of telling some excellent applicants that their proposals could not all be funded this year. We have big ideas and high hopes for future research in this area.”

Project summaries and additional information about the program is available online at [ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu](http://ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu).

Bringing together researchers and expertise from the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, two institutions with a long record of research leadership in this area, the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program oversees external research grants on federal nutrition assistance programs and supports a community of researchers applying their expertise to nutrition assistance topics.

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