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For Immediate Release: June 3, 2019

Eight New Research Grants to Enhance Food Security and Dietary Quality in Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs

RIDGE Program Announces 2019 Grant Awards

Medford, Mass./Hartford, Conn. – With support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Program 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 2019 round, the program announces eight research grant awards, reflecting a wide range of nutrition assistance program topics.

“Federal nutrition assistance programs rely on a diversity of research initiatives, small and large, to provide the evidence base for continual improvement,” said RIDGE Program director Parke Wilde, a professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. “Using a wide variety of data sources, including surveys, administrative data, and qualitative methods, these eight research projects can inform programs that provide nutrition assistance to people at all ages and in all parts of the country.”

Seven grants are for faculty researchers (up to \$50,000 each):

- Irma Arteaga, Ph.D. *Does maternal depression caused by food insufficiency influence parenting practices and impact infant wellbeing? The role of SNAP.* University of Missouri. Area of focus: SNAP.
- Caitlin Caspi, Sc.D. *SNAP and work-related policies: An in-depth analysis of low-wage worker perspectives and behaviors.* University of Minnesota. Area of focus: SNAP.

- M. Pia Chaparro, M.S., Ph.D. *Food insecurity and child food consumption patterns among WIC participating families in Los Angeles County within the context of the WIC food package change and WIC + SNAP concurrent participation.* Tulane University. Areas of focus: SNAP, WIC.
- Jason Cook, M.A., Ph.D. *Labor supply distortions from nutrition assistance programs: Evidence from a bunching estimator.* University of Pittsburgh. Areas of focus: SNAP, WIC.
- Maggie Dickinson, Ph.D. *Understanding barriers to SNAP enrollment among college students.* CUNY Guttman. Area of focus: SNAP.
- Agustina Laurito, Ph.D. *SNAP, school meals, and the food security of multigenerational households.* University of Illinois at Chicago. Areas of focus: NSLP, SBP, SNAP.
- Michael Thomsen, Ph.D. *Breakfast in the classroom, body mass index, and academic outcomes.* University of Arkansas. Area of focus: SBP.

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

- Pourya Valizadeh, Ph.D. *Did the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act Help Improve Dietary Quality among School-Age Children?* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Areas of focus: NSLP, SBP.

The projects treat nutrition assistance as just one part of a broader array of social policy challenges. “For example,” said RIDGE co-director Tatiana Andreyeva of the University of Connecticut, “two of the project focus on connections between nutrition assistance and labor markets for low-income workers. Another addresses food security outcomes for children in relation to maternal depression and not just to economic constraints alone. Our grantees will study children’s nutrition programs in schools, of course, but also in the context of their family environment, including multi-generational families.”

Bringing together 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.

The RIDGE program issued the request for proposals in early 2019. 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 external reviewers, USDA reviewers, and by the program directors at the University of Connecticut and Tufts University. Using recommendations from the RIDGE Program, the award decision was made by USDA’s Economic Research Service and Food and Nutrition Service.

“We received excellent applications,” Wilde said. “We wanted to fund more of them. The pool was very strong.”

Project summaries and additional information about the program is available online at ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu.

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