

Generating rural options for weight-healthy kids and communities

A \$4.8 million research grant funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agriculture and Food Research Initiative

Remarks at press conference by Kathy Gunter

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January 13, 2011

- The project team is thrilled about the attention being paid to this award, but it's the work that we will be doing and the problem of childhood overweight and obesity that should be the focus of this event.
- **The prevalence of over of overweight and obesity has more than tripled** since the 1970's. Over thirty percent of US children aged 2-19 years old are overweight and nearly 16% of them are obese. And while Oregon's rates may be slightly lower (24.3% among children aged 10-17) we still fall far short of the federal government's 5% childhood obesity goal. *National Survey of Children's Health, 2007*
- **Approximately 21% of our nation's preschoolers are overweight or obese** and are at an increased risk of numerous health complications, many of which may present before they reach adulthood. Americans spend about 10% of their total medical costs on obesity-related illnesses and the estimated direct costs of treating obesity-related diseases exceeds \$61 billion dollars a year.
- **The prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity** is higher among children living in rural areas (36% vs 30%) and to date most of the strategies to combat this epidemic have been developed in more urban areas.
- **It was our intention with this project to engage rural communities** residents in all aspects of the project; to help us evaluate attributes of the rural environment to identify features unique to rural areas that may be particularly obesity promoting or preventing; and to work with us to develop a rural specific intervention program informed by the data collected from rural communities across 6 Western States. In a few moments, Deborah is going to fill you in on more of the project particulars.
- **This project is exactly the type of work that a land grant institution** with a strong focus on public health should be doing. The land grant mission requires that we serve the people of our state through teaching, research and service. Extension faculty are embedded within communities across the state, have established partnerships with numerous local entities including schools, local government and local health departments. Thus we are uniquely poised to further the state's public health priorities and this project is just one example of how Oregon State University through broad-scale collaboration can help to improve the health of Oregonians.