

Online “Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Programming” Course Helps Bridge the Gap between Nutrition and Agriculture



U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Feed the Future initiative fosters synergies between nutrition and agriculture and helps countries integrate nutrition into other sectors, expanding their capacity to reduce hunger, undernutrition, and poverty and spur economic growth. To support the integration of nutrition into agriculture programming, the USAID Bureaus for Food Security and Global Health funded an online course, developed by FANTA and Michigan State University, that introduces the fundamentals of nutrition-sensitive agriculture and provides guidelines for designing nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs. Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Programming is a comprehensive 3-hour course that can be used to create agriculture programs focused on smallholder farmers that support good nutrition outcomes. It is currently hosted on the Agrilinks and USAID University websites.

Why Have a Nutrition-Sensitive Approach to Agriculture Programming?

Good nutrition is particularly critical in the first 1,000 days and during adolescence. Research has shown that good nutrition during the first 1,000 days is important for individuals to reach

their full growth potential and to have optimal ability to learn and work.¹ Agriculture can have positive direct and indirect effects on nutrition. In addition, good nutrition and health are no longer only seen as outputs of agriculture programming, but are also critical inputs for improving agricultural productivity and economic growth.

Who Can Benefit from the Course?

Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Programming is designed for development program managers and staff who want to learn how to plan, design, and implement integrated agriculture and nutrition programming. By strengthening participants’ nutrition knowledge and skills and introducing key concepts in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, the course helps program managers and staff integrate nutrition into agriculture and food security programming. The course is also useful for ministry and lower level government officials engaged in agriculture, nutrition, or multisectoral work in their countries, as well as for agriculture workers, health workers, community leaders, or others who are interested in cross-sectoral collaboration and/or cross-training in agriculture and nutrition.

¹ The 2008 *Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series* identified the need to focus on the first 1,000 days, during which good nutrition and healthy growth have lasting benefits throughout life.

How Does the Course Work?

The course consists of five modules. Module 1 provides an overview of the relationship between agriculture and nutrition and illustrates why it makes sense for the two sectors to work together. It introduces the key concepts of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions and relates how the latter applies to agricultural programs. Nutrition-specific interventions focus on reducing the direct causes of malnutrition, such as a lack of dietary quality, quantity, and diversity; disease; and inadequate child feeding and caregiving practices. Nutrition-sensitive interventions address some of the underlying causes of undernutrition, such as insufficient food production, lack of access to markets, poor access to education, and women’s marginalization.

Module 2 introduces essential nutrition concepts and explains types of malnutrition including acute malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and chronic malnutrition. It also explains the most common indicators of nutritional status and ways to identify nutritionally vulnerable populations. In addition, the module illuminates the interdependence among nutrition, health, productivity, and income generation. Finally, it explains why nutrition programming focuses so heavily on women and children, outlining the lifelong consequences of poor nutrition during pregnancy, lactation, and the first two years of life, on health, mental and physical capacity, and national economic productivity. The module also recommends that agricultural program staff consider undernutrition prevalence and issues specific to the local context in program design and implementation.

“Through this course, we’re looking to improve our abilities to support good health and nutrition outcomes through agricultural programming, not instead of agricultural programming.”

–Kimberly Chung, Associate Professor,
Dept. of Community Sustainability,
Michigan State University, course architect

Module 3 presents the three main pathways through which agriculture influences nutritional status—the production, income, and women’s empowerment pathways—and shows how to identify opportunities to intervene at various points along each pathway. The module stresses the importance of locally appropriate complementary strategies, such as health and nutrition education around locally available foods or investments in home or community hygiene and sanitation facilities, to ensure positive nutrition outcomes. To this end, it encourages program staff to form cross-sectoral partnerships to increase their ability to plan and implement nutrition interventions in both the agriculture and health sectors. The module also encourages agriculture program staff to seek out opportunities for gender-sensitive nutrition interventions along the agriculture value chain.

Module 4 provides practical recommendations for planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating nutrition-sensitive programming, beginning with the initial steps that agricultural program officers



can take to connect their work with nutrition outcomes. It gives practical advice on how to implement 10 recommendations for agriculture programs interested in improving nutrition (see box) and provides resources for additional information, step-by-step guidance, and tools to support the process. The module also includes a real-life case study illustrating how an existing agriculture program successfully navigated the process and sharing lessons learned from the experience.

10 Recommendations for Improving Nutrition via Agriculture

1. Incorporate explicit nutrition objectives and indicators in program design.
2. Assess the local context.
3. Focus on vulnerable groups and improve equity.
4. Collaborate and coordinate with other sectors.
5. Maintain or improve the natural resource base.
6. Empower women and support their voice in decision making.
7. Facilitate production diversity and increase production of nutrient-dense food.
8. Improve food processing, storage, and preservation.
9. Expand markets and market access for vulnerable groups.
10. Adapt nutrition promotion and education to local knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

Module 5 provides a case study so that course users can test their understanding of the material. The module presents a real-life example of a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program that needed to find ways to reduce aflatoxins in groundnuts. It then challenges participants to practice their new skills by answering a set of questions about the case.

What Are the Takeaways for Multisectoral Collaboration and Program Integration?

All five course modules provide important guidance on cross-sectoral collaboration and integration of program activities to maximize the success of multisectoral projects. Integrated nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs work best when nutrition goals are planned alongside agricultural goals, with sector experts implementing the activities according to their areas of expertise. The course encourages program designers to put careful thought into determining the appropriate level of integration considering program goals and partners' collaboration capacity. It provides guidance on how to find partners and what to look for in partners. Throughout program implementation and on completion, the module recommends adopting a multisectoral evaluation focus to ensure joint accountability across sectors and among all partners.

Since its launch on the Agrilinks website in mid-2015, Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Programming has been the website's sixth-most frequently visited page, with almost 3,400 visitors from 111 countries by January 2017. In addition, over 1,000 people have visited the Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Course webpage on FANTA's website since the page was launched in September 2015.



www.fantaproject.org



@FANTAproject

Contact Information:

Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA)
FHI 360
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-5721
Tel: 202-884-8000
Fax: 202-884-8432
Email: fantamail@fhi360.org

Recommended Citation: Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA). 2017. *Online “Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Programming” Course Helps Bridge the Gap between Nutrition and Agriculture*. Washington, DC: FHI 360/FANTA.

This brief is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the support of the Office of Health, Infectious Diseases, and Nutrition, Bureau for Global Health, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-QAA-A-12-00005, through the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA), managed by FHI 360.

The contents are the responsibility of FHI 360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.