



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 4 June 2021**

## **COOKING TO COMBAT COVID-19: Empowering communities of color through plant-based nutrition**

**Washington, DC:** In late 2020, eight Food for Life instructors took part in “Cooking to Combat COVID-19,” a community education initiative by [Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine](#). [VegFund](#) awarded grants to the instructors, who offered a series of four classes to low-income families at no cost to them. Following the program, the first cohort of students reported positive outcomes as a result of eating fewer or no animal products. Based on these positive results, VegFund has extended its support to all Food for Life instructors.



Deitra Dennis, Food for Life instructor

Part of Physicians Committee, [Food for Life](#) is an award-winning nutrition education program designed by physicians, nurses, and registered dietitians to promote healthful eating based on the latest scientific research. Classes offered to the public provide information about plant-based nutrition and hands-on cooking instruction to people seeking improved health through their food choices.

**Deitra Dennis, instructor**, commented:

*“The greatest success was empowering communities of color with tools (recipes, handouts, etc.) to address underlying chronic conditions. Some participants experienced normalizing of blood pressure, reversal of pre-diabetes, and weight loss.”*

### **Goals**

- Provide participants with the inspiration and tools to try plant-based eating
- Offer free classes in communities of color, taught mostly by people of color
- Encourage participants to join the [Physicians Committee's 21-Day Vegan Kickstart](#)

### **Approach**

Food for Life instructors taught classes as part of Physicians Committee's “Cooking to Combat COVID-19 campaign,” a campaign to empower people with underlying conditions such as diabetes and hypertension that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19. A plant-based diet has been scientifically proven to prevent and even reverse diabetes and hypertension.

*(continued)*

Black and Latinx individuals have been especially affected by COVID-19 due to several factors, including healthcare disparities, the prevalence of underlying conditions, and a disproportionately high rate of infection. Therefore, the program offered free classes to eight communities of color, taught mostly by people of color.

VegFund grants assisted with costs of marketing as well as food for cooking demonstrations.

## Results

After completing the “Cooking to Combat COVID-19” course, 65 of the participants filled out a survey. Positive outcomes include:

- Participants reported positive outcomes after eating fewer or no animal products: 60% reported better energy, 49% reported better sleep, 42% reported better digestion.
- Of the 54 (83%) participants who were not already eating a plant-based diet before classes started, 44 (81%) committed to a plant-based diet for at least 21 days following the course.
- Of the participants who ate animal products before classes started, many reported decreased consumption. The percentage reporting decreased consumption of the following meat and dairy foods was: 66% for poultry, 63% for red meat, 52% for dairy products, 51% for eggs; 45% for fish.
- Of the participants who were not already eating six or more servings of plant-based foods, the percentage reporting increased consumption of plant-based foods was: 68% for vegetables, 67% for beans, 60% for fruit, 55% for grains.



Sharon McRae, Food for Life instructor

## What's next?

After this successful pilot program with eight instructors, VegFund plans to continue to fund Food for Life instructors, including those who are widening their scope by offering courses to institutions and otherwise broadening their community outreach.

**Leslie Barcus, Executive Director of VegFund**, commented:

*“VegFund is most pleased to hear from Food for Life instructors and educational alliance partners that the grant support is invaluable for facilitating and deepening their community outreach.”*

Funding partners interested in participating with VegFund in their support of Food for Life instructors should contact Leslie Barcus, VegFund’s Executive Director, at [leslie@vegfund.org](mailto:leslie@vegfund.org).

**About VegFund:** Founded in 2009, VegFund is a nonprofit that empowers vegan advocates by funding effective vegan outreach that inspires people to choose and maintain a vegan life. Our most popular grantee activities include food sampling, film screenings, vegfests and health fairs, conferences, learning events, vegan challenges, and online campaigns. VegFund also develops and curates the very best resources available on effective advocacy and facilitates information sharing among activists in the vegan community.

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**Note to editors:** VegFund logo can be found at <https://vegfund.org/press>.  
For photos, please contact [Kari Hallenburg](mailto:Kari.Hallenburg).