

# Research Update on African Heritage Diets

February 21, 2023

# About Oldways

- **Our Vision**  
A healthier, happier life through cultural food traditions.
- **Our Mission**  
We inspire people to embrace the healthy, sustainable joys of the old ways of eating.
- **Best Known for**  
Creating the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid and other Heritage Diet Pyramids, Creating the Whole Grain Stamp, Culinary Travel



*Source: Kelly LeBlanc for Oldways*

# Housekeeping

- Attendees will receive an email within ONE WEEK with **CPEU certificate, slides, and recording**
- Visit **oldwayspt.org/CPEU** to register for upcoming webinars or view recordings of previous webinars
- Please submit any questions using the Q&A function in Zoom
- Join us for an upcoming webinar. Spring webinar lineup to be announced soon!

# Today's Speakers



**Adante Hart, MPH, RDN, LDN**  
Outreach Dietitian  
Oldways



**Samara Sterling, PhD**  
Research Director  
The Peanut Institute



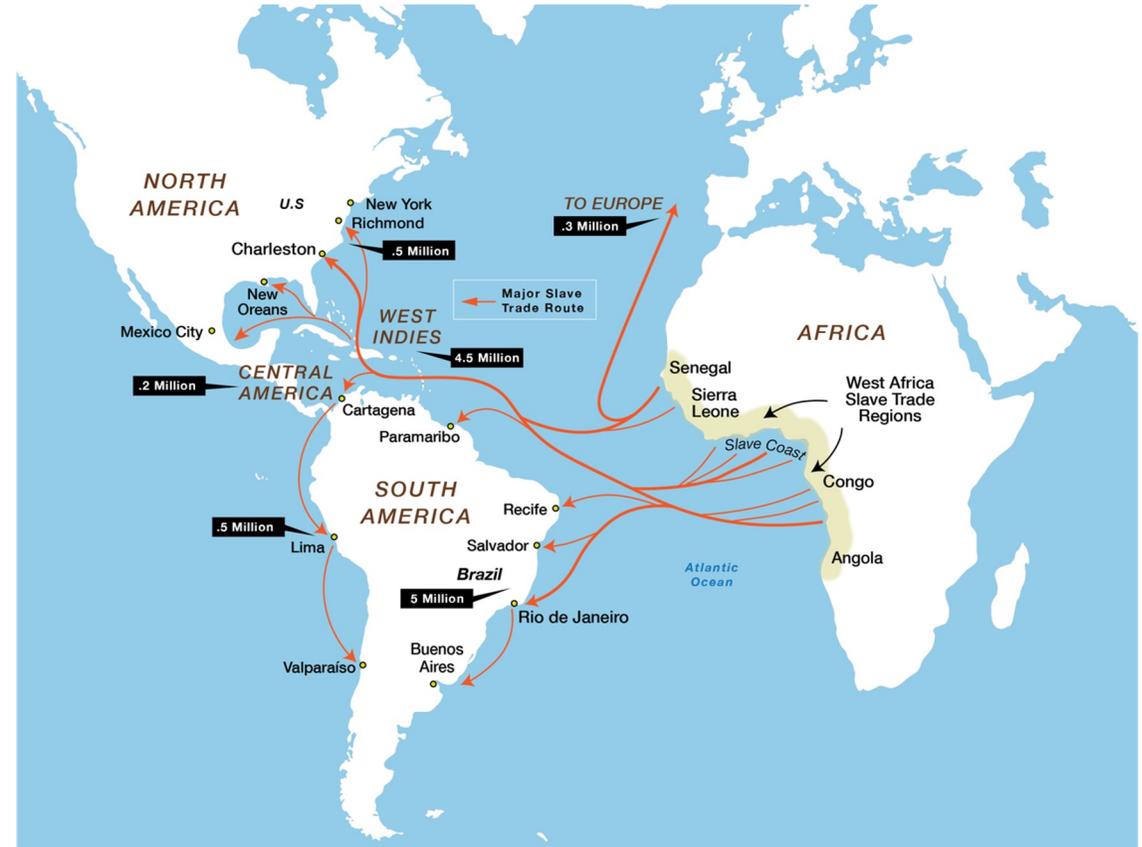
# What is the African Heritage Diet?

# What is the African Diaspora?

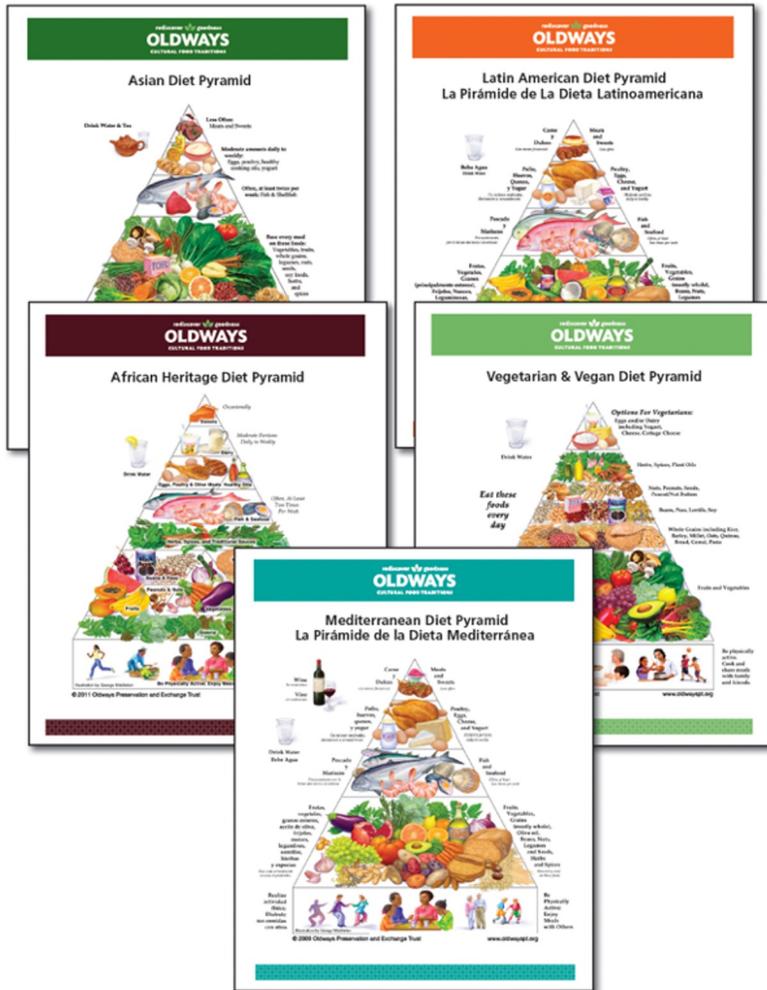
**Diaspora: the scattering of any people from their original homeland**

The African Diaspora encompasses:

- Continental Africa (West/Central Africa)
- The Caribbean
- Latin America
- The American South



# Exploring Cultural Models of Healthy Eating



Oldways has worked with subject matter experts to develop several heritage diet pyramids over the years.

- 1993: Mediterranean Diet Pyramid
- 1995: Asian Heritage Diet Pyramid
- 1997: Vegetarian Diet Pyramid
- 2009: Latin American Heritage Diet Pyramid
- 2011: African Heritage Diet Pyramid

# African Heritage Diet Advisory Committee



- CONSTANCE BROWN-RIGGS, MSED, RD, CDE, CDN

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# African Heritage Diet Pyramid

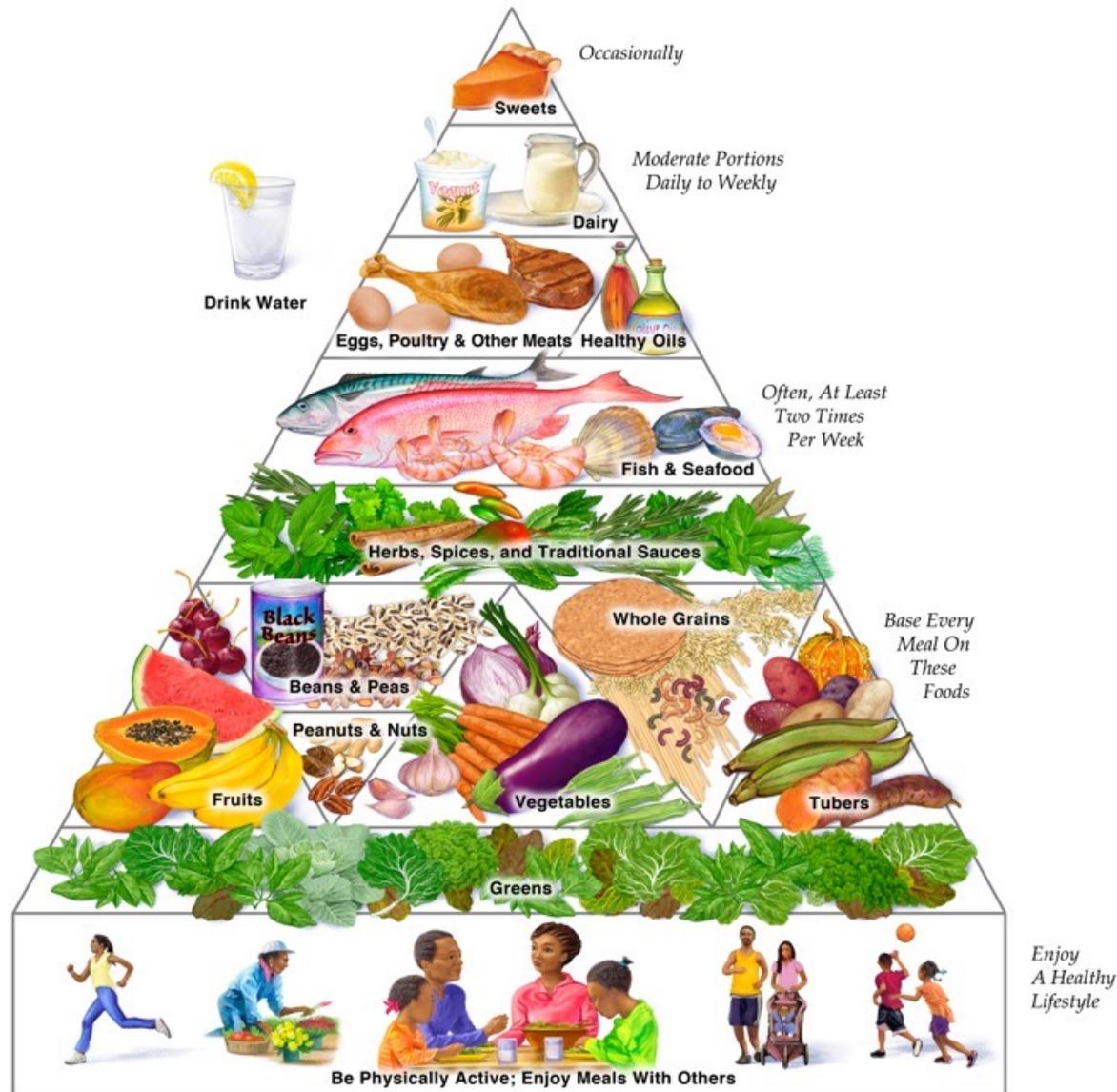


Illustration by George Middleton

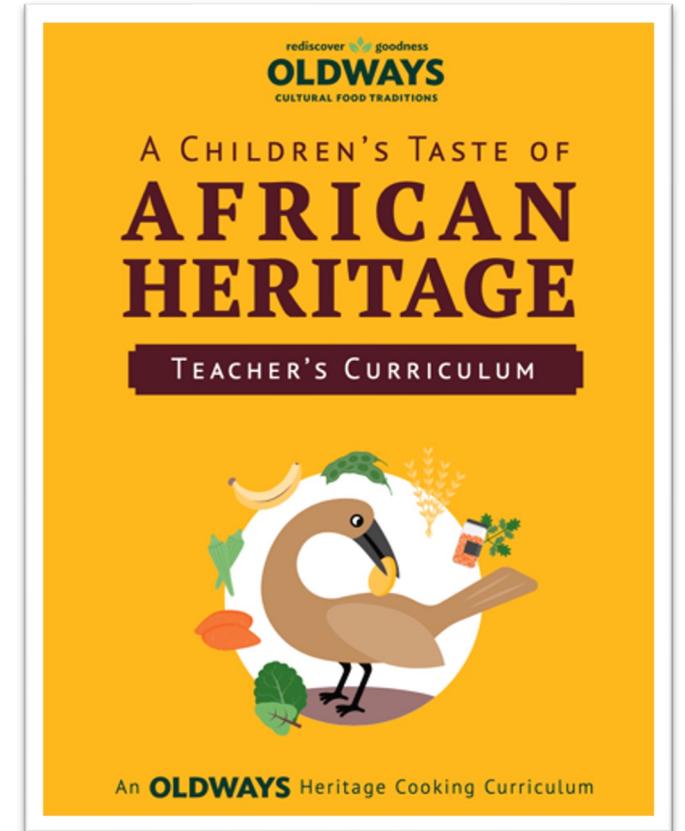
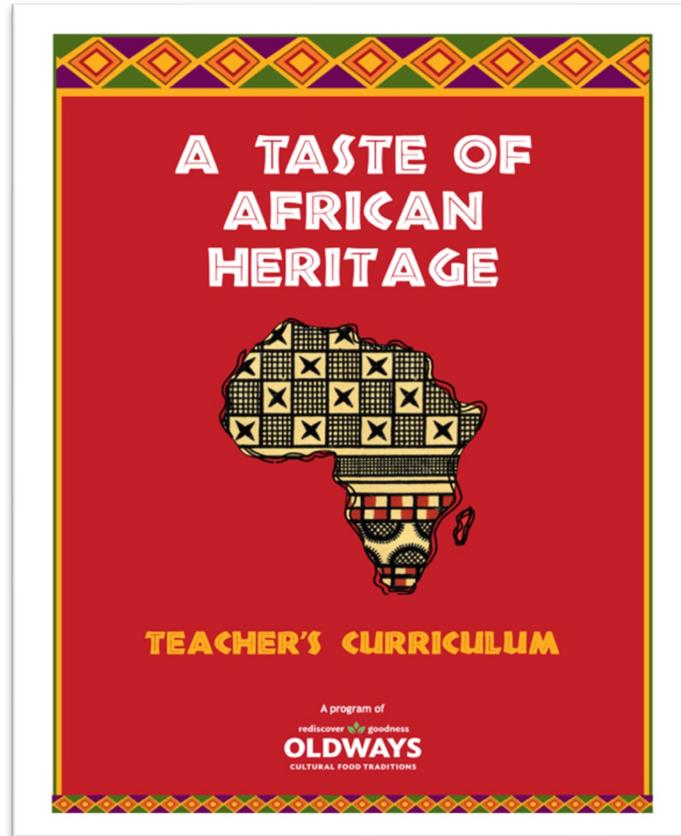
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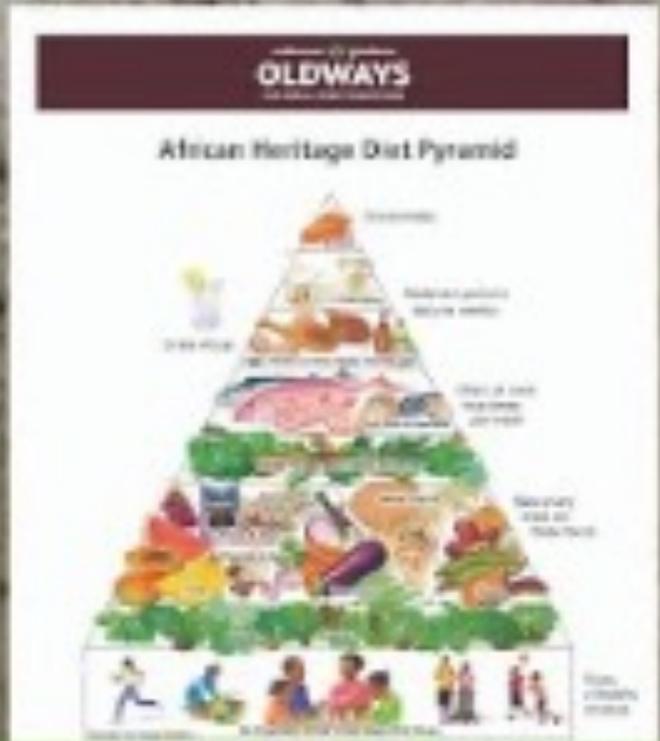
# African Heritage Diet vs. Standard American Diet

Traditional African Heritage Diet Pattern	Modern Standard American Diet Pattern
Plant-based	Animal-based
Whole foods	Fast food and pre-packaged convenience foods
High in fiber and complex carbohydrates: whole grains, cereals, starchy vegetables and tubers	Low in fiber; high in refined flours and grains
Naturally low in sodium	High in sodium
Low in unhealthy fats and refined sugars	High in fried foods, soft drinks and other sugary drinks

# A Taste of African Heritage



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**A Taste of African Heritage**

# CELEBRATING THE CULTURAL LUNCHBOX

**Samara Sterling, PhD, RD**

Director of Research & Nutrition, The Peanut Institute

Director & Principal Investigator, Veggie & Soul



# Happy Black History Month

Black History Month is a celebration to commemorate the achievements of Black people in the history of the United States.





**What is one of your favorite foods or dishes? Tell us what country or culture it is from (if you know)**

# The Yuckiest Lunchbox by Debbie Min

At lunchtime, everyone was hungry, including Nari. She opened her lunch box. Yes! It was kimbap, her favorite Korean food.



"What's that green stuff?" someone shouted. "It looks slimy!"



"What's this about, Nari?"

"I just want to be like everyone else. Why does my food look slimy and smell funny?"

Her mom hugged her. "Our food is part of our culture. It's what your dad and I eat, what your grandparents ate. You love kimbap, don't you?"

"The kids laughed at me, Mom," Nari whispered.

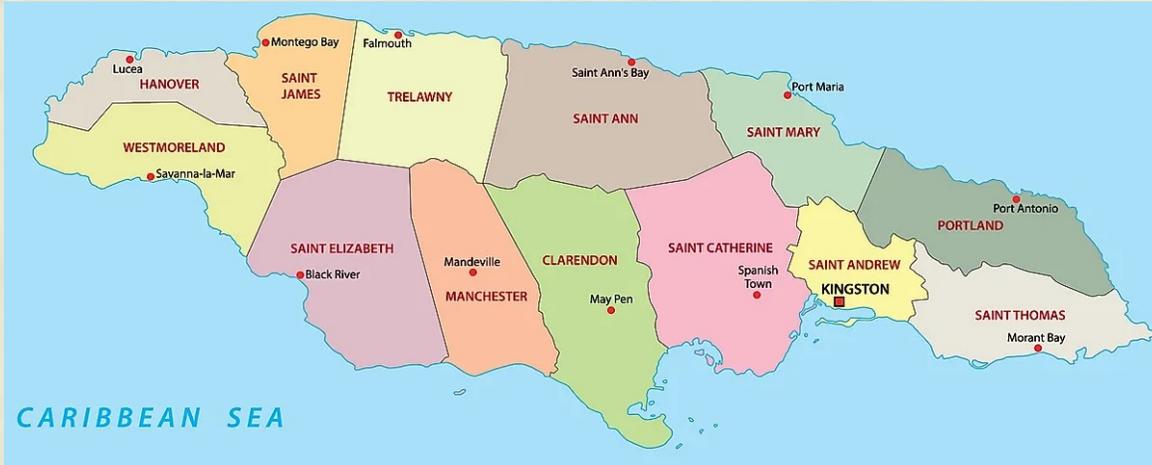
"Sometimes people make fun of things they've never seen before or don't understand, but they don't always mean to hurt your feelings."

"Can I please have an American lunch tomorrow? Please?"



Nari is Korean-American whose mother prepares **traditional Korean foods** for her to eat at school during lunchtime. The other children make fun of the "strange-looking" foods, making Nari embarrassed of her culture and wanting her mom to prepare "normal" American food for her. Nari's mother shares with her the importance of her culture and what it means to their family. When another child's mom tries her kimbap and loves it, Nari realizes that her culture is special and deserves to be celebrated. Cultural lunchbox=a place of acceptance and celebration of heritage.

# My Experience



Upon migrating to the United States (New York), I was often homesick because I missed many of **my traditional foods**—fresh ackee, callaloo, breadfruit, otaheite apples, jackfruit, guavas, etc. I remember in some instances being “forced” to change my palate to accommodate other foods. Some I liked, some I didn’t. Fortunately, NY had some Caribbean markets, which helped my family stay connected to our roots.

**...and then  
there was the  
carrot salad...**



There was nothing inherently wrong with carrot salad; it just was not a blend of flavors I liked or was accustomed to.



## Mediterranean Diet

🏆 #1 in Best Diets Overall

The Mediterranean diet is one of U.S. News & World Report's Best Diets of 2023. Read more for Mediterranean diet meal plans, food lists and tips.

[READ MORE »](#)

Overall Score

**4.6/5.0**

Overall Weight Loss

**4.2/5.0**

Healthiness Score

**4.6/5.0**

# Cultural Appreciation and Inclusivity

- The Mediterranean Diet is celebrated through research, policy, and social rankings.
- As nutrition professionals, we can promote inclusivity by broadening our recommendations for what foods fit into a healthy diet

# Dietary Patterns Recommended in the Dietary Guidelines 2020-2025



- **The Healthy U.S.-Style Dietary Pattern:** utilizes foods that Americans typically consume; emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low- and fat-free dairy, healthy fats, lean meats and poultry, and limits added sugars and refined starches.
- **The Healthy Vegetarian Dietary Pattern:** adaptation of the Healthy U.S.-Style Dietary Pattern but does not include meats, poultry or seafood.
- **The DASH Diet:** emphasizes limiting a person's intake of sodium.
- **The Healthy Mediterranean-Style Dietary Pattern:** focuses on the traditional foods eaten in the countries that surround the Mediterranean Sea; emphasizes plant foods/fish and minimizes red/processed meats.





# Where does my culture fit?



# Higher risk of chronic disease among Black Americans and people in the South

 NEWS

## Southern cooking may be killing African-Americans, study finds

That down-home cooking loaded with salt, sugar and fat raises blood pressure.

**Southern diet:** one that includes a high intake of red/processed meats, fried foods, organ meats, egg, egg dishes, added fats, high-fat dairy foods, sugar-sweetened beverages and bread.

Original study showed that a plant-based pattern was most common in older, female, black participants.

 AMA

## 1 big reason for racial gap in hypertension: the Southern diet

DEC 21, 2018 • 4 MIN READ



Judd SE, Gutiérrez OM, Newby PK, Howard G, Howard VJ, Locher JL, Kissela BM, Shikany JM. Dietary patterns are associated with incident stroke and contribute to excess risk of stroke in black Americans. *Stroke*. 2013 Dec;44(12):3305-11. doi: 10.1161/STROKEAHA.113.002636. Epub 2013 Oct 24. PMID: 24159061; PMCID: PMC3898713.

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# Is there anything good about my food?

Yes, high intakes of red/processed meats, fried foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages is an American problem, but identifying and highlighting the nutritious aspects of cultural foods is important.



# Messaging Contributes to Barriers

- Early study on food perceptions and choices of African Americans in Northern Florida.
- **Major barriers to eating a “healthy” diet:**
  - A misperception that eating healthy means giving up traditional cultural foods and family recipes, flavors, heritage, and even identity.
  - Poor taste of “healthy” foods.



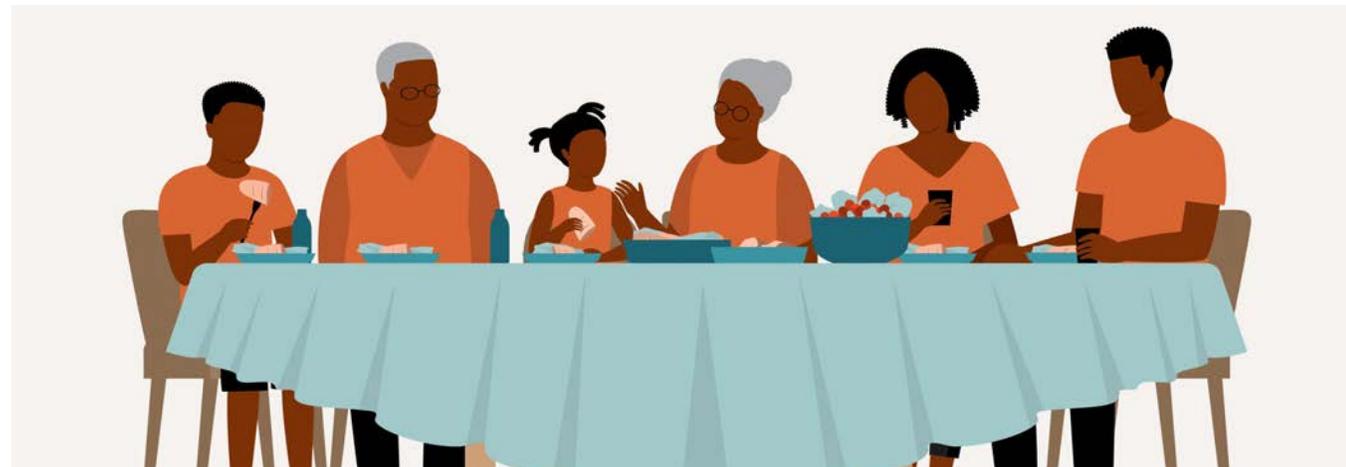
James DC. Factors influencing food choices, dietary intake, and nutrition-related attitudes among African Americans: application of a culturally sensitive model. *Ethn Health*. 2004 Nov;9(4):349-67. doi: 10.1080/1355785042000285375. PMID: 15570680.

# Dietary Preferences of African-Americans in the Deep South

- Dietary preferences among 270 older black and white adults living in the Black Belt region of South
  - African Americans were more likely than European Americans to describe collard greens, turnip greens, and cabbage as their favorite foods; while European Americans were more likely to describe salad and potatoes as their favorite foods.
- **2020 study:** Greens, okra-corn-tomato mix, grits, and sweet potatoes were eaten at least twice a month by 30%-50% of 97 African Americans living ages 25-60 living in the Southwest

Yang Y, Buys DR, Judd SE, Gower BA, Locher JL. Favorite foods of older adults living in the Black Belt Region of the United States. Influences of ethnicity, gender, and education. *Appetite*. 2013 Apr;63:18-23. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2012.12.007. Epub 2012 Dec 20. PMID: 23262296; PMCID: PMC3578153.

Winham DM, Knoblauch ST, Heer MM, Thompson SV, Der Ananian C. African-American Views of Food Choices and Use of Traditional Foods. *Am J Health Behav*. 2020 Nov 1;44(6):848-863. doi: 10.5993/AJHB.44.6.9. PMID: 33081881.



Sharecropping was considered a form of oppression for formerly enslaved people. They farmed land in exchange for a portion of the food that was being planted.



Mrs. Katie Johnson, 95

# A Lesser Told History of Southern Food

- Many of the grains and vegetables enjoyed here have African roots
- Ancestors who were enslaved brought with them seeds to preserve their cultural heritage
  - Black-eyed peas
  - Yams
  - Eggplant
  - Rice
  - Peanuts
- Sharecroppers ate off the land

“Soul Fooled? Eating ‘Black’ May Be Healthier than You Think,” Egypt Freeman (1996)



# A Better Strategy that Celebrates the Lunchbox

## Highlight

Highlight nutrient-dense foods that are popular within the cultural context

- Collard greens vs kale

## Celebrate

Celebrate rich flavors in newer food items that are introduced

- Cajun seasoning; herbs, spices, and sauces

## Teach

Teach best practices related to preserving and enhancing the nutrient density of each meal

- Steaming vegetables; plate portions; plant-centric

# The movement back to plant-forward eating in the Black community

- Eight percent (8%) of Black Americans report being vegan or vegetarian, compared to 3% of the US population.
- 2020 Gallop poll found that 31% of non-white Americans had reduced their meat consumption in the past year, compared to only 19% of white Americans.

## Why black Americans are more likely to be vegan

© 11 September 2020



BBC

NEWS



SUBMITTED PHOTO / MICHELLE LYN

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53787329>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/282779/nearly-one-four-cut-back-eating-meat.aspx>

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# Restaurants catering to familiar cultural flavors using plants



# Veggie & Soul Intervention

A 12-week intervention to examine the effect of a soul food, plant-based lifestyle on:

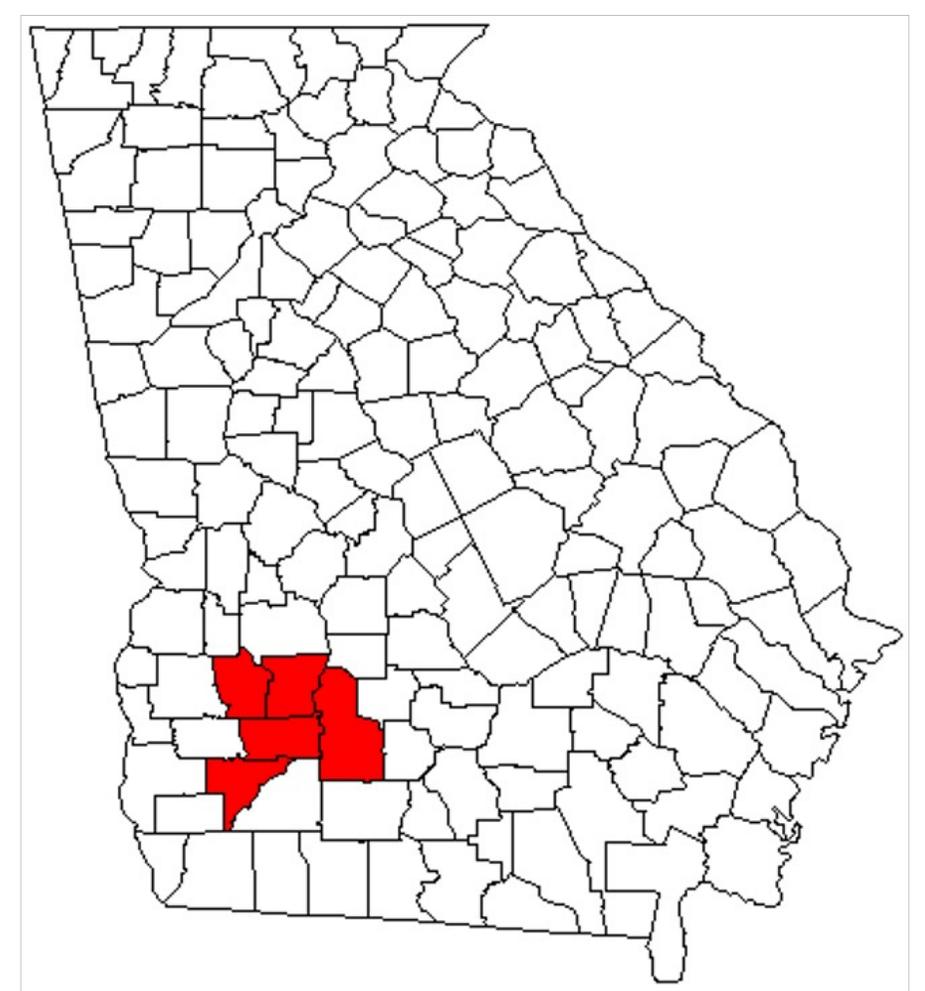
- ✓ Risk for heart disease among Black adults in Albany, GA
  - Body composition
  - Lipids
  - Blood pressure
  - Blood sugar
  
- ✓ Inflammation, which is a marker for underlying heart disease and other chronic conditions
  - hs-CRP
  - TMAO
  
- ✓ Dietary behaviors and attitudes



# Components of the 12-week intervention



- Weekly Monday night Zoom classes
- Virtual support groups
- Facebook group
- Weekly plant-based meals
- Weekly grocery boxes
- Bi-weekly produce boxes
- Meal plans
- Physical activity
- Before and after lab work



# ALBANY, GA

## Part of the Black Belt (rich, dark soil; >50% Black population)

- 73% Black, 23% White
- Top 3 causes of death among Black individuals in Dougherty County: diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and heart disease
- United States Department of Agriculture data illustrates that much of Albany is situated in low-income areas and food deserts, with low access to nutritious food



# SOME PARTNERS



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



**A non-profit organization that provided plant-based soul food meals to residents in the Albany, GA community. The organization also formed a network with local farmers to provide fresh produce to residents in the surrounding food desert areas. This organization was one of the very few resources for residents to receive plant-based food in Albany, GA. The Gud Life Flow team was an integral part of this project, assisting with recruitment, education, cooking classes from a trained chef, and food distribution.**





# FOCUS ON PLANTS

Emphasize plant foods that are typically familiar within the ethnic Southern-style diet and introduce less common plant-based foods.

## FAMILIAR PLANT FOODS

- Black-eyed peas
- Black beans
- Kidney beans
- Corn
- Peanuts
- Peanut butter
- Collard greens
- Turnip greens
- Mustard greens
- Cabbage
- Sweet potatoes
- Oatmeal
- Grits
- Apples
- Bananas
- Peaches
- Okra
- Eggplant
- Green beans
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Garlic

## LESS COMMON PLANT-BASED FOODS INTRODUCED

- Red meat alternatives
- Processed meat alternatives
- Chicken alternatives
- Fish alternatives
- Dairy alternatives
- Mushrooms
- Lentils
- Garbanzo beans
- Whole grains





# SURVEYS + ASSESSMENTS



## BEGINNING

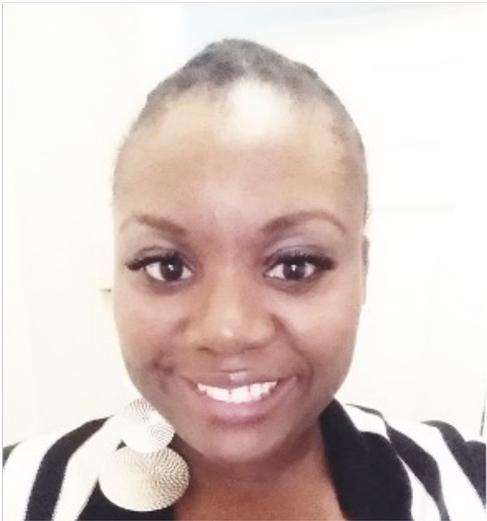
1. Baseline meeting
2. Informed Consent
3. Intake surveys
4. Dietary assessments
5. Clinical measurements

## 12 WEEKS

1. Final surveys
2. Dietary assessments
3. Clinical measurements

# COMMUNITY HEALTH LEADERS

- Motivated participants and provided regular contact throughout the week
- Led breakout groups for Monday night sessions
- Shared expertise, experiences, and recipes
- Built a sense of togetherness within their teams

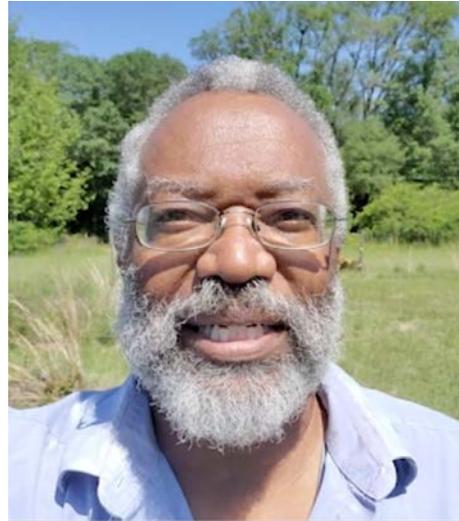


**Team 1**

*also Study Manager and  
Lesson Facilitator*



**Team 2**



**Team 3**



**Team 4**



**Team 5**

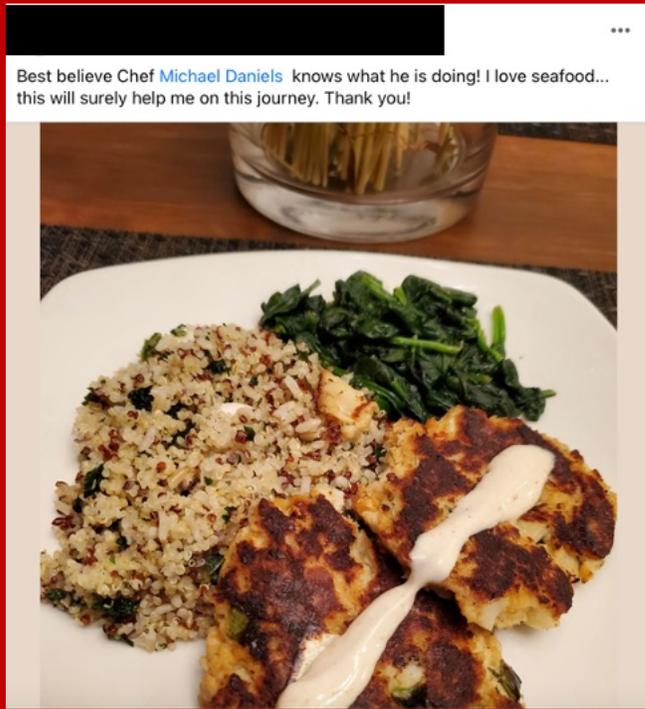
Centered around  
meat, animal  
products, and  
processed foods;  
Low in plants



70-90% of all deaths are due to chronic diseases of **our own making**.



# “Crab” Cakes



# CHEF-TAUGHT COOK- A-LONG CLASSES

## *Buffalo tofu bites*



## *Pad Thai*





# Weekly Food + Meals + Goodies



# Recipe Examples

## Southern Black Eyed Peas

Ingredients:  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 cup yellow onion, diced  
¼ cup celery, diced  
½ red bell pepper, diced  
½ cup low-sodium vegetable broth  
2 cans black eyed peas  
2 tsp garlic powder  
½ tsp crushed red pepper  
½ tsp paprika  
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper  
1½ tsp liquid smoke or smoked paprika  
1 tsp sugar



## Baked Beans

Ingredients:  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1/2 onion, diced  
1 green bell pepper, diced  
3 cans cannellini beans, rinsed and drained  
3/4 cup tomato sauce  
1/2 cup water  
1/4 cup maple syrup  
1 tbsp dijon mustard  
1 tbsp apple cider vinegar  
2 tsp smoked paprika  
1 tsp garlic powder  
1/4 tsp black pepper  
2 tbsp brown sugar



## Vegan Gumbo

Ingredients:  
1/4 cup olive oil  
1/4 cup all-purpose flour  
1 medium onion, diced  
1 green pepper, diced  
1 celery stalk, diced  
3 cloves of garlic, minced  
2 cups okra, sliced  
1 can crushed tomatoes (low sodium, if possible)  
2 ½ - 3 ½ cups low-sodium vegetable broth  
10 mushrooms, sliced  
½ teaspoon thyme  
½ tsp cayenne pepper  
2 bay leaves  
2 cups cooked beans, drained, rinsed (can be any beans you have, chickpeas, kidney, etc.)  
1 tsp salt-free creole seasoning



## Beefy Vegan Chili

Ingredients:  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 container Ozo™ Grounds  
2 cans low-sodium chili beans  
3 tsp minced garlic  
½ red onion, diced  
2 - 14.5 oz. cans low-sodium diced tomatoes  
1 cup low-sodium vegetable broth  
2 tbsp cumin  
2 tbsp chili powder  
½ tsp dried oregano  
1 green pepper, diced  
¼ tsp ground cayenne pepper  
1 tsp paprika  
1/4 tsp black pepper  
\*If you do not have Ozo™ Grounds, add in 2 cans low-sodium black beans, rinsed and drained



# facebook

# PARTICIPANT PHOTOS

I made the Lentil Chili in the slow cooker. It's very tasty!! 😊



Nice and comforting on this cool/ rainy day. My version of olive garden Zuppa Toscana Soup.



Today's dinner: Red Lentil Curry (cooked in my Instant Pot) with my vegan ranch and Naan bread. 😊

It was delicious! Another hit with my family too! 😊



Where u at? Come at me bro! 😂



I used the recipe in our booklet added other non sodium seasonings, homemade guacamole and vegan cheese shreds.





## RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

1/3 of participants reported having some form of food insecurity as measured by the USDA Food Security Survey

**Table 1.** Baseline Demographic Characteristics of 24 Black Adults Enrolled in a 12-wk Plant-based Nutrition and Lifestyle Intervention in a Black Belt County in Georgia

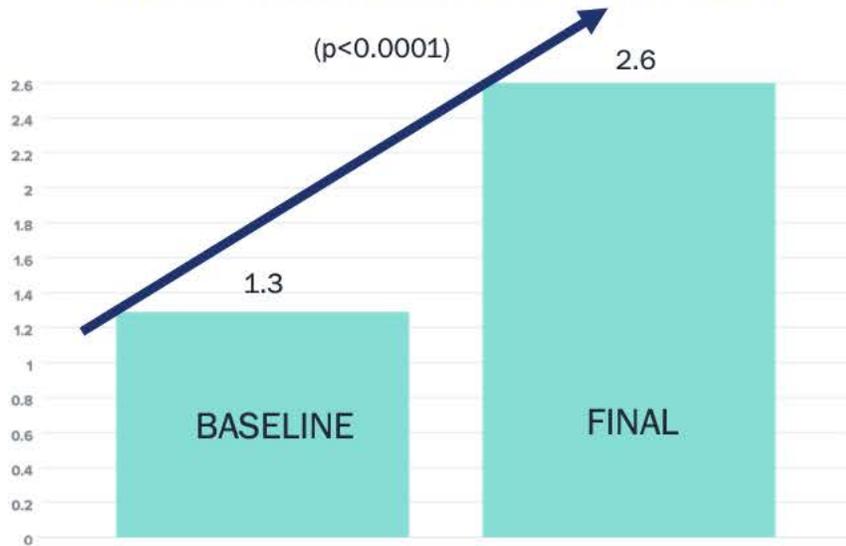
Characteristics	Mean $\pm$ SD or n (%)
Age, y (mean $\pm$ SD)	43.6 $\pm$ 10.5
Body mass index (mean $\pm$ SD)	43.1 $\pm$ 10.5
Marital status	
Single/divorced	14 (58)
Married	9 (38)
Missing	1 (4)
Sex	
Male	2 (8)
Female	22 (92)
Income	
< \$10,000	3 (13)
\$15,000-\$44,999	4 (17)
$\geq$ \$45,000	7 (29)
Prefer not to answer	6 (25)
Missing	4 (17)
Education	
Less than high school	0 (0)
High school	6 (25)
Associate's degree	2 (8)
Bachelor's degree	8 (33)
Master's degree or higher	7 (29)
Missing	1 (4)

Note: Continuous variables were calculated as means  $\pm$  SD, and categorical data were calculated as counts and percentages. On the baseline survey, race or ethnicity was self-reported from a list including African American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, multiple races, and other (specify).



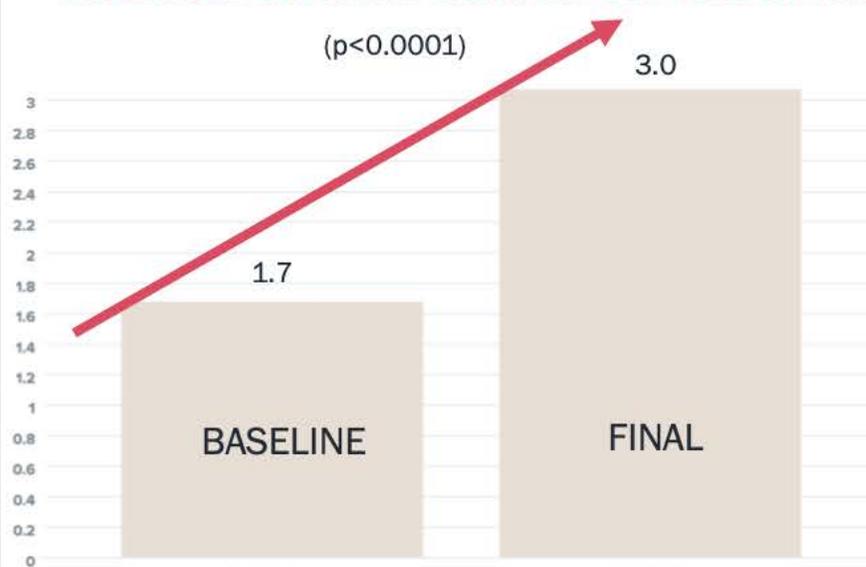
"HOW MANY DAILY SERVINGS OF FRUITS DO YOU EAT?"

### FRUIT CONSUMPTION: BEFORE AND AFTER



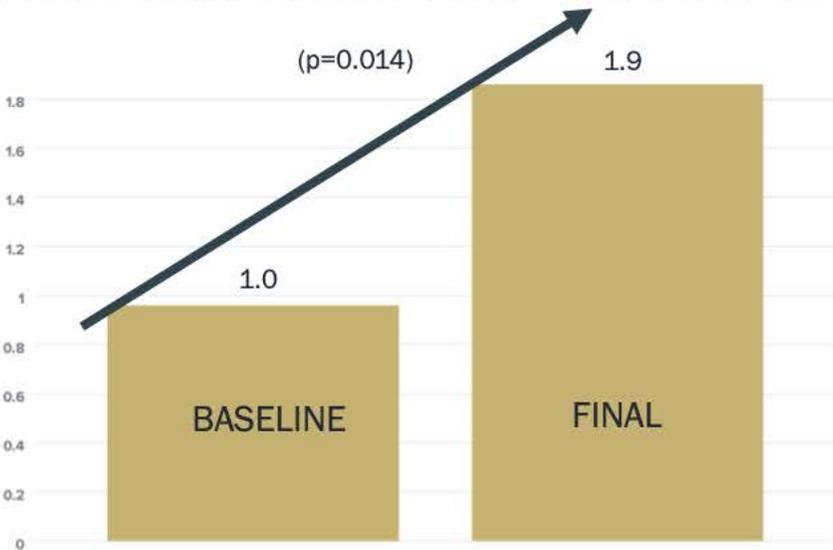
"HOW MANY DAILY SERVINGS OF VEGETABLES DO YOU EAT?"

### VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION: BEFORE AND AFTER

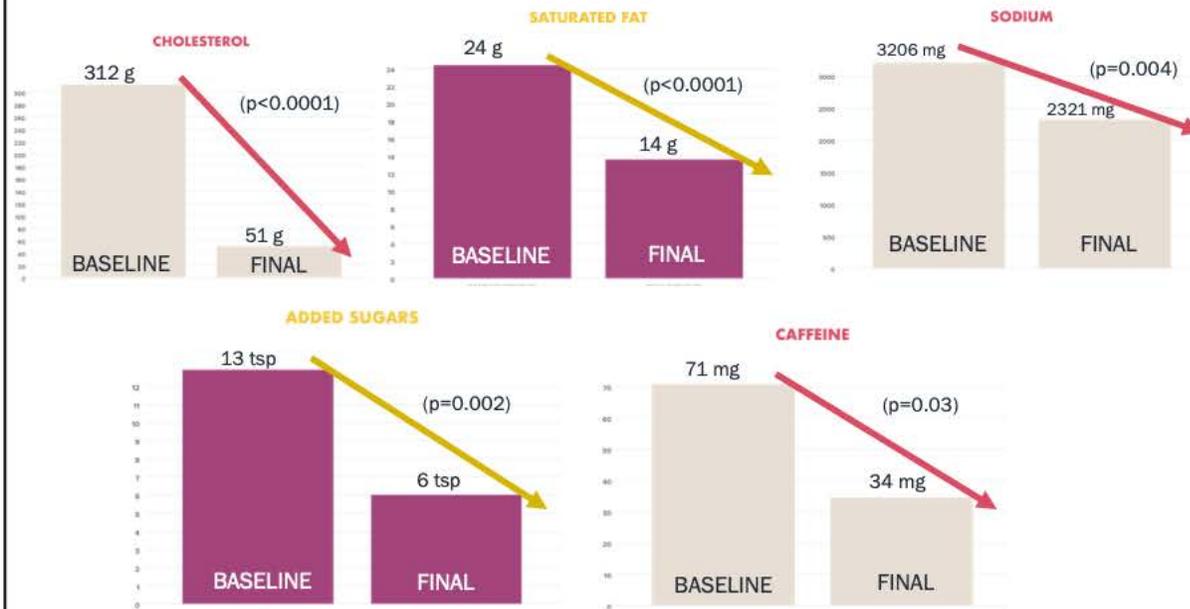


"HOW MANY DAILY SERVINGS OF WHOLE GRAINS DO YOU EAT?"

### WHOLE GRAIN CONSUMPTION: BEFORE AND AFTER



### CONSUMPTION OF NUTRIENTS TO LIMIT





## PREPARING AND SHOPPING FOR HEALTHY FOODS

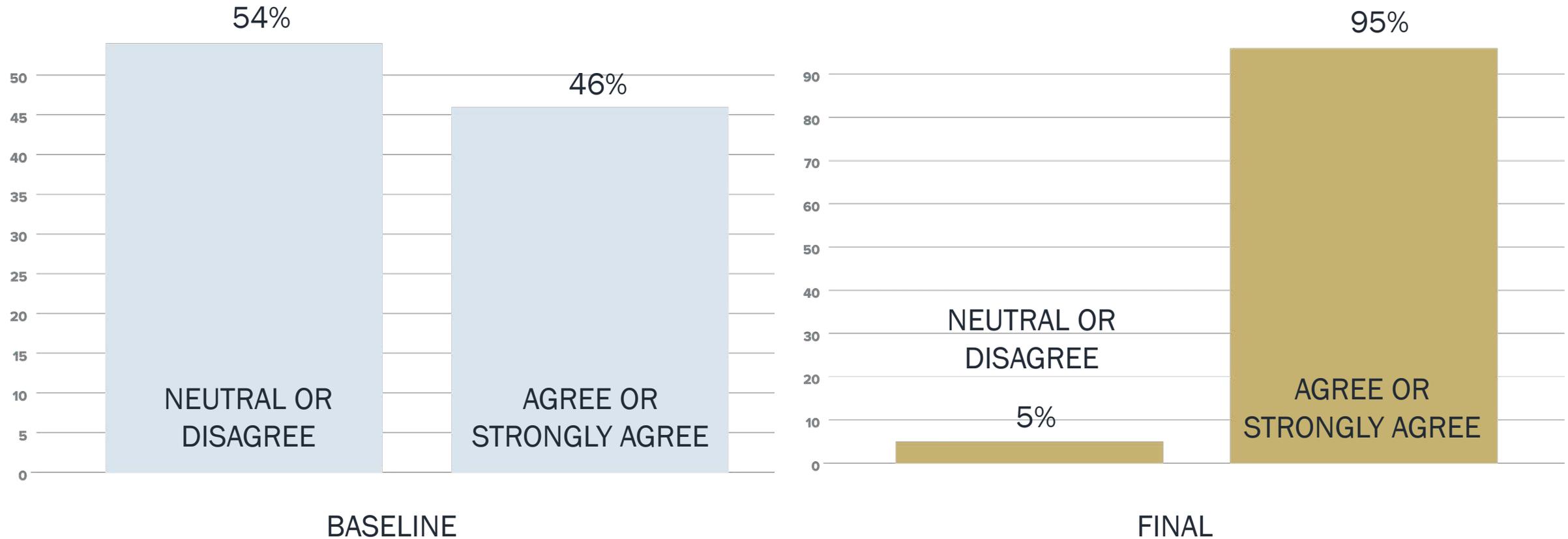
- ↑ Planning meals before grocery shopping more often ( $p=0.0013$ )
- ↑ Reading nutrition facts labels when grocery shopping more often ( $p<0.0001$ )
- ↑ Using a grocery list more often ( $p=0.006$ )
- ↑ More confidence in preparing healthy meals ( $p=0.03$ )
- ↑ More confidence in using healthier substitutes for meals ( $p=0.055$ )

**Table 2.** Preclinical and Postclinical Outcomes of 24 Participants Enrolled in a 12-wk Plant-based Nutrition and Lifestyle Intervention in a Black Belt County in Georgia

Measurement	Preintervention (Mean ± SD)	Postintervention (Mean ± SD)	<i>P</i> (95% Confidence Interval)
<b>Body Composition</b>			
Body mass index (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	42.6 ± 10.7	40.8 ± 10.7	<0.001 (−2.42 to −1.09)*
Waist circumference (cm)	122.7 ± 19.9	113.5 ± 19.4	<0.001 (−12.01 to −6.36)*
Clinical waist-hip ratio	0.9 ± 0.1	0.9 ± 0.1	0.06 (−0.06 to 0.001)
<b>Cholesterol</b>			
Total	198.6 ± 34.1	177.0 ± 26.3	<0.001 (−30.55 to −12.53)*
Low-density lipoprotein	123.5 ± 31.6	106.3 ± 26.3	<0.001 (−25.34 to −9.08)*
High-density lipoprotein	57.1 (14.4)	52.3 +11.6	0.002 (−7.59 to −1.99)*
<b>Inflammation</b>			
High-sensitive C-reactive protein	14.7 ± 13.5	10.9 ± 10.4	0.02 (−6.90 to −0.70)*
Trimethylamine N-oxide <sup>a</sup>	4.7 ± 2.9	3.7 ± 0.9	0.11 (−2.40 to 0.26)

<sup>a</sup>Laboratory error resulted in a sample size of 17 for this measurement; \*Statistically significant preintervention and postintervention differences (*P* < 0.05) as determined by paired *t* tests.

# "A diet without meat is satisfactory and nutritious"



Beliefs and attitudes towards plant-based diets significantly improved by the end of the program

$P < 0.0005$



# Program Feasibility, Acceptability, & Retention

Program rated highly among participants

Mean weekly attendance: 93%

Food & grocery box redemption: 98%

Top motivations for engaging and remaining in the program

- Lesson content
- Food & grocery boxes
- Virtual support groups

Most highly rated meals

- Lasagna
- Black bean burgers
- Lentil meatloaf



# Limitations

- As a quasi-experimental pilot study, randomization was not feasible.
  - Results should be interpreted cautiously
  - Findings align with similar studies in Black populations, such as the large-scale NEW Soul study
- Majority of participants were women.
- The use of a 24-hour recall to assess dietary intake may be limited in interpretation due to a poor reflection of long-term diets.



# Implications for Practice

- Changes toward plant-based diets can be challenging in rural Black communities where food deserts may be prevalent.
- Rural environments that are not built to accommodate physical activity may continue to pose a challenge for residents who want to practice healthier lifestyles.
- The importance of family interdependence and close relationships require practitioners to deliberately apply culturally-appropriate strategies when addressing interventions in communities where food plays an integral role in the social-environmental lifestyle.
- Individual, community, and system-level stakeholder collaborations will be salient to the success of future programs.



# Future directions

- Larger-scale RCTs that oversample men
- Continued community partnerships with public health organizations, hospitals, and food justice advocates
- Our ongoing work
  - We host nutrition education sessions
  - We organize month-long cooking and nutrition education classes
  - Partnering with local hospital to host a health fair



# 3 Tips: How do I celebrate cultural lunchboxes in my own work?

- **Consider and honor your client's food preferences and cultural traditions.**
  - May prefer turnip greens instead of kale; cornmeal porridge instead of bran muffins
  - Breakfast foods may be similar to lunch/dinner foods
- **As you review the general recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines, involve your patient/client in identifying where their where favorite foods fit on MyPlate.**
  - Visual representation of cultural foods promote pride and acceptance
- **Utilize culturally-representative handouts that promote positive imagery when possible.**





Special thanks the Veggie & Soul staff (Princess Brownlee, LMSW, LaShombria Ellerbee, Chelsea McMillan, Dr Jeanette Pope-Ozimba, Dr Temitope Olarewaju), Health Leaders (Pastor Joshua Nelson, Jacinta Sterling, Annette Davis, Joe Powell), and students (Shantel Wahl, Jessica Grzybowski, Amanda Fischer). A special thanks to all community leaders (Food Justice Coalition, Emanuel SDA Church, Gud Life Flow, Chef Michael Daniels, Fredando Jackson, a.k.a. Farmer Fredo) and all the study participants who made this research possible.



**EAT MORE VEGGIES, LIVE WITH SOUL**

# Health Benefits of Traditional African Heritage Diets: The Evidence

- Switching to a traditional African diet improved markers for cancer, reduced inflammation, and improved gut microbiome.<sup>1</sup>
- Providing culturally-appropriate interventions focusing on healthy foods that are already regularly enjoyed in Black cuisine can promote good nutrition in Black communities.<sup>2</sup>
- Making culturally-sensitive modifications to diet programs can lead to improvements in blood pressure, weight, and other health parameters.<sup>3</sup>

1. "Fat, Fiber and Cancer Risk in African Americans and Rural Africans" doi: 10.1038/ncomms7342

2. "The Potential for Plant-Based Diets to Promote Health Among Blacks Living in the United States" doi: 10.3390/nu11122915

3. "Culturally-sensitive weight loss program produces significant reduction in weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol in eight weeks." PMID: 11152083

# ATOAH is a SNAP-ED Evidence-based Intervention!

## Research Article

### Impacts of A Taste of African Heritage: A Culinary Heritage Cooking Course



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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To examine changes in cooking and dietary behaviors and health outcomes following participation in *A Taste of African Heritage*, a culinary heritage cooking course.

**Design:** One group, pre-post program design, surveys, and physical assessments.

**Setting:** Community centers, churches, health care settings, homes, and housing complexes.

**Participants:** Participants (n = 586, 84% women) were recruited by partner organizations from 2013–2018 across 21 states and the District of Columbia.

**Intervention(s):** A 6-week cooking curriculum that teaches history, nutrition, and cooking techniques to reconnect participants with the vibrant, healthy traditions of the African Diaspora.

**Main Outcome Measure(s):** Weekly frequency of cooking, food group intake, and exercise assessed by surveys, measured weight, waist circumference, and blood pressure.

**Analysis:** Linear and logistic mixed-effects models with random intercepts for participant and teacher, sex and site type as covariates comparing pre-post physical measurements and binary behavioral outcomes,  $P < 0.0033$  for statistical significance after Bonferroni correction.

**Results:** Intake frequencies of fruit, vegetable, and greens and exercise frequency were improved from pre-program to postprogram (all  $P < 0.0021$ ). Weight, waist circumference, and systolic blood pressure were also improved from preprogram to postprogram (all  $P < 0.0001$ ).

**Conclusions and Implications:** Participation in *A Taste of African Heritage* was associated with positive behavior changes and health outcomes. Integrating cultural heritage and behaviors are positive components to connect participants to healthy old ways or traditions.

**Key Words:** cooking curriculum, African culinary heritage, adults, eating patterns, weight (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2022;54:388–396.)

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#### INTRODUCTION

The African Heritage Diet is described by Oldways,<sup>1</sup> a nonprofit organization focused on improving health

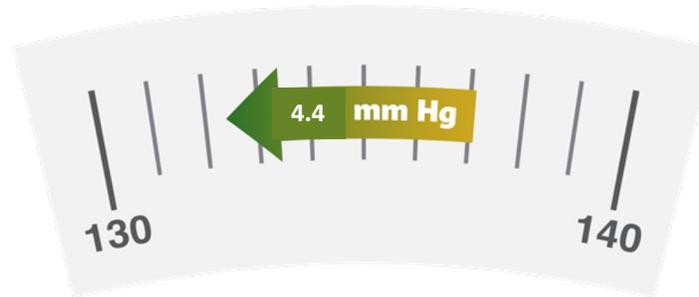
the Americas.<sup>2</sup> The African Heritage Diet is based on traditions of the African Diaspora, which includes the American South, West and Central Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of

The program is intended to reconnect participants with the vibrant, healthy traditions of the African Diaspora and promote eating patterns on the basis of plant foods,

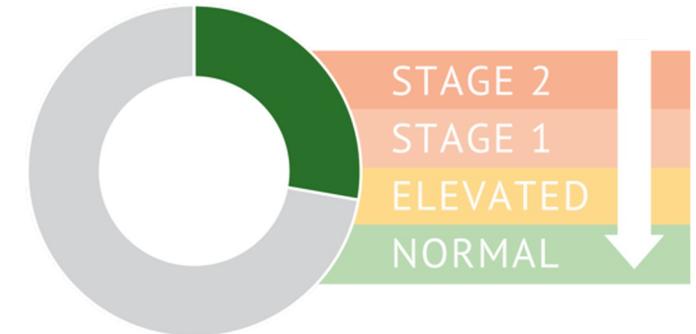
# Results of A Taste of African Heritage



98 percent of adult participants report that **history** and **heritage** were positive motivators for eating and living well



In adults, **systolic blood pressure decreased** by an average of 4.4 mm Hg over the six-week program.



29.7 percent of adult participants **reduced their blood pressure by a full stage** (moving from stage 2 hypertension to stage 1, stage 1 to elevated, or elevated to normal).

# Testimonials

**“I’ve always been interested in healthy eating; I just didn’t know how to start, and this class jump started my new life. Now I eat more greens and fruits everyday!” —Participant in East Orange, NJ**

**“This cooking series has had a positive impact on the community because many class participants create lasting friendships by learning and cooking together for six weeks, which is great to see. Many participants have expressed their love for the recipes created in class and how their families really enjoyed them when made at home, as well.” — Instructor in Philadelphia, PA**

**“I think it is our duty to stay connected to our roots and other cultures. I truly enjoyed this, thank you. I was 281 when I started; I currently weigh 266.” —Participant in Cleveland Heights, OH**

# Breaking Barriers and Shifting Paradigms

- Lessons emphasize affordability of African Heritage Diet foods, and whole food, plant-based diets in general
- Program dispels the belief that one's culture must be sacrificed for health\*
- Lessons help participants rewrite the narratives about their foods and reclaim their healthy heritage



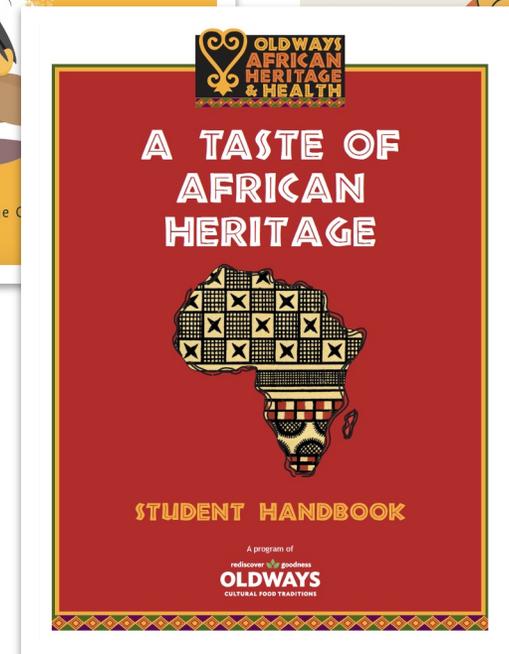
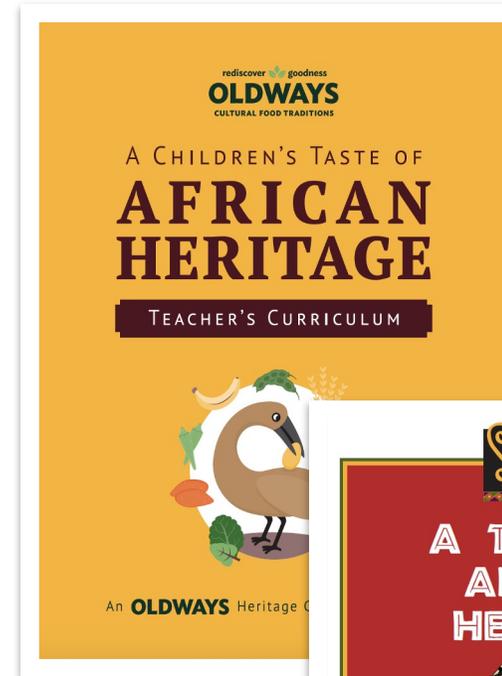
Image courtesy of Adante Hart

\*James D.C. Factors influencing food choices, dietary intake, and nutrition-related attitudes among African Americans: Application of a culturally sensitive model. *Ethn. Health.* 2004;9:349–367. doi: 10.1080/1355785042000285375.

# Bring Oldways Heritage to Your Community

To learn more or to teach a class series:

- Contact [classes@oldwayspt.org](mailto:classes@oldwayspt.org)
- Visit [oldwayspt.org/atoah](http://oldwayspt.org/atoah)



# Takeaways

- Heritage diets are full of flavor and nutrition
- Tell, Show, Taste
- Use what you have
- Every food has a time and place
- Heritage foods are everywhere
- Embrace patients'/clients' cultural diversity
- Continue learning



**“I have yet to hear of a traditional diet — from any culture, anywhere in the world — that is not substantially healthier than the ‘standard American diet.’ The more we honor cultural differences in eating, the healthier we will be.”**

Michael Pollan

The New York Times Magazine

Oct 2011

# Questions?



[www.oldwayspt.org](http://www.oldwayspt.org)



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# Housekeeping

- Attendees will receive an email within ONE WEEK with **CPEU certificate, slides, and recording**
- Visit **oldwayspt.org/CPEU** to register for upcoming webinars or view recordings of previous webinars
- Please submit any questions using the Q&A function in Zoom
- Join us for an upcoming webinar. Spring webinar lineup to be announced soon!