
From Salty Snacks to Fresh Food

Community Activists in the Kyrgyz Republic Improve Food-buying Habits

By SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic



Community activist Nazira Subankulova with the fresh produce she sells. After SPRING's nutrition trainings, it is now in high demand.

Nazira credits the demand for fresh vegetables and fruits to the messages that SPRING began promoting in 2014.

Nazira Subankulova lives with her family in the rural village of Aral in Naryn *oblast*. She runs her own grocery store, and volunteers as a community "activist" with the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), SPRING is teaching "activists" in Naryn and Jalalabad oblasts about exclusive breastfeeding of infants through six months of age, complementary feeding after six months, handwashing, dietary diversity, and other ways to improve child nutrition. In turn, community activists relay this information to their neighbors at community meetings and when they visit "1,000-day households" (homes with a pregnant or lactating woman and/or a child under two years).

As a volunteer, Nazira spends several hours a week visiting neighbors and hosting meetings to talk about nutrition based on what she learned from SPRING. She distributes reading material, such as a food pyramid diagram and a cookbook that SPRING produced, to families with pregnant women or young children to encourage them to try nutritious foods in new ways. Like other volunteers, Nazira helps friends and neighbors understand the small things they can do to improve the nutrition and health of their families, such as reducing the amount of junk food children eat.

As a grocery store owner, Nazira has noticed a marked shift in the food buying habits within her community. A year ago, her neighbors primarily purchased chips, sausages, instant noodles, salted

crackers, and other pre-packaged products. Now she can't keep enough vegetables on the shelves because they are so popular.

She credits the demand for fresh vegetables and fruits to the messages SPRING began promoting in 2014. Nazira says that because of SPRING's focus on promoting local foods, dietary diversity, and nutrition, mothers pay more attention to family meals and purchase healthier products. Nazira has happily changed her store stock to include more fresh fruits and vegetables to reflect this beneficial shift.

SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic works to improve the nutritional status of women and children within the Feed the Future zone of influence by improving nutrition-related behaviors, enhancing the quality and diversity of diets, and supporting evidence-based nutrition policies. SPRING's geographic focus is Jalalabad and Naryn *oblasts*. SPRING's work plan includes community interventions and mass media to improve nutrition practices at the household level as well as activities to strengthen delivery of nutrition services, including counseling through the health services.



Photo credit: SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

Vegetables for sale at Nazira's store, where she is now offering a more healthy variety of food



Photo credit: SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

Nazira Subankulova and Kurmanbek Asanabekov sort through fresh produce. They are among the Aral village people who have benefited from SPRING's information on nutrition.

This story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement AID-OAA-A-11-00031. The SPRING project is managed by the JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), with partners Helen Keller International, the Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute. The contents are the responsibility of JSI, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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