Benefit to Texans
Texas ranks ninth among the most physically inactive states; thirteenth among the states with the highest adult obesity rates; and seventh among the states with the highest childhood overweight rates. About 1.8 million Texas adults have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, and this number continues to rise.

Regular physical activity and controlling weight can significantly reduce the incidence and impact of such chronic diseases as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, and depression. Annual health care costs for people without diabetes are estimated between $2,935 and $5,095, compared to $11,744 for people with diabetes. Medical research shows that exercise and weight loss can temporarily or permanently delay the onset of type 2 diabetes in 58 percent of people.

Research also shows that education is the single most important factor in helping people with diabetes improve their health status and prevent the onset of complications. Building on AgriLife Extension resources, this initiative will improve Texans’ access to healthy food and physical activity to reduce the social and economic impacts of chronic diseases.

Description and Justification
Chronic diseases are costly: an estimated 75 percent of public health care dollars are spent on the treatment of these diseases. This exceptional item focuses on disease prevention — particularly of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and childhood and adult obesity — in underserved and at-risk groups by improving access to healthy food, nutrition education, and opportunities for more physical activity. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and its collaborators will build on existing resources, experience, and a statewide network of county Extension educators and volunteers directly supporting communities.
Diets of low-income households, including those receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and those with children, often lack variety and are typically inadequate in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy products, and lean meats.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 161 of 254 Texas counties have one or more “food deserts” — low-income census tracts where residents have little access to a supermarket. These food deserts affect an estimated 3.2 million rural and urban Texans, who must rely on convenience stores, “dollar” stores, and other nontraditional outlets for their food. Lack of access to a supermarket affects the food choices that are available to individuals, particularly healthier food options such as fresh produce and low-fat dairy products. In addition, research has linked limited access to grocery stores to an increased prevalence of obesity.

Extension programs include Do Well Be Well with Diabetes and Walk Across Texas. These five- and eight-week programs serve Texans throughout the state and are supported by Extension-trained Master Wellness volunteers.

Through this exceptional item, we seek funding for resource development and 20 FTEs to support additional efforts by Extension educators to:

- Train families to prepare healthy meals and preserve fresh produce
- Expand delivery of educational resources by partnering with existing and start-up wellness programs of health care providers and others, based on a pilot initiative with major clinic systems
- Conduct local initiatives that result in improved access to healthy food and physical activity
- Help growers and farmers’ markets build sustainable business models that support their expansion
- Increase growers’ ability to sell directly to communities that have poor access to fresh produce, using mobile farmers’ markets and providing farmers’ markets at schools and community centers
- Increase availability of school facilities for physical activity, improve tracks and fields for walking and sports, and enhance recreational programs at parks and other facilities to encourage physical activity