# Health and Human Science Matters Season 3, Episode 1: Megan Mueller

Megan Mueller: I really value being able to step back and say, "This is my research area. I want to continue to build this." But I also want to talk to my community partners and really learn what's important to them, what do they care about? How can we find synergies in the things that maybe I want to ask just a little question in that? But mostly, I'm focused on really achieving their goals. And I love that I can do that, which is very rewarding to me. It's very fulfilling. Data stuff is for the nerdy side of me, but the community engaged stuff is so much fun because I actually get to, again, work with people.

Avery Martin: Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey: And I'm Matt Hickey, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. In our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and well-being through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it, each episode we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff. And today we're lucky enough to have Megan Mueller with us from Food Science and Human Nutrition. Megan, welcome.

Megan Mueller: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Matt Hickey: Well, we're glad we were able to work this out. Life of course is complicated and so we're happy to be able to have this conversation.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, I'm glad to be here. Thank you.

Matt Hickey: And we're happy for you in general. The family is always an exciting piece of the puzzle.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Got a bundle of joy on the way.

Matt Hickey: A bundle of joy on the way [inaudible 00:01:30] to celebrate.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Megan, as we were talking about before we came on here, we want to get to know you as a scholar and as a person and, of course, the looming motherhood as part of the person piece. We'll start with some of the scholarly stuff, though, if that's okay. We're interested... When you think about your scholarship, what are some of the big problems that you seek to address and what kind of impact are you hoping to have?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, in terms of the health outcomes, the big problem I'm focused on is obesity prevention in children and families, which now will become a very personal thing for me as well. And I always say my research takes more of this policy systems and environmental approach, so really thinking about the context within which we live and what we're dealing with in our busy lives and how our environment can really shape our behavior.

Thinking about a lot of my work is in the restaurant space, how restaurants and other food retailers can situate neighborhoods, how, within those food retailers, we can be influenced by how menus are constructed, for example, or the type of words that are on menus. And really get a deeper understanding of what are those cues in our environments that can shape our behavior, and also how do people interact with those cues? Do they even notice them? Is that sort of a conscious thing for people? And how can we empower individuals and communities to really be part of social change, be part of environmental change, be part of policy change, and hold businesses accountable to what they say they're doing in the health realm as well.

Matt Hickey: This is so great. And again, it plays into this unfolding story that's been so fun. And in the two seasons we've done this, we have such a diverse college and a range of scholarly interest that focuses on this broad healthy people and healthy communities kind of story, if we think about it as a tagline in some ways.

The conversations about labs are not always with beakers and weigh boats and pipettes and these kinds of things. I think the range of research that is done in this college is really interesting. For you, the lab is out there. You talked about its policy and it might even be food deserts and it can be the way in which marketing is oriented often towards, of course, something other than health, as you know. It can be a sense of being like a salmon swimming upstream sometimes. I suspect you feel like it's tough to battle.

Megan Mueller: Right, yeah. Oh, definitely. And it's really interesting to dive into some of these things and think about how they specifically impact communities of color or low income communities and can perpetuate health disparities. It's definitely something I'm really passionate about, thinking about our world and how it influences us as people.

Matt Hickey: And access to healthy food is part geography, but it's also part sort of checkbook. I mean, we can talk until we're blue in the face and often the audience will go, "Well, yeah, but... I mean, even if I wanted to..."

Megan Mueller: Right. It's too expensive. It's not accessible. Exactly. Exactly. So, thinking about what are those barriers for people? How can we, as public health practitioners, as health practitioners, support them through that lens as well? Some of my work is focused on time poverty, this idea of it's not just economic poverty or lack of resources in terms of money, but certain individuals, certain families also face this pressure to work multiple jobs and not have the ability to pay for those time-saving things that may be a more well off family might have access to. That's also something I'm looking into.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: That's fascinating, time poverty. I haven't heard that phrase before, but it's a rich one for sure.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, it is. It's very powerful.

Matt Hickey: Tell us a little bit about how you got interested in the questions that are consuming you as a scholar right now.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, I think, many academics, I get excited about a lot of things. And you could ask my lab group and they would tell you the same thing. And we're all very excited about a lot of things, which is great. It gives me energy to do what I do every day. But I actually had sort of a circuitous route into nutrition. My undergrad degree was in biology and environmental studies.

Matt Hickey: And where was that, if you don't mind my asking?

Megan Mueller: St. Olaf College, a small liberal arts school where they really encouraged us to also be thinking about topics in a very complex, interactive way. And I wanted to be an ecologist. I was like, "I don't want to go to med school. Everybody in biology goes to med school. I want to be different." It was like my rebellious streak. It was the worst thing I did in college was to not go to med school.

I wanted to be in ecology, and I did this summer undergrad research experience. It was an REU at the University of Minnesota in plant pathology and microbial ecology, and that lab was really interested in this topic of green manures. This idea that, on fields, you could use existing bacteria that is protective against pathogens. And they weren't doing that work actively, but I was just like, "This is sustainable agriculture. I need to do this. This is kind of very big food systems type stuff." And I loved it. But going back to your point about bench versus community science, I think the last straw was I was cleaning out the -80 freezer and I was like, "I cannot do this for the rest of my life."

And I needed to connect it to people somehow. I like working with people, I like talking with people, even though, from a science perspective, it's so much harder to work with people. The living laboratory is much more complicated than-

Avery Martin: There any more variables, for sure.

Megan Mueller: So many more. Yeah. but that was also a little exciting for me. It's kind of a challenge. Between sort of that experience, a couple economics classes I took in undergrad that were on kind of globalization and poverty and economics of food systems, I got into this sort of obesity question of tying food systems to a health outcome into people. And then I did my MPH at the University of Minnesota, where there's this great group of researchers working on obesity prevention work and I was very persistent about getting opportunities to work with many of them. In fact, my advisor at one point was like, "Is there somebody here you haven't worked with?"

Avery Martin: That's great.

Megan Mueller: I just wanted to do everything and try to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible there, and I think that's when I really went into more of the space I'm in now. I did my PhD at Tufts with Christina Economos, who's done a lot of community engaged work and obesity prevention in children and families and has this sort of systems thinking type approach as well. So, I just learned so much from her and I still use that framework and the thinking that I learned at Tufts today.

Matt Hickey: Now, I want to push this conversation further because we're always interested in sort of this mentors and moments kind of notion in terms of pathways. These may be family mentors that long preceded St. Olaf, it could be somebody at St. Olaf who began to sort of spark a fire in you. What even led you to say, "I want an mph"? Was it this really sort of autonomous, was there a mentor involved in this process? How did you end up at Tufts in particular? Because often when we think about PhD mentors and postdoc mentors, it's people. Who, not where. Where is sort of a secondary issue sometimes, right?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. Because I went to the small liberal arts school, I had some very good faculty mentors that I would sit in their office. We'd have office chats for hours. And I look back and I'm like, "Wow, that was such a luxury that not every student has." And I try to also be very, as much as possible, generous with my time with students because it really shaped who I am. And I think it's important to pay it forward to give that back.

I was in plant pathology after undergrad working and, again, the -80 thing, I just couldn't do it anymore. So, I got a job with the Department of Veterans Affairs, actually, which I was on the benefit side. It was my first introduction into epidemiology, really, as a concept because it's tying service experiences with health outcomes basically. That was sort of an interesting thing that was helpful that I didn't necessarily think would be. And I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay kind of working at the VA, even though I thought it was a great organization and really important work. It topically... I didn't have as much passion about just giving vets checks for what they experience and service. I kind of wanted to do more prevention and I was like, "I could do it with the vet population. That could be really cool," but I wanted to be more on that side of things.

Matt Hickey: Now, was that in the Twin Cities area?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, the St. Paul Regional Office. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Just a quick question, is that home? Is Minnesota home for you?

Megan Mueller: No, I'm from St. Louis, actually.

Matt Hickey: Oh, okay.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. And I don't even know... I think I had friends at St. Olaf and I visited them and I was like, "This place is awesome." I went and, yeah, I was in Minnesota for eight years.

Matt Hickey: How about that, huh? Great.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. It's like home-ish,

Matt Hickey: Do you miss it?

Megan Mueller: I do. I mean, I like Minnesota. I don't miss the winters.

Avery Martin: I'm sure.

Megan Mueller: I think the summers are lovely. The people are really nice. I do still have family. My husband's family is in Minnesota, so I get to go back.

Matt Hickey: Oh, good.

Megan Mueller: I miss it, but I get to see it when I [inaudible 00:12:28].

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And Colorado's not half bad, right?

Megan Mueller: Oh, Colorado's amazing.

Matt Hickey: So, it was that the VA that the MPH began to...

Megan Mueller: Yeah. I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do and I met basically with this professor that I had formed a very strong relationship with. And she sort of helped me figure out, just based on my interests and our conversations and what I was thinking about that I wanted to do. She helped me figure out that I wanted to do the MPH, and I just applied to Minnesota. It's a great school, so I'm glad I got in. But, yeah, it was really lucky.

Matt Hickey: And then when did the "I want the PhD" sort of light bulb go on?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. It's funny because, as an undergrad, I thought I wanted to go the full PhD route. And then when I was working at the VA, I was like, "It's a good job, good benefits, it's a nice life. I could do this. I could do government stuff, but maybe more in the prevention side." So, that's what I was thinking when I went into the MPH. And then again, I had another mentor, my advisor, [inaudible 00:13:41], who could see that I was just a curious person and I got excited about asking questions about the world. And I was decent at statistics and that kind of stuff, and she was like, "You should think about a PhD." So, I think between that and then the research experiences that I got there, it really solidified that that was something I wanted to do.

Matt Hickey: And then did you apply just to one place for your PhD?

Megan Mueller: No. I applied more places. Yeah. That would've been very lucky, though.

Avery Martin: It is. Yeah. One for one on both sides. That's impressive.

Matt Hickey: On a roll, right?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. But I do feel lucky that I got to go to what was a top choice school for me.

Avery Martin: That's great.

Matt Hickey: And that was an individual whose work you had been engaging with? This is often the case?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, it was interesting. Something I've noticed just jumping around institutions is how we learn so much about the faculty that are at that and the work that they do, that are at that institution. You really get kind of a deep dive into the expertise of Diana Matt Strainer or Mary Story or Bob Jeffrey at Minnesota and Simone French. There's so many good people. And then I think we had maybe one or two papers from Chris Economos there, but it wasn't until I was looking at PhD programs that I was really diving into the work of other people in the field, trying to expand my scope. I think that's sort of when I had come across her work, which is obviously very impressive.

Matt Hickey: Good.

Avery Martin: Of course.

Matt Hickey: Tell us about the problems you were pursuing as a PhD student, your dissertation work. What did that entail?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, yeah. I was actually focused on restaurant-related work there as well, but it was more along the lines of interventions targeting families and sort of creating communications campaigns and social media campaigns around sort of simple messagings about things that moms can do in particular to promote healthier choices for their kids in restaurants. So, that was one of my chapters.

And then I also looked at a couple questions around trends in the availability of healthier options in restaurants and how those were associated with policy changes that were happening at the same time. Is there pressure that restaurants feel just from the discussion of policy, not even necessarily passing policy, that would cause them or would lead to them promote them to make healthier changes to their menus?

Matt Hickey: Interesting.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. And then I was lucky to also work with a large regional restaurant chain while I was there called the Silver Diner, and they gave us access to basically their whole point of sale system, which was kind of crazy. They had implemented a healthy kids' menu in April of 2012 and they just wanted to know, "Does this matter for what kids are actually ordering?" And so I was involved in several papers.

Chris Economos was the senior author and then Steph Anzman-Frasca, who's at Buffalo, was the lead author on those, looking at how that affects choice or what kids are ordering both immediately after this healthy menu change, and then over time, two years after. And then for my dissertation, I looked a little bit more deeply about kind of patterns of how kids were ordering. If kids order fries, are they also likely to order soda? And then if they order soda, can they sometimes get strawberries? Just sort of getting an idea of what are those kind of co-occurring behaviors that happen within children.

And now I'm doing some stuff on kind of the words, the sort of health or nutrition-related type words that restaurants can use when they're describing menu items. So, really thinking about, is that promoting people to choose specific things if they're thinking more along the lines of wanting a healthier option?

Matt Hickey: I have to ask you, being a nerd with a capital N, has behavioral economics found its way into menus in terms of tailors, nudges, and what have you? Did we see any of that or is it-

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yeah. That was sort of the impetus for that initial study with the Silver Diner was they were using these healthy defaults, where you automatically pair the healthier side or beverage with an entree. It's just what it comes with. Instead of coming with, which is what we expect fries and a soda, your burger now comes with strawberries and milk.

Matt Hickey: Interesting. Yeah. Very cool.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yeah. It's sort of interesting.

Matt Hickey: You're a doc student and you're thinking to yourself, "What's next? Where do I go from here"?

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Tell us about that.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, my postdoc was at UCLA with May Wang, and I was lucky there to do work in this technique called agent-based modeling. It's the type of system science where it's actually quantifying these interactions between people, their environments, their biology. You can go as deep as you want to with these models. And with this, we were looking at among the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and children, so WIC. Among those participants, there was all this stuff happening over the last 10 years to prevent obesity among WIC children, low income children.

We wanted to know what of these interventions or these combinations of interventions are effective, because we saw in the data... We had data for basically all participating WIC children in the Los Angeles County area on their obesity status. And we saw declines over time and we wanted to know what's helping. Why are we seeing this? Because there's all this money being thrown at it, all this programming being thrown at it, which is great, but they're sort of coming from disparate sources. Nobody's talking to each other, so we were trying to quantify this basically.

Matt Hickey: But that was a complicated task.

Megan Mueller: Super complicated. And again, it goes back to this exciting interdisciplinary work, where I got to work with computer scientists and epidemiologists and other nutrition folks and community members to really help build this model. So, it was a very hard but very rewarding task.

Matt Hickey: And how long was your postdoc?

Megan Mueller: Two years. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Uh-huh. And then what happened?

Megan Mueller: And then I came here.

Avery Martin: Wow.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. So, yeah, I was lucky enough to get a job at Colorado State in Food Science and Human Nutrition, where I'm now a assistant professor.

Matt Hickey: When did you join the faculty?

Megan Mueller: 2019.

Matt Hickey: Wow. [inaudible 00:21:01]. Right.

Megan Mueller: Right before COVID. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: An atypical adjustment for many of us, although ones shared by a number of [inaudible 00:21:11] career folks all over the country, right?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. And I'm lucky I have lots of other men-... I guess, yeah, I would say we are at the same stage, but we mentor each other. People that I can talk to that have been through similar things.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And who supports your work? What are agencies that help Megan do what she wants to do as a scholar?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. I have funding through the American Heart Association. It's a career development award, and that is looking at this corporate social responsibility. When companies or restaurants or food companies commit to social issues including health, does that actually affect or is it associated with what they're offering to customers? And then are those restaurants that have those kinds of positions really just locating in higher income neighborhoods? Are they just offering healthier options, too, and promoting health in a higher income area? So, I have funding there.

I also was lucky enough to get the Agricultural Experiment Stations Grant.

Matt Hickey: You did? Congratulations.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, for some community engaged work that will be starting this summer. It's really been sort of a long process of working with community members to define research questions and develop tools and all that sort of stuff. That's been going on for about a year, just with the help of a student in my own excitement about it.

Matt Hickey: And your collaborator's in the College of Ag, right?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. In economics. Yep. Yep. That's looking at food insecurity in a mountain resort region, like the Aspen Region in Colorado, and trying to understand sort of differences in how people experience food insecurity when they can qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, versus when they can't because of income. Because they technically make too much money, but Picken County, which is where a lot of my partners are and where Aspen is, the median home price there is 1.65 million or something.

Avery Martin: Oh, goodness.

Megan Mueller: It's crazy. If you're working in the tourism industry, you're not living there.

Matt Hickey: No kidding.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Megan Mueller: And for a lot of people, it's a long commute, so you think of this time poverty thing. It's in the mountain, so it's not like anything's easy to get to. There's just a lot more complicatedness to that experience for those people.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Oh, my goodness.

Megan Mueller: So, yeah, we're excited.

Matt Hickey: Talk to us a little bit about a day in the life of the Mueller lab in your group. I'm understanding, of course, there is no such thing as a typical day, right? We adjust as we need to.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yes, exactly.

Matt Hickey: How does it look like?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Because I have all these data projects, I have a little group of students that are all learning how to use data, which is the statistical software. It's pretty nerdy. We all sit there and code together sometimes and help each other out and all that kind of stuff. We're doing a lot of actually analysis and writing right now. My master's students and my PhD student are both already in that. I kind of just threw them in and they were good sports about it.

Matt Hickey: Oh, great. Good. Yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah, it's been good because I think that's how I learned, and it's trial by fire a little bit. And there's questions they have and I'm like, "That is the stats that we need to talk to the stats' help." But it's been really fun. And most of my students are really active. I have several CrossFit coaches in my group, a competitive runner who I ask her about her races and she's like, "Oh, yeah. It was on the podium." In a very nonchalant way. She's winning races.

Matt Hickey: That's cool.

Avery Martin: So, yeah, we all sort of try to find activity within our days as well, even with the baby still keeping up with just for my sanity.

Matt Hickey: And let me run with that a little bit because we're always, again, interested in, again, the other side of life. When you're not coding, when you're not sitting in front of a computer, mentoring students, what do you like to do? What are some recreational things or ways in which you find work-life balance? What does that look like for you?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yeah, I try to do something active every day. Even if it's just going for a walk, a longer walk with my dog or something. I feel better when I'm physically active. It's nice to get the fresh air. I love all the activities that Colorado has to offer, which is another reason that was a very attractive place to come. And so hiking, backpacking... I do road biking. I don't do mountain biking. Too many people. I was going to say, "I know too many people that have gotten hurt."

Matt Hickey: Yeah. Yeah, it's true.

Megan Mueller: But I do snowshoe. I enjoy winter, being outside in the winter as well. And it's much nicer here than Minnesota.

Avery Martin: I bet.

Matt Hickey: Indeed.

Megan Mueller: So, yeah.

Matt Hickey: So, St. Louis to St. Olaf, and then the Twin Cities, Boston, LA, and now here on the front range [inaudible 00:26:49].

Megan Mueller: Yeah, I know. I really made my way around the country. Yeah, it's been fun. It's really neat to live in very, very different places and kind of find what you like about each one. And I like Fort Collins because it kind of combines some of my favorite things about all of those places. It's not too big, but if you want to get to Denver, you can. And there's plenty to do here, really. I guess, in terms of fun things to do, I love coffee shops.

Matt Hickey: Oh, good.

Avery Martin: Yeah, we have plenty.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. We do, don't we? Yeah, coffee shops and restaurants.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. I feel like there's plenty to do.

Matt Hickey: I have other questions about the environment. We've sung the praises of Fort Collins and Colorado as we should. We'll talk a little bit about the campus environment. Of course you're part of this College of Health and Human Sciences, and as we've hinted that we have such a range of scholarly activity within the college. What do you best over the course of your three years or admittedly some of the forced onto teams and these sorts of things? But being a faculty member in the College of Health and Human Sciences, what appeals to you?

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Again, I really like the interdisciplinary-ness. It's such a unique college.

Matt Hickey: It is.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. There's so many... And in fact, I describe the departments in my college to other folks and they're like, "Wait, construction management?"

Matt Hickey: How did that happen?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Megan Mueller: It's a really interesting kind of mix. And I appreciate that because I think it kind of forces you really to expand your own thinking. When I went to the research day, for example, I was like, "Oh, never thought about textile material and for running gear or whatever." It's really kind of a neat experience to be in this. And as a lifelong learner, I definitely appreciate that.

Matt Hickey: That's great.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. Yeah. And everybody's so nice and it's just really easy to work with everybody and you want to come to the campus and it's a nice place to be.

Matt Hickey: And we don't take that for granted.

Megan Mueller: Yes.

Matt Hickey: We don't at all. We don't at all.

Avery Martin: And I'm sure with your research area and what you're interested in particular, there are so many opportunities for collaboration.

Megan Mueller: There are.

Avery Martin: Just listening to what you study, there's social work in that. It's hospitality management, so...

Megan Mueller: Oh, totally. Yeah. even occupational therapy. I have a colleague that I am on a committee, her students committee, and she reached out to me and I was like, "Oh, this is sort of weird." But we do have an overlap and I just never would've thought that.

Matt Hickey: [inaudible 00:29:43].

Megan Mueller: Yeah, it's so interesting.

Matt Hickey: Expand our vision, right?

Megan Mueller: I know.

Matt Hickey: That's cool.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, it's really forcing me to continue to grow, which I like. Yeah.

Avery Martin: Oh, it is. That's great.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: We're nested within this institution that's a land-grant, right?

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And one of the things I've enjoyed in 25 years at CSU is they don't just pay lip service to the land-grant mission. They really take it seriously. So, talk to us a little bit about how your work connects to the land-grant mission and vision at CSU.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. I mean, I feel really, again, I guess lucky is the right... I just do, being here because I think one of the benefits is because I do community engaged work and I really value being able to step back and say, "This is my research area. I want to continue to build this." But I also want to talk to my community partners and really learn what's important to them, what do they care about, how can we find synergies in the things that... Maybe I want to ask just a little question in that, but mostly I'm focused on really achieving their goals. And I can do that as part of my job. I mean, not that I wouldn't do this if it was, but it's not a volunteer thing. It's part of how you're evaluated here. It's very much ingrained in the mission of the university, of the college. And I love that I can do that, which is very rewarding to me. It's very fulfilling.

Data stuff is from for the nerdy side of me, but the community engaged stuff is so much fun because I actually get to, again, work with people and actually learn from them and help them and have them help me. It's a synergistic thing, where we get to build something together. And because it's community engaged, often they know the infrastructure that they have. They know what they can do and they're excited to do it. They're empowered to do it. And so, that's where we see sustainable initiatives happening, that's where people actually feel empowered, which is super important to me. That's something I really value about being at a land-grant, specifically CSU.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. And I think your work fits so seamlessly into that land-grant vision. It's fantastic.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Avery Martin: As we come to a close on this episode, I'm really curious, what impact has your research made thus far and what's the impact that you hope your research and your work makes whenever your career comes to a close?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, that's a great question. In terms of research impacts so far, that study I mentioned with the restaurant partner, Silver Diner that I did in Boston... Actually, I was able to talk with them, with the chef, basically, of that restaurant and make recommendations as to what further menu changes they should make or how they should kind of restructure the way that they prompt menu items for kids or even what the alternatives are. And it's been something that I've been using now as well.

Another one of my community partners, I didn't get a chance to talk about this, is this healthy beverage partnership, which is a consortium of five local public health agencies here in Colorado. And they're working really hard around the state to pass policies that would require basically restaurants to only offer healthier beverages on children's menus. I've been a part of some of those policy passings, actually.

Longmont City Council, recently in this past fall, actually passed this Healthy Beverage Ordinance or Healthy Kids Meal Ordinance and I was able to testify in front of the council about this work that I had done at Silver Diner, which was incredibly rewarding. I had taken a class on how to influence public policy at Minnesota, and so I actually used the work from that class-

Avery Martin: Talk about a full circle moment.

Megan Mueller: I know. And I emailed the professor and I was like, "Guess what I did?"

Avery Martin: That's so cool.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. It was really neat. And I could see some of this work that I'm doing in Aspen area also translating into big public impact for the state. That's the goal is my community partners want to understand this experience of food insecurity in their region, how bad it is, what it looks like to create a five-year strategic plan to address it. It's like I get to be part of that process.

Avery Martin: That's incredible.

Megan Mueller: It's so cool.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. And that's such a widespread problem, too, with income disparities, et cetera, that I think it could easily be cloned, for lack of a better word, and modified for other communities.

Megan Mueller: Yeah. We're thinking of submitting a grant to USDA to look at it both there and in Boulder.

Matt Hickey: Good.

Megan Mueller: So, yeah, trying to be smart about that.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. Yeah, that's great. That's awesome.

Megan Mueller: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: 30 years, hence, to see some of these things become standard operating procedures in communities. And can you talk a little bit about what would be fun to envision 30 years down the road?

Megan Mueller: Yeah, I think it would... I mean, I guess that's sort of the long term goal is to see some of these sort of smaller local initiatives really expand kind of broader in more contexts. And I think they're great models for other places. Colorado is unique in a lot of ways, but some of those experiences are shared. I think it could be big, potentially.

Avery Martin: Yeah, I'm looking forward to seeing it.

Megan Mueller: Yeah, I hope so.

Matt Hickey: And I'd love to wrap us up. So, these policies are adopted so that... Fill in the blank for me. So that...?

Megan Mueller: So that basically it's easier to be healthier, essentially.

Matt Hickey: You nailed it. That's perfect.

Avery Martin: That's right.

Megan Mueller: It's not so hard.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Yes.

Megan Mueller: We have enough hard things in our lives, like just being healthy the easy thing.

Avery Martin: And that's the show. Thank you for listening to another episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Matt Hickey: Stay tuned for the next episode. And in the meantime, go listen to our episodes from seasons one and two. And if you want to learn more about our College of Health and Human Sciences at CSU, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.