

Food is Medicine: Prescribing Nutrition for Better Health

 UTHealth[®] Houston
School of Public Health

Center for Health Equity

Session Objectives

- **Food is Medicine (FIM):** integrating nutrition into healthcare.
- **Culinary Medicine:** teaching patients and communities how to cook and eat healthfully.
- **Today's focus: how FIM and culinary education reduce food loss and improve health outcomes.**



The Food Waste Problem

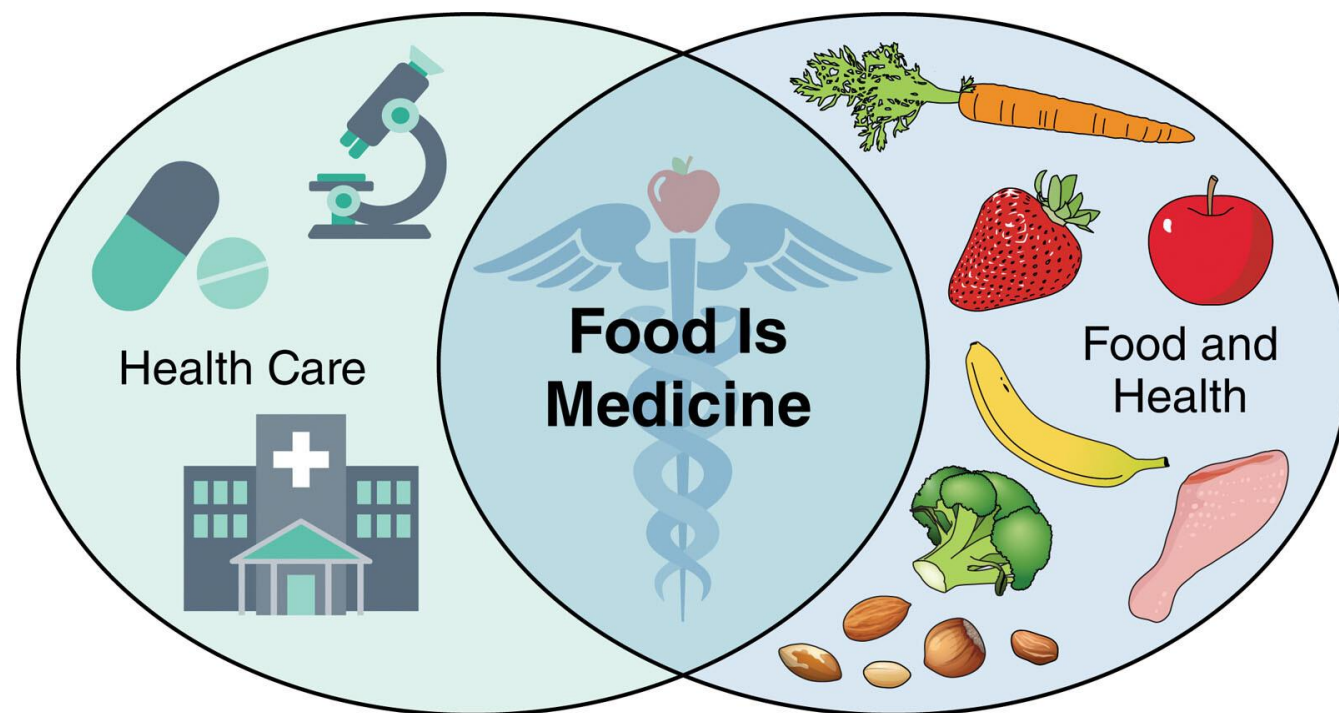
- **Nearly 30-40% of food in the U.S. is wasted.**
- **Households** are a major source of **food waste**.
- Often due to lack of knowledge about how to **store, cook, or reuse ingredients**.



Food Is Medicine

Food Is Medicine (FIM) is the provision of healthy food to prevent, manage, or treat specific health conditions in a way that is integrated with a doctor's clinic and hospital system.

- Medically Tailored Meals
- Produce Prescription Programs
- Medically Tailored Groceries



The FIM Pyramid

Food is Medicine

Food is Medicine refers to an array of supportive programs and services that recognize and respond to the critical link between nutrition and health.⁸



**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants and Children (WIC); Healthy Incentives Programs (HIP)*

Culinary Medicine

- **Definition:** blending the art & pleasure of cooking with nutrition and medical science.
- **Why it works:** practical demos > theoretical lectures.
- **Examples:** monthly recipe demos, short how-to videos, *“recipe of the month for heart health.”*



Reducing Food Loss Through Education

- **Teaching people how to cook** = better use of fresh produce.
- Participants learn to **plan meals** and **use ingredients efficiently**.
- **Builds confidence to try new recipes with unfamiliar foods.**



Embracing New Ingredients

- FIM programs often **introduce unfamiliar fruits and vegetables.**
- Education **encourages exploration, reducing the chance food is discarded.**
- **Helps diversify diets and prevent nutrient gaps.**



Technology as a Tool: Chatbots & Artificial Intelligence

- **AI tools like chatbots can support FIM programs.**
- Offer real-time **cooking** ideas for **leftovers**.
- Answer questions about how to use **unfamiliar and new ingredients**.
- **Available 24/7 for support**, especially for low-resource communities.



Real-world examples of FIM Programs

Produce Prescriptions (Produce Rx). UTHealth Houston



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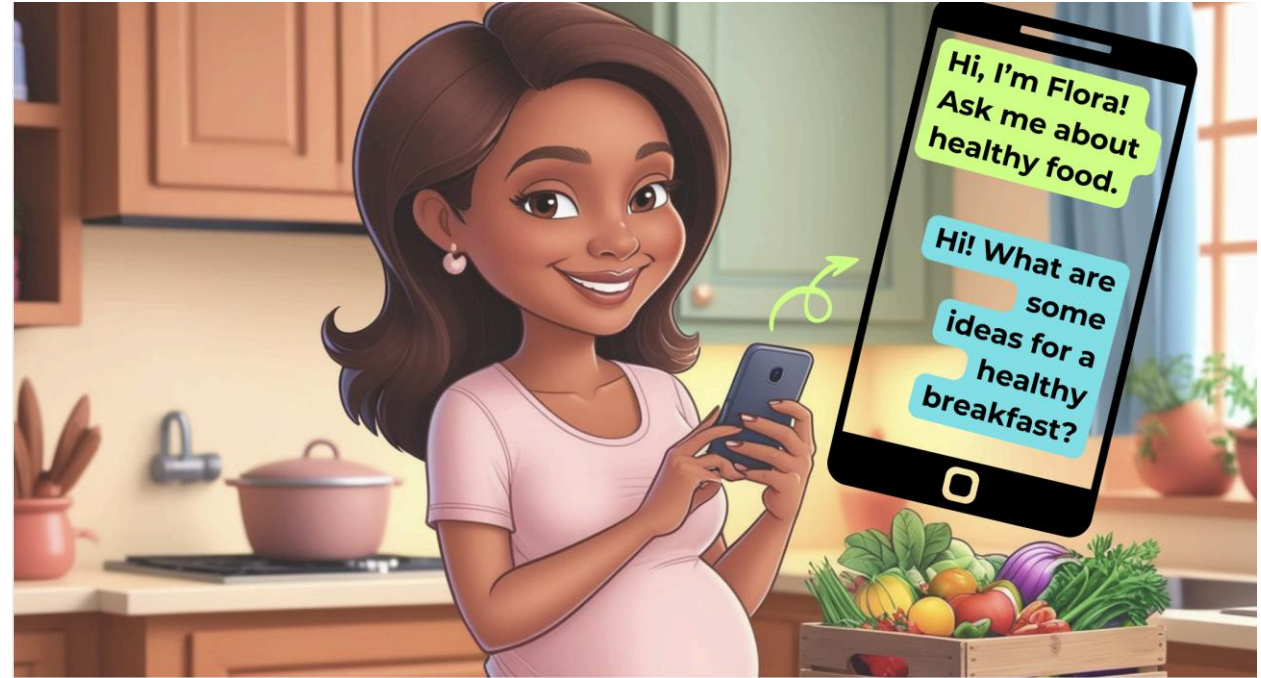
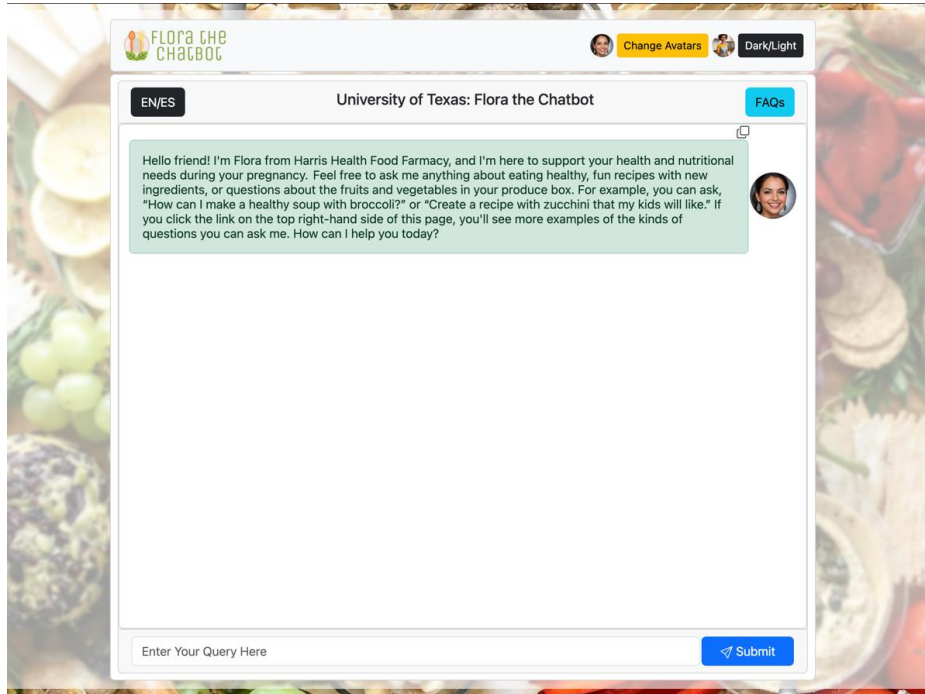


Door Dash and BB



Produce Rx Box delivered at patients' homes

FIM Programs Produce Prescriptions (Produce Rx) and AI Chatbot. UTHealth Houston



Summary

- Food is Medicine and Culinary Medicine **reduce food waste through education.**
- Programs **empower people to cook** with what they have.
- **Technology** like chatbots can **amplify these efforts and support behavior change and reduce food waste.**



***Let's work together to turn waste into wellness
through food, education, and innovation.***

