An Interview with Professor Tatiana Andreyeva

By Julia Ward

Hi, this is Julia Ward, I'm a staff writer for the ARE department newsletter, is this Professor Andreyeva?

Yes, hello Julia!

Awesome, so I thought we could start with some introductions - just our names and what each of us does at the university. My name is Julia Ward, I am a sophomore majoring in Applied and Resource Economics and I write for the ARE newsletter!

Hi. My name is Tatiana Andreyeva. I'm an associate professor in the department and I'm the Director of Economic Initiatives at the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity.

Awesome, so to start off why don't you tell me a little more about yourself?

I'm a mom of an active and curious 7-year-old girl, 2 dogs and 3 cats, so they keep me busy! I am a food policy researcher and teacher. I love swimming, travel (in pre-COVID-19 days) and gardening.

How did you become interested in Economics?

I grew up in Ukraine during the transition period from the former Soviet Union to a market economy and experienced first-hand the collapse of socialism. I was a teenager as all this new information about private enterprises, the stock market, prices was coming in and got me interested in economics. Also, it was impossible at the time to get into medical school in Ukraine without a substantial bribe (commonplace corruption), so I couldn't pursue my childhood dream of becoming a doctor and focused on health economics instead. What seemed as "second-best" at the time, turned into the best decision.

Professor Tatiana Andreyeva

What made you decide to become a professor and what brought you here to UConn?

I like doing research, and teaching. It gives a lot of flexibility and freedom and the job is rewarding, especially when you get published. As far as UConn, that was the transition of the Rudd Center from Yale and me as part of the Center. We felt it was a very good place for us as a whole center to be at UConn, to conduct food policy research at a land-grant university.

What classes are you currently teaching and what do you enjoy or dislike about them?

I teach food policy, ARE 3260 and also run a graduate seminar. At the Rudd Center, I have been doing food policy research for almost 14 years, so it's my career, my research passion. I find it really rewarding to be teaching what I know best, what I've been doing for a long time and what I'm excited about. For example, sugary drink taxes, food assistance programs, helping people get access to better nutrition; these are the topics of my research and my food policy class. I have a large class, with students from different majors and different backgrounds, which I really like. Many students are interested in food, nutrition for a variety of reasons, such as healthy eating, weight loss, sustainability. Interest in the topic really helps with good discussion and we have lots of discussion time in class.

Interview Continues

Food policy affects everybody, it affects what we eat, see in grocery stores, restaurants, our food assistance system. Now with millions of people out of work, food assistance programs are critical in helping people survive and avoid food insecurity.

What do you hope to accomplish while you are here at UCONN?

I want to see policy change on the topics that I study. For example, the sugary drink tax, I want to see it implemented widely, and I want to see more effective food assistance programs, with better nutrition standards, better and more equitable access to healthy foods for vulnerable populations. For example, I want to see much better access to the Child and Adult Care Food Program funding for Connecticut child care centers, so they can feed young children and provide nutrition that many of these kids lack at home. So, if years from now we will see those funding and participation numbers increasing, I will be very happy. To summarize, I want to see policy change, in Connecticut, nationally, or globally, that improves nutrition and health outcomes, especially for children from low-income families.

What are you currently researching at the Rudd Center?

I currently have three areas; one is fiscal policy (e.g., the sugary drink tax), and I'm doing a big review of the existing evidence whether fiscal policies improve health and dietary outcomes. Another area of my work is improving nutrition in childcare centers, focusing on policies for very young children. And the third is policy changes in the federal food assistance programs, such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), WIC (the federal nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children) and the National School Lunch Program. I'm looking at policy changes in these programs that can improve access to healthy food.

Of all of your research, which project are you most proud of and which was your favorite to work on?

I think it was the WIC revisions evaluation project. WIC had big policy changes in 2009, with improved nutrition standards. My team at the Rudd Center and I did a number of studies looking at the impact of these policy changes on access to food, purchasing behavior, and communities.

We were some of the first people to do it and to demonstrate how a cost-neutral policy (no additional money from taxpayers) was improving nutrition in low income households, so we had all these good outcomes from a public health point of view, better dietary outcomes without paying more. Multiple papers came out from that WIC evaluation and the Rudd Center became well known for that work.

What is your favorite country to work in?

I've been to thirty countries so far and my goal was to visit fifty countries before age fifty. I don't know if that will happen with COVID though. Switzerland was by far my favorite country to visit. It seems like paradise on Earth.

About Professor Tatiana Andreyeva

Professor Tatiana Andreyeva is an Associate Professor at the Agricultural and Resource Economics Deparment (ARE) in the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources (CAHNR) at the University of Connecticut. She received her PhD in 2006 from the The Pardee RAND Graduate School and joined the ARE Department in 2015.