The Power of Extension is a summary of the educational programs conducted by the Robeson County Cooperative Extension which impact the lives of Robeson County citizens. The organization works with citizens to determine the most important and urgent issues to the community. When the issues have been identified, the staff utilizes university resources to help address these needs. The Robeson County Center works with clients in four main areas: Agriculture, Community Resource Development (CRD), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), and Youth Development through our 4-H program. We hope this newsletter provides more information about the opportunities offered by Cooperative Extension.

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**Agriculture**

One challenge facing small and part-time farmers is marketing alternative crops and enterprises. Robeson County Cooperative Extension and North Carolina A&T University addressed this challenge by offering a web page design workshop to 3 families. The purpose of the workshop was to create business e-mail addresses and personal farm business web pages. Many small farmers have little or no knowledge of these resources. Links for these web pages were posted on the North Carolina Department of Agriculture/Consumer Services General Store and to the local Harvest websites. Linking to these web sites promotes agricultural goods and services. All 3 families created business web pages and now have knowledge of these resources. Based on market research, website promotion can potentially provide a 30% increase in customer base. These farm families can use web pages to successfully promote products to customers.

_-Nelson Brownlee, Extension Agent Farm Management_

In Robeson County, resistant Palmer Amaranth weed has become a major problem for producers, affecting multiple crops. Palmer amaranth left uncontrolled has been shown to drastically reduce yield and profitability. Based on this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension held a tri-county soybean meeting for 38 participants. The educational program addressed herbicide resistance management in soybeans. Survey results revealed 88% of participants gained knowledge, while 64% would adopt a program with new or different herbicides for weed control. The outcome of this educational program will be increased farmer profitability.

_-Mac Malloy, Extension Agent Crops_
Access to local foods is difficult when living in a small county with a limited number of vegetable and meat producers. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension worked with the Robeson County Farmers Market Association and a local grass fed beef producer to expand a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. The previous season’s CSA served only the residents of Robeson County. The new fall CSA consisted of 34 Robeson County participants and 24 Hoke County participants. The participating vendors earned a total of $4,920. Survey results showed 80% of CSA participants had not shopped with any of the vendors in the past, but would now continue to do business with them. Because of the success of the Robeson County CSA, 2012 plans include further expansion of both the customer and vendor base.

-Kerrie Roach, Extension Agent Horticultural

According to information provided by the Learner.org website, every year the United States generates approximately 230 million tons of “trash”--about 4.6 pounds per person per day. Less than one-quarter of the trash is recycled; the rest is incinerated or buried in landfills. To address this problem, Cooperative Extension hosted the 2nd Annual Go Green with Extension workshop. The workshop provided information to livestock producers and homeowners on making mineral feeders and rain collection barrels out of used 55-gallon drums. Present cost of cattle mineral feeders range from $130 to $300 and rain collection barrels cost $50 to $100. In the past two years this workshop has saved 22 clients over $1,500. Using these recycled items has kept 35 barrels and 15 tractor tires out of the local landfill. The homeowners also estimated a savings of over 270 gallons of water by using the collection barrels. Because of positive feedback from the participants, plans are to continue the Go Green Workshop as an annual event.

-Michelle Shooter, Extension Agent Livestock

Community Resource Development

Many Robeson County departments, organizations, and agencies are experiencing reduced budgets due to difficult economic hardships. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension offered a 2-day grants writing workshop. Thirty-four (34) participants attended from local non-profits, churches, county government and other organizations. Training was provided on writing grants, locating funding sources, contacting grantors, and finding statistical information. Workshop surveys revealed 100% of the participants increased their knowledge in the areas of writing grants and finding grantors. Additionally, 100% of the participants indicated the intent to submit a grant in the future. Given the county economic situation, organizations and county residents can benefit from the receipt of grant funds.

- Dr. Cathy Graham, County Extension Director

Family and Consumer Sciences

Due to the down turn in the economy, there is a renewed interest in finding nutritious, cost-effective and safe ways to feed families with local foods. In an effort to address the need, Cooperative Extension offered a hands-on food preservation class to 6 participants. A written evaluation revealed 100% of the participants improved water-bath canning skills to produce high-quality home-canned
foods. The evaluation also revealed 25% of the participants were already practicing these skills while the remaining 75% plan to begin using the new canning skills. By canning at home participants are able to preserve fresh local foods, which are healthier and cost less than store-bought items. Due to the success of this class future canning classes will be offered.

-Janice Fields, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences

According to statistics from the American Community Survey, Robeson County has 2,734 grandparents as the primary caregivers of grandchildren. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension partners with the Family Caregiver Support Program to facilitate a monthly support group. Currently the support group has 15 members with an average monthly attendance of 11. The 15 members care for 16 grandchildren who live in the home with an additional 25 grandchildren who are cared for on a regular basis. During the monthly meetings, educational programs cover accessing resources, dealing with school issues and where to find help with daily concerns. In addition to the fellowship among the participants, the program provides respite from the challenges that raising a grandchild can present. Of the 12 participants surveyed 100% indicated the support group helped them locate information and resources. In addition, 100% indicated they received emotional support from the group and made new friendships, also providing encouragement in raising their grandchildren. Of the 15 members, 3 have been with the support group since the inception 7 years ago and 4 have been members for more than 5 years. This type of attendance is building longevity and stability for the group allowing the members to be comfortable with sharing experiences. Due to the success of the support group it will continue to meet.

-Christy Strickland, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences

According to the North Carolina Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program, 1/3 of North Carolina children typically consume one serving or less of vegetables per day. To increase the number of vegetable servings children consume daily, nutrition classes were offered by Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to students at Rowland Middle School. The 4-H EFNEP program delivered six food and nutrition lessons focusing on the importance of consuming vegetables as well as the health benefits vegetables provide. More than 60 youth used food models and measuring cups to determine the correct amount of vegetables needed each day. After completing the program, written evaluations revealed 100% of the participants increased their healthy food choices and vegetable servings. Due to the success of this program 4-H EFNEP will continue to partner with middle schools to increase children’s daily vegetable intake.

-Tamika McLean, Extension 4-H EFNEP Program Assistant
4-H Youth Development

Studies show American students are falling behind students around the world in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). To encourage youth engagement in STEM subjects the Bladen, Cumberland, Hoke, and Robeson County Cooperative Extension 4-H Programs worked together to offer youth a week long Biotech Day camp. The camp exposed youth to a variety of topics including food, chemical, medical and natural sciences. A written evaluation at the end of the day camp revealed, 50% of the campers increased their knowledge in the area of entomology; while as many as 70% of the campers demonstrated increased knowledge in the areas of military technology and food science. Of the 40 campers, 43% increased their knowledge on giving presentations and 68% increased their skills in the area of food science. All of the youth stated the camp gave them a better idea of which careers to pursue in the future, such as careers in the military, medicine, technology and food science fields. To encourage youth to pursue STEM related education and careers, more programs will be offered in the future.

-Shea Ann DeJarnette, 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent

Writing is an extremely important life skill for success and can be very stressful. Yet, writing is often under-taught and forgotten in today’s society. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Program conducted a project and cumulative record workshop. A total of 35 project books were completed, and 21 were judged on the district level. Ten project records and 1 cumulative record received district recognition. Based on the quality and quantity of records submitted, all youth involved in the workshop demonstrated an increased in writing, communication and organizational skills. These type skills will enable 4-H members to become competent adults later in life.

-Aggie Rogers, Extension 4-H Program Associate

For more information about upcoming educational opportunities, please check out our Robeson County Cooperative Extension Programming Calendar at: