The Power of Extension is a summary of the educational programs conducted by the staff of the Robeson County Cooperative Extension Center 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.

Agriculture
Small farmers are faced with a constant challenge of finding alternative sources of income to make their farms more profitable and sustainable. In order to address this challenge, Robeson County Cooperative Extension conducted a Spring Alternative Enterprise Tour. The tour gave 6 farmers an opportunity to explore alternative production strategies and provided information on alternative crops and enterprises. Evaluations revealed 83% of the farmers would apply information, from the tour to diversify their operations. Several weeks after the tour, one of the farmers enhanced his produce operation by installing a plasticulture system, on 1 acre, using plastic mulch and drip irrigation. In the past, the farmer planted all crops on bare ground. The new system will provide the producer with earlier crops, higher yields, and better quality. The farmer expects to generate an increase of approximately $10,000 in net income. With this new source of income, the family farm can be sustained. Due to the success of the program, the tour will be conducted annually. -Nelson Brownlee, Extension Agent Farm Management

Higher costs of seed, fertilizer, chemical, equipment, and fuel can increase production costs and reduce profitability for farmers. Based on this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension held a Tri-County Wheat Production Meeting for 34 participants. The educational program
addressed optimum planting rates/dates, optimal fertilization, and pest management. Survey results revealed 72% of the participants increased their knowledge in nutrient management and 79% increased knowledge in disease control in wheat. Implementing Cooperative Extension research-based knowledge can reduce production costs, therefore increasing profitability.

-Mac Malloy, Extension Agent Crops

The recent economic downturn has seen a significant increase in the number of homeowners interested in do-it-yourself projects. Based on this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension in cooperation with a local wholesale nursery held a pruning workshop focused on woody trees and shrubs. Twenty people attended the educational workshop. Surveys indicated 100% of the participants found the information useful, easy to understand, and would recommend the workshop to others. As a result of the training, 44% of the participants indicated they now felt comfortable to complete their own landscape pruning instead of hiring a company to complete the job. This is a potential savings of $5,600 a year!

-Kerrie Roach, Extension Agent Horticultural

According to the North Carolina Crime Statistics website, Robeson County has a property crime rate of 6,402 per 100,000 persons; the state rate is 3,761. Based on this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension in cooperation with the Sheriffs’ Department held a Rural Crime Prevention educational program. Topics included theft prevention, security options, and steps to retrieve stolen property. Twenty participants attended the program. Feedback revealed 85% of the participants will change storage practices to prevent theft and 62% will install a security system. The surveys also revealed 100% of the participants learned new options for reducing theft on their property. Discussions on rural crime prevention will help residents take the steps to decrease theft and increase the likelihood of retrieving stolen property.

-Michelle Shooter, Extension Agent Livestock

Community Resource Development
Previously, there was not an on-line resource for visitors or interested parties to view the amenities and attractions in Robeson County. In an effort to market the county’s assets, Robeson County Cooperative Extension partnered with Robeson County government and CGI Communications. The partnership created, at no cost to the partnership, 10 one-minute videos, which were placed on the Robeson County government web site. Tracking software determined that in less than 1 month, 416 people viewed the video from 23 states and 3 countries. Every overnight visitor spends an average of $198 per day which improves the local economy. The videos will continue to market Robeson County as a positive destination for visitors or people wishing to relocate.

Mande Swisher, Extension Agent Tourism

Family and Consumer Sciences
The obesity and overweight rate for children in Robeson County is 40.4%. Obesity in children increases the likelihood they will experience health problems later in life. To address this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension partnered with the public schools to offer “Steps to Health” nutrition education to 14 classes in 3 schools. At Green Grove Elementary School, teacher surveys indicated 100% of students had benefited from the “Steps to Health” program. All teachers had observed changes
in eating and physical activity among students. Teachers also noted students are more willing to try new fruits and vegetables at lunch. Parent surveys indicated 77% of students are eating more fruits and vegetables, 85% are drinking fewer soft drinks, 69% are reading nutrition labels, and 69% have increased their physical activity. Based on the success of “Steps to Health,” this program will be offered in other elementary schools.

-Janice Fields, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences

Due to the high obesity rate in Robeson County, and the other diseases obesity leads to, we are learning that for the first time our children’s life span will be shorter than ours. To address this issue, Robeson County Cooperative Extension conducts Steps to Health in 14 local elementary classrooms in an effort to help educate young children about the importance of eating healthy. At Green Grove Elementary School, 74 students (Pre-K and Kindergarten) participated in 9 lessons focusing on eating more fruits and vegetables. Teachers reported 100% of the students showed improvement in their willingness to taste fruits and vegetables. Parent surveys indicated a 100% improvement in their child’s willingness to taste fruits and vegetables. In addition, comments from parents indicated the cookbook and handouts received, as part of their child’s participation, will assist in improving their meal preparations and making healthier food choices for their families. Based on positive feedback, the program will continue to be offered in other elementary schools in the county.

-Christy Strickland, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences

Robeson County ranks 98th in North Carolina as one of the poorest counties in the state and as a result, 740 families depend on food stamps to purchase their groceries each month. Also 36% of adults in the county are obese and do not know how to budget their food stamps. Many families run out of food before the end of the month. Based on this need, Robeson County Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partnered with Robeson Health Care to deliver a series of 14 classes. Using the curriculum, "Plan: Know What's For Dinner," EFNEP taught 14 limited-resource families with young children how to improve their nutrition and physical activity. The lessons focused on planning ahead and using a shopping list to decrease impulse buying and increase the purchasing of healthy foods. Based on feedback, a participant saved $30 a month, which is a $360 annual savings. Due to positive results, EFNEP will continue to partner with Robeson Health Care to offer more classes.

-Ava Locklear, Extension EFNEP Program Assistant

Obesity in children increases the likelihood they will experience health problems later in life. The obesity and overweight rate for children in Robeson County is 40.4%. To address this problem, Robeson County Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Expanded Food & Nutrition Education
Program (EFNEP) delivered 6 nutrition classes to approximately 200 Pre-K and elementary students. After the classes were completed, several teachers reported the students are more willing to try new foods and are eating more fruits and vegetables at lunch. Changes in diet will decrease the risk of chronic diseases, such as stroke, cancer, type II diabetes, and high blood pressure as adults. Due to the success of this program, 4-H EFNEP will continue to provide classes to other elementary schools.

-Tamika McLean, Extension 4-H EFNEP Program Assistant

4-H Youth Development
Students in North Carolina and Robeson County are falling behind in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (S.T.E.M.). In order to address this issue, Robeson County Cooperative Extension offered Embryology training to second and third grade teachers through its 4-H program. Embryology is a research-based, hands-on curriculum that allows students to learn about life cycles, science, and technology by hatching chickens from eggs in an incubator. Through pre and posttests, the teachers demonstrated a 35% increase in knowledge. That knowledge translated into a more productive Embryology project in the classroom with teachers in 35 classrooms averaging an 85% hatch rate, which is equal to industry standards. With increased knowledge, the teachers had a more productive hatch, which will ultimately lead to increased understanding of life cycles, science, and technology for students. Robeson County 4-H will conduct a second round of Embryology later in the school year to introduce more students to STEM curriculum.

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

Finding safe and nurturing opportunities for youth to practice their leadership skills in a rural, economically challenged county can be difficult. The Robeson County Cooperative Extension 4-H Program collaborated with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to create an adult-youth partnership giving youth a safe and nurturing place to practice their leadership skills. The adults worked with 4-H members to create a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration. Youth demonstrated their leadership abilities by helping plan the program, serving as hosts and hostesses, and sharing thoughts for the day. One 4-H member who was introduced to the event last year expanded on her duties by mentoring and training the new 4-H members taking part in the event for the first time and by giving a public presentation as part of the ceremony. Youth also demonstrated abilities as a team when they created and presented an original song for the ceremony. Due to the success of this partnership, as well as the increasing opportunities for youth to gain and demonstrate leadership abilities, 4-H will partner with the NAACP in the near future.

-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: