

The Power of Extension

Robeson County Center

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Inside This Issue

Agriculture

Greenhouses	1
Pesticide Disposal	2
Cattle Conference.....	2
Community Supported Agriculture.....	2-3

Community and Rural Development

Leadership Academy	3
Sustainable Ag.....	3

Family and Consumer Sciences

Nutrition Education	4
Bullying	4
Germ Prevention.....	4-5
Adult Obesity	5

4-H Youth Development

Farm to Fork	5
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An Inside Glance into Cooperative Extension

The Power of Extension is a summary of the educational programs conducted by North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County 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 and Rural Development (CRD), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), and 4-H Youth Development. We hope this newsletter provides more information about the opportunities offered by Cooperative Extension.

Cathy L. Graham

Cathy L. Graham
County Extension Director

Agriculture



High-Tunnel Greenhouses -- Small-scale produce farmers are constantly searching for new methods and varieties to extend the growing season and maximize profits. To assist these farmers, Cooperative Extension in Robeson and Bladen Counties has provided several educational workshops and farm tours that showcased the benefits of high-tunnel greenhouses. A high tunnel is a solar-heated greenhouse with no electrical or automated ventilation. Evaluations from 54 farmers revealed 58 percent expressed an interest in installing a high-tunnel greenhouse on their farms. Since 2010, five of the participants have installed high-tunnel greenhouses to plant produce during the fall and winter months and extended their growing seasons. These greenhouses have generated over \$17,000 in extra income. In the future, these farmers will use their high-tunnel greenhouses to continue to expand their produce operations. This will allow for increasing yields, expanding crop varieties, extending the growing season, and increasing profits. Small/part-time farmers will continue to benefit from educational opportunities provided by Cooperative Extension.

Nelson Brownlee, Extension Area Farm Management Agent

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Pesticide Disposal -- Inventories of unwanted pesticides (insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides) by pesticide applicators, including homeowners, need to be properly disposed of to prevent health and environmental hazards. These inventories occur by overlooking used pesticides in storage from previous years, applicators retiring or no longer in business, or from individuals who acquire property with pesticides left in outbuildings. Individuals often improperly dispose of unwanted chemicals. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension held a one-day Pesticide Disposal Collection

Event in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) Pesticide Disposal Assistance Program. As a result of the free amnesty event, a certified contractor collected a total of 5,150 pounds of unwanted pesticides for proper disposal. Disposal of unwanted pesticides by private individuals would cost on average \$3 per pound. The combined savings for all participants was \$15,450. Proper pesticide disposal contributes to the improvement of environmental and public health by keeping pesticides out of the environment and reducing the risk of pesticide exposure to all citizens.

Mac Malloy, Extension Field Crops Agent

Cape Fear Cattle Conference -- Most of the larger cattle conferences in North Carolina are held at least two hours from the counties in Southeastern North Carolina. This leaves producers little opportunity to receive new information from specialists and learn about developments in animal health, nutrition, pasture management, and farm financing from industry representatives. Based on this need, North Carolina Cooperative Extension in Robeson, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Hoke, and Scotland Counties provide an annual Cape Fear Cattle Conference. Partnering with specialists from the University and industry, this conference has grown in each of its three years. Topics addressed needs presented by advisory committees and past conference evaluations.



Topics in 2012 included: predator management (coyote and vulture) and improving genetic potential on cattle farms. Ninety cattle farmers representing over 2,349 animals and 15 vendors attended the conference. Survey results showed: 91 percent of attendees learned new ideas about predator management and factors that affect cow-calf profitability; 85 percent said they will use knowledge from the predator management to make decisions or changes on their farm; 89 percent will use knowledge from genetic factors to increase cow-calf profitability on their farm, and 53 percent also said they had lost a calf due to predators in the past. Giving area cattle producers an opportunity to learn about new research and products allows local cattle farms to become more profitable. A follow-up survey will be completed to see how many producers attribute new management techniques to information presented at the conference.

Michelle Shooter, Extension Area Livestock Agent



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) -- Managing a niche market business is a tremendous challenge to most, especially those who have training in agriculture but no marketing experience. In Robeson County, local meat producers have had a hard time marketing their natural beef product. Like other niche meat producers, they have a desired product but are plagued by marketing woes and the inability to get their name out in the community. To address this problem, Cooperative Extension partnered with the local Farmers

Market to put together a local Community Supported Agriculture Program. To date, over 50 families have participated by registering to pick up a bag of local produce, local eggs, and a different cut of local beef for five weeks. This CSA option allowed the local farmers and producers to increase their

marketability and income. Through word-of-mouth advertising, the local beef and chicken producers' visibility increased and profits rose by \$2,940. Cooperative Extension will continue to provide assistance in marketing to vegetable and fruit growers as well as local beef, pork, and poultry producers.

Mack Johnson, Extension Horticultural Agent

Community and Rural Development



Robeson Leadership Academy -- Leadership and staff development were identified as high priority needs by Robeson County commissioners and the county manager to increase productivity among county employees. In order to encourage staff retention, satisfaction, and effectiveness, county administration requested Cooperative Extension facilitate staff development/leadership training. Based on this need, a five-day Robeson Leadership Academy was conducted. Thirty-nine county employees, including department managers, supervisors, and aspiring supervisors, attended from 21 different county departments. Educational topics included team building, effective communication, conflict resolution, and the Conscious Discipline Brain Model. Additionally, each participant completed Human Patterns, which is a self-administered inventory indicating personal preferences and interests to assist in problem-solving, understanding interpersonal relationships, and identifying leadership styles. A follow-up survey was completed by 26 of the 39 participants seven months after the completion of the Academy. Results of the survey revealed: 96 percent of the participants are using effective communication techniques and Human Patterns information learned in the Academy to respond effectively to other people. Also, 96 percent of the participants are limiting their involvement in the Drama Triangle and 100 percent are using active listening skills. One department manager stated: "I have learned to be a better listener, more patient, and understanding with my staff and no longer play the victim role." Based on the success of the Academy, additional trainings will be offered to county employees in the future.

Cathy L. Graham, County Extension Director

Sustainable Agriculture -- In Robeson County, a need exists for education on sustainable farming methods. To address this need, Cooperative Extension conducted a tour of Raft Swamp Farm. Sustainable agricultural techniques were demonstrated such as: minimal tillage, use of cover crops, windmills/drip-irrigation, natural beekeeping, rotating livestock pastures, cultivated crop plots to minimize weeds/insects as well as increase soil fertility, and reducing/eliminating the use of costly chemical applications. Eighteen participants attended the tour. A post-tour survey revealed 50 percent of participants plan to reduce synthetic chemical use to save money; 63 percent intend to reduce use of water, fuel, electricity, and materials, resulting in cost savings; 75 percent intend to use cover crops/minimal tillage to promote soil fertility and reduce erosion; and 88 percent will grow, raise, or harvest a new product in a more sustainable way. Farm tours are an excellent way to demonstrate sustainable agricultural techniques to experienced farmers as well as to potential new farmers/local foods producers. Based on the success of this tour, other educational tours will be held in the future.



Tahnea Locklear, Extension Community and Rural Development Agent

Family and Consumer Sciences

Nutrition Education -- The obesity and overweight rate for children in Robeson County is over 40 percent. Obesity in children increases the likelihood they will experience health problems later in life. To address this need, Cooperative Extension partnered with the public schools to offer “Steps to Health” nutrition education to 125 second graders in two schools. Based on parent surveys, 79 percent thought their child benefited from the Steps to Health Program. Surveys also indicated the family had benefited - 70 percent of parents are now eating more fruits and vegetables, 64 percent are drinking more water, 71 percent are more physically active, and 77 percent are more likely to try new foods. Furthermore, 93 percent of parents found the information and healthy recipes sent home to be helpful and had already prepared the recipes or were planning to try them. Several parents were thankful for the program, because their children are now more willing to try new foods. Based on the success of “Steps to Health,” this program will be offered again.



Janice Fields, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent



Bullying -- Bullying is becoming an increasing problem for youth with more than 43 percent saying they are afraid of being bullied at school. Part of bullying prevention is teaching youth positive communication and basic social skills as essential tools to help youth communicate with their peers. Effective communication also helps young people discuss and set realistic goals and make good decisions allowing for growth into successful adults. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension designed a weeklong day camp for youth ages 10 - 14, with several components enabling youth to gain such skills. Educational instruction

focused on bully prevention strategies, etiquette skills, and effective communication. A written evaluation from the 14 participants revealed 93 percent of the youth gained knowledge on etiquette skills, specifically table setting, and 71 percent demonstrated increased skills concerning table setting and proper etiquette skills. In addition, 71 percent of the youth would be more active team participants in the future. A follow-up parent evaluation revealed 80 percent of the youth were communicating more, and 60 percent of the parents said they had noticed more interaction between their child and others since the day camp experience. With these skills, youth are more likely to be successful adults later in life. Due to the success of this program, Cooperative Extension will continue to create opportunities to help youth manage positive interaction skills.

Christy Strickland, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

Germ Prevention -- According to the Center for Disease Control, proper hand washing is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of harmful bacteria, which can make people sick. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partnered with a pre-K class to teach nutrition classes. During one class called Color Me Healthy, youth used a black light with glow-in-the-dark “germs” to learn how harmful bacteria spreads when hands are not properly washed. To remove all germs, children washed their hands for 20 seconds while singing the ABC song.



Although the germs were unreal, the experience gave youth a real example of how germs can be passed from one person to the next. Participating children were amazed at the amount of pretend germs on their hands, clothes, face, and desk, which was demonstrated with the use of the black light. Teachers gave

testimonies of how children now sing the ABC song while washing their hands. Also, parents reported their children wash their hands before eating meals as well as remind everyone else in the home to wash their hands. Since programming with pre-K class had a tremendous impact, 4-H EFNEP will continue to partner with other grade levels in the future.

Tamika McLean, Extension 4-H EFNEP Assistant



Adult Obesity -- According to the 2012 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps Survey, the adult obesity rate in Robeson County is 41 percent. Based on these statistics, almost half the population has an increased chance of suffering from heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. To address this issue, Cooperative Extension's Adult EFNEP partnered with Robeson Community College Adult Literacy Program to deliver nine nutrition classes to 12 participants. The educational classes focused on cooking easy, quick, and healthy meals; planning weekly menus on a limited budget; and kitchen/food safety. Feedback from one of the participants revealed the following changes in behavior: serving 100 percent fruit juice to her family, substituting fruit salad for sweet desserts, and now sanitizing her kitchen before and after use. Due to the success of this program, EFNEP will continue to partner with similar organizations.

Wendy Maynor, Extension 4-H Program Assistant

4-H Youth Development

Farm to Fork -- The average age of a farmer in Robeson County is 58, according to statistics from NCDA. Agriculture is the number one economic business in the county, and with an aging producer population, the economic impact could be damaging if younger farmers are not nurtured to fill an industry gap. Based on this need, Cooperative Extension held a weeklong day camp to introduce children to local farmers and their crops. As part of the camp, youth were taught where food comes from before it arrives in the grocery store or before being served. At the conclusion of the camp, a written evaluation revealed 71 percent of the youth had a better understanding of how their food is grown and where it comes from. A follow-up parent evaluation showed more than 90 percent of youth increased their understanding of agricultural systems. One parent commented the camp gave her son an increased passion for animals and healthy foods. Introducing youth to agriculture at a young age allows them to consider a future career in agriculture that will have a significant economic impact on the future of Robeson County.



Shea Ann DeJarnette, Extension 4-H Youth Development Agent

For more information about upcoming educational opportunities, please check out our programming calendar at:

<http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu>

