



NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION - STATEWIDE IMPACTS

Week Ending 2/27/09

- ◆ The agricultural community has struggled with profitability in recent years due primarily to low prices for commodities and tremendous increases in inputs. As a result, farmers are constantly seeking ways to improve their profits through better management practices, more effective pest management, and higher yielding varieties. One way that NC Cooperative Extension in Pasquotank County in cooperation with other Extension Centers in northeast North Carolina is addressing profitability is through coordinated variety trials for corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton. These trials are conducted in the counties and the data is compiled and distributed among the growers through newsletters, at meetings, and on a website for the general public to access. Based on some higher yielding varieties of the 2007 variety trials that farmers planted in 2008, producers in Pasquotank County earned an additional \$175,000 for corn and \$20,000 for cotton over other varieties that they could have planted.
- ◆ The demand for locally produced foods in the Triangle Area, as well as in the region, has inspired the creation of a collaborative effort between NC Cooperative Extension Centers in Orange, Durham, Chatham and Alamance Counties in the development of the *Piedmont Value-Added Shared-Use Food & Agricultural Processing Center*, which will be located in Orange County. This Center will allow local farmers and agricultural vendors access to a facility that will help them add value to fresh produce and farm-related items during their farming transition from tobacco. Currently, this project has received \$861,000 towards a budgeted project of \$1.2 million. NC Cooperative Extension staff in Orange County will continue to be involved in the development of the Management Entity for the processing center.
- ◆ Three Graham County 4-Hers attending NC Citizenship Focus identified youth leadership training as an important community need. Using The Leadership Team as the planning team, these youth decided to form a new 4-H Youth Council dedicated to building teen leaders. Graham County 4-Hers proceeded to write grants to support these educational efforts. As a result, they have been awarded \$19,000 from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation. To date, The Leadership Team has participated in facilitator training, marketed the youth council, accepted applications, conducted interviews, selected twelve teens to participate, and sponsored team-building activities. Through the identification of a local need, planning a program to address the need, locating financial support for the project, and being successful in attracting a group of teens interested in becoming community leaders, the six 4-H teen volunteers have learned leadership skills that will last a lifetime and will leave a lasting legacy in their community.
- ◆ The average charge per hospital stay for Cardiovascular Disease in NC currently exceeds \$25,000. NC Cooperative Extension's *Give Your Heart A Healthy Beat* program emphasizes healthful changes in eating and exercise habits designed to help prevent cardiovascular disease. Two 13-week sessions were offered to 2 Perquimans County groups, with 22 of 35 participants attending at least 10 of the classes. A total of 138 pounds were lost. As a result of these classes, 22 of the 35 participants indicate healthy eating and lifestyle changes are being made to reduce their risks of cardiovascular disease. With these lifestyle changes and improved health, it is estimated that each participant could reduce the likelihood of hospital visits directly related to cardiovascular disease with a savings of over \$25,000 per hospital stay from insurance and out of pocket expenses.

- ◆ As the population of Buncombe County has grown to 218,000, the influx of new homeowners not only increases the demand for reliable horticulture information, but also increases the potential environmental impacts of inappropriate gardening practices. In response to this need, Extension Master Gardener Volunteers are trained by the Extension Agent to assist Buncombe County residents with diagnosing problems and learning about environmentally sound gardening practices. In 2008, 111 volunteers assisted over 6,000 people and contributed over 8,000 volunteer work hours, the equivalent of 4 full-time employees. An elected Steering Committee functions to better manage the organization and operation of this large group of volunteers. This group of volunteers was critical to extending the resources of NC Cooperative Extension to better serve the citizens of Buncombe County.
- ◆ Over the past two years, herbicide resistant Palmer Amaranth has become widespread in Cumberland County. Our Extension Agent has been working with farmers to promote crop rotations and weed control strategies to help break the cycle of resistance. In particular, farmers that are rotating crops that have glyphosate tolerance have been encouraged to use conventional varieties for one crop or the other. Cotton farmers have been encouraged to rotate heavily infested fields out of cotton for one to two years to help break the cycle. To date, 30 farmers have used recommended practices from NC Cooperative Extension on management of Palmer Amaranth saving them approximately \$30,000 in chemical costs and reducing the incidence of Palmer Amaranth in their fields.
- ◆ With the signing of the tobacco buyout in 2004 and the rising cost of fuel and fertilizers, many Madison County farmers are experimenting with alternative crops for additional and/or replacement farm income. NC Cooperative Extension's WNC AgOptions grant cycle aided 5 Madison County farmers with a total of \$15,000 in 2008. Their projects include converting a tobacco barn to a horse boarding barn, an aging cave for goat cheese, a mobile molasses mill, a growing pad for mums, and a native nursery. These grants have impacted these and other farmers in Western North Carolina by increasing their income and in some cases extending their growing and/or production season.
- ◆ Science and engineering are essential for ensuring America's economic growth; however, school-aged students are not performing well in science and math. In an effort to increase student's interest and grades in science, the Northampton County 4-H program offered training on the NC 4-H embryology program for elementary school teachers and home school families. Curriculum kits provided to educators saved the county over \$1,200. Four new home school educators and four new elementary school teachers conducted embryology projects reaching 217 students. According to data collected from educators, over 85% of the students involved in the embryology program increased their knowledge and grasp the concepts easily through the experiential learning process.
- ◆ There is a nationwide concern for childhood obesity as well as children's lack of participation in outdoor activities. School gardens can serve as a valuable resource to introduce children to the natural environment and increase interest in eating fresh vegetables. But, funding for such projects is a major impediment in many school systems. In response to this concern, Buncombe County Extension Master Gardeners have implemented a *School Garden Grants* program. The program uses funds from targeted fundraising activities to support gardening programs in schools by helping to fund the creation or expansion of school garden projects. In the 2007 and 2008 school years, \$3,000 was distributed to 9 schools, enabling 1,600 students to experience the outdoor classroom.

- ◆ Cattle are grazing animals and producers try to maximize their profits by maintaining a good source of grass to reduce their overall feed cost. Over the past several years, North Carolina pastures have suffered greatly due to the droughts and there is a need for rejuvenation. NC Cooperative Extension in Warren County partnered with the Soil and Water Conservation District and hosted a beef farm tour. NCSU and NC A&T SU specialists presented information on marketing, pasture renewal, culling practices, and stocking rates. The Soil and Water staff also discussed cost-share opportunities for rejuvenating pastures for cattle. Over 40 producers attended the tour and we have 25 producers implementing best management practices. They have been granted over \$58,328 to improve the quality of their pastures. As a result, producers will be able to depend more on their land and less on costly feed.
- ◆ The CDC estimates foodborne illnesses affect 76 million people annually in the United States, causing an estimated 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. Training food service employees to utilize safe food practices can prevent illnesses. In Lee County, NC Cooperative Extension collaborated with the Lee County Health Department to provide two 18-hour food safety certification classes and one food safety certification class taught totally in Spanish. Participants from 37 establishments completed the class with 31 passing the certification exam. The National Restaurant Association estimates the average cost of a foodborne illness outbreak to an establishment is \$75,000. If each of the 30 establishments prevented one foodborne illness outbreak, food safety education provided an estimated cost savings of \$2,250,000.
- ◆ After-school care is an issue for many low-income families. Violence and inappropriate activities increase during these hours. Seeing this need, a local elementary school in Forsyth County decided to open a tutoring program after-school. One of the teachers charged with leading the program, remembered his positive experiences as a 4-H camper in Alleghany County and contacted NC Cooperative Extension in Forsyth County about starting a 4-H program at their after-school site. A 4-H club was formed utilizing 4-H curriculum kits as programming options for these youth. Not only are they now provided a safe place to be after-school, but they are learning life skills and practicing experiential education. In a months' time, club participation has doubled and the teacher indicates that many of the students are excited about science for the first time due to the hands-on nature of the Aerospace curriculum.
- ◆ Camden County has been deemed a 21st Century County due to its lack of economic development and a high limited-resource population. The county also has one of the highest tax bases in the state. With the number of limited resource families and high property tax rates, it is hard for 4-H families to afford many of the district and state level 4-H trips. At the Northeast District Activity Day, 7 Camden 4-Hers qualified to attend NC 4-H Congress, with 11 4-Hers actually attending. All 11 4-Hers came together and completed 2 fundraisers where they raised over \$2,000 to go toward the county registration fees for NC 4-H Congress. No child had to pay more than \$50 of their own money to attend this state level trip. By working on these fundraisers, these 4-Hers have learned how to effectively make a profit and work together as a team.
- ◆ NC Cooperative Extension staff in Wayne County realized the disconnect between Latino individuals and communities at large. A Latino Extension and Community Association Club was created to foster civic involvement in the Latino community. Since its beginning in May 2008, this club has successfully participated in the Wayne Regional Fair with its educational booth on disaster preparedness and hospitality table. Using money earned at the fair, the group hosted a traditional "Pasada Latina" for 99 participants. Members have moved quickly from a new club to taking on responsibility for organizing their own events.

- ◆ Local growers and vendors need more participants to make the Farmer's Market in Salisbury viable. The Salisbury Farmer's Market began accepting WIC vouchers last year with approval from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture. Vendor participation increased to 11 as compared to 8 local growers eligible to receive vouchers in 2007. WIC voucher redemption continues to be a success for local producers, providing a great boost to the market. In their second year of participation in the WIC program, the Salisbury-Rowan Farmer's Market is above the state average in redemption of WIC coupons. The positive redemption rate accounted for 300 additional vouchers for WIC participants in August. WIC redemptions at the market were over \$9,000 in 2008, a \$3,000 increase from 2007. Vendors have commented that WIC vouchers were a definitive factor in positive cash flows and provided them incentive to continue participation during slow sale days.