Aquatic weeds are a major problem for Cumberland County pond owners. NC Cooperative Extension offers assistance to clients by helping them accurately identify their weed problem, then prescribing the proper treatment for controlling the unwanted plant material. This is accomplished through office and on-site visits with the client. Since 2004, 175 pond owners have followed Extension’s recommendations for their pond weed management, and have successfully managed their problem. With some aquatic herbicides costing up to $500 per acre to apply, it is estimated that this group of pond owners saved approximately $115,000 by having their weeds accurately identified and following Cooperative Extension’s recommendations for aquatic weed control.

Tourism is a major industry for Carteret County, bringing in over $200 million annually. Litter hurts this county’s economy, especially tourism and new business recruitment. Tourists will not linger, spend money or return with their friends to trashy areas. Every year, animals are found entangled in litter and some litter can be deadly. NC Big Sweep and county coordinators work to educate school groups, boy scouts, civic organizations and interest groups to foster volunteers. In 2009, 566 volunteers cleaned 28 miles of beaches and waterways and swept 3,839 pounds of litter. Volunteers worked 2,830 hours saving the county $57,308. Volunteers make the county’s environment a cleaner place to call home.

Helping clients find resources that they qualify for is very important to financially challenged residents of Chowan County. One client that is a post-transplant patient did not qualify for patient assistance programs or Low Income Subsidy, and was faced with over $6,000 in out-of-pocket expenses related to his drugs. After talking to his employer, the employer agreed to reimburse the client for all of the medication and premium costs related to his Medicare Part D plan. Over 25 clients were assisted with obtaining Low Income Subsidy, which is worth approximately $37,500 to these clients in drug-related savings. An additional 15 were assisted with Patient Assistance programs through drug manufacturers, which will assist those who do not qualify for any programs when they go into the gap.

Data shows that volunteering rates in the U.S. held steady, despite the onset of an economic recession during 2008. Studies suggest that youth volunteers gain lasting benefits. Benefits include skills enhancement (with increased job marketability), increased self esteem, development of empathy for others, and a stronger connection to communities. Research shows that youth who volunteer are more than twice as likely to continue volunteering when they become adults. Youth volunteers are also more likely to stay in, or return to, their communities as they get older. The current estimated value of volunteer time is $20.28 per hour. Henderson County 4-H partnered with the Carl Sandburg National Historic Site to give 27 youth an opportunity to work at the site and help educate park visitors. Youth volunteers contributed approximately 765 hours for a total value of $15,514.

Consumers want fresh, locally grown, healthy foods to feed their families. Extension’s educational demonstrations, workshops and programs increased the local food production on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in 2009. Cherokee families and community gardens who grew the Chiefs Cherokee Family Garden Kit conservatively produced 2,000 bushels of green beans, 20,000 summer squash, 12,000 winter squash, 40,000 ears of corn, and 50,000 pounds of potatoes. The Center for Cherokee Plants grew 2,000 pounds of candy roaster squash (from only 5 plants!) which were distributed to community members. Additionally, the Cherokee Farmers Market supplied a minimum of 200 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables during its seasonal sales. These Extension programs are helping meet the demand for fresh foods and increasing the self-sufficiency and capacity of the Cherokee community.
Heightened interest in local food consumption, the growing need for small farmer diversification of revenue streams, and preservation of family farms are local issues of concern. Helping address these factors, NC Cooperative Extension in Rockingham County facilitated the formation of a Local Food Coalition. Small group discussions helped identify specific needs. Through regular meetings, organized working groups for education and infrastructure projects were created. During 2009, three Sustainability Festival events were held throughout the county—organized by volunteers of the Education Group. The Infrastructure Group developed a regional food distribution project, Piedmont Local Food. Membership expanded to include neighboring counties.

Modeling after another successful enterprise, the project will use the internet for nearby urban customers—including restaurants and families—to place food orders from participating farmers. Projected launch date for weekly order delivery is March, 2010. Anticipated economic impacts are substantial because of immediate enthusiasm of productive volunteers and leadership of the entire Extension staff.

Access to healthy, fresh foods can be a challenge for families with children—especially in current tough economic times. Meanwhile, farmers market vendors need to increase sales. To address both needs, NC Cooperative Extension in Rockingham County provided leadership to the member-run Farmers Market. Extension facilitated the process of acquiring 21st Century Market status, making it possible for vendors to accept Food Stamp EBT payments, as well as debit and credit cards. Coordination between the market and the WIC office ensured that issuance of Farmers Market vouchers were timed with peak availability of product. Creative advertising by market vendors included two days when $5 vouchers were given to students, who were accompanied by parents, for the purchase of fruits and veggies. Extension used the opportunity to share grant-acquired publications about healthy eating with families and demonstrated easy-to-prepare recipes. Vendors saw 100% of their advertising dollars returned through voucher redemption, new customer relationships were created, and families received free healthy foods.

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According to information from the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs “North Carolina has many low-wealth, rural counties experiencing declining economic opportunities, difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified educators, and large numbers of disadvantaged youth. NC is heavily impacted by today’s recession. State budgets have suffered and social and educational programs impacting young people have been cut. Data shows that high school dropouts are more likely to commit crimes which cost taxpayers millions of dollars a year.” In an effort to support school age youth enrolled in programs that are of interest to them so that they are adequately supervised during vulnerable afterschool hours, 4-H is participating with Randolph County schools to offer 4-H classes designed and implemented by Extension staff. Through cooperation with the 21st Century Learning Grant and Safe Schools Initiative, 4-H is contributing to the effort of increasing safety while reducing vulnerable youth in our community.

The push toward healthy citizens in Beaufort County began with the establishment of the Beaufort County Community Garden in 2009. This was a collaboration between Cooperative Extension, the City of Washington, Beaufort County Government, local agribusinesses and Master Gardeners. The Master Gardeners raised $7,815 to establish the Community Garden. The garden had over 143 people gardening in 49 individual garden plots, remaining physically active and attending educational lessons on small-plot gardening, environmental stewardship and fresh produce safety, and nutrition.

It is a well known problem, that hazardous waste has tendency to collect around the home, and could eventually be an environmental problem. After failed attempts to obtain a grant to collect hazardous waste by the Currituck Extension Center and the Albemarle Solid Waste Authority, the Currituck County commissioners secured funds from solid waste tipping fees to hold a household hazardous waste collection for its residents. In cooperation with the Pesticide Collection Section of NCDA&CS and Cooperative Extension’s county pesticide coordinator, 818 pounds of garden and agriculture pesticides were collected for disposal. A possible environmental hazard has been eliminated, and at a cost of $7 per pound for disposal, $5,726 was saved on the disposal of these pesticides by the county.
Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating cost Americans an estimated $57 million in avoidable medical expenses. Through the *Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less* program conducted by the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Caswell County, class participants learned to live mindfully by tracking their food intake, reducing their daily caloric intake and moving more. **For this class, 8 out of 12 participants completed the 15-week session and boast a total weight loss of 88 pounds.** Most participants experienced a waist circumference reduction of at least 3 inches, and the difference is their beginning and ending blood pressure readings were astronomical. All participants expressed that they are confident that they learned what it will take to continue living a healthy lifestyle. They were also confident that they gained the necessary knowledge to continue on their future weight loss or weight maintenance goals.

As food sources become more uncertain, and the perceived possibility of contamination continues to exist, locally grown meat and produce has seen a significant increase in popularity. NC Cooperative Extension fields numerous calls from citizens interested in locating farms and farm markets that provide such products. **Cooperative Extension in the Piedmont region of North Carolina developed a map detailing farm product information to inform those interested with the location and product list for each participating farm.** After a final edit by Extension agents, the maps were printed thanks to a generous $1,000 gift from the North Carolina Farm Bureau offices of each of the participating counties. Each county has received 1,000 of the professionally designed maps for distribution to interested citizens at no cost. The 64 farms have seen an increase in their business as a direct result of being listed on the "Tastes of the Piedmont" map.