USDA-Rural Development provides guaranteed loans to qualified, low to moderate-income borrowers. As part of the application process, borrowers must attend a Homebuyer education workshop to help understand the responsibility of home ownership. The Johnston County Cooperative Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences helped 28 participants complete the education requirement, and they later closed on their homes. Those participants received government guaranteed loans totaling $3,957,362.

Extension is mandated through state and federal laws to assist individuals that have jobs requiring them to purchase and/or use pesticides in obtaining and maintaining a pesticide license. The Pasquotank County Extension Center, with the assistance of other Extension Agents, Extension Specialists, and other government agency personnel, conducted programs that included topics such as personal protective equipment usage/maintenance, identification/control of various pests and recordkeeping, etc. Four commercial pesticide applicator/dealer recertification classes as well as other programs provided 294 participants with a total of 882 hours of credits for commercial pesticide applicators. By attending these Extension classes, the participants collectively saved themselves $7,350 in fees. These 882 hours of credits preserved a combined wage earnings estimated at $1,837,499. These types of educational programs not only enhance the earning potential of the participants, but also help insure that they are competent and environmentally sound in their use of pesticides.

Agriculture is the largest industry in Pasquotank County, which generates nearly $50,000,000. To be profitable, farmers are seeking information and technical assistance. Among those things needed by the farmers are variety trials that generate local data and identify varieties that are adapted to the area. The County Extension Centers of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Pasquotank and Perquimans coordinate their variety trials for corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton to generate data that is more definitive for growers in selecting varieties they will grow. In 2009, 3 corn hybrids identified through trials as performing well generated the farmers in Pasquotank County more than $380,000 in additional income. Also, 3 soybean varieties identified through the variety trials netted farmers in Pasquotank County more than $338,659 in additional income. Such impacts will allow farmers to be more profitable and should result in a better quality of life.

Determining peanut maturity and digging at the optimum time is one of the most important decisions that a peanut farmer faces. Maturity affects flavor, grade, milling quality, and shelf life. Not only do mature peanuts have the quality characteristics that consumers desire, they are worth more to the producer. Research shows that growers can lose from 4 to 19 pounds of pod yield per acre per day when peanuts are dug too soon. To assist growers in determining the optimum time for digging, a pod blasting clinic was held at Keel Peanut Company in Belvoir, NC. During this workshop, peanut farmers submit samples for pod blasting and the pods are placed on a profile board to estimate the best digging date. In Pitt County, fifteen peanut producers participated in this workshop representing 1,355 acres. Their participation represented a potential benefit of $271,026 for their operations.

Profit margins remain narrow in tobacco because of high input costs. Variety selection is a critical component in the grower’s decision-making process because it determines the crop’s ultimate yield potential. Educational efforts by the Edgecombe County Extension Center through meetings, newsletters, and individual visits have helped tobacco growers select high yielding tobacco varieties where practical. According to Official Variety Tests, above average yielding varieties yield 314 more pounds per acre than below average yielding varieties. For 2009, 366 more acres of higher yielding varieties were planted which improved grower profitability by $201,117.
The Lee County 4-H Advisory Committee has strongly encouraged increasing collaboration between the 4-H program and the Lee County public school system in an effort to compliment and enrich their existing curriculum. In 2009 through 4-H programming in the schools, we were able to reach over 1,800 students by delivering numerous programs in the areas of nutrition, healthy eating, gardening, environmental education, animal science, and embryology. At the conclusion of each program, teachers and students completed evaluations detailing the benefits of the programs. In nearly every classroom, the teachers noticed that students' interest in school, grades, behavior, and subject matter knowledge had all increased. The majority of students surveyed also felt that these 4-H programs helped make the school curriculum more interesting and gave them greater incentive to pursue new academic areas of interest. New collaborations are currently underway with the schools to provide further school enrichment programming.

In Onslow County, NC Cooperative Extension partnered with law enforcement agencies, volunteers, local governments, community partners and sponsors to conduct Operation Medicine Cabinet. This effort ensures the safe disposal of medicines collected from citizens, and keeps these medicines out of the water supply. As a result, over 150,000 pills and liquid medicines were collected and properly disposed of.

Farmers in Chatham County, NC have faced disasters, both natural and man-made. Eighteen months of drought, followed by high fertilizer and fuel costs, increased grain and feed costs and decreasing prices for livestock sales, along with a tightening credit market have put many farmers into an extremely tight financial bind. There are some government safety nets that are available through the Farm Bill to help provide some protection to farmers. The Chatham County Extension Center worked to educate producers about disaster programs and the Non-insurable Crop Assistance Program (NAP) for pasture and hay land losses. During 2009, producers who purchased the NAP insurance collected over $50,000 for losses that occurred in 2008.

Transylvania County Cooperative Extension was approached by a new farmer (less than 3 years) about diversifying his operation. He had raised feeder calves and sold through the weekly auction, but was not satisfied with his income. He decided he wanted to start finishing cattle and direct marketing meat. We advised him that this would be a time consuming project and that he should start slowly. Once he got involved in marketing his first animals he realized he needed to produce more. We advised him to buy quality cattle locally and begin finishing these animals. Since April 2009, he has finished, slaughtered and marketed 65 animals increasing his income by nearly $30,000. His plans are to expand to 200 animals if his market allows.

The Centers for Disease Control indicates that approximately 10% of Catawba County's population has been diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes, another 5% is undiagnosed, and an estimated 20% is pre-diabetic. To address this issue, NC Cooperative Extension and the Catawba County Center for Diabetes Control collaborated to offer an education/support series, Take Charge of Your Diabetes. Twenty-one adults who enrolled in the program reported increased their knowledge of managing diet, medications, exercise, blood sugar monitoring, and foot care. Since implementing practices learned in these workshops, one person has lost seventy-five pounds; one person prevented serious results by proactive medical care of her feet; and another person has been advised by her physician that her diabetes is being controlled. This program has provided education and support that ranges in cost from $300 to $700 when obtained in other settings. This is a potential savings of $6,300 to $14,700 for class participants.

Chatham County is the 17th fastest growing county in North Carolina, and consistently ranks in the state’s top 25 agricultural counties. As a result of this rapid growth from the Triangle metro areas to the east and the Triad metro areas to the northwest, agricultural lands are rapidly being encroached upon by homes. Agriculture is also Chatham County’s number one industry and largest tax base in the county. Future planning by local government has identified agriculture as a critically important industry to be preserved. As a result of this need, NC Cooperative Extension in cooperation with the Triangle Land Conservancy and other county departments applied for and received a $35,000 grant from the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to develop an Agricultural Land Use Plan and Agricultural Economic Development Plan. These plans were completed in 2009 and now await adoption by the county commissioners.
According to the 2009 Anson County Profile by the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, land developed per capita increased from 1996 to 2006 by 115%. The number of developed acres per person in Anson increased rapidly from 1976 to 2006, and is projected to double from 2006 to 2030. Efforts must be made now to identify and preserve agricultural lands from non-farm development. Working with the Anson Ag Advisory Board, NC Cooperative Extension is administering the county’s Voluntary and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts Ordinance with over 3,500 acres currently enrolled in the program. In addition, Extension was awarded an $8,500 grant through the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to implement the ordinance, including landowner sign design and creation, educational programs, and marketing the program. Goals are to preserve county rural and working farmlands, maintain an agricultural economic base and protect the county’s natural areas.

The McDowell County Commissioners asked the solid waste advisory committee to initiate an educational program. Increased recycling would save the county money on solid waste disposal fees, decrease the litter problem and help to improve the environment. NC Cooperative Extension, McDowell Public Works, McDowell County Schools and Keep McDowell Beautiful joined together to plan and initiate the program. The program included a recycling initiative in the county schools and a community recycling program. The program included equipment for the schools, educational programs for the schools and in the community, a new recycling brochure and a new collection system at county convenience centers to make recycling easier. An additional 40 tons of solid waste from the county schools has been diverted to recycling during the 2008-2009 school year. The public works director estimates that recycling at the convenience centers has increased 50%.

Madison County farmers are continuing to diversify their farm enterprises after the tobacco buyout, and with the current economy, many are looking for a profitable alternative. In 2009, WNC AgOptions awarded 2 current Madison county livestock producers the total of $9,000 to produce and sell pasture-raised poultry with one farmer building a mobile slaughter unit. Each producer was able to produce and slaughter 3 separate runs of 60-75 birds. They were able to sell them to markets locally as well as in Asheville, Charlotte, Charleston, and Atlanta. Each farmer made a profit of $5-$7 per bird making an average profit of $1,500 per farmer. These producers said that without the grant from WNC AgOptions, they would not have been able to risk trying to diversify their farm operations. They plan to raise pasture poultry as well as heritage breeds of turkeys in the future.

Afterschool 4-H’ers in Cabarrus County explored one of the most important issues facing our nation today – biofuels. In October 2009, 1,200 afterschool 4-H’ers participated in 4-H National Youth Science Day. All 1,200 children participated in an experiment called “Biofuel Blast.” This experiment assisted youth in understanding the importance of environmental issues our global community faces together and the opportunities available for a greener tomorrow. Participants learned that the sugar in corn and other cellulose plants can be converted into biofuels with yeast, with 89% saying that the experiment was a success and 97% said they are more interested in science after participating in this experiment. Biofuel Blast kits were purchased for 23 afterschool sites with a grant received from Philip Morris USA. This grant saved NC Cooperative Extension Service, Cabarrus County Schools Kids: Plus program and day care centers in Cabarrus County $3,450 in supplies needed for the experiment.

Local Food Systems can impact farms, farmers, the local economy, and farmland preservation. The development of local markets for farm products is a major component for sustainable and successful local food systems and local farms. The Avery County Cooperative Extension Center worked with several farms in developing farm plans, diversifying, and marketing skills to assist in their endeavors. The Avery County Center also worked very closely with several local agriculture leaders to develop a local tailgate/farmers market as an outlet for farm products, with 10 or more local farmers selling goods throughout the summer months. This increased income from new marketing endeavors earned one farmer over $12,000, making it possible for him to stay on the farm.
Only 74% of the students who start 9th grade in Randolph County actually graduate from high school in four years. In an attempt to encourage youth to stay in school, NC Cooperative Extension worked in cooperation with Randolph Communities in Schools to support the Reality Store, a financial educational program for 9th grade students at three local high schools. Over 725 youth participated. Students were exposed to what the “real” cost of living is, therefore encouraging them to stay in school and continue their education. The Reality Store program is being expanded to all high schools in Randolph County.

Scenic Byways give travelers an opportunity to experience a slice of local history, geography or culture through unique landscapes found along roads less traveled, while providing safe, interesting alternate routes that preserve and protect a community’s diverse natural beauty and culture. In 2006, Cooperative Extension and other county partners presented a proposal to the NC Department of Transportation that included a detailed historical narrative and current photographs from nearly 50 miles of existing highway that tracks General Nathaniel Greene’s escape route from the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in 1781 during the Revolutionary War. In 2009, three portions of the Rockingham County route were selected to be included in NC Scenic Byway’s network that includes only 2,000 miles of NC highways that showcase our state for the traveling public. These designations will increase tourism in the county.