Our Back Home Visit in Guilford County

Date/Time: Monday, April 27, 2009 at 8:00 a.m.

Place: Guilford County Agricultural Building

Welcome and introductions were made by State Advisory Council member, Steva Allgood, after which all present enjoyed a delicious breakfast of pastries with fresh fruit and coffee/juice. As breakfast was winding down, two testimonials were given regarding what and how Extension has made a difference in their lives. The first was Andre Harris of North East McLeansville 4-H Club who talked about how his life and his direction have been positively impacted by his involvement with 4-H. His talk was not only interesting but very well written and delivered. He gives the focus his life is taking directly to his participation in the 4-H programs. After the meeting was adjourned and before the tour, Andre came over and talked to Dr. Stewart about 4-H and his future plans for higher education.

The second testimonial was made by Ken Rudd, a strawberry and vegetable farmer in Guilford County, who gives Cooperative Extension full credit for his success as a farmer. Mr. Rudd grew up on a farm in Guilford County and graduated from NC State with an engineering degree. He said that it did not take him long to realize that engineering was not the line of work he was cut out to do for the rest of his working life so he decided to try his luck at farming. In starting this new adventure, he said he did not know one thing about farming so he turned to Cooperative Extension for help and guidance. He gives all the credit for any success he has had to Cooperative Extension from what to plant, when, how to prepare the soil, when it is best to fertilize, harvest, and so on. He said several times that there is no doubt in his mind that he would never have survived or been nearly as successful with his farming if it had not been for the willingness and cooperation of Cooperative Extension’s knowledgeable staff. Plus, he brought some delicious strawberries and tomatoes for those present to enjoy. Ummmmmm.

After Mr. Rudd’s testimonial, Brenda Morris gave a brief summary of the programs in which Cooperative Extension has been involved this year utilizing over 34,000 volunteer hours with a monetary value of over $650,000. Mention was made regarding the Guilford Country 4-H program where teenagers go into the schools to teach Junior Master Gardner lessons, improving nutrition with Room at the Inn offering subsidized housing for abandoned and homeless mothers, encouraging better health care in the elderly, and reaching out to challenged citizens to name a few. Plus, they have programs in place to promote agricultural awareness and education of horse owners.

Rep. Maggie Jeffus gave us an update on budget items, cuts, and services relative to Guilford County. North Carolina is in the middle of this economic scenario. To help with the many layoffs, it is working on counseling families with the top priority being the protection of the peoples’ homes. Obviously, a home is one’s most valuable resource. For the first time since Rep. Jeffus has been in Raleigh, she noted that education was not
a top priority. Jobs and the economy have taken the top rung on the ladder. However, protecting the investment in education is a high second. Health centers and health programs also remain high on the ladder.

The general feeling in Raleigh is that the individual counties should control where the stimulus money should go since a county has a better understanding of what is most important in their own area. The Stimulus Program is only a 2-year program and will not be recurring, i.e. putting money into safety net programs to help people get through these very tough times. In Raleigh, Rep. Jeffus said it did not look good. She emphasized that Raleigh is well aware of the many people who have lost their jobs and the overall impact this has had on the economy of our state. They are trying to look at cuts that will have the least negative impact on our State. All states are in a similar situation with some being worse than others.

Rep. Jeffus has been, and is, a staunch supporter of Cooperative Extension. Guilford County is very fortunate to have her represent us in Raleigh for over 18 years.

Those present were given the opportunity to pick up a new ‘Discover North Carolina Farms’ brochure and ‘Tastes of the Piedmont’ brochure both with maps included. Great information.

We then toured the Legacy and Community Gardens which were outstanding in every way. The Legacy Garden is maintained by volunteers and each section from shade plants to herb plants has its own caretaker. Many receptions and wedding are held here. The Community Garden started several years ago with 20 plots and now it has multiplied ten times over. It has become quite popular with an interesting variation of herbs, vegetables, and flowers. The two gardens were quite impressive and Rep. Jeffus enjoyed conversing with several who were present and working their ‘plot’.

End of Tour