Hello, Neighbors! I’m sure grateful for the recent rains. For the year, however, we’re still almost 20 inches below our typical annual rainfall of 50-52 inches. As we stand on the cusp of winter, now is a good time to:

WINTERIZE PIPES AND IRRIGATION SYSTEMS
Take these steps to avoid frozen – and potentially busted – pipes.
- Disconnect garden hoses from outdoor faucets, then drain the pipes and close the valve that supplies water to outdoor faucets
- Drain and winterize irrigation systems
- Open doors to allow heated air into laundry rooms and cabinets that house water pipes, especially where pipes are adjacent to exterior walls
- Before going to bed, set a drip in one or two interior faucets. Movement through the pipes helps prevent water from freezing.

PREVENT FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS
While it may be tough to avoid exchanging winter cold viruses with family members, we can take steps to keep those holiday gathering meals healthy. Don’t worry, I’m not recommending that you skip the gravy and pie. I’m talking about taking steps to avoid the most common causes of food-borne illness – cross contamination, improper cooking, and letting food stand out too long. Read more.

GET GARDENING QUESTIONS ANSWERED
On December 10, our Forsyth County Master Gardener Extension Volunteers will host the Ask a Master Gardener booth at the anniversary celebration for Earth Fare at The Collection at Forsyth, 3140 Ronald Reagan Boulevard, Cumming, GA. Come by with your lawn and garden questions from noon to 2 p.m.

BRING YOUR CHICKENS HOME TO ROOST
Cold temperatures and wild bird migrations bring the return of the avian influenza virus. Bringing backyard chickens into roofed enclosures is the best way to protect them from
infection by wild birds. Migratory birds, especially waterfowl, carry and spread avian influenza. On December 1, 2016, the Wild Bird Surveillance Program detected the virus in a hunter-harvest wild bird in Stewart County, GA. Avian influenza is a cold-hardy virus that is deadly to chickens, turkeys, and quail.

BRAG ON OUR EXTENSION VOLUNTEERS

Earlier this month, Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation presented our Forsyth County Master Naturalist Extension Volunteers with a First Place award in Community Improvement and Greening for their Anuran Monitoring project. A partnership with Keep Forsyth County Beautiful, FC Parks and Recreation Department, and University of North Georgia, this project assesses environmental health and tracks changes by identifying different species of frogs and toads and mapping their distribution throughout the county.

Because of their permeable skin and the fact that they spend the first part of their life cycle in water and the next part of it on land, frogs and toads – anurans – are important bio-indicators of stream and air quality. Previous studies found that 14 of Georgia’s 32 species of frogs and toads were present in Forsyth County. Since beginning the anuran monitoring program in August 2015, MNEVs have collected data that confirms the presence of 12 of those species. They have also detected changes in the distribution of frogs and toads after site preparation for large construction projects, and as wetlands along the Big Creek Greenway dried up during the recent drought.

Data collection continues year-round. As the project moves forward over the next several years, data will be compared to the baseline information gathered this year. The findings may be used to inform or influence land use decisions as urbanization continues in the county.

You can read more about this project in the Sunday, December 11 issue of Forsyth County News, and at http://fcmasternaturalists.com/.

START A NEW PROGRAM

Beginning in January, Forsyth County Extension will partner with FC Parks and Recreation Department to bring a unique program to Fowler Park. Soup ‘n Walk/Talk combines low-impact exercise (during temperate months), nature, and great food on the third Wednesday of each month. For each monthly session, Extension agents and trained volunteers will share expert knowledge on seasonal topics, and local restaurants

The University of Georgia is committed to the principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.
Forsyth County Extension, 875 Lanier 400 Parkway, Suite 158, Cumming, GA 30040
770-887-2418   www.ugaextension.com/forsyth
will provide seasonal soups and more. See the schedule. Registration is handled through Forsyth County Parks and Recreation Department.

WELCOME OUR NEW STAFF MEMBER
We are excited to welcome our new 4-H Program Assistant to our Forsyth County Extension staff. As a former member of our 4-H horse club, Caitlin Porter is well experienced with the 4-H program. We are lucky to have her on board, and look forward to the fresh ideas she will bring to our youth leadership development programs.

PREPARE FOR 4-H DPA GREATNESS
District Project Achievement (DPA) is an opportunity for 7th-12th grade 4-H’ers to tell others about their project of interest during a fun and eventful weekend at Rock Eagle 4-H Camp, March 10-12, 2017. To participate in DPA, 4-H’ers must create two things:

- A Portfolio, or record book of the 4-H’er’s work in their project area; and
- A Presentation to give before peers and judges at Rock Eagle

To help junior and senior level 4-H’ers prepare for DPA, our Forsyth County 4-H staff members are hosting a portfolio workshop.

DPA Portfolio Workshop
When: December 21, 2016, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Where: Forsyth County Extension Office
875 Lanier 400 Parkway, Building D, Cumming, GA
To Register: Contact Emily Addis or Jack Lowery at 770-887-2418

FRESH AND LOCAL FORSYTH
Yes, it’s winter, but our local farmers are still producing fresh, local foods. On the menu this month: tasty, healthy, economical chicken!

Poultry is the largest sector of Georgia’s agriculture industry. Over 100 counties, including Forsyth, produce over $1 million in poultry products at the farm level. Associated industries, such as transportation, processing, and retail sales create additional jobs and income value.

Warm up with some spicy gumbo featuring chicken thighs from Georgia on these chilly days. Packed with protein, dark meat cuts can be a less expensive and very flavorful option to add to soups and stews. To cut back on fat, remove the skin before using.
Barbara’s Louisiana Gumbo

Ingredients:
1 T plus 1/2 c vegetable oil
1 pound andouille sausage, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
2 pounds skinless chicken thighs (bone-in is fine)
1 T Creole seasoning (your choice of brand)
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 cup chopped onions
1 cup chopped celery
1 cup chopped bell peppers
1 t salt
3/4 t cayenne
Hot sauce

3 bay leaves
9 c low sodium chicken broth
½ cup chopped green onions
1 clove garlic
1 spring fresh thyme (1/2 T)
2 T chopped fresh parsley
1 T file powder
1 cup okra, cut into 1/4” pieces
2/3 pound shrimp
Brown rice

Directions:
In a large cast iron Dutch oven or other large cooking vessel, heat 1 T of the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and cook until browned. Remove the sausage with a slotted spoon and set aside on paper towels.

Season the chicken thighs with the Creole seasoning and add, in batches, to the fat remaining in the pot. Cook until well browned. Remove and let cool. Refrigerate the chicken until ready to use later.

Combine the remaining 1/2 c of oil and flour in the pot over medium heat to make the roux. Cook, stirring slowly and constantly, for approximately 25 minutes until it is dark brown, like the color of chocolate. You must stir continuously. If you burn the roux, you must start again.

Add the onions, celery, and bell peppers, and okra (if using fresh okra) and cook until soft, approximately 5 minutes. Add the reserved sausage, salt, cayenne, and bay leaves. Cook for 2 minutes, continuously stirring. Slowly, add the chicken stock and stir until combined. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 1 hour.

Add the reserved chicken to the pot and simmer for 1.5 hours, skimming off any fat that may rise to the surface. If using frozen okra, add in the last 5 minutes of cooking at this time, along with the shrimp.

Remove the pot from heat. Using a slotted spoon, remove the chicken thighs from the gumbo and place on a cutting board to cool slightly. Remove and discard the bay leaves. Pull the chicken away from the bone and shred. Discard the bones. Return the chicken meat to the pot. Stir in the green onions, parsley, and file powder.

Serve in large bowls over brown rice with hot sauce to taste.

HOLIDAY CLOSING
UGA Extension Forsyth County will be closed from December 26, 2016 through January 2, 2017. Please submit any soil, water, or forage samples to our office by Monday, December 19, 2016.

Your Extension staff wishes you joy and peace this holiday season!