University of Georgia Cooperative Extension is working hard for its constituents. The following are examples of Extension’s impact in the county over the past year.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Jackson County ranks in the top five counties in hay production in Georgia. The drought of 2016 resulted in low quality and quantity of forages in northeast Georgia. The lack of rainfall elevated nitrate levels in the region. Fifty hay producers tested their hay through the Jackson County Extension office, and one sample caused concern. A local producer submitted a sample with a nitrate level of an alarming 22,252 parts per million (ppm), an unacceptable level of nitrates according to the UGA Feed and Environmental Water Lab. The agent thought a sampling error may have occurred and contacted the producer. The agent found that the sample was retrieved as a grab sample and was not collected with a core sampling tool, which is the suggested means of retrieving a sample according to UGA. After visiting the farm, the agent resampled the hay using the correct tool and educated the producer on the proper sampling procedure. This sample returned with a nitrate level of 2,832 ppm, well below the level of concern. The Jackson County producer was able to feed the sampled hay without rationing and without supplementing. There were 50 bales of hay that were in this sample, valued at $55 per bale, a total value of $2,750. Fifty samples were processed through the Extension office, with an average sample of 25 bales per sample. The office tested a total of 1,250 bales, and all properly identified nitrate levels and quality. The value of these bales was $68,750, which does not include the value of saving and properly feeding cattle through the knowledge gained by testing the hay.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Jackson County Extension helps local schools meet Georgia Department of Education requirements. Georgia public schools are required to teach lessons based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). Fifth-grade lessons cover finance, government and public administration, technology, and marketing. These career areas have been strategically positioned in lessons during club meetings. One lesson comes from the UGA-developed curricula, Zoonotic Disease Detective and Wash Your Paws, Georgia. The activity simulates transmission of microorganisms, which are illuminated under a blacklight. An evaluation tracked the improvement in knowledge and intent: 70.4 percent of students had a better understanding of how government plays a role in disease prevention, 76.3 percent improved their understanding of how powerful marketing can be to public health, 38.2 percent of students plan to be more vigilant in appropriately covering their coughs and sneezes, 22.1 percent intend to improve their consistency in handwashing after using the restroom, and 73.5 percent of students have a greater comprehension of the proper steps in effective hand-washing.

Last year brought tremendous work in the 4-H specialty clubs. Archery continues to thrive in the shooting range. The BB, shotgun and 22 rimfire programs continue to be strong. The junior and senior robotics clubs surpassed fundraising efforts of $20,000 to build a world-class, award-winning robot that placed in the world finals. Judging teams, camping, leadership and public speaking clubs all had measurable growth. Jackson County 4-H continues to work with community partners on events to create opportunities for the more than 1,200 students in the 4-H program and will solidify continued growth across the board.
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Goods and services related to Georgia’s agriculture and natural resources affect each of the state’s communities every day. Agriculture is Georgia’s largest industry, and its direct and indirect economic impact totals $73.3 billion. More than 383,600 Georgia jobs are directly involved in commodity or food- and fiber-related industries.

UGA Extension faculty and staff play a key role in the success of this industry by sharing university-based research for Georgians to use on the farm and at home. Recommendations in areas including soil fertility, pest management, plant and crop varieties, water quality, and herd health and management focus on maximizing production and profits while minimizing environmental impacts.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension agents also provide homeowners and communities with information on lawn care, landscaping, gardening and water conservation through a variety of workshops. Some agents also work with schools on projects like community gardens and farm-to-school programs. Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteers give thousands of hours of service to their communities by answering questions in county offices and creating educational opportunities.

4-H Youth Development

As the youth development program of UGA Extension, 4-H is also part of a national network. Georgia 4-H reaches more than 170,000 fourth- through 12th-grade students across the state and helps students develop the knowledge, life skills and attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. This mission is fulfilled through hands-on learning experiences in agricultural and environmental awareness, leadership, communication skills, citizenship, energy conservation, health, and food and nutrition.

Georgia 4-H’ers are well-known for sharing their knowledge and volunteering throughout their communities. At the school and county levels, students participate in club meetings organized by 4-H Youth Development Extension agents. At the state level, students participate in competitions, summer camps and conferences. Some 4-H competitions and events are also offered at the regional and national levels.

Research indicates that, as a result of participating in 4-H, members are more engaged in their academic studies, less likely to be involved in risky behavior, and more likely to graduate from high school and continue their education.

Family & Consumer Sciences

Family and Consumer Sciences Extension specialists, agents and staff assist in addressing real-life issues faced by Georgians of all ages. They provide programs and the latest information on obesity, chronic disease, food and financial insecurity, family stresses, unhealthy housing, food safety and preservation, nutrition and more.

To help promote the positive development and safety of preschool, school-aged and adolescent youth, UGA Extension offers resources for parents, caregivers and others. Extension professionals in this program area lead consumer economics trainings and programs such as ServSafe®, Relationship Smarts, and PRIDE, a parent and teen driving education course.

Extension also promotes healthy lifestyles through statewide programs. Walk Georgia is a virtual, fitness-tracking resource that encourages physical fitness and healthy lifestyles to better the lives of Georgians. Other health programs managed by UGA include the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). These classes teach families how to stretch their food dollars, eat healthier meals and snacks, and reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.