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

PROJECT F.R.E.E.

UGA Extension has an exciting new campus–community partnership: Project F.R.E.E. (Fostering Relationship and Economic Enrichment). Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Project F.R.E.E. offers free relationship classes, financial capability classes and tax preparation. The project spans a 12-county area. Project F.R.E.E. promotes stable homes for children by teaching healthy relationship and co-parenting skills to new and expectant parents, foster caregivers and parents who have recently reunified with their children after foster care. Class participants learn and practice skills such as managing stress and conflict, increasing positive interactions with family members and building family strengths. By the end of the five-year project, Project F.R.E.E. hopes to reach 1,600 families. Project F.R.E.E. held its first Newton County classes in February and March 2017. For more information and to express interest in classes, visit the website www.ugaprojectfree.com.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Newton County is ideal for growing fresh produce for the greater Atlanta area. The Newton County Extension office is the leading promoter of local agriculture through educational programs, tours and internships. Newton County produce farmers have been reinforcing the importance of locally grown produce by opening their farms up to UGA Extension educational programs. In the summer of 2016, Crystal Organic Farm hosted 25 county agents from across the state for a walking tour showcasing the daily workings and practices on the farm. Day-to-day operations used to grow a quality product were the main topic. After the tour, UGA produce specialists taught agents and the farmer new and innovative ways of controlling pests on organic farms. The local Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program, conducted by UGA Extension, needed a farm to show participants how to run farm machinery for growing vegetables. Mitcham Farm in Newton County provided the 35 participants with this guided farm tour. The Newton County agent coordinated two on-farm internships with local farmers for prospective farmers who needed hands-on training.

SERVICE LEARNING THROUGH STEAM

Service-learning projects happen when youth take the initiative to identify a need, find a solution and lead others in attempting to address the need. Members of 4-H were encouraged to take ownership of current projects and to create new ones. Two youth began a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) project club to serve younger 4-H’ers, and the response showed the need for more STEAM programming. The agent solicited ideas from youth, and 4-H members took off! Eight middle and high school 4-H’ers and one volunteer planned five days of curriculum used in a day camp and at a summer program, where one youth led a 3-D printing service project that allowed 4-H’ers to make prosthetic hands for kids, and two youth completed STEM ambassador certification. Two youth were selected for the Georgia 4-H Communications and Technology Team. One 4-H’er earned a $500 grant to expand the prosthetic project with the purchase of a 3-D printer for 4-H! Everyone at STEAM camp reported being more excited about science afterward; 100 percent of Teen Leaders reported learning lessons on leadership and teaching. Six of the eight youth have continued work on STEAM-related service projects for other youth in the community since the camp, and two new 4-H’ers have applied to the team.
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, with $74 billion in direct and indirect economic impact. More than 411,000 Georgia jobs are involved directly 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 – a virtual, fitness–tracking resource – encourages improving physical fitness and healthy lifestyles in order 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.