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.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Horse club, horse show and horse quiz bowl are only a handful of the many equine activities that Banks County 4-H offers youth. However, there are several major barriers that prevent some interested youths from participating in equine activities. A lack of money, not owning a horse and not having knowledge about horses was more than enough to discourage many Banks County youths from participating in 4-H equine programs.

Banks County Extension Agent Lauren Morris and Grove River Ranch Owner CJ Farmer felt there was a need to increase participation in Banks County 4-H equine activities, so the two organizations worked together to revamp the Banks County 4-H Horse Club by addressing the various barriers that prevented growth in the program.

To make the program more accessible to all youths, the Banks County 4-H Club provided horse club scholarships to youth who requested them. CJ Farmer provided lesson horses to all horse club riders to help those youths who did not own their own horses. Lauren Morris provided hands-on learning about horse safety and helped each horse club member complete equine lessons in the “Georgia 4-H Horse Project – The Novice Horseman” to increase members’ knowledge about horses. Banks County 4-H Horse Club held 10 meetings from September 2017 through May 2018 with 24 members, four horse-club teen leaders, three volunteers and three Banks County 4-H staff.

The Banks County 4-H Horse Club increased its membership from six members in 2016-2017 to 24 members in 2017-2018. The increase of 18 students in a single year is a testament that working to overcome common barriers in 4-H horse programs is well worth the effort.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Banks County’s cattle, hay and forage crop has a gross farm-gate income of more than $10 million, ranking second only to poultry ($255.4 million) in farm-gate income for the county. The county agent — working with local livestock associations and agricultural producers throughout the county — identified key factors in successful cattle operations. Feed efficiency, nutrition and supplemental feeding, economics, hay harvest and storage, and vaccination programs were among the subjects targeted. Monthly production meetings were set up to address these issues.

Banks County is a rural, agricultural community which has a large presence on Interstate 85 for retail sales. With the potential for a shift toward nonagrarian populations in the county, it is imperative that this segment of the population be educated on the benefits of agriculture, in terms of both the economy and community enhancement. The county agent, working with the agricultural awards committee, set up an agriculture tour highlighting the various agricultural entities that have a major economic impact on the county. The tour had 40 attendees consisting of elected officials, community leaders, civic club representatives and business owners outside of the agriculture industry, highlighting a second-generation family egg farm that produces, packs and distributes eggs for grocery and food-service customers throughout the Southeast U.S. Their operation is supported by 1.7 million egg-laying hens. Another tour highlighted a family farm that has been in operation for more than 100 years. They produce and sell fruits and vegetables, operate two produce and fresh-fruit stores, and offer meeting facilities as well as an agritourism operation.
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 $73.7 billion. More than 392,400 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.