AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Columbia County ranks No. 1 in Georgia farm-gate value for ornamental horticulture, or the production of flowers and landscape plants. Last year, the UGA Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) agent made more than 19,000 contacts and 300 site visits related to homeowner horticulture. Of special interest, Columbia County Cultivators meetings foster an educational partnership with industry professionals and homeowners. The monthly meetings host UGA specialists and industry professionals and cover a range of topics, from weed control in turfgrass to organic gardening.

For those who desire intensive training, courses for Master Gardener Extension Volunteers are held biannually. The Master Gardener program is an 11-week class that covers a broad range of horticultural topics. The goal of the Master Gardener program is to educate horticulture enthusiasts so that they are equipped to volunteer and disseminate horticultural information to the public. The current Master Gardener graduating class was very productive. They donated 3,851 hours to the community and the Extension office, worth a total value of $92,963.14, throughout 2018.

Another special interest this past year was the Environment Matters workshop that provided public education for the environmental protection of natural water resources and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer system. This partnership program educated citizens about the effects of rain on hard, impervious surfaces that cause pollutants to make their way to natural water resources. Participants learned how landscape grasses and plantings help reduce pollutants from entering vital natural waters by slowing down water runoff and acting as a filter. The two-part structure of the program included an environmental presentation by the ANR agent followed by a presentation by the coordinating Columbia County department responsible for oversight of the environmental matter.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Columbia County 4-H prides itself on building active citizens for our future. Some projects accomplished in 2018 include raising more than $6,000 for 4-H scholarships through Vidalia onion sales, $3,000 for 4-H general funds through Georgia-grown pecan sales, donating more than 1,100 pounds in soda can tabs in support of Ronald McDonald House Charities, ringing the Salvation Army bell for 64 hours, collecting $3,147 for the Salvation Army, and collecting more than 800 towels for pets and Columbia County Animal Control through the Towels for Tiggers program.

There are more than 2,800 active students in the Columbia County 4-H program. Through a partnership with the Columbia County Board of Education, the program is able to hold approximately 100 monthly club meetings in every elementary and middle school in the county. Monthly programs focus on leadership, citizenship, the environment and public speaking. Columbia County 4-H structures programming to provide experiential learning that complements the school curriculum and increases student writing-test scores. The 4-H staff also works in conjunction with the water and sewer department to implement a best management education plan for youth stormwater education. In 2018, Columbia County 4-H provided 88 programs for more than 2,800 students.
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 programs and the latest information and 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.