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
The Laurens County 4-H Club has nearly 800 youth members and is growing. 4-H youth-development programs are available to fourth- through 12th-graders in Laurens County. Laurens County 4-H partners with the Laurens County School System and the Dublin City School System to deliver 4-H in all fifth-grade classrooms. Through in-school club meetings, more than 680 fifth-grade students are learning how to prepare and present a public speaking demonstration for Project Achievement. Through the 4-H Project Achievement process, youth explore an area of interest, gain knowledge and skills in that area, and prepare a public-speaking demonstration to present in front of their peers.

Laurens County 4-H reaches more than 100 middle school students before school at East Laurens Middle School and West Laurens Middle School. High school students meet after school at the Laurens County Extension Office. Through 4-H, youth engage in experiences that enhance their academic content, personal development, healthier lifestyles and civic engagement.

Laurens County 4-H offers several specialty clubs that provide experiences for young people to learn by doing through various educational hands-on activities that teach problem solving, creative and critical thinking and build excitement and awareness of these important areas and their impact on our future. Laurens County 4-H specialty clubs include Horse Club; livestock showing; Project SAFE (Shooting Awareness, Fun and Education) BB, Shotgun and .22 Rifle clubs; judging teams; community service projects; citizenship programs; healthy living programs, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs; summer camp; and other summer activities.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Laurens County is a very diverse agricultural county. In 2016, the farm-gate value of agriculture in the county was $55 million. The Laurens County Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) agent coordinated with UGA Extension specialists to provide five row-crop production educational programs for commercial agriculture producers in Laurens County. Two hundred twenty-nine people attended these programs. In collaboration with the Laurens County Library, the ANR agent developed and presented six home-gardening programs with 64 individuals in attendance. The ANR agent had more than 2,500 individual contacts through face-to-face interactions, phone calls, office visits and home/farm visits. Farmers, agribusinesses and homeowners submitted more than 1,000 soil, plant, water and forage samples for testing at UGA’s Agricultural and Environmental Services Laboratories.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES
The Laurens County Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) agent taught 43 nutrition, food safety, and food preservation-related classes to 717 participants, resulting in 1,876 educational contact hours.

The agent is a certified ServSafe® instructor and teaches the manager and food handler courses. For the third year in a row, 100 percent of high school students who took the class passed the online exam and received certification. Seventy-six percent of adult participants passed the exam and received certification from the National Restaurant Association.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) uses federal, state and local resources to provide research-based nutrition education to low-income families with children, teaching them how to purchase and prepare nutritious meals on a budget. Participants learn to eat healthier while decreasing sodium, improving food safety and increasing exercise, which results in improved health and well-being, reduced health care costs and less absenteeism from work. In 2018, EFNEP reached 324 adults and 18 youths in the Laurens County region.
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.