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

The primary agricultural enterprise in Liberty County is timber, but the county is also home to school and community gardens, Christmas tree farms, fruit and vegetable production, hay pastures, beef cattle, and small ruminants. The Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) agent has helped growers increase their production through on-site consultations and by sharing valuable information regarding plant varieties, innovative propagation methods such as grafting, and integrated pest and disease management strategies. Hay and beef cattle producers also received assistance testing forage quality and making nutrient-management decisions. Water quality, coastal resiliency and conservation also are important program focuses.

In 2018, the ANR Pollinator Program gained regional attention. Residents from seven counties received research-based information on pollinator decline and conservation, and valuable community partnerships developed. Liberty County Elementary School, Liberty County High School and Keep Liberty County Beautiful collaborated with the UGA Extension ANR agent to create the county’s first UGA Pollinator Spaces. These gardens provide pollinators with needed habitat and serve as venues for environmental discovery and experiential learning for students, after-school programs and adults.

As more people move into the county, homeowner needs increase. Commonly used services include soil, water and plant testing through UGA laboratories and on-site consultations. Residents also benefit from county educational programs developed to address local needs and interests. The ANR agent maintains a weekly column in the Coastal Courier where information about agricultural and natural resource topics are shared.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

With an increased focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects in schools, the Liberty County 4-H program has been recognized as a partner in public education within the community. All fifth-grade students attending school within Liberty County participate in monthly 4-H lessons concentrating on building science-literacy skills. These hands-on activities meet the Georgia Standards of Excellence and reinforce content being taught in the classrooms.

During spring 2018, Liberty Elementary School completed the process of becoming a Georgia Department of Education STEM-Certified School. Schools completing this certification process must demonstrate a STEM vision and culture, offer a unique and explicit STEM curriculum, and provide STEM teachers ongoing STEM professional learning opportunities. Less than 3 percent of the more than 2,200 public schools in Georgia have obtained the STEM certification.

As a community partner, the Liberty County 4-H Club presented guest instructors in the STEM classrooms, helping teachers achieve the National Science Teacher Association’s goals of STEM education, developing inquiry and processing skills through first-hand exploration, building instruction around students’ conceptual framework, organizing content around broad conceptual themes, and integrating math and communication skills into science instruction. Eight lessons about soils, plants, and animals were taught to kindergarten, first-, second- and fourth-grade STEM classes. More than 300 students have benefited from this partnership, and one student commented, “I believe that science can change lives worldwide.”
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.

Learn more at: extension.uga.edu

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