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
Agriculture is a driving economic force in Stephens County with an estimated farm-gate value of $52.1 million. The vast majority of agricultural production can be attributed to the thriving poultry and cattle industries in the county. Broiler production is particularly important, with a total farm-gate value of more than $27.5 million. Beef cattle production is also very important with a value of $9.1 million. Due to the thriving beef industry in Stephens County, hay production is also very prevalent with a value of more than $1.1 million. There are a total of 218 farms in Stephens County spanning 18,409 acres, with an average of 84 acres per farm.

The purpose of UGA Extension in Stephens County is to provide unbiased, research-based information to the agricultural producers, homeowners and businesses of Stephens County. Through university resources, the UGA Extension office is able to provide support in many different agricultural and natural resource topic areas. Some of the topics include soil fertility, proper water use, safe pesticide application, crop management, pasture management and home gardening. The Extension office also provides many testing services to the people of Stephens County. Soil, water and forage tests are routinely submitted to the soil and water laboratory for analyses. Effective weed identification, insect identification and plant–disease diagnosis are also routinely done by the county agent to ensure accurate recommendations to agricultural producers, homeowners and businesses. In-office consultations and on-farm visits are a vital part of connecting with the residents of Stephens County and helping them solve their agricultural and natural resource issues.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Litter is one of the most visible and persistent environmental issues our community and towns are facing today. In Toccoa and Stephens County, the effects of litter and blight are seen throughout the county. It reduces the aesthetic appeal of our community, pollutes our water supply and decreases economic growth. Research shows that providing environmental education to youth at an early age will help discourage littering and create attentiveness to litter and abatement in our communities. Education and behavior change are essential to create a generation of environmental stewards of our world. To address this issue, the Stephens County 4-H agent presented an environmental education program in each fifth-grade 4-H class meeting. This curriculum focused on litter and pollution, decomposition and conservation. To enhance the information gained in the environmental education lessons, the Stephens County 4-H Club sponsored an antilitter poster contest for fifth-grade students. The students created an antilitter slogan and artwork to promote litter awareness. Changing attitudes and influencing behavior are most effective through education and experiential learning. Through a post-evaluation, 100 percent of 4-H members were more likely not to litter, saw litter as a problem in our community, and were motivated to share the knowledge gained with others. Changes in attitudes and behaviors are not limited to the 4-H’ers, but are transferred to their parents and peers.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES
The Stephens County 4-H agent addresses Family and Consumer Sciences areas of food safety, nutrition and child development to local citizens through weekly radio information segments, community home and health fairs, and informational brochures.
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.