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

Walker County agriculture supports an $81.9 million farm-gate value with tremendous crop diversity. Major crop commodities of poultry, beef and row crops combine with livestock including dairy, horses, sheep, goats and alpacas; and small fruits including apples, blueberries and muscadines. Numerous vegetables, greenhouse production, turfgrass, honeybees, timber, Christmas trees and other crops are produced on over 525 farms. UGA Extension in Walker County connects the agricultural community to current UGA and land-grant university research and production advancements to support the diverse crop clientele. In 2018, our office provided 270 laboratory testing services for soil, feed and forage, animal waste, and water quality. Results allow agricultural users to maintain crop and soil health, balance fertilizer and nutrient applications, and make knowledgeable decisions concerning plant, crop and livestock nutrient needs while protecting water quality and our environment. Water testing provides specific information, allowing clients to make knowledgeable, informed decisions concerning potential treatments. Our office serves each individual’s needs, discussing options one-on-one, based on site-specific laboratory results.

Pest management on the farm or at home is a common concern. Pesticide application is serious business. Our office strives to reach private and commercial applicators, property owners and residents with current changes in rules, labels, laws, application methods, pest alerts and cultural practices. Communication is critical to reaching agricultural and green industry clients engaged in pest management on sometimes short notice. We worked to broaden our communication networks. The year 2018 allowed Walker County Extension to celebrate the retirement of agricultural agent Norman Edwards in April and welcome Wade Hutcheson on September 1.

4-H Youth Development

Youth need opportunities to practice and assume leadership roles while building the life skills that lead to safe and healthy choices. Walker County 4-H members became leaders in the local community by teaching various lessons from the Underwriters Laboratories Safety Smart curriculum as well as the LifeSmarts OTC Medicine Safety Mentoring Project. Four students each had a part in teaching 15 separate classes, creating awareness flyers and a YouTube video, building an online survey, and evaluating each of the programs. Students ranging from elementary to high school were taught lessons on environmental stewardship. Elementary students were also taught lessons on being healthy and fit, being honest and real, travel safety, and online safety. Middle-school students were taught lessons on drug label awareness and medication safety. The general public was made aware of the dangers of over-the-counter medicines and participated in an online survey to gauge local knowledge of over-the-counter medicines. The youth leaders reported learning how to plan, implement and evaluate programs through this process. They also were able to practice speaking to school officials to secure permission to present lessons during school hours. Their comments included, “I learned how important it is to teach students about over-the-counter medicine safety. It was shocking to see how very few had never seen a drug label but also admitted to self-medicating themselves.” Student instruction yielded impact to 271 direct contacts and more than 1,980 indirect contacts.
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.