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

With the ever-expanding human population and the increasing migration of residents to rural areas, the occurrence of human-wildlife interaction is on the rise. Over the past year, the Wilkes County Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) agent has received many calls concerning a variety of backyard nuisance wildlife issues, from armadillos to squirrels. Using county funds, the Wilkes County ANR agent purchased several traps to be loaned to residents and used for educational demonstrations. For homeowners who chose to utilize these traps, the ANR agent visited their property and assisted them in properly setting the traps. The cost of nuisance wildlife removal in Georgia ranges between $150 and $800 — depending on the nuisance wildlife control technician, the species being removed and the landscape of the area where the animal was being removed — with the average cost being around $350. Based on these figures, for the short period of time that the traps have been loaned out, the Wilkes County ANR agent saved homeowners an estimated $2,400 per year in removal costs collectively.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Commercial goat livestock projects provide an experiential learning approach to animal-production agriculture. It has been proven that showing livestock generally develops students’ communication, teamwork, leadership and decision-making skills. Local farmers, the 4-H Extension Program Development Team and community stakeholders requested that UGA Extension in Wilkes County better educate youth on animal production agriculture. Wilkes County Extension addressed this need by offering a statewide opportunity for youth to attend the Small Town Show Down Commercial Doe Show. This show enables exhibitors to gain hands-on experience. In 2018, 45 Georgia 4-H and FFA members exhibited 80 animal projects. The committee hopes to increase participation to 50 exhibitors due to popularity and location. Committee members raised $12,000 locally to be paid back to the participants. Students refer back to their experiences for skills that help in everyday life. 4-H’er Jake Tucker stated, “Stock showing teaches you responsibility and hard work to be proud of for a lifetime. There is no better experience than learning by doing hands-on.”

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES

As the prevalence of poor nutrition, physical inactivity, tobacco use and access to fast-food restaurants continues to increase, so have the rates of obesity among adults and children. In Wilkes County, 33 percent of adults are obese, with chronic diseases contributing to a significant portion of the county death rate. Obesity contributes to the development of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer and other chronic diseases. UGA’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is working to alleviate health disparities imposed by socioeconomic status by providing low-income Georgians with the knowledge, skills and resources to improve nutrition practices and increase physical activity.

The program is delivered through sessions outlined in the Food Talk curriculum to address barriers to healthful lifestyles that are encountered by families with limited resources. Participants observe food demonstrations and taste the recipes prepared free of charge. In 2018, Wilkes County Extension directly reached 12 youth and 53 adults with direct education sessions, representing households of 193 individuals. Community collaborators volunteered 44 hours of their time, valued at $1,047 of in-kind services.
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.