I. Executive Summary

Bladen County is the 4th largest county in North Carolina with a total area of 875 square miles. The population of the county is 32,491 (est. 2001) with 36.9 persons per square mile. The racial makeup of the county is 57.2% White, 37.9% Black, 2.0% American Indian, and a growing Hispanic/Latino population of 3.7%. The per capita income is $14,735 (1999) with 21.0% of the population below the poverty level. Persons under 18 years old comprise 24.6% of the population with 14.2% over the age of 65.

Agriculture and related industries are a significant contributor to the local economy. The value of farm products at the farm level for 2002 is estimated at 214 million dollars. Bladen County has a diverse agricultural economy and is number 1 in blueberry production, number 3 in hogs, and number 10 in peanuts in North Carolina. Carolina Food Processors is the largest employer with over 4000 employees and processes approximately 34,000 hogs per day.

An environmental scan was conducted in 2003 to identify issues and trends effecting Bladen County. Extension staff working with local advisory committees and members gathered input from citizens of the county. Questionnaires, meetings and interviews were the techniques used to gather the data on issues and trends facing the county.

The following is a list of issues and trends identified by the environmental scan:

- Lack of economic growth – job creation
- The impact of livestock environmental regulations on industry viability
- Family health and the lack of quality health care
- Obesity of youth and adults
- Compliance with waste management regulations and record keeping requirements
- Crime prevention among youth
- Farm business management and marketing skills
- Tobacco buyout and the economic impact
- Lack of a county convention center
- Agricultural literacy of Bladen County citizens especially the youth

Cooperative Extension with our local resources and our access to the resources of North Carolina State University is positioned to provide educational programs, technical assistance, and leadership in addressing county issues. Identified issues and trends are the basis on which this County Plan of Work is prepared. Continuing to work with and through our local advisory system, county government, and all the citizens of Bladen County, the staff will plan, develop, implement and evaluate our educational programs and efforts to make sure we serve the needs as identified by Bladen County.
II. Major Focus Areas and Objectives in Bladen County Extension's Long Range Plan

Bladen County Cooperative Extension will address 5 major focus areas:

- Enhancing Agricultural, Forest and Food Systems
- Developing Responsible Youth
- Strengthening and Sustaining Families
- Conserving and Improving the Environment and Natural Resources
- Building Quality Communities

- Enhancing Agriculture, Forest and Food Systems

The following agents will have programming responsibilities for this focus area:

Becky Spearman, Livestock Agent
Ryan Harrelson, Field Crops Agent
Corey Crabtree, Horticulture Agent
James Cochran, Area Specialized Agent, Poultry
Kent Wooten, Extension Director

Based on identified issues and trends for Bladen County, the following objectives will be addressed:

- Animal, poultry and aquaculture producers including limited resource audiences will implement practices or enterprises that will achieve individual and family goals related to profitability and quality of life.
- Bladen County citizens (farm and non-farm) will respond to issues of mutual concern that relate to production agriculture, including human nutrition, nuisance identification, food quality assurance, quality of life, economic impacts, the appropriate treatment of farm animals, and environmental stewardship.
- Youth involved in animal projects will improve personal development and learn leadership and life skills related to animal husbandry including: record keeping, finances, producing high quality animal products, sportsmanship, and appropriate treatment of animals.
- Field crop growers will implement recommended and potential production practices and systems, investigate innovative agricultural opportunities, develop business and human resource plans, and explore marketing options to ensure continued farm productivity and profits and quality of life.
- Commercial horticulture growers will implement recommended and potential production practices and systems, investigate innovative agricultural opportunities, develop business and human resource plans, and explore marketing options to ensure continued farm productivity and profits and quality of life.
- Turf and Green Industry growers will implement recommended and potential production practices and systems, investigate innovative agricultural opportunities, develop business and human resource plans, and explore marketing options to ensure continued farm productivity and profits and quality of life.
Part-time, limited resource and other farmers will increase the quality of life and the sustainability of their farms through crop diversification, integration of appropriate alternative opportunities and enterprises, intensive management practices, water and nutrient management, business management, and expanded markets.

FORESTRY CONSERVATION, MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING: Program participants will improve the economic and environmental sustainability of North Carolina’s forest resources.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT: Participants will improve management of wildlife and fisheries resources.

Limited resource people and other audiences involved in various aspects of agriculture and natural resource management will understand the health and safety concerns inherent in their work and will develop skill and techniques allowing them to adopt appropriate practices to reduce illnesses and injuries.

Target audiences will adopt best management practices for residential, industrial and community pest issues.

Through the consumer horticulture program, consumers will increase their knowledge and adopt practices concerning proper plant selection, cultural practices, and pest management strategies that maximize plant performance while minimizing inputs, and protect environmental resources.

Youth will increase their knowledge of plants, insects, and the environment while learning new gardening skills through participation in 4-H, school, and special interest classes, and activities.

Developing Responsible Youth

The following agent and staff will have primary programming responsibility for this focus area:

Angela Redinger, 4-H and Youth Development Agent  
Kathy Cooper, 4-H Program Associate  
Johnice Autry, Teen Court/Restitution Coordinator  
Elizabeth Hackstall, Life Skills Coordinator  
Stephanie Hollis, Friends of Youth Director

Based on identified issues and trends for Bladen County, the following objectives will be addressed:

Long term support systems in 4-H clubs will develop competent youth by building internal and external assets through life skill development.

Youth involved in special interest educational programs will show increased life skill knowledge and subject matter skill.

Youth involved in workforce preparation programs will acquire improved understanding of occupational career choice options, career preparation options, entrepreneurship knowledge and competencies required in entry level positions.

Youth in high risk environments will participate in community based programs resulting in opportunities for the youth to acquire internal and external assets.

To increase the quality of after school programs by helping to provide safe, nurturing and appropriate environments for children, through Cooperative Extension work.
• To increase availability of quality school age care as a result of collaboration and/or increased resource development, through Cooperative Extension work.
• School based youth educators and administrators will be actively engaged in the design, delivery and revisions of programs, which enrich school-based curriculum design and delivery; resulting in improved academic performance.
• Provide youth experiential educational opportunities in cooperative, nurturing, residential camping environments that stimulate the development of life skills, while focusing on the mental, physical and social growth of the individual.
• Youth and adult volunteerism will strengthen a community's capacity for positive youth development.
• Youth and adults will be engaged in positive community leadership roles.

• **Strengthening and Sustaining Families**

The following agent and staff will have primary programming responsibility for this focus area:

  Sandra Kelly, Family and Consumer Science Agent  
  Earlene Blue, EFNEP Program Assistant

Based on identified issues and trends for Bladen County, the following objectives will be addressed:

• **Building Healthy Families.** Bladen County citizens, including limited resource individuals/families will improve the quality of their lives through eating healthy, being active, handling food safely, managing resources for food security, and practicing health-promoting behaviors.
• **Building Strong Families.** Families, including those with limited resources, and those who work with families will gain knowledge and practice skills in understanding lifespan development, positive interpersonal relationships, and improving quality of life.
• **Fostering Resiliency for Families in Transition.** Bladen County citizens, including those with limited resources, will develop skills and strategies to manage effectively their personal finances through expected and unexpected economic change and life events.
• **Developing Leadership and Community Capacity.** Individuals and groups will develop leadership skills and take action to maximize development and use of community resources leading to improved quality of life for all families.
• **Promoting Safe and Healthy Environments.** Bladen County citizens, including those with limited resources, will improve the safety and health of their working and living environments.
• **Conserving and Improving the Environment and Natural Resources**

The following agents will have programming responsibilities for this focus area:

Becky Spearman, Livestock Agent  
Ryan Harrelson, Field Crops Agent  
Corey Crabtree, Horticulture Agent  
James Cochran, Area Specialized Agent, Poultry  
Kent Wooten, Extension Director

Based on identified issues and trends for Bladen County, the following objectives will be addressed:

• Livestock, poultry, and fish producers will adopt and promote economically and environmentally sound practices to manage water and waste materials for the purpose of improving air and water quality protection.

• Field crop producers will adopt and promote economically and environmentally-sound practices to manage water, soil, nutrients and pesticides for the purpose of enhancing environmental quality.

• Green industry, greenhouse, fruit, vegetable, and turf growers and turf landscape professionals will adopt and promote economically and environmentally sound practices to manage water, soil, nutrients and pesticides for the purpose of enhancing environmental quality.

• Extension will network with agricultural service agencies and allied agribusiness professionals to promote economically and environmentally sound practices for the purpose of improving air and water quality protection.

• ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS: Participants, particularly youth, will increase their appreciation for and knowledge of biological diversity and ecosystem management.

• NATURAL RESOURCE DECISION MAKING: Limited resource and other audiences confronted with a wide range of viewpoints on natural resource and environmental management issues will gain knowledge, awareness, understanding, and skills to develop plans for overcoming barriers that prevent them from realizing the link between informed decision making and the capacity to sustain natural resources.

• WATERSHED MANAGEMENT: Watershed residents, businesses, industries, and government officials will adopt and promote effective practices to conserve and protect ground and surface water and other related natural resources.

• PESTICIDE CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING PROGRAM: All commercial pesticide applicators, public operators, consultants, dealers and private pesticide applicators will be certified and trained in pesticide BMP to protect worker health, crop safety, beneficial insect populations and other environmental protection issues.
Building Quality Communities

The following agents will have programming responsibilities for this focus area:

Ryan Harrelson, Field Crops Agent
Corey Crabtree, Horticulture Agent
Kent Wooten, Extension Director

Based on identified issues and trends for Bladen County, the following objectives will be addressed:

• Citizens and local officials will become more aware, better informed, and more involved on issues regarding community growth and change, land use, and community design, community infrastructure, and organizational and community leadership.
• Citizens and Private Community Leaders Will Use Business and Economic Development Concepts to Implement Sustainable Economic Opportunities and Enterprises.
• Paid staff and volunteers working in partnership will design and manage volunteer systems where manager volunteers involve other volunteers to help accomplish mutual goals.
• Solid Waste Management: Elected officials, business and industry representatives, youth, educators, citizens and solid waste managers will learn solid waste management alternatives and their consequences and implement strategies that protect public health and the environment.
• Individuals, communities, and businesses will increase knowledge and adopt practices to improve preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters and emergencies and to increase safety in the personal and work environment.

III. Relationship to County Government Objectives

Cooperative Extension will serve as a resource before, during and after any emergencies or natural disasters. Extension will provide assistance and educational materials prior to emergencies or natural disasters to prepare citizens for such events. Extension will work through Emergency Management Services to help provide basic assistance and comfort to residents during emergencies or natural disasters. After such events, Extension staff will evaluate damages and access losses to crops, livestock, farm buildings and equipment, stored commodities, farm and timber property, feed, and supplies. Reports will be completed and submitted as requested by Emergency Management Services.

Extension will work with Economic Development in helping promote growth in business and industry within the county. Assistance will be given by providing data and technical assistance as appropriate.

Extension is committed to a collaborative approach in solving county needs and seeks out opportunities to build a working relationship with county government to meet its objectives.
IV. Diversity Statement

Bladen County Cooperative Extension is committed to serving all the citizens of Bladen County. Every effort will be made to reach new and under served audiences within the county. Limited resource farmers and families will be identified and targeted to address their needs. The growing Hispanic population in the county will be targeted by working with local ministries to translate Extension materials and programs. Educational programs will be conducted in locations that are convenient and accessible to new and under served audiences. Mass media efforts will be made promoting educational programs/events. Development of announcements, posters, etc., will be placed in public places frequented by minorities. Personal contacts will be made to minority clientele encouraging their participation. Contacts will be made with community groups that can assist in informing minorities of available programs.

V. Primary Delivery and Evaluation Systems

Bladen County Cooperative Extension staff will use several methods to deliver our educational programs based on available resources and targeted audiences. Emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency will be major considerations in delivery method selection. Collaboration with other agencies and partners will be utilized to more effectively deliver our programs.

Delivery methods include formal meetings such as workshops, conferences, educational meetings, and demonstrations. Television, radio, news articles, and web sites will be used to reach targeted and general audiences. Newsletters, brochures, videos, and curriculum will be used to deliver educational programs to selected audiences. One-on-one visits will be used as appropriate.

Program evaluation is essential to program success and continuation. Program evaluation will include on-going assessments of the effectiveness and viability of planned and implemented programs. Such assessment will be conducted via observations, interviews, data analysis, testimonials, questionnaires, and surveys as appropriate.

VI. Contact Information

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