MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

We here at Cooperative Extension are very proud of our work in serving the citizens of Bladen County. Please take a few minutes and review our 3rd quarter report of "Extension Highlights". The summer has been very busy with numerous educational programming efforts and the orientation of some new staff members. We are excited that we have a full staff covering all our program areas. Our Extension Highlights cover only a few of our accomplishments. We welcome your inquiries into any area that may be of further interest to you. I hope you find this report informative and please let us know how we can better serve our clients.

Kent D. Wooten, CED

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Administration - Kent D. Wooten, County Extension Director

We here at Cooperative Extension are continually evaluating our educational programs in an effort to improve the quality of service we provide to the citizens of Bladen County. Mr. Danny Shaw, South Central District Director visited our office on August 10 to evaluate our educational programs. Danny requested to visit some of the clients we serve to see and hear first-hand the impacts we are making in their lives. We referred to the day as "Extension in Action". We were able to visit and observe our youth in action during 4-H Summer Academy, Friends of Bladen County, and Youth, and Youth Livestock, a beef producer’s finishing operation, a newly established vineyard, and Extension and Community Association volunteers helping new mothers and their babies. We were very proud of our accomplishments and Danny offered suggestions to help improve our efforts even more.

Professional Improvement

Sandra Kelly, our Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, recently completed a series of day workshops and exercises for “New and Aspiring County Extension Directors”. The series focused on building leadership skills for our leaders of today and tomorrow. Sessions included Budgeting, Effective Customer Service, Staff Development, Ethics, Performance Appraisals, Recruitment, Team Building, and Conflict Resolution. Sandra commented that one thing she learned about being an effective leader is understanding others’ personality types and how important it is in successful communication. We are very proud of Sandra and because of her leadership abilities; she has been assigned some staff development responsibilities for this year.

Staff Update

As of July 1, I am delighted to report that we are fully staffed! We have gone through many changes over the past two years but with change come opportunities. One such opportunity has been putting together a staff that can meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. We will always strive to improve, because our world does not stand still, but I am proud of where we are today.

4-H and Youth Development - Angela Redinger, Extension Agent, 4-H

Bladen County 4-H had a series of “Fantastic Adventures” this summer. 4-H Camp, Summer Academy, and numerous trips were among just some of what 4-H had to offer. These events were held in collaboration with our partners including Bladen HealthWatch, Bladen Fitness Center, Parks & Recreation, Jones Lake State Park, Tumbling Creek Educational Forest, NC Wildlife Commission, United Way, and many 4-H Volunteers. Fundraising efforts brought in $5,355 to offer educational opportunities for Bladen County youth in 4-H programs this summer.

The Bladen Lakes Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Squires Hardwoods, and the Wake County Wildlife Club all helped to sponsor three youth to attend Fur, Fish ‘N Game camp. Campers studied wildlife, taxidermy, orienteering, aquatic biology, and game management. They explored career opportunities and learned firearm safety while earning their Hunter Safety Certification.

Ten youth attended a more traditional week long 4-H Camp which included activities such as swimming, archery, rifelry, woodworking, and horseback riding. These youth were sponsored, in part, by the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, and 4-H Teen Court, Life Skills, and Friends of Youth programs. A one night mini camp was also offered and eleven youth experienced these same activities in two days without the stress of being away from home.

This year’s 4-H Summer Academy involved over 200 Bladen County youth offering them the opportunity to learn all about “Fantastic Adventures in Food, Fun, and Fitness”. We felt that it was important to incorporate a healthy snack break and physical movement into every class to help keep youth on the path to living a healthy lifestyle.

Trips were also included in our summer activities, giving youth the chance to visit places such as “Alligator Adventure” first-hand. The seventy-three sessions included as part of the 4-H Summer Academy were led by Cooperative Extension staff members, partners and volunteers, allowing us to offer a wide variety of programs for Bladen County youth.
Field Crops - Ryan Harrelson, Extension Agent, Field Crops

In 2005, the peanut acreage decreased from 6,164 in 2004 to 5,068 acres in Bladen County. A decrease in contract prices and limitation in production quantity are two of the main variables in the decrease of peanuts planted in 2005. Although with a decrease in peanut acreage there were still new growers entering into peanut production in Bladen County this year. One of the major management decisions for peanut farmers is when to harvest. Bladen County Cooperative Extension in collaboration with the Crop Science Department at North Carolina State University held a “Pod Blasting” Field Day to measure peanut maturity. Nineteen farmers attended the pod blasting on a local farm and brought 42 samples for testing. Farmers were able to better estimate when to begin digging peanuts for harvesting, some as many as ten days later than they expected. An estimated 26% of the peanut acreage in the county reached a higher maturity than if the pod blaster had not been used. This resulted in an increased gross income of $9,200 per farmer that participated.

Family and Consumer Sciences - Sandra Kelly, Extension Agent, FCS

Under the area of Family and Consumer Sciences, Extension and Community Association, Inc. (ECA) is the adult volunteer organization of North Carolina Cooperative Extension. One part of the mission of ECA is to strengthen families through volunteer work. In response to the recent hurricanes and flooding, ECA members from across the county came together for two community workdays.

In addition to making 100 baby blankets, members purchased and collected items to make 85 Baby Kits. Kits included diapers, wipes, soap, shampoo, lotion, two outfits and a toy. Also, several Extension publications related to Child Development and Parenting were enclosed.

The kits were shipped to hurricane and flood victims in shelters in Louisiana and Mississippi. Twenty volunteers donated 120 man hours and goods valued at approximately $3,600 to this humanitarian effort.

Horticulture - Corey Crabtree, Extension Agent, Horticulture

Bladen County Cooperative Extension has held twelve separate Private Pesticide Applicator Recertification trainings this year. Private pesticide applicators are required to obtain 4 hours (2 hours of safety training and 2 hours of “specialty” training) of recertification credits every three years by September 30 of the year their license expires. The last class for the year was offered on September 15, 2005. This year 216 pesticide applicators received all or some of the required recertification credits. Of the 156 Bladen County Private Pesticide Applicators whose license expire in 2005, 87% obtained the necessary four hours of recertification credits.

Muscadine Grape farming has increased in Bladen County over the past year because of the Tobacco Buyout Program. Farmers are now looking for an alternative method of income lost by limited tobacco production. On July 14, 2005, Bladen County Extension hosted a training day for Muscadine Grape growers. Bill Cline, NCSU Plant Pathologist, and Whit Jones, Duplin County Extension Agent, were the guest speakers for that day. Training included on-site visits with local grape growers. Topics covered included fertilization requirements, training and pruning of grape vines, and disease and insect spray programs. Bladen County now has over 110 acres of muscadine grapes with an expected increase of more than 60 acres in 2006.

Livestock - Becky Spearman, Extension Agent, Livestock

The 4-H Youth Livestock Program is in its second year in Bladen County. Eleven youth are involved in animal projects including chickens, turkeys, rabbits, meat goats, and heifers. In order to help prepare these youth to raise and exhibit their animals, two training sessions have been held at the Robeson County Fairgrounds. Experienced youth helped teach the sessions that covered the basic care of rabbits, pigs, chickens, turkeys, goats, and cattle. Some of the topics included selecting an animal, feeding, watering, shelter and halterbreaking. The youth were able to get free health certificates for their animals which saved the parents $600. The youth are currently exhibiting their animals at local county shows.

The livestock skillathon contest expands a youth’s livestock knowledge through a contest with four major areas that include a written exam; visual identification of feedstuffs, breeds, meat cuts, and livestock equipment; hay judging; and meat judging. Monthly practices are held to prepare the youth for three state level contests. Seven youth are on the livestock skillathon team. The junior team placed in the top five at two contests this year. The junior team also had an individual who placed in the top ten at the same contests. The team will be competing at the NC State Fair in October.