The Bladen County Cooperative Extension Advisory Council identified agricultural literacy in Bladen County as a need. Ag’em Up Day, a two day Agricultural Field Day Adventure for Bladen County 3rd grade was held on September 20th and 21st to help address this issue with our youth. Seven stations focusing primarily on agriculture in the county but also emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle were part of the two day event. Bladen County Cooperative Extension, Bladen Soil and Water Conservation Service, Bladen County Farm Bureau, Cape Fear Farm Credit, Bladen County Livestock Association, West Bladen High School FFA and the Bladen County Board of Education worked together to put on the event. Over 50 volunteers and staff made the two days go smoothly.

The 430 third grade students had a wonderful time learning about the number one industry in Bladen County – Agriculture. We have a diverse agricultural economy in the county with the farm value of all commodities exceeding $214 million. The 3rd graders learned about field crops, swine, beef and poultry, blueberries, soils and the environment, nutrition of our food and physical fitness. Hands-on activities engaged the students to make the learning experience rich and fun.

At the Agricultural stations, students picked cotton and learned that the clothes they wear are made from the fiber. They learned that Bladen County is number one in blueberry production and number three in hog production in the State. They identified the parts of a plant and how each one is important in producing the food we eat. The students learned how pigs, poultry and cattle are raised, the products that make up their feed, where they live, and who keeps them healthy. Meat is the biggest use of an animal but the students also learned of the many by-products that come from animals which they use everyday. The students participated in an experiment that taught them the importance of the soil that grows their food and our environment.

At the Nutrition station, students learned about the importance of eating healthy foods and what eating too much fat can do to their bodies. They also prepared and enjoyed a healthy snack. The Fitness station taught the students about the importance of getting and staying fit. 4-H’ers helped lead the exercises and promoted involvement in Bladen County 4-H.

One teacher said, “We live in an active agricultural county and it is important to help our students understand these concepts.” Another teacher said, “The areas of soil, animals and plants in particular are part of our Science Curriculum and therefore a good use of my instructional time.” One more comment from a teacher was, “The field day gave important facts about their county and somehow uplifts their morals as citizens belonging to this community and to be proud of their place.”

Pre and post tests were given to the students to measure knowledge gained. The results are still being tabulated.
Administration - Kent D. Wooten, County Extension Director

Bladen County Cooperative Extension received several honors during the 2006 North Carolina 4-H Agents State Meeting. Top honors included: Search for Excellence in Teen Programming - Bladen County Teen Summit, this award was presented to Sandra Kelly and Angela Shaver in collaboration with Carol Strickland, Alonzo Braggs and Stacie Kinlaw.

The Excellence in 4-H Club Support Team - Green Acres 4-H Club was awarded to Kathy Cooper, Becky Spearman and Angela Shaver. Kathy and Angela were also honored by receiving the Communicator Award for Promotional Package Team - National 4-H Week. Kathy Cooper was also honored as recipient of the NCAE4HA 4-H Program Associate Award in the 1-3 years of service category.

Angela Shaver received two awards: Communicator Award for Exhibit and Communicator Award for Promotional Piece. She also was the recipient of the NCAE4HA National Conference Scholarship which included $250 to attend the 4-H National Conference in Milwaukee, WI in October. Angela also received recognition for serving on the NCAE4HA Board as Treasurer-Elect.

Bladen County Staff members (Angela Shaver, Corey Crabtree, Ryan Harrelson, Becky Spearman, Sandra Kelly, Kent Wooten and Devona Beard) also were recognized for their team efforts by winning the Communicator Award for Promotional Piece Team for our Report To The People. They also received the Communicator Award for Periodical Publication for Extension Highlights and this piece will be receiving the Southern Regional Award during the National 4-H Conference in Milwaukee, WI.

Livestock - Becky Spearman, Extension Agent, Livestock

Feed costs are one of the largest expenses for all livestock producers. One way to reduce costs is to have permanent pastures for the animals. Robeson County and Bladen County Cooperative Extension Centers held a Pasture and Turf Expo for producers to learn more about establishment and care of their pastures. Presentations included general forage and pasture information and specific forage information for goats and cattle. Hands-on training was held on how to sample soils, how to take forage samples, and how to sample turf and pasture for disease and insects. After the Expo, the Extension Agent worked with two producers, who have 15 acres, on recommendations for their pastures. The two saved over $1,500 by following recommendations from Extension. Extension has future plans to work with small acreage farmers to improve their pastures to help them save money.

Family and Consumer Sciences - Sandra Kelly, Extension Agent, FCS 4-H and Youth Development - Angela Shaver, Extension Agent, 4-H

Bladen County youth are 10% above the state average relating to childhood overweight and obesity. Cooperative Extension 4-H and FCS programs partnered with Bladen HealthWatch, Bladen County Schools, Bladen County Hospital, the Health Department, and Bladen County Public Library to put together a program to address these rising statistics. Mission Possible: Get Fit For Life was a week long day camp to teach overweight youth between the ages of 5 and 12 about eating healthy and getting fit. Forty-one youth, 8 teen volunteers and 17 adult volunteers took part in the daily activities including preparing healthy snacks, learning how to read food nutrition labels, My Pyramid, and physical fitness. Youth showed a 78% increase in knowledge about nutrition and My Pyramid at the end of the camp. Quarterly follow-up family activities are planned to track the progress of the youth.

Horticulture - Corey Crabtree, Extension Agent, Horticulture

Bladen County has a total of 18 muscadine vineyards with 14 of those started after 2004. This equals 102 acres of newly planted vineyards with at least 60% coming into production this year. Based on the need expressed from new grape growers, a farm tour was organized and held on July 17, 2006 with Bill Cline, NCSU Muscadine Agent to answer questions about grape diseases and production estimates. The tour showcased the growth of muscadine vineyards in the county since 2004. It also served the purpose of introducing Connie Fisk, who is the new muscadine agent for the whole state to Bladen County grape growers.

Field Crops - Ryan Harrelson, Extension Agent, Field Crops

Bladen County Cooperative Extension in cooperation with the Crop Science Department at NCSU held a “Pod Blasting” field day to measure peanut maturity. Forty-one (41) farmers attended the pod blasting on a local farm and brought 87 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 31% 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 $8,300 per farmer that participated.