North Carolina Cooperative Extension  Bladen County Center

Report To The People
2004 Highlights

Family and Consumer Sciences

The Family and Consumer Sciences program includes the areas of Nutrition and Health, Human Development, Family Resource Management, Housing, Apparel and Textiles as well as Liaison for Extension and Community Association.

Limited resource families need to acquire knowledge, skills and changed behavior for nutritionally sound diets. The Nutrition Program Assistant taught 90 participants nutrition education including food preparation skills. 90% of the EFNEP graduates showed a positive dietary change in one or more food groups at exit. 33% of the graduates showed improvement in one or more food resource management practices. 80% showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices. 87% of the graduates showed improvement in one or more food safety practices.

In Bladen County, there are very few opportunities for child care providers to receive educational training. Surveys were conducted to determine areas of greatest need. The results were incorporated into the following sessions for 2004: SIDS Reduction, Raising Children in Troubled Times, Day Care Rules and Regulations, Healthy Nutritious Snacks, Food Safety, Basic School Age Care, Helping Children Cope with Stress, and Get Moving, Get Fit.

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Livestock

The 122 animal waste operators in Bladen County must attend continuing education classes to keep their license to stay in compliance with laws. 5.5 hours of continuing education credits were offered in 2004. Producers are informed of regulations in waste management through newsletters, postcards, and meetings. Extension provides assistance to producers on sludge management, equipment calibration, record-keeping, nutrient management plans, and many other areas. The Livestock Agent worked with 21 producers which helped them to save over $9,000 by performing these tasks themselves.

The Bladen Feeders are a group of six beef producers that have joined together to learn more about finishing cattle. The Livestock agent has been working with the group to learn more about finishing and marketing truckload lots of finished cattle to send to market. The producers received $43,000 in grant money to build and

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Agriculture

With changes in the federal peanut program, Bladen County’s peanut acreage has doubled from 3000 acres to over 6000 acres. The increase came from existing growers increasing their acreage and new growers entering production. A major management decision for peanut farmers is when to harvest. Extension assembled the resources and coordinated efforts with the Crop Science Department at NCSU to offer a peanut “Pod blasting” field day to measure peanut maturity. Twenty two farmers attended the pod blasting on a local farm and brought over 50 samples for testing. Farmers were able to better coordinate their efforts and determine when to begin harvesting, some as many as 4 weeks later than they expected. An estimated 20% 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 average gross income of $22,500 per farmer that participated.

Assistance was given to a small father and son row crop farm operation to secure a $10,000 grant from the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA in order to establish a muscadine grape vineyard that has the potential to significantly replace lost tobacco income. Technical assistance for vineyard establishment, grape production and grant writing was provided to the farmers.

A farmer and his wife have recently been added to the Small Farmer Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Project and the Farmers Adopt Computer Training Project through the North Carolina A&T Cooperative Extension Program. In the past, they expressed a desire to seek alternative livestock sources of income. Currently they are raising nursery pigs and beef cattle along with field corn, hay and soybeans. This spring they expressed an interest in raising meat goats and selling to the local markets and through the North Carolina Meat Goat Cooperative. In May, they applied for a grant through a meat goat project sponsored by North Carolina A&T State University and eight other 1890 land-grant institutions. In October, they were one of two farm families in North Carolina to receive a $10,000 grant to produce and market meat goats. This grant will allow them to diversify their livestock operation and help manage risks. With the help of the Cooperative Extension Service, this farm family will reach their financial goals.

4-H and Youth Development

Out of the 5,800 total youth ages 5 to 18 in the county, Bladen County 4-H reached 1,927 through various programming efforts in 2004. This represents 33% of the total population and is a 368% increase from 2003. 4-H participants have gained valuable life skills, reduced court involvement, and learned to be a positive impact on our communities.

The 4-H Life Skills program was established to offer character education to court referred and youth at-risk of court referral. The Character and Karate program was formed in 2004 to provide a more focused program that centers on the areas of responsibility, sincerity and justice.

The self-discipline that accompanies this art form is an invaluable tool to teaching youth about controlling anger and stress management. The character sessions help participants to learn the self-discipline and problem solving skills necessary to make wise choices in the future.

This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Bladen County 4-H Friends of Youth program. In its ten year history, the program has brought in over $250,000 to help match youth with adult mentors, and has successfully matched over 150 pairs. 4-H Friends of Youth continues to be an encouraging program for our county’s youth.

Bladen County Teen Court has more teen volunteers than are necessary to act as jurors and attorneys for the program. Several of the teen volunteers are former defendants that were referred to the program. These youth learn public speaking and decision making skills that will help them to make the right choices and not end up in the court system themselves. Many graduates of this program have gone on to college to pursue degrees in the legal profession.

As you can see, Bladen County 4-H continues to be a thriving program for our youth. Through new and continued efforts, Bladen County 4-H is striving “To Make the Best Better” by reaching more youth in 2005.
Horticulture

The Horticulture program in Bladen County includes the areas of consumer and commercial horticulture. The Horticulture Agent also has the responsibilities of the Master Gardener Coordinator and the Pesticide Education Coordinator.

The Horticulture Agent participated in and led 10 presentations, workshops, and tours that focused on the consumer aspect of horticulture. For example, attendees learned about general horticulture, vegetable gardening, herbs, indoor plants, pruning woody ornamentals, and landscape design and maintenance. Over 100 people attended these presentations, workshops, and tours.

The Annual Bladen County Blueberry Production Meeting was held in March 2004 with 68 blueberry farmers and members of the blueberry community attending. The Horticulture Agent worked with local farmers who sought alternative crops to supplement their income form the loss of tobacco. Muscadine grapes proved to be a successful option. The Horticulture Agent assisted one local farmer in receiving a Federal Grant to establish his first acre of muscadine grapes.

Family and Consumer Sciences continued

One hundred eighty-four child care providers received 404 hours of educational training to provide quality care to Bladen County children.

In 2002, Bladen County’s rate for overweight youth was 23.4% for 5-11 year olds and 27.3% for 12-18 year olds, both rates being above the state average. In an effort to stress the importance of healthy eating and to provide educational activities emphasizing the Food Guide Pyramid, Cooperative Extension, in collaboration with Bladen County Schools, Bladen Co. Health Dept and Bladen HealthWatch, conducted "March Madness". A total of 1379 (30.5%) Elementary and Middle School students and 138 teachers participated in the “Gimme Five” challenge, striving to eat at least 5 fruits and vegetables per day. Collaborating partners visited all schools and presented stickers to all participants reaching their goals. Teachers observed students continuing to try new foods and increasing intake of fruits and vegetables after the program ended.

Livestock continued

upgrade farm facilities. The Bladen Feeders plan to involve other local producers and finish out more animals in the future.

Cattle producers who can decrease input feed costs will profit more in the long run. The Livestock agent has worked with several cattle producers to establish cost effective feeding programs. Producers using new feed programs have saved over $7,500 in feed costs.

4-H Youth Livestock

The Extension Advisory Board recognized the need for agricultural literacy in Bladen County. The Bladen County Livestock Agent and the 4-H Agent reestablished a Youth Livestock Program in 2004. Seventeen youth were involved in the 4-H Youth Livestock Program. Youth participated in animal projects, monthly educational meetings, and participated on the livestock skill-a-thon team.
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Mission Statement

Our mission is to help people improve the quality of their lives through research-based information and informal educational opportunities focused on issues and needs.