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North Carolina A&T State University
School of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences
Newsletter

October 2007 • Vol. VI, No. 5

Extension gets new slate of local-level inspirations



Child development issues from nutrition to entrepreneurship were addressed by some of the seven innovative grants to County Extension Centers, collaborating agencies and farm-based businesses.

The idea: introduce The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T to new audiences; help people who haven't been helped before by the organization; reward new approaches to evolving problems.

The method: award innovative grants to seven Cooperative Extension projects across the state, in amounts ranging from \$12,000 to \$15,000.

The result: Mountain residents harnessing more affordable energy supplies through microhydroelectric power systems; Piedmont farmers harvesting

grapes for something other than wine and selling out their entire first harvest; and Hispanic parents in the Triangle get more involved in their childrens' educations.

Innovative-grant funding has also supported efforts in Wake County, where a community garden planted by children and adults on church grounds has inspired the gardeners to exercise more and eat more fruits and vegetables. In Gaston County, childhood obesity is being tackled with nutrition education and community development in addition to community gardens.

Five Franklin County farmers are raising and selling their hormone-free beef directly to "foodies" and high-end restaurants. Former tobacco farmers in Wilkes, Surry and Alleghany counties, revamping their farms in the wake of tobacco buyout legislation, are now planting blueberries and boxwoods, and exploring agri-tourism.

As the two-year grant cycle wound down Sept. 30, Extension administrators took the opportunity to assess the projects that were funded. Extension Administrator Dr. Ray McKinnie and his special assistant, Sheilda Sutton, say the grant projects help people across the state to address and resolve their problems while providing the local Extension center with the payoff of fresh ideas and creative approaches.

For example, in Watauga County, where the high cost of energy and land, combined with mountainous terrain and short growing seasons make it extra challenging for farmers to diversify, an A&T innovative grant is funding research on an alternative, renewable-energy system. Using the water power of a mountain stream, a microhydroelectric power system was installed at Mollie's Branch Farm, owned by Diane Price. Student volunteers of the Appalachian State University Sustainable Energy Society installed the system, which is part of a collaborative effort that also includes the Appalachian Regional Initiative for Sustainable Energy, as well as A&T's own renewable-energy researcher, Dr. Ghasem Shahbazi.

Price hosts demonstrations for other farmers to see the system, and learn how they can get similar technology at their farms.

Part of the criteria for awarding the innovative grants is that the projects they fund must serve limited-resource audiences, Sutton says. The standard helps ensure that even while reaching out to new audiences, the grant awards still foster The Cooperative Extension Program's mission of support to limited-resource audiences.

"These projects bring significant benefits to us as stakeholders," McKinnie says. "We will certainly look at this and look at ways of continuing funding as our budget will allow."

Dr. T's Moment

I was watching one of the reality programs recently where they were deciding between which of the two candidates to send home. One had a poor concept but a fairly decent execution and the other had a good concept, but executed it poorly.

That got me to thinking about the work we do in the SAES. How can you function with a good concept but an inability to execute? Or how can you get started if you have no plan?

I don't see how it's possible. That's why in the SAES we are working to make sure that we have sound, creative, effective concepts and that we then turn them into sound, creative and effective programs, activities, lessons, etc.

Most recently, we completed internal control guidelines for the SAES. This compilation of materials includes the policies and procedures from the federal government, the state, the University system, North Carolina A&T and the individual granting agencies we work with. Some of these guidelines are hard to read and comprehend. That's why we've pulled all the information into one electronic document. The next step is to make sure that all faculty, staff and student leaders are trained and can prove competence on all aspects of the internal control guidelines.

A good concept. Sound execution. Both are interdependent. Both are what we are striving for and will attain.

By the way, on the reality show, the poor execution lost.

— Dr. Alton Thompson
Dean, SAES

Seeds planted by seven “Innovative Grants” to county Extension projects from The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T in 2005 are taking root.

“The whole idea with innovative grants is to spark new ideas to reach new audiences. The hope is that these innovative projects will lead down the road to a new way of doing things in Extension.”

— Sheila Sutton, The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T

Developing a Market for Pastured-Raised Natural Beef in Franklin County

A group of beef cattle producers wanted to develop a niche market for natural, pasture-raised beef — targeting the health-conscious clientele in adjacent counties who were willing to pay premium prices for a



The Franklin County Natural Beef Alliance received jump start funding from The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T to help farmers produce beef without growth hormones or antibiotics.

quality product. They are working with Franklin County Cooperative Extension Agent Martha Mobley, and getting guidance in marketing, quality assurance and underpinnings for a successful alliance.

They have developed a marketing brochure and a Web site (<http://www.buynaturalbeef.us/index.php>), held 10 educational meetings and bought a freezer cargo trailer for members to use. The farmers are often making \$500 more per head for pasture-raised cattle than when they were selling the calves just after they were born.

Sustaining the Agricultural and Economic Viability and Heritage of Rural Wilkes, Surry and Alleghany counties

Farmers without extensive acreage or financial resources in northwestern North Carolina are weathering a severe drop in income due to tobacco buyout legislation and other changes in the region’s agricultural economics. Many farmers, but especially those with limited-resources, are eager to find alternative crops or agri-tourism enterprises to generate additional income.

Bill Hanlin, an Area Extension agent, is using a 100-acre Wilkes County farm that was donated for Extension demonstrations and research, to give farmers a look at new varieties of fruit trees and ornamental shrubs that are well suited to the region’s

growing conditions. Northwestern North Carolina farmers have planted 12 different varieties of blueberries and 19 different varieties of boxwoods that they learned about through the demonstrations. The grant has also made it possible for 25 current and potential boxwood growers to attend a production practices seminar.

Table Grape Production and Profitability in Granville County

Many growers in North Carolina are growing grapes for wine, which is a

profitable but demanding enterprise for small-scale farmers. Table grape varieties, grown for fresh-from-the-vine consumption, are an inviting alternative, especially because they are suited to direct marketing.

At the Granville County farm of Doreathy Booth and with help from fellow farmer and partner Celine Koropchak, 13 different varieties of seedless grapes were planted. Young vines were planted with bamboo stakes for trellising. Growing tubes and fencing were also installed to protect young vines from deer, machinery and herbicides. The growers attended a table grape festival in New York to get ideas and advice. They have come up with a three-year business plan for expansion, and have worked with Theresa Nartea, Extension agribusiness and marketing specialist and Carl Cantaluppi, an Extension horticulture agent in Granville and Person counties. Although the growers were hit by the Easter frost this year, they still had a profitable harvest, selling grapes at \$3 per pound.

Micro-Hydroelectric Alternative Energy Demonstration in Watauga County

High energy costs, escalating land prices, short growing seasons and inhospitable terrain restrain small-scale farmers from diversifying into alternative crops in northwestern North Carolina. Streams and rivers, though, are plentiful in the region, and represent an untapped source for affordable energy.

Watauga County Extension is collaborating with the Appalachian Regional Initiative for Sustainable Energy and the Appalachian State University Sustainable Energy Society to maintain and demonstrate a micro-hydroelectric power-generating system on a stream on Diane Price’s Watauga County farm. Farmers, landowners, students, and other groups have been to Price’s farm for demonstrations of the system. The project is overseen by Sue Counts, Watauga County Extension director, with technical input from Dr. Ghasem Shahbazi, who conducts renewable energy



Photo by Brent Summerville

Scott Suddreth (left) and Mike Dooraghi, were with collaborating agencies that worked with Cooperative Extension on a micro-hydroelectric power demonstration in Watauga County.

research in the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at A&T.

Faith-based Inner-City Community Garden Project for Minority Youth and Families in Wake County

Inactive youth with unhealthy eating behaviors are likely to become inactive adults with poor eating habits. Children and adults at Gethsemane Seventh Day Adventist Church in Raleigh planted a community garden that yielded entrepreneurship and health benefits as well as fruits and vegetables. There were 17 families working and harvesting, and the personal benefits they get from the exercise of garden work become community benefits when fruit and produce is used to stock the church’s food bank, or sold at a community market. The project is supported by Agricultural and Natural Resources Agent Morris Dunn and Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Dr. Carol Mitchell of the Wake County Extension staff. Dr. Bob Williamson, natural resources specialist for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, and Theresa Nartea, agribusiness and marketing specialist, are also involved with the project.

Gardening for Green in Gaston County

Childhood obesity in Gaston County is above the state and national averages. There has also been a loss of more than 7,000 manufacturing jobs in the region, which has reduced employment opportunities for youth, and in turn made youth development issues community-wide concerns.

at A&T to integrate horticulture, nutrition and community development programming to address obesity, dropout rates and a need to inspire entrepreneurship among elementary and middle school students.

A community gardening and nutrition program, combining Extension horticulture, 4-H and EFNEP resources was Gaston County Extension’s approach to addressing these issues. The joint action has been reaching about 150 elementary and middle school students each semester and about 250 YMCA day-campers during the summer. Students are learning how to make healthy snacks and other basics for good nutrition, and their work in the garden is redirecting them from sedentary activities that contribute to obesity. The A&T grant was used to pay the salary of a project coordinator, who is continuing the program even though the A&T funds have expired.

Family Advocacy and Support Training for Latino Parents in Durham County

There is a significant gap between the academic achievement of Hispanic students and their Caucasian counterparts, and

The Gaston County Extension team is using its funding from The Cooperative Extension Program

the language barrier is a significant factor. The Hispanic dropout rate for students in Durham County has increased dramatically and the county also has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in North Carolina. But now, about 200 Latino parents have been trained to serve as community advocates who can help Spanish-speaking parents stay better informed of how their children are doing in an English-speaking school system.

The A&T Extension grant helped make possible a Spanish translation of sessions from the Parent and Family Advocacy and Support Training curriculum. Both the English and Spanish versions of the curriculum are now part of the Durham Public School System’s parent education plan. County Extension Director Delphine Sellars says the number of Latino parents attending school activities is also increasing. A Latino Parent Support Group has been established and 30 Latino parents have received continuing education credits for employment and promotions.

The Innovative Grants funded by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T had a series of new approaches to hands-on training in the most essential life skills.



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North Carolina A&T State University School of
Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Newsletter
*Produced by the Agricultural Communications and
Technology Unit*

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