SOLUTIONS for NORTH CAROLINA
The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T State University
Our Mission: Improving the quality of life for limited-resource individuals, families and communities in North Carolina, through education.
From her office at Coltrane Hall, Dr. Celvia Stovall continues reaching out to Cooperative Extension audiences. Our family and consumer-science educators have taught strategies for maintaining good health and for effectively managing people's money and children. We continue reaching out to our audience.

In this issue of Solutions for North Carolina®, highlighting the impact that we’re having on the people of our state, we’ll show just how we have touched people. Their experiences are told in their own words, pictures and voices. Their stories are captured in this multi-media presentation that is the annual report of The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University. Listen to them. We have. Their testimonies solidify research that Extension has undertaken over the years to determine our marketing and program strategies. Touch, for us, is gold. It symbolizes the relationship between Cooperative Extension and the people of North Carolina; both those that we help directly and those who benefit as taxpayers from the services we provide. We continue at the campus level to create programs and curricula, and to find solutions for the problems experienced by North Carolina residents. Just as we continue to reach out to our audiences, we want you all to maintain that same line of involvement with us. This is a call to action.

Get involved.
Get engaged.
Get in touch.
Continue to let us know you appreciate the work Extension is doing.

We are honored to shake your hand.

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie
Associate Dean and Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program
N.C. A&T State University

Dr. Celvia Stovall
Associate Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program
N.C. A&T State University

Approaching nearly a century in business, Cooperative Extension continues to change and evolve; yet more than ever, we know who we are and what we’re good at doing.

We are that marvelous amalgam of good old-fashioned know-how and cutting-edge ability; best described as “high touch.” Of course, many organizations help people and communicate with them in this age of instant access and information. Although we make use of those same technologies, what distinguishes Cooperative Extension is its “high touch” reputation.

We’re still the same Cooperative Extension whose agents walk the crop rows with farmers, checking their tomato plants for early blight and checking the progress of the tobacco barn that they’ve converted into a greenhouse.

We’re the Cooperative Extension whose community-resource development agent visits fellowship halls and community centers. In fact, it’s our agent who helped find the resources that helped renovate those fellowship halls and community centers.

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Stanly County Habitat for Humanity has found that Cooperative Extension money-management classes are as much a part of giving new homeowners what they need to succeed as good lumber and skilled carpentry.

As simple as that logic seems, before they took the Extension classes the Garcias may have likely gotten the new TV, and they likely would have gone out to dinner to celebrate their acquisition. Brooke Garcia didn’t merely eat restaurant food most of the week, but she insisted on the more expensive dine-in restaurant fare. Now the family cooks at home five or six days a week, and Hernan usually has enough left over for lunch the next day.

For each of their bills, they set aside money in envelopes and use that system for staying on track.

For many of the residents that Alexi taught, the issue was not having enough money, but “more a matter of money slipping between their fingers,” she says. Alexi uses the H Plan financial money-management system, developed by Dr. Claudette Smith through The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T. The system includes a worksheet for users to assess their monthly income and expenses. It’s called H Plan because users are asked to evaluate, “How much are you spending?” “How well are you managing?” and “How do you move ahead?”

“The clients absolutely love this plan,” Alexi says. “Before you can start planning a budget, you have to know where your money is going.”

With the H Plan and accompanying computer software, PowerPay™ (a debt reduction tool), Extension was offering the very thing that Habitat had not been able to provide on its own: specific, tools-based instruction.

“Cooperative Extension and those classes taught us to live freely,” Brooke Garcia says. “There are certain things you’ve freed us from debt and it’s freed us from worrying about money.”
Cooperative Extension is fighting the battle against childhood obesity by providing information on wise eating that makes more out of fruits, vegetables and even fast food.

“Whole grains,” he told his mother.

Clark later checked her son’s assertions and found out he was right.

For Gloria Russ, nutrition program assistant at the Guilford County Extension Center, Cameron’s certainty represents the kind of impact she works to achieve. It is one thing for children to be able to recite what they’ve learned at the end of a session, but for them to use the information and apply it weeks and months later to their daily eating habits is the goal of the program.

Russ is on the frontlines of a battle against childhood obesity and overweight, which are at epidemic levels. The number of overweight children ages 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, increasing from 7 percent in 1980 to nearly 19 percent in 2004, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Also, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University found that overweight children are absent from school 20 percent more than students of normal weight. The study of students in the fourth through sixth grades concludes that it is not so much health problems, but the stigma and bullying directed at overweight children, that keeps them away from school. Ultimately, school absenteeism has been documented as a risk factor in teen pregnancy, drug use and poor academic performance.

The Clark family, though, is motivated by the health consequences of obesity. Considering that about 61 percent of overweight children have at least one additional risk factor for heart disease — such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol — Janice Clark and her husband encourage their children to eat healthy. But with progeny who naturally prefer meat to leafy green vegetables, having Cooperative Extension help educate their children about nutrition makes it easier for the Clarks to keep their children healthy.

Both Cameron and Alexandra have conscientiously added more fruit to their diets, choosing apples, peaches and other options in the school cafeteria — where they would have once avoided them.

“When I come home from school, I eat an apple or a banana or something healthy,” Cameron adds. Even when dining out, Cameron has found ways to augment his fast-food meals with fresh food. For example, at Chick-fil-A restaurant Cameron discovered diet lemonade. The restaurant makes it fresh daily, using only freshly squeezed lemon juice, water and a low-calorie sweetener, and it’s about 100 calories less than the sugar-made original. The sweetest part of his healthy discovery is that for Cameron, “The diet lemonade tastes better than the regular kind.”

A healthy supply of nutrition education hits home early.

G R E E N S B O R O — Cameron Clark, 9, knows all about the food pyramid — the new one that was developed in 2005. This revamped pyramid has stairs on its side symbolizing athletic activity, and it also has a vertical rainbow where each color represents a food group.

Cameron knows about the guide because for the past two summers he and his twin sister, Alexandra, attended their church summer camp where a Cooperative Extension program assistant taught them about nutrition.

“The food guide pyramid says to eat less fats and oils, and eat more wheat, fruit and vegetables,” Cameron says.

After the St. James Baptist Church camp had ended, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Also, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University found that overweight children are absent from school 20 percent more than students of normal weight. The study of students in the fourth through sixth grades concludes that it is not so much health problems, but the stigma and bullying directed at overweight children, that keeps them away from school. Ultimately, school absenteeism has been documented as a risk factor in teen pregnancy, drug use and poor academic performance.

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When L’Tonya Jackson grocery shops with her two children, Niya, 9, points out all the vegetables she recognizes as they stroll through the produce area. Noah, 5, wants to know why people need to buy all this stuff. Why don’t they just grow “like we do,” he asks his mother.

The “we” in this instance is Gethsemane Seventh-day Adventist Church, where an innovative-programs grant from The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T was used by Wake County Cooperative Extension to start a community garden on the church grounds. For two years, Extension has partnered with Gethsemane to teach parents and their children about growing fresh produce.

The Gethsemane garden was filled last summer with fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, zucchini, strawberries, watermelon and carrots, all of which the children helped plan, tend, harvest and eat.

As a result of the children growing their own food, Morris Dunn, agricultural agent with the Wake County Cooperative Extension Center, says a couple of goals are being reached. Children are getting more of the recommended servings of fresh fruit and vegetables, and children and the adults who help in the garden are getting more exercise.

Gethsemane’s children are also getting a taste of business savvy through their gardening experiences. Before the first seed was ever sown, Cooperative Extension Marketing Specialist Theresa Nartea worked with Dunn and volunteers from the church to choose crops tailored to consumer demand.

Familiarity with what’s in the garden makes it easier for them to eat what they grow, even if they don’t love it, she says. “They come home excited every time, talking about how the garden is growing,” Jackson says. Such excitement was expected during warm months, when gardening activities were at their height. But even in cold weather when the garden was at rest, the Jackson children continued their firsthand interaction with food.

“When we go to the grocery store, they’ll say ‘that’s zucchini and that’s squash,’” Jackson relays. “ ‘We grow that in our garden.’”

Noah and Niya Jackson have learned to feel at home at the urban garden and in a grocery store.

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uneven floors and unreliable plumbing, senior citizens were scared to come out of their houses because of nearby drug dealing.

“I went down there and tried to reason with them,” Haywood says of the dealers and users. “I told them, ‘if you’re going to hang out here, go inside. Stay out of these old people’s yards. Be respectful.’”

The dealers and users agreed, but eventually crept back to their former ways. Haywood called the police and reported the activity, and kept pressure on the landlords who eventually evicted undesirable residents.

“I want to make a difference because I live in this neighborhood,” Haywood says. “My daughter lives in this neighborhood and I want it to be better for us, for all of us.”

Born in Miami and raised in Daytona Beach, this Florida native handpicked Rocky Mount to be his home in 1996, searching for a new place to make a fresh start after a stay in drug rehabilitation. He chose Rocky Mount because his parents had met here. He fell in love with the city and then with the woman he would marry, Sheila. The couple first moved to the place on Beal Street, and then to his current and larger home, on Pine Street. They joined First Calvary Missionary Baptist Church on Beal Street and have recommitted their lives to Christ.

But Haywood is no pushover. He walks the hot asphalt of Beal Street on a scorching June afternoon, and he can point out every house, boarded up, thriving or questionable. He knows each pathway and each open space, and what the development plans are for each open plot — whether for new multi-family housing or community garden. The few people out on this sizzling dog day afternoon either hail him openly or try to avoid him.

One of the unabashed greeters is Lizzie Hedgepeth, 81, who’s lived on Beal Street for 46 years. She’s on the front porch of her neat brick home, lush with plants and padded outdoors furniture, and she is not afraid to be there — anymore.

“It was him,” she says, hugging Haywood, “who got things cleaned up around here.”

Community Voices — A&T Extension’s leadership development program — is resonating in inner-city neighborhoods and economically depressed rural areas across North Carolina.

ROCKY MOUNT — Matthew Haywood has been around — U.S. Marine Corps, Vietnam, Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, musician in a rhythm and blues band. But the most recent chapters of his storied life are defined by two words and one place: Happy Hill.

Happy Hill is where he lives, where he met his wife, where he goes to church and where for the five years he’s been a resident, the place where he’s made a difference in his community. When problems arise in Happy Hill, people call on “Mr. Matt.” When crime rears its ugly head in the neighborhood, “Mr. Matt” is one of the few residents unafraid and unfettered enough to call the police.

“I’m the mayor,” says Haywood, 54, claiming the unofficial title. “Anything that anybody needs to get done in this community, they come to me.”

So when the East Carolina University-Central Rocky Mount Partnership set out to revitalize some of the city’s neighborhoods, and sought community leaders to help in the effort, it wasn’t long before Haywood’s name came up. It wasn’t long before Cooperative Extension’s name came up, too.

The partnership needed an organization to conduct leadership training and Tracy Harvey, community development agent with the Nash County Cooperative Extension at the time, was at the ready. He conducted the leadership training program, Community Voices, developed through The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T. Haywood was a standout leader. The training helped him refine his leadership skills. He learned to seek out, compile and evaluate information, and to keep pressing with questions if he didn’t understand something.

When ECU awarded federal grants to Rocky Mount neighborhoods, Haywood administered the one for Happy Hill — conducting a health fair and setting up summer recreational outings for neighborhood children.

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Matthew Haywood,
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“Mayor Matt” makes Happy Hill happier

Lizzie Hedgepeth is pleased by what she sees, going on in the community she has lived in for 46 years.
of his life — the western North Carolina farmer returned to ginseng root as an alternative source of income. The Bradfords had actually begun growing ginseng as an alternative crop 10 years ago. It takes at least eight years for ginseng that grows in the wild to produce a sizable root and from his experience, Bradford knew to start early. As Claude Deyton, an agriculture and natural resources technician for Yancey County Cooperative Extension, says, they all knew that the tobacco price supports would eventually be phased out. So he helped the Bradfords transition from tobacco.

“Tobacco,” says Georgia Bradford, who also works the farm. “When you’re getting into something you don’t know, that’s good to know.” Although Bradford bluntly says ginseng has not been as profitable as the five acres of tobacco he grew in the heyday of his production of the golden leaf, both he and Deyton are optimistic. Ginseng root sells for about $500 per pound and it thrives in the shady forests of the western North Carolina mountains where Bradford owns about 90 acres.

“Ginseng,” Bradford says, “is just like money in the bank.”

The Bradfords also grow other forest products such as black cohosh, golden seal and ramps; as well as Christmas trees, boxwoods, blueberries and rhododendrons. Although their farm income is not yet as high as it was with tobacco, their forest commodities are the reason they can continue the farm lifestyle they love. Their home is nestled in a mountain cove and they want to move even deeper and higher into the mountains than they are now.

“Agriculture & Natural Resources Technician Claude Deyton (left in the black-and-white photo) with Georgia and Albert Bradford at their farm in 1987, is still part of the production mix. Outside for the Bradfords at their farm in 2007.

Facers getting out of tobacco production are finding that their options include taking prudent advantage of what their forestlands have to offer.

BUNNVILLE — Albert Bradford is 62, and he and ginseng go back a ways. As a boy, when Bradford needed money for school clothes, he would go into the forested mountainside that was his backyard and harvest the herb.

“Tobacco had a lot of help that comes from Claude,” says Georgia Bradford, who also works the farm. “When you’re getting into something you don’t know, that’s good to know.”

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“This is enjoyable to work with this,” Bradford says, as he easily clammers up the side of a slope. “I’m out in the woods. There are many jobs you can get where you can be out in this environment.”

Farmers getting out of tobacco production are finding that their options include taking prudent advantage of what their forestlands have to offer.

High country agriculture winding its way from tobacco to agro-forestry

Agriculture & Natural Resources Technician Claude Deyton (left in the black-and-white photo) with Georgia and Albert Bradford at their farm in 1987, is still part of the production mix. Outside for the Bradfords at their farm in 2007.

BURNsville — Albert Bradford is 62, and he and ginseng go back a ways. As a boy, when Bradford needed money for school clothes, he would go into the forested mountainside that was his backyard and harvest the herb.

“Times was hard in the mountains,” Bradford says. “I been digging ginseng since I was a kid.”

Credited for having various medicinal benefits — from lowering cholesterol and blood sugar to helping with cancer treatments and healing impotency — ginseng’s popularity and value have only increased in the 50- or 60 years since Bradford used it for spending cash. Four years ago, when the government stopped the price supports of tobacco — which the adult Bradford had farmed for much of his life — the western North Carolina farmer returned to ginseng root as an alternative source of income.

The Bradfords had actually begun growing ginseng as an alternative crop 10 years ago. It takes at least eight years for ginseng that grows in the wild to produce a sizable root and from his experience, Bradford knew to start early. As Claude Deyton, an agriculture and natural resources technician for Yancey County Cooperative Extension, says, they all knew that the tobacco price supports would eventually be phased out. So he helped the Bradfords transition from tobacco.

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Jackson moved to Illinois after her 2006 graduation and worked for a year as an administrative assistant for an architectural engineering firm. She recently returned to North Carolina and is planning to go to graduate school to build on the English degree she got from Peace. Her goals and accomplishments are traceable, she says, to her 4-H experiences and the attention of Bettina Odom, 4-H Youth Development agent for Bertie County Cooperative Extension.

She had always planned to pursue higher education but says: “4-H definitely motivated me to go to college. It was the first club that I was ever a part of.”

“Because I got exposure to different things through 4-H, I was willing to step out there and go to college, and try other things.” New experiences are easier for her now, but it wasn’t always that way. Described by her mother as “friendly, but not going out of her way to be friends with someone,” Sophia Jackson gently pressured her middle daughter to attend Peace to broaden her horizons — culturally and professionally. Her daughter’s reaction when she got to school: “I freaked out,” Jackson says. She closed herself off for her first several months at college. Her roommate was from China and spoke little English, and their Asian and African American experiences seemed worlds apart. Jackson wanted to quit. She called home every day for two months — often crying — pleading to come home, but her mother held firm.

Finally, Jackson says, she got in touch with her 4-H experiences to ratchet up her confidence.

“4-H allowed me to communicate and interact with kids from other areas of North Carolina,” Jackson says. “It helped me adjust to people from different cultural backgrounds.” From that reckoning, she never looked back. Jackson began to socialize. She and the Chinese roommate became friends. She later traveled to Haiti as part of a campus mission trip.

“Peace became home,” Jackson says. “I couldn’t even see myself outside another school besides that one. I had a close relationship with my professors, with the faculty and staff. I had a whole bunch of friends of all different races and colors.”

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Jacquelyn Jackson

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America Flores after Extension nutrition education classes — having lost more than 20 pounds.

SNOW HILL — When zippers wouldn’t budge and buttons wouldn’t stay fastened, America Flores realized that the 150 pounds on her 5-foot frame was too much. By following practices she learned through nutrition classes taught through the Greene County Cooperative Extension Center, Flores lost more than 20 pounds in 2006.

“I have my scale and every day I watch my weight and see the difference,” says Flores, 31. “I see the difference in my clothes and I’m very happy because my size before was 11/12 and now it’s 8.”

Although the clothes she couldn’t fit into motivated her to lose weight, Flores says she was ultimately most concerned with her well-being.

“It’s for being healthy, not to just look better,” Flores says. “It’s for my health. It’s important to eat healthy, so that we don’t get diseases.”

Maintaining a healthy weight is a burgeoning issue for the entire country, but especially for Hispanic Americans, whose incidence of diabetes is more than double that of the general population. Weight is a prime factor in the development of Type 2 diabetes, which affects about 66 of every 1,000 Hispanic Americans, compared with 50 of every 1,000 people in the general population. And 25 percent of all Hispanic deaths in America are from heart disease — another condition for which being overweight is a risk factor.

Additionally, overweight and obese Americans cost the country more than $90 billion in health care, with about half of that price tag being footed by the government in the form of Medicaid and Medicare programs that support the needy and the elderly, respectively.

In the Extension classes taught by Nutrition Program Assistant Shirley Howard, Flores learned how to lower those national odds one tortilla at a time. She now cooks with canola and olive oils instead of animal fats; bakes chicken instead of frying it; controls portions and servings; exercises; and drinks lots of water — a gallon every day. Instead of the 10 to 12 tortillas she used to eat at one sitting, Flores now eats only two.

“I drink a lot of water before I eat,” Flores says. “Ms. Shirley showed me how it was important to drink a lot of water.”

Water before meals helps with appetite control.

Flores’ two oldest children also have started to modify how and what they eat, as has her husband, Javier. And at the Greene County Education Center where Flores and other women work to improve their education through the Lucy Hart Hill Family Literacy program, Flores is not the only one leading a healthier life. Others have sought the help of the nutrition course taught by Howard and set their own agendas for healthy living.

Araceli Angeles also drinks a gallon of water a day; walks for exercise; eats smaller portions, and dropped 25 pounds — going from 170 to 145 — in 2006. Her health-conscious attitude also has affected her 9-year-old son, who presses the grease out of his French fries.

Rosa Cruz Perez, who did not need to lose weight, still wanted to improve her eating. After going through the classes, she now uses less salt on her food and eats more fresh fruit and vegetables. Her teenage daughter reads nutrition labels when they grocery shop.

All such strategies are helping families beat the odds in a demographic where 75.2 percent of all women in the United States with Mexican ancestry were overweight in 2002-2004, according to the most recently available statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics. Medical studies show that people who exercise and maintain a healthy, low-calorie and nutrient-rich diet can reverse their health challenges by losing weight, lowering cholesterol and warding off diabetes — all factors for heart disease.

Healthy eating adds up to subtractions.

Cooperative Extension’s nutrition educational outreach efforts are bringing down the numbers on the bathroom scales before they add up to poor health and medical bills.
When parenting issues come up with her husband, Herbert — who chose not to attend the classes because Stroud says he believes his parenting skills are fine — she now uses diplomacy.

“Before, I would have said, ‘Honey, that’s wrong,’ and I wouldn’t have cared if he got defensive,” Stroud says. “Now I’ll say, ‘Well Honey, a situation came up like that in the parenting meeting, and we discussed doing this…’”

Some are the anxious attacks she used to have from the stress of dealing with her 15-year-old son. In Parenting Matters, Stroud learned techniques to manage her stress. Now she counts to 10, takes a deep breath and envisions the ocean before responding to something her son says or does.

It also helps Stroud that she can share her experiences with the other parents from her sessions. The support network Stroud and other parents have organized has regular monthly sessions. The support network Stroud and other parents have organized has regular monthly sessions. The support network Stroud and other parents have organized has regular monthly sessions. The support network Stroud and other parents have organized has regular monthly sessions.

“I’d rather try to help my son now than for him to go down the list and do something drastic, and get locked up for a long time by the court system,” Stroud says.

She is right to take such preventive measures, says Wanda Campbell-Clay, family and consumer science educator for Duplin Extension. Violent crime among North Carolina juveniles under 18 is on the wane — down from 3,462 arrests in 1997 to 2,762 arrests in 2006 — but the numbers are beginning to creep back up from a low of 2,531 arrests in 2000. Without the knowledge and self-awareness that motivated Stroud: “Her son could probably end up in prison or jail,” Stewart says. “That’s been the track record.”

Instead, the Stroud family, Extension and other community resources are actively working to ensure her son is saved. “I’m loving him right on, but I’m going to get help for my son,” Stroud says. “I’m trying to be more objective than I was before.”

When children and teenagers get out of line and parents are feeling stress and frustration, Parenting Matters gives them strategies for managing their own emotions as well as better approaches to child and adolescent behavior problems.
SUPPLY — Cooperative Extension helped Yolanda Palmer affirm that she is a good mother and refine her parenting approach with techniques she still uses.

Five years ago, when her boys were primary-school age, Palmer was spanking her oldest son with a belt when it slipped and the buckle accidentally hit him in the head. The Department of Social Services ordered Palmer to take the Parenting Matters class developed at The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T and offered by the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Center.

Upset that she was being viewed as an abuser, Palmer grudgingly complied to attend the eight-week program. What she learned there changed the way she disciplined her sons five years ago, and still affects how she parents her boys, now 10 and 12.

“I learned a lot of stuff taking that parenting class,” says Palmer, 32. “They offer some wonderful stuff. I recommend it to anybody who’s got kids.”

She learned in Parenting Matters that denying privileges is an effective strategy for helping to manage her sons’ behavior. Although “time out” did not initially work for her boys, she now uses the technique to good effect. Palmer still believes in the spare-the-rod, spoil-the-child approach to disciplining her children, but since the parenting class says, “I wouldn’t have used the belt.”

“I don’t beat my kids and I don’t abuse them,” says Palmer, a school bus driver and teacher’s assistant. “If I don’t discipline them and they get out here in the real world, the police are going to do it.”

Since the class, and now that her sons are older, spanking has gone from first resort, to last resort, to no longer necessary. “Just take away the stuff they want to do and it gets them,” she says, laughing. “Taking away their privileges really works.”

Demarea, 12, now lives with his father and sees his mother and brother every weekend and DaVonte, 10, lives full time with his mother. Both boys are on the A-B honor roll, love sports and are what their mother lovingly describes as “baseball fanatics.”

“We’re doing great,” Palmer says. “We’re all doing great.”

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Kim McDuffie and Keri Hennesssee, 2007

HICKORY — What Kim McDuffie learned more than six years ago in a Cooperative Extension nutrition class, she still incorporates today at her home day care. Mainly, McDuffie introduces her babies, toddlers and preschoolers to fruits and vegetables they might not have ever before tasted, in the hopes of getting them to eat healthy.

“We just had pear applesauce,” McDuffie says. “I had two who loved it and one who didn’t, but I’m one of these people who say ‘try it.’”

In 2002, she got Benjamin Deitz and Keri Hennessee to try star fruit — something McDuffie had never even tried herself. She was introduced to new food and teaching approaches by the Extension “Nutrition Lady” who taught day-care operators through the Nutrition Education for Limited Resource Children program funded by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

Today, Benjamin and Keri are strapping and healthy, primary-school students whose progress is still tracked by McDuffie. Keri, 4, is 48 pounds and 44 inches tall, and is what McDuffie describes as “still a good eater.” Mary Beth Hennessee also vouches for her daughter’s varied appetite. She eats broccoli, green beans, carrots and just about every fruit, except bananas, her mother says.

Although Keri’s parents would have seen to it that she ate properly, Hennessee credits McDuffie with getting Keri to be a more adventurous eater and therefore less likely to revolt at having to eat the same kinds of foods.

“Kim is very good about encouraging them to at least try it,” Hennessee says. “For me, Keri is more ‘I don’t want to.’ It’s more of a battle. Kim was able to at least get her to try things.”

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Kim McDuffie and Keri Hennessee, 2002

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
GREENSBORO — Add college graduate to Tonda Osteen’s growing list of accomplishments. She moved her tassel across her mortarboard in May 2007 at Guilford College, having earned a degree in criminal justice studies.

“I wanted to do things,” Edwards says, “but I didn’t have a clue. Claudia has just been a godsend.”

Growing flowers, though not yet as profitable as tobacco production, is steadily increasing farm income for the Edwardses. Prosperity Farms made four times as much in 2007 as in 2006. The industrious Edwards family believes their flowers, greenhouses and other crops will eventually leave tobacco income in the smoke.

“We made a lot of money on our 63 acres of tobacco,” Edwards says. “We lived well. But I think we’re going to surpass it. If things keep going and we have the continued help of the Cooperative Extension Center, we’ll do well.”

BURNSVILLE — Five years ago, Tammie and Mike Edwards were looking for a way out of tobacco farming. For years it had been their primary crop, even as they were making forays into growing such alternative crops as mums and the ornamental plant, galax.

Today their flower-production business is growing like kudzu, and they are weaned from tobacco and the continuing changes in subsidies that scared them off.

The Edwardses and their Prosperity Farms are the owners of not one, not two, not three, but count ’em, four greenhouses — the largest of which they opened in 2006 as a commercial enterprise with an adjacent country store. Their thriving operation began a few years ago when Tammie Edwards decided to grow fall mums out of her husband’s empty tobacco barn. She ended up with nearly 400 of the flowers that she sold from the back of the family’s truck.

If mums worked so well, she reasoned, why not try other flowers. Edwards acknowledges having a natural green thumb, but didn’t know the technicalities of flower production. So she got help from the same people who’d helped the Edwardses with tobacco production, the folks at the Yancey County Cooperative Extension Center. Extension agents, and Claude Deyton, an agricultural and natural resources technician, helped her determine the best type of greenhouse for what she wanted to do.

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After celebrating, she and her son returned to their home, which Osteen bought in 2004 after learning some pivotal money-management information from Cooperative Extension.

Osteen, single mom to son Jack, 5, has turned her life around in the past six years. The list of what she’s overcome is impressive: cocaine addiction, homelessness and low self-esteem. She lived two years in a shelter for pregnant, single women and while there, sat in on money-management classes taught by the Guilford County Cooperative Extension.

Osteen never dreamed that she’d be self-sufficient enough to leave the cocoon of Room at the Inn of the Triad. But the information she learned in the Extension classes struck a chord. When her income-tax refund check came in and she put it aside for safekeeping, and a few months later a small house became available with a down payment of nearly exactly what her check was, Osteen got the courage to leap.

Today she is still at that home in northern Guilford County with her son, and still using techniques she learned in the Extension class to manage her carefully balanced money.

“I still have my house,” says Osteen. “I’m still doing well.”
Solutions by the numbers

The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at N.C. State work collaboratively to provide research-based educational programs to individuals, families and communities. A long-range Plan of Work follows guidelines in the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 to establish a focus on five major areas of public concern. Note-worthy recent impacts in the five major areas include:

Sustaining Agriculture and Forestry

• Big gains from small spores — Wake County Extension worked with A&T Extension’s agribusiness and marketing specialist to help 15 mushroom growers work together. The Triangle Mushroom Grower Group, a producers’ group that got 5,080 pounds of shiitakes to market.

• Eyeing new market niches — Workshops and training to help small-scale farmers adjust to new economic realities helped 942 farmers improve their overall marketing strategy and also helped 1,397 farmers diversify into new markets, increasing their income by a total of $1,010,299. In Stokes County, 11 farmers increased their income by $3,500 in one day, after using their newly learned marketing skills to sell fresh fruit and vegetables to needy senior citizens and young parents.

Protecting the Environment

• Research reaches small farms — Building on research and demonstrations at both the A&T State University Farm and the Center for Environmental Tar<button>tol Systems near Goldsboro, A&T Extension’s small farm outreach collaborated with community partners to introduce or enhance sustainable agricultural practices and marketing solutions for over 1,500 growers who were either beginning, limited resource or socially disadvantaged. By learning ergonomic harvesting practices, these farmers now know how to reduce farm injuries. By learning to produce harvest outside the normal growing season, farmers now also have the potential to increase their income.

• Discovering agriculture inside the city limits — More than 4,000 youths from public and parochial schools in Guilford, Davidson and Orange counties participated in agriculture literacy programs at the A&T University Farm. In learning about environmentally sustainable agriculture and participating in hands-on activities, students increased the science skills that are part of the standard course of study in North Carolina public schools.

Maintaining Viable Communities

• Action is the reaction — To resolve community problems, 365 action plans were developed that resulted in a total of more than $266,230 in economic value to affected communities across state.

• Hurdling the language barrier — The achievement gap between Hispanic students and their Caucasian counterparts in Durham County has been bridging because of a language barrier. An A&T grant funded a Spanish translation of some key parenting lessons and helped train 200 people as community advocates. It also established a Latino Parent Support Group; composed of 67 parents who have become more informed advocates, and have the potential for helping their children stay in school and keep up with their class work.

• Growing their own — In Gaston County, the childhood obesity rate is above state and national averages; middle-school children are eating more fruits and vegetables after participating in a community-gardening program funded and supported by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, the Gaston County Cooperative Extension Center and other community partners. By learning to garden, the children learned the importance of fresh produce and changed how they eat. This pilot project has since blossomed into an ongoing blend of harvesting exercise, nutrition education and entrepreneurship from a community garden.

Developing Responsible Youth

• 4-H gets added dimension — A&T Extension’s focus on youth growing up without the financial advantages of mainstream America brought 2,230 youth from families with limited financial resources into 4-H programs. Of those, 837 increased their conflict-resolution knowledge and skills, and more than 1,600 are now better equipped to resist peer pressure.

• Nutrition information goes bilingual — New Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP) funds made possible a nutrition mini-camp for Hispanic youth in Greensboro. The program included hands-on activities, where they discussed the new food guide pyramid and used its guidelines to prepare healthy meals.

• Everything adds up — A&T Extension specialists and Family and Consumer Sciences agents working together helped 677 limited-resource families statewide improve their financial status. Of that number, 135 established financial goals, 56 reduced their debt and saved a total of $4,658.

• Thought for food — Through Extension’s nutrition education programs, 14,904 participants in Food Stamp, Women Infants and Children (WIC), and free- and reduced-lunch programs increased their knowledge of basic nutrition. More than 800 participants reduced their intakes of sugar, salt and fat, increased the amount of fruits and vegetables they eat, and increased their physical activity.

• How they deal with their children; with 837 limited-resource participants spending more time with their children.

Developing Strong, Healthy and Safe Families

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