OUR MISSION: Improving the quality of life for limited-resource individuals, families and communities in North Carolina, through education.
It is our job to not only bear witness to this growth, but to actually ignite it through the programs and work generated by Cooperative Extension. We recognize that if babies are born healthier, they are less likely to need expensive, continual and very-often tax-supported health care. If we find ways to help farmers become successful and tap into new markets, we are not only helping supply a safe, affordable and nutritious food source, but we are also maintaining the economic viability of communities that rely on farm income.

Helping is what universities are supposed to do — not only to educate their students and provide research and scholarship, but to also enrich communities through public service. The University of North Carolina, of which A&T is a member institution, is making a systemic effort to assess the challenges facing our state and to determine how we can continuously respond to those issues.

We in Cooperative Extension have long asked these questions and responded with programs and work that benefit our audiences. We are connected to the land. We are connected to the people. We are all benefiting our state. Whether it is the first young tomato sprout pushing its way up past the dirt, or the first welcome mat that a new homeowner puts on her doorstep, it’s our job — our pleasure — to help grow the vast resources of our state.

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

One of us grew up on a farm; the other always had a garden. We attended six different land-grant universities between us. We’re both parents. Suffice it to say we know a thing or two about how things grow.

As the administrators of the Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University, the continual growth and development of the audiences we work with is life-affirming. The work we do matters to thousands of residents. Watching them progress, expand and grow in success and confidence is the business of what Cooperative Extension does.

Sometimes we are helping people literally put seeds in the ground and sometimes our work has more to do with helping people develop their potential — become better parents, healthier consumers and successful students. In this era of economic downturn that includes bank failures, sluggish retail growth, rising food and fuel prices, Cooperative Extension is more vital than ever to people’s future. As the national home-mortgage crisis continues and thousands of people are losing their houses, Cooperative Extension has been able to successfully transform renters into homeowners.

You will find stories about some of these successful people in this year’s Solutions for North Carolina. Our magazine-style multimedia report doesn’t just give you hard, cold data. We let you see and hear from the people who have benefited from Cooperative Extension programs: who interact with our tireless staff. Most of the people featured here work hard on their own behalf, and despite limited means they work with Cooperative Extension to make more out of what they have.

Their successes are ours — and yours. Ours in Extension and ours as taxpayers.
Extension nutrition education programs are responding to the urgent needs of teens facing motherhood at difficult times.

GREENSBORO — They made a place for Gabrielle Prince at Room at the Inn of the Triad, a private not-for-profit residence for pregnant women who have no other place to go.

Prince, 18, in turn made room in her life for the baby that grew inside her, a girl that she named Harmony, and kept healthy through good nutrition practices. Gloria Russ, a program assistant at the Guilford County Cooperative Extension Center, held nutrition classes at Room at the Inn last spring for Prince and other young mothers-to-be.

Using lessons from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program’s curriculum for pregnant and parenting teens, Russ discussed the importance of healthy eating during and after pregnancy.

“She was telling us,” says Prince, “about healthier ways to eat using 2 percent milk and low-fat milk, about sugar-free ice cream and about exercising some. She also talked about the importance of breast feeding; it builds the immune system of the baby.”

Some of what Russ taught wasn’t new to Prince, but motivated by her baby and inspired by Russ’s presentation, Prince more astutely screened what she put into her body. She realized what she ate affected her unborn child.

“I heard it before but I started applying it now because I’m pregnant,” Prince said in an interview during her third trimester.

Prince cut down on her fast food, drank more water than sodas, and many of her evening meals featured green beans, collards and broccoli.

African American teens, like Prince, are twice as likely to deliver low birth-weight babies and 1.5 times more likely to have premature babies than white mothers, according to a study from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. What those young mothers eat during pregnancy and whether they gain enough weight during pregnancy are prime factors in whether their babies will be born prematurely.

Consequently, the toll of caring for premature babies exacts an emotional as well as an enormous financial cost on the American health care system. Hospital charges for premature and low birth-weight babies in 2003 were more than $18 billion, according to the March of Dimes. Mothers of the low birth-weight babies also miss twice as much work as mothers of babies born with healthy weights, and low birth-weight babies have twice as many doctors’ office visits in the first year.

Prince, who had a couple of false-labor visits to the hospital before her daughter was born in late September, was determined that her baby would beat the statistics. She also expanded her food options, trying new foods, knowing Harmony will benefit.

“I think she’ll be healthy and her immune system will be strong,” Prince says. “It’s real important because you want your kids to have better than you had and be a better person than you are. It’s good to start now while they’re in your stomach.”

Gabrielle Prince and Extension Program Assistant Gloria Russ prepare fresh fruit.

Gabrielle Prince

Guidance ASAP for mothers-to-be

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Gabrielle Prince and Extension Program Assistant Gloria Russ prepare fresh fruit.
Small-scale swine production was nearly made obsolete by corporate farming, but A&T Extension has saved the day for old-school hog farmers by introducing them to new consumer preferences.

Warsaw — Love a pig. John McCoy does, and it’s working for him. James Hartsfield, Area Extension Agent for Duplin and Sampson counties, encouraged McCoy and other farmers to become certified through the Pork Quality Assurance program to help boost their income opportunities. Hartsfield helped put them in touch with the Robeson County Extension Center where the farmers got study materials and support that prepped them for testing and certification.

Ever since, McCoy has been able to command a better price — sometimes triple what he previously made — for his hogs. Not only that, he’s grown his livestock operation from about 20 hogs to over 70.

"Before, they'd write you a check right there," McCoy says about selling his hogs to a stockyard. "But it wouldn't be near as much as I get now. It wouldn't be half as much." Before getting certified in 2006, McCoy got up to 36 cents per pound for hogs, selling in whole-hog quantity; an amount he recalls as being "much of nothing." As a card-carrying member of the National Pork Board's quality assurance program, McCoy, 69, now gets about three times as much for his pasture-raised hogs as he was before earning the certification. Recently, McCoy has commanded as much as $1.04 per pound for a dressed-weight hog, which has been cleaned and gutted. At that rate, McCoy was able to sell 12 hogs for $200 each, for a total of $2,400 — considerably more than the $860 he would have gotten selling at a stockyard.

"Every cent input has been good," McCoy says. "They help with the paperwork, with a lot of that." With Hartsfield, anything that I have questions about or anything, I go to him.

The Pork Board's certification gives McCoy a stamp of approval that vouches for the quality of his animals and enables him to sell directly to a wholesaler. As part of the quality assurance measures, McCoy's farm is regularly audited by inspectors to ensure that the hogs are treated humanely, including that:

- Their living conditions are adequate — meaning they aren’t living in wet and muddy environments, or in their own waste, and that they have straw bedding.
- They are maintained in a low-stress environment — even as they're on the way to the slaughterhouse. McCoy loads the animals in a trailer, for market, by coaxing, rather than hinting. He uses feed to entice them inside the trailer.

Such benign treatment is not only humane, but has a more pragmatic application that affects consumers. "When a hog is stressed there’s a tendency to jam more, to create a thickness and that makes him tougher," McCoy says.

McCoy has farmed all his life, all of it in the vicinity of the 101 acres on which he now raises soybeans, watermelons, cows, hogs and enough corn to keep his hogs fed. He farmed as a boy helping his daddy. He farmed the 30 years he had a full-time job as a barber at Camp Lejeune. He farmed in the heyday of tobacco, which for him ended in 2003 when the subsidies were cut. Now that he has another more profitable venture as a certified Pork Board breeder, McCoy can continue farming and maintaining the life he loves. "I just like to get out here where it ain't nobody but the cows and the hogs and nobody saying nothing to you," McCoy says.
Ann Rose shed another layer and grew a little more. When she realized 13 years ago that her marriage was faltering, she took her three daughters and left, and bought a small farmhouse in those sprawling mountains. When the nursing job she’d worked so hard to attain kept her cooped up inside, shuffling paperwork and pushing pills, she walked out on a $60,000-a-year career and started to farm full time, initially making just $5,000 — a twelfth of her former salary. Then, when Rose, now 41, realized she spent about half a day every month washing the knickknacks in her kitchen, she sold her modest three-bedroom house to her daughter. She got rid of most of her possessions and moved further up the mountain into a 264-square-foot room with no electricity that started out as an 8-foot by 12-foot utility shed built by one of her daughters in shop class. “I have an outhouse and I don’t care who knows it,” Rose says, laughing. “I have a solar clothes dryer (clothes line) and I use a wood stove for heat.” And when there is something she can’t figure out on her own, she calls on the Ashe County Cooperative Extension Center. Rose met Extension Area Agent Richard Boylan about seven years ago when her tomatoes were hit with leaf blight. At the time she had only what she calls “a kitchen garden” to feed her family, but Boylan nonetheless helped diagnose her problem and suggested corrections. “Richard came and ever since then it’s just been one thing after another,” Rose says. “He totally introduced me to better practices. This is what Extension does and how it helps.” Now that she is farming for her livelihood, her relationship with Extension is even more crucial. Boylan helped get Rose involved in organic farming and helped her to factor labor costs into her market prices. Through Extension, Rose has also learned cover cropping, saving seed and crop rotations. The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T helped her install black plastic and drip irrigation on her farm, so that she can reap earlier yields, and also introduced her to growing mushrooms on logs. Rose owns 28 acres, and leases another 5 acres. She raises dairy goats, pastured pigs, horses and Katahdin sheep. She farms organically, is a founding member of the New River Organic Growers, and is a driving force in the Ashe County Farmers Market in West Jefferson. Rose projects that she could make $20,000 by the end of the 2008 growing season, and that’s a good year. “Economically, she’s moved into markets that she finds profitable, making ends meet and doing well,” Boylan says. Growing up on a farm in Yadkin County, Rose learned farming from her parents. As she married and reared her own family, Rose always had some type of garden. Growing her own food helped keep her daughters enormously healthy, she says. Rose always had a gift for making things grow. Yet now that she farms professionally and is learning new techniques and information through Extension, Rose realizes how much she had to learn. “There are a lot of things about farming I didn’t know,” Rose says. “We didn’t do it right when I was a kid.” The education from Cooperative Extension has been how to do it and make money from it.”

Ann Rose

A Rose grows in the Carolina high country

Small-scale farmers who turn the corner into organic production are finding that Cooperative Extension awaits with expertise in marketing and livestock, as well as fruits and vegetables.

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Growing up with goals

Teenagers growing up in the first decade of the 21st century face an unprecedented slate of hurdles and temptations. Cooperative Extension has broadened 4-H into a support system for youth.

Windsor — Among the hundreds of young people gathered at Athens Drive High School to compete in the annual North Carolina 4-H Congress, there are two young men from Bertie County who couldn’t be more physically different. Yet, they are traveling the same path shaped by devoted grandparents, raised in the church, and nurtured by 4-H and Bertie County 4-H Extension.

Sezman Williams is a 17-year-old mountain of a young man with a parallel immovable countenance about who he is. “My friends call me granddaddy because they say I am old-soul,” says Williams, a standout football player who is also in the top 10 of his class academically at Bertie High. “My grandmother, Clara, and Lloyd Hendrix, my grandparents, are the foundation to me,” Bass says. “Whatever it takes, they make sure that I’m not out in the street.”

“4-H has helped me to realize the calling of my life is leadership,” says Williams, who is also a member of his high school debate team. Bass was selected to attend the National 4-H Leadership Conference in Washington in 2008, was given an N.C. Extension Youth Award in 2007, started a 4-H chapter in his high school and has amassed several awards. His defining 4-H moment came four years ago when he won a bronze award for a 4-H District competition in which he made a solo presentation after his partner got sick the day before the presentation and was hospitalized.

“It let me know that I can accomplish anything no matter what obstacles come my way,” Bass says. “It helped me gain success even outside 4-H.”

Ke’Ron Bass

Ke’Ron Bass, also 17, is a natty, slightly built go-getter, who was student-body president his junior year at Bertie High, and is in the top 15 of his class. Bass credits 4-H with keeping him out of harm’s way. “If it wasn’t for 4-H, I wouldn’t be here,” Bass says. “I wouldn’t be the person I am today. I probably wouldn’t be alive today.”

Bass lives with his grandmother and great-grandmother. His mother and stepfather — who are supportive — love a few doors away. Bass describes his father’s involvement in his life as “rare.” His grandmother, Delores Bazemore, works two shifts at a chicken processing plant so that Bass can have a car, gas for it, clothes and all the other necessities that other kids have.

“My grandmother and great-grandmother are the foundation to me,” Bass says. “Whatever it takes, they make sure that I’m not out in the street. My family would have kept me off the street, but 4-H gave me that place to go.”

Williams and two younger siblings started out with their mother, but as she continued to be the victim of both an abused boyfriend and a drug dependency, Williams went to live with his father in Tennessee. He stayed there for two years until he was 8, when — returning to Bertie County for a visit — “I fell back in love with my family.”

The connections with his immediate and extended family were so strong Williams didn’t want to leave. He eventually moved back in with his mother and siblings. The boyfriend was still there too. One day as his mother was being attacked, the 11-year-old man-child that was Williams boldly stood up to the abuser.

After that confrontation, his mother feared for his safety and sent him and his brother to their grandparents. Clara and Lloyd Hendrix.

As African-American youth, Williams and Bass are not only aware of the scary statistics on drugs, prison and violence that disproportionately befall black men, they are regularly confronted with the reality of it. They are equally determined not to fall prey. A summer program that Williams attended at East Carolina University has inspired him to want to be an anesthesiologist, but he hasn’t decided which college to attend.

For Williams, who won a first-place speaking award at 4-H State Congress in 2007, his defining 4-H moment was realized four years ago when he was given an N.C. Extension Youth Award in 2007, started a 4-H chapter in his high school and has amassed several awards. His defining 4-H moment came five years ago when he was given a bronze award for a 4-H District competition in which he made a solo presentation after his partner got sick the day before the presentation and was hospitalized.

“It let me know that I can accomplish anything no matter what obstacles come my way,” Bass says. “It helped me gain success even outside 4-H.”
PITTSBURG — She was a history major with a minor in biology, so initially, Emily Lancaster, 24, had planned to teach history and then travel the world saving rare plants.

Now, though, she’s a fledgling young farmer and is something of a history maker, choosing to work the land in an area where the age of the average North Carolina farmer is 55. The rarity that Lancaster may very well end up preserving is the existence of the young farmer. She and people like herself are defying the odds and foregoing the corporate sector and the world stage. Instead, they work to sustain the land of their communities — places where each season they put new seed in a ground that is fertilized with the blood, sweat and tears of their forbearers.

When Lancaster began farming in 2007: “I tried to farm cold turkey and I went into debt about $1,500,” she says.

This year has been a more successful one for her, partly because of the Farmer-to-Farmer Mentor Program, which matches young and beginning farmers with seasoned veterans. The program is organized through The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University and relies on county Extension field staffs to help forge the bonds between fledgling and experienced farmers. The new farmers pay a small registration fee that is used to compensate the mentor farmers who work with them.

“IT takes a lot to start out,” Lancaster says. “Being a young farmer you don’t have that infrastructure. You don’t have land. You’re not (in her case) from a farming family.”

Lancaster was paired with Orange County farmer Cathy Jones to glean techniques for cut flowers and vegetable production. What she learns from Jones, with input from Chatham County Agent Debbie Run, Lancaster pours back into the 5 acres of Chatham County farmland. There she and her partner and boyfriend, Farrell Moose, 28, grow vegetables, cut flowers and raise chickens.

“The biggest thing I learned from Cathy is the importance of integrating everything,” Lancaster says. Lancaster was only lukewarm to the idea of growing flowers, considering them a trendy enterprise, but the more she learned and worked with Jones, the greater her awareness of long-range profitability. Now Lancaster proudly points out a row of calendula, noting that the petals are edible, and that salve can be made from them that is good for the skin. They also attract bees that help pollinate the tomatoes in the greenhouse.

In addition to tomatoes and cut flowers, Lancaster and Moose grow potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, beans, okra and corn. They are contributors in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group and supply local members with $20 worth of produce a week, per member, from their farm. DeShon Cromartie, the former A&T coordinator of the Farmer-to-Farmer Mentor Program, says the relationship between Jones and Lancaster has been a winning match.

“A lot of times, if you’re with a farmer, you don’t have time to sit down and ask a lot of questions,” Lancaster says. “Cathy (Jones) spent time with me. This is a great program. Just having another resource, is reassuring. To be able to see it done and know that other people are doing it is really helpful.”

Rookie farmers find best mentors are the old pros

Emily Lancaster

Farmer Extension Associate
DeShon Cromartie (l) and Emily Lancaster

The profit margins for small-scale agriculture have grown too slim for the expenses that add up when newcomers are learning their lesson through the school of hard knocks. The Farmer-to-Farmer Mentor Program is pairing up knowledge and enthusiasm...cost effectively.
At the same time that quick-fix approaches to first-time home ownership were setting the underpinnings for economic disaster, Extension’s family and consumer science programs were plugging along effectively and prudently.

Establishing self-reliance one step at a time

WINSTON-SALEM — Ever since she was at least 17 and left her mother’s home with her baby daughter in tow, Jackie Baldwin has had a firm grasp on her own bootstraps. She was pulling herself up just fine, but sometimes throughout the course of her life, the straps would break.

She was left off the good job she had for eight years at AT&T. Baldwin went back to school; she got other jobs.

The daughter Baldwin had as a teenager became a teenage mother too. Then Baldwin had school; she got other jobs.

Baldwin enrolled in an Individual Development Account (IDA) program, used by community organizations across the country to help people with limited or modest resources build their assets through savings accounts.

Baldwin used them and realized she could save money if she cut down on eating out and on clothes shopping. Baldwin then mined the silver out of the clouds. She now recognizes that finding a linens skirt for $30 isn’t such a bargain if she spends $8 having it dry-cleaned a couple of times a month. Doing more of her own cooking, she said, enabled her to “become an excellent cook.”

Using the wits that had stood her in such good stead over the years and with regular encouragement from her sister, Yvonne Rorie, it wasn’t long before Baldwin had saved the $1,000 for her IDA account, which was matched by program sponsors.

Not only is she thriving, Baldwin was such a success in the classes that she later applied for and got a job as a wealth counselor at the Experiment in Self Reliance Center. She graduated from Winston-Salem State University in May 2007 with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies.

“At this program helped me to see what I needed to do and focus on how to do it. It’s given me something to believe in. If I do what I’m supposed to do, I won’t fail.”

Baldwin said.

Cooperative Extension helped Baldwin take her own dreams some true.

With $38,000 in grants and interest loans, and $1,000 she saved, Baldwin made a down payment and moved into a house in Sage Meadows a little more than a year ago.

“I’ve always aspired to home ownership,” Baldwin says. “But to start or boost a small business, or to pay for school or job training.”

Participants save money to buy a first home, to start or boost a small business, or to pay for school or job training. What limited-resource participants save in their IDA accounts is then matched through public and private sources.

“Offered through Experiment in Self Reliance, a non-profit agency that empowers limited-resource people, IDA programs partnered with Forsyth County Cooperative Extension to teach money management,” Deborah Womack, a family and consumer sciences extension agent, trained Baldwin and others to assess how they were spending their money using the money tracker tool developed by Dr. Claudine Smith of the Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

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Customers come first, then keep coming back for more

LUMBERTON — Demands on his time include a lawn-care business, raising up to 200 hogs and managing a 57-acre farm, but if owner Dannie Livingston is in his downtown Lumberton meat market and convenience store, no matter how busy he is or how pressed for time, he greets his customers. Many of them he doesn’t know. Yet, he wants them to come back so he always makes sure they feel welcome … here … at Tomboy’s Blessed Sausage.

As the name of this business implies, Livingston has a sense of humor as well as a sense of purpose. And he’s combined those two traits into a small business where he and his family sell prime cuts of pork from their family farm, as well as produce, dry goods and other supplies.

The Livingstons had farmed tobacco and hogs for years, but when the government phased out price supports for tobacco, the family got out of the tobacco business. Dannie Livingston, 50, sought other ways to keep the family farm viable through alternative agricultural opportunities.

“Our search is to find out how to make that little farm be prosperous again,” Livingston says of the family homestead.

“How do you go back and make that farm productive so that it will take care of your family?”

Livingston attended a small-scale hog forum sponsored by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, at which experts offered ways to make hogs more profitable. A chance conversation Livingston later had with an inspector sparked an idea that had been floated in the hog forum: converting an old tobacco barn into a cold storage unit. Nelson Brownlee, a farm management agent for Extension in Robeson and Bladen counties who had helped Livingston develop a farm management plan, assisted Livingston in finding a grant to pay for a freezer and a refrigerated truck. Thus, in 2002, began the family’s on-farm meat enterprise.

Two years ago, when an older friend wanted to sell his downtown meat market and retire, Livingston got a loan and bought the business.

“You get an inkling,” Livingston says, “that this is your blessing.”

With a larger facility, Livingston has eliminated the middleman — the need for a butcher to dress, cut and wrap the meat that he then took back to his cold-storage barn to sell. In the first six months of business in 2007, Livingston increased his net retail income by $6,000 more than the previous year.

Tomboy’s Blessed Sausage takes its name from the Livingston family legacy: three sisters who grew up able to operate lawnmowers, tractors and farm equipment along with Dannie Livingston and his brother, Michael. Also, Livingston’s son, father and grandfather are all named Thomas. When they needed something folks would just call for “Tom Boy.”

“And because we pray over everything we do,” Livingston says, he also wanted the store to have an assisted identity.

The “sausage” label just rounded out the store name in what has become something of a conversation piece for customers, friends and folks about town. As expected, though, a lot more than sausage is available in the store. Jerome Livingston, Dannie Livingston’s cousin, is busy on a recent visit cutting pork chops into one-inch portions in the cold storage part of the store.

Out front, other cuts of meat are wrapped and ready for sale. A stream of customers trickles in over the course of an hour, some looking into coolers at the meat selection. Others just want milk, or soda or any of an assortment of products grown or made locally: watermelon from Bladenboro, eggs from his father’s hens, liver pudding from Scottish Packing Co., corn meal ground in Cerro Gordo, and Uncle Buck’s Barbecue Sauce that is made in Lumberton.

Even though others are busy working in the store, it’s Dannie Livingston who makes a point of greeting people, smiling at them, making sure they can find what they’re looking for.

“We drill on customer service,” Livingston says. “People walk in with their money in their pockets. If you don’t talk to them and don’t have conversation with them, they might just walk out … with your money.”
They just finished their second year as Scott Farm Organics. Their fields present a lush, organized and neatly designed landscape, where they also grow beets, radishes, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes, sweet and hot peppers, green beans, turnips, onions, squash, pumpkins and more. It’s all certified organic and, happily, they have a ready and wanting market.

“We’re 10 miles from New Bern,” Scott says. “The tourists and retirement communities are there. They love fresh vegetables and they’d rather buy them directly from the growers.”

The Scotts sell at farmers markets in New Bern and Oriental, but also sell to local restaurants. In 2007, when they farmed 3 acres, they made about $35,000. In 2008, they were projecting to gross $45,000 to $50,000.

Even though the Scotts grossed about $65,000 in Trent’s last year of landscaping, about 70 percent of that — $45,500 — went back into the business. Organic farming has produced about $10,000 per acre and a reinvestment of only about 50 percent of gross income covers recurring production expenses.

“It’s not a get-rich-quick farming thing,” says Trent Scott, “but we definitely think that it’s profitable and it is a lifestyle that we hope to maintain. We want to be able to raise a family on it. We think it will be successful.”

Eddie Scott would be skeptical about how 5 acres in production instead of 50 could generate steady income, but nonetheless he “scarcely” about the transition from tobacco to organics, says his family.

“When Trent first started organic farming, he said, ‘Mom, this is exciting. It’s the new way,’” recalls Trent’s mother Anita Scott. “But when it comes to farming, a lot of things don’t change: the hard work and the satisfaction of doing it.”

**Environmental friendly farming is their specialty**
Youth Voices grad continues to sing praises

DURHAM — In the nearly three years since he graduated from high school, Timothy Fields, 20, has quickly assumed the mantle of adulthood.

He’s had a semester of community college, moved 120 miles away from home and back, worked two jobs, and now works and shares a condominium with his big sister as he prepares to enroll in art school.

Without the leadership program that he took part in the summer he was 16, Fields isn’t sure he would have had the nerve to take on some of his responsibilities. Orange County Youth Voices, sponsored through The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University, offered several government- and public-service summer youth classes in community-home and back, worked two jobs, and college, moved 120 miles away from

“it helped me learn what to do,” Fields says. “I’m not nervous in interviews.”

Fields once thought he wanted to be a psychologist, majoring in adolescent behavior. His semester at Alamance Community College and other experiences, though, have turned his attention to more artistic endeavors. He wants to design greeting cards, and is planning to enroll in art school in the coming months.

Looking back on that experience of four years ago, Fields says that the mock job interviews that he participated in at Youth Voices, helped him with the jobs he has gotten since high school. He worked as an administrative assistant at a law firm while living in Wilmington in 2005, and more recently works as an administrative assistant for a medical center in Durham.

“I made note of,” Hughes says. “The biggest help Extension has provided over the years can’t be summed up in any one project or enterprise. For Hughes, Extension’s involvement culminates in his “being able to stay on the farm.”

Farmer’s Extension connections still paying dividends

CEDAR GROVE — For lifelong Orange County farmer Stanley Hughes, greens beget green. Hughes’ Pine Knot Farm supplies the Q Shack in Raleigh with eight-to-10 boxes of collards a week. The Triangle barbecue restaurant has greens on the menu every day and needs Hughes’ regular, fresh supply all year long. Hughes, in turn, cashes in.

Hughes, 60, continues to work with Orange County Cooperative Extension and The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T to explore niche enterprises and to market his products. He cultivated those relationships in the 1990s when he wanted more research about ventures he was considering, such as pastured poultry, and black plastic and drip irrigation.

“I could go down there and ask for what research has been done on different projects if that was what I wanted to try,” says Hughes, who is one of a select cadre of small farmers who continue to farm tobacco despite changes in government subsidies, now grows 12 acres of organic tobacco for a cigarette company.

Organic produce is also his calling card, and his production mix includes kale, collards, sweet potatoes, sweet chard, broccoli, Napa cabbage, coriander and cauliflower. Chapel Hill restaurants, Elaine’s on Franklin and the Lantern, both cook with Hughes’ vegetables. In addition to having such gourmet restaurants as customers, Hughes sells produce and pasture-raised chickens through Eastern Carolina Organics, Weaver Street, and farmers markets in Durham and Carrboro.

In addition to his staples of sweet potatoes and greens, Hughes determines what to grow each season by market demand.

Last year's new crops included the cool-weather Brussels sprouts and fennel.

“If customers ask for something that’s what I make note of,” Hughes says. If he needs help getting started or determining how to do it, Hughes knows Extension is just a visit or a phone call away.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

SOLUTIONS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

STANLEY HUGHES

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With what Buff describes as “the biggest support and the greatest love” from teachers and staff, her anger subsided and she changed into a well-behaved, A and B student.

She also took part in the 4-H Mini-Society program, where children 8 to 12 learn entrepreneurship by setting up their own societies, complete with governments, businesses and currencifies. Her participation in Mini-Society helped her to envision a future and to set goals.

Now, in addition to being a full-time student, Buff works at Miracle Grounds — the Crossnore-founded coffee house. The retail-coffee business is a vocational classroom for students, and Buff’s participation in Mini-Society prepared her to learn fast and well. She quickly became assistant supervisor.

When Buff graduated from high school in 2007, she opted through a voluntary placement agreement to remain under Crossnore’s protective structure in a supervised cottage. Peers who struck out on their own got pregnant and are struggling to succeed, Buff says.

“I took everything apart like a puzzle and I looked at it,” Buff says. “I use all the stuff that I’ve been through as a stepping stone for where I want to go. I made a deal with God, that ‘I’ll go wherever you want me to go,’ because I’ll know that’s where I’m supposed to be.” So, until she can afford her dream car, she drives a red Chevrolet Cavalier that she bought with the savings she amassed from her various jobs at Crossnore. If all goes according to schedule, she’ll finish Mayland Community College, transfer to Gardner-Webb, graduate in 2010 and then go on for master’s degree in clinical psychology.

“I want a nice life and a nice house and I want to work for it,” Buff says. “I don’t want to live off the government.”

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