Simpson County: Making a Difference in the Lives of all Residents

The Simpson County Cooperative Extension Service continues its mission to bring research-based information from both land grand institutions (University of Kentucky & Kentucky State University) to local individuals and families. As we reflect on the past year, it is apparent that Cooperative Extension continues to make strides in serving a diverse group of clientele. Although we continue to meet the needs of rural populations, we are also hosting numerous programs that serve those living in more urbanized areas. Extension provides programs in the various areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development and community and economic development. We hope that you will take time to review the programs highlighted in this report and we look forward to seeing you at one of our programs soon!

“Extension has literally changed my life. After retiring, extension programs have inspired me to lose weight, quit smoking, and save money. I have also had the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people through volunteering with 4-H.”

- Debbie Head, Homemaker & 4-H Club Leader
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Simpson County 4-H impacted some 259 middle school students and teachers/mentors with the LEGO Robotics Mindstorm curriculum for the 2013/2014 school year, in an effort to promote SET careers and increase achievement in math and science. The middle school’s approach in utilizing the $17,500 OJJDP grant Simpson County 4-H obtained in 2013 was in-school instruction, based on 6th grade science teachers integrating SET into their classroom. Initiating the robotics curriculum in the 6th grade science classes provided the opportunity to introduce SET skills to students that otherwise would never have the opportunity to experience it hands on. The Lego Robotics program was incorporated into classroom learning to promote teamwork and SET concepts.

Youth programmed robots through a hands-on learning process. The students worked in pairs in the classroom, to work cooperatively and problem-solve by programming their robots to do a specific task. This took place daily for six weeks in the 6th grade classes. The 4-H grant made it possible for all students to experience engineering concepts, problem solve, and increase self confidence in knowing that they can fix something when it goes wrong! The schools technology coordinator reported that pre and post test scores showed an increase of 45% in knowing the parts of a NXT Robot and how to program a robot. Pre test scores averaged a 39% and post test scores averaged 84%.

KY 4-H Achievement Program

Simpson County 4-H member Anna Meador, with Catherine Webster, Simpson Co. 4-H Youth Development Agent, received the 4-H Emerald Honor in 2014. The Emerald Honor is the highest achievement a 4-H member can receive in the Kentucky and only four are awarded annually from 220,000 Kentucky 4-H members.

FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

Building family rapport, communication skills, caring and respect start at an early age. The bonding often begins as parents and children work together on chores or projects and tell family stories, make future plans and share their dreams. Since having a request for a preschool cooking class, the Simpson County FCS agent and the Community Education Director combined efforts to advertise and conduct a series of classes called "Cooking With Your Preschooler."

“My child is always asking when the next class will be and is so excited the day of the class he won’t even take a nap!”

- Cooking with Your Preschooler parent

The focus of the classes would be to teach parents how their child can help with food prep, promote family meals and increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables. As a result of the 10 sessions which involved over 50 families and 160 individuals, parents indicated that their children had learned how to be helpful in the kitchen (100%), the importance of food safety and hand washing (100%), and that helping with food prep increased their interest in trying new foods.
(75%). Parents also noted that the classes had increased their child's confidence, cooperative skills, understanding of sequencing, following directions and respect for delicate or dangerous items in the kitchen. All families have spent more time in the kitchen together since participating in the classes.

SNAP-Ed

The SNAP Ed program in Simpson County has been going strong for the past four years. The classes have expanded to several different locations in town including the Housing Authority, Boys and Girls Club, Brooks-Wright Center, the Simpson County jail, F-S West Campus School, Head Start and Kids First, and the Medical Center of Franklin. There were approximately 85 adult participants and 150 youth from age three through high school. All the participants learned the value of healthy eating, getting adequate exercise and enough sleep. The youth and adults had the opportunity to taste new foods, try interesting recipes and learn about measuring ingredients properly when creating healthy meals. Many of the adults expressed gratitude for the reinforcement items such as measuring cups, strainers, and cutting boards which enabled them to prepare more foods from scratch in their kitchens at home.

Participants from the Housing Authority classes were instrumental in creating a Community Garden on the grounds of the Housing Authority. These participants attended workshops for preserving their produce, they taught the children about growing and preserving foods, and about tasting new foods, too. Funds from SNAP Ed purchased seeds and fertilizer for these families to assist them in making their gardens grow. Older residents who could not work a large plot found success in growing tomatoes, peppers and eggplant in large pots near their front door.

Over 90% of adult participants reported increasing their servings of fruits, vegetables and whole grains as a result of what they had learned in the SNAP Ed classes.

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

By increasing our budget with a county tax, we were able to work with our District Board to purchase additional property for Extension use that is adjacent to the Extension Service office in downtown Franklin. Through meetings with local leadership we established that there was a strong need for a new community pavilion that would be primarily used for the Franklin-Simpson Farmers' Market. A grant to the Governor's Office for Agricultural Policy for the Farmers’ Market Infrastructure Grant Program was written and approved for $50,000. Over 90,000 in local matching funds have been raised. The construction of the pavilion will be completed in December 2014.

In the long-term, this permanent structure will make for an overall more appealing environment for Farmers’ Market vendors and patrons. Produce will be handled in a more efficient manner, and resources will be more readily available for vendors to employ good agricultural practices to help ensure food safety. Infrastructure that is not currently available will be in place to allow vendors to accept EBT and Debit cards. The pavilion will also be aesthetically pleasing, and will boost the traffic and patronage of local businesses in the downtown area.

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Board members of the Franklin Boy’s and Girl’s Club asked the Simpson County Extension Office to help in the development of a Garden Project. Over the past two years, the program has become the model for other Boy’s and Girl’s Clubs across the state of Kentucky. Since the inception of the garden project, 135 mostly minority and at-risk youth participated. The program was designed to teach youth about food production, financial management, marketing, nutrition, food preparation and the rewards of hard work.

All agents and the Snap-Ed assistant participated by providing education, advising, hands-on demonstrations, irrigation, soil testing, nutrition education, food preparation, weed ID, vegetable selection and fertilization. Initial outcomes of the garden project include knowledge gained about proper production
practices, improved nutrition, selecting produce, garden design, food safety, vegetable and recipe preparation, and marketing skills.

A post survey indicated participants had a 50% increase in eating 3 or more vegetables per day, an 11% increase in daily vegetable consumption, 30% increase in complete understanding of a recipe, 73% believe they know how to select the best produce, and 63% always wash their hands before food prep. Garden hours totaled 986 while income totaled $2917.51, which translates into $2.96 per hour worked or an average of $34.32 per child. Parent surveys indicated that Garden Project participants were more responsible at home, helped with home gardens and food preparation. The involvement of the Boy's and Girl's Club with the Simpson County Farmer's Market has increased community support for the market and sales by regular vendors.

**Farm to Table Luncheon**

In an effort to promote and highlight those farmers who sell at the Simpson County Farmer's Market, the Ag Awareness Committee decided to host a Farm to Table Luncheon at the Franklin Country Club. The meal was prepared by a chef from a local restaurant and the food was provided by six local farmers and produce from the Boy's and Girl's Club garden. The luncheon was free to the 115 professional clientele who attended. The speaker provided insight into the importance of buying local and supporting the producers in our county. Sponsors for the event included the Extension Homemakers, the Rotary Club of Franklin, F/S Chamber of Commerce, Simpson County Soil Conservation District and Beekeepers from Allen and Warren Counties. Seven Plate-It-Up recipes were featured by the chef. As a result of this program farmer's market vendors experienced an increase in sales, the chef used one of the Plate-It-Up recipes in his restaurant and kept buying locally grown produce for his businesses and a "Wine and Dine" event was held and advertised at the luncheon that raised $2000 for the Farmer's Market Pavilion.

**Building a Health Coalition**

An assessment of Simpson County revealed there was no organized effort to work collaboratively for the health of Simpson County. A coalition was formed and facilitated by the Simpson County Extension FCS agent. We have established priority work groups to focus on physical activity, nutrition, smoke-free work places and drugs, alcohol and OTC drug abuse. Since the first meeting in October 2013, the group has contributed well over 600 hours to the community via a community health fair, a middle school health fair, the Sidewalk/Bike Path Project, the smoke-free workplace initiative, a Chamber Eye Opener, radio programs and newspaper articles. We have reached approximately 14,133 contacts both directly and indirectly through the efforts of our 30 member coalition. As a result of the sidewalk/bike path survey, over 1000 individuals voted to identify the priority locations for the next 5 sidewalk projects. This now allows the city of Franklin to be "grant and shovel ready" for built environment projects as they become available.

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**The Simpson County Cooperative Extension Service**

_Extending Knowledge, Changing Lives_

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