Enhancing Our Horticulture

East Austin Garden Fair

The East Austin Garden Fair is Extension’s annual horticultural event that specifically reaches out to our low-income and minority neighbors, a non-traditional audience for horticulture programming. The event was collaborative between Travis County faculty, and focused especially on the connection between gardening and nutrition. Since family health is a major motivator for gardening and consuming more fresh produce, this collaboration was a natural fit and truly exhibited Extension’s strength across content areas. For example, Master Wellness Volunteers did a seasonal produce tasting, and taught fairgoers about fresh home-grown or locally-grown foods and community partner Capital Area Food Bank’s SNAP registration counsellors then talked to interested fairgoers about SNAP eligibility and the application process. In order to connect with new audiences, we sent our press release to various family and eco-centered local blogs, as well as to many of the local “free fun” calendar web sites. As a result, we had more families and children than ever in the seven year history of this event. We also reached out to our deaf community and had interpreters to accompany the 17 deaf participants around the fair. With over 450 attendees, this was our largest event ever.

Junior Master Gardener Programs

JMG (Junior Master Gardener) programs were conducted at 18 locations, with 4,014 youth participating in hands-on gardening activities. Two participants attended the entire four-week series of classes, for a total of 38 hours of training. Participants completed a post-program evaluation survey that provided the following results:

- 88% will develop a business and marketing plan.
- 100% plan to evaluate their property’s soil, climate and water-use.
- 100% plan to use sustainable environmental practices.
- $57.00 per acre was the average expected economic benefit of this program, for a total of savings of $103,400.

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Making a Difference

Extension Education in Travis County

Travis County is located in the heart of Texas and is home to the State Capitol. According to the 2012 Census estimate, 1,065,584 people call Travis County home, an increase of seven percent since 2010. Our growing, urban population includes a diverse demographic of 50% White; 34% Hispanic; 9% Black; 6% Asian; and 1% American Indian.

The Extension program in Travis County is part of the statewide Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program. It is linked with Texas county governments and the national Cooperative Extension System. Extension values and promotes citizen and community involvement, scientifically-based education, lifelong learning and volunteerism. We are pleased to provide you with this 2013 annual report showcasing a variety of our educational activities in Travis County.

2013 Educational Outreach

Educational Programs Presented: 6,038 Attendance at Educational Programs: 108,293

Individual Contacts: 297,870 Volunteers Involved: 2,055

47,817 Volunteer Hours

Valued at $1,058,668*

*Hourly value of volunteer time, provided by Independent Sector

Improving Our Health

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

EFNEP offers practical lessons in basic nutrition, food preparation, food budget management and food safety to young families and youth most at risk from hunger and food insecurity. During 2013, EFNEP staff enrolled 667 families and 5,140 youth in a series of classes. Upon completion, 99% increased consumption of at least one food group; and 87% improved one or more nutrition practices such as using the “Nutrition Facts” on food labels to make healthier food choices.

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Studies have shown that for every $1 spent on EFNEP, $10 was estimated to be saved in health care costs and $2 saved in food costs by participants. For Travis County, this is $3.1 million in estimated health care cost savings and almost $622,506 in food costs.

Chronic Disease Prevention Program

In Travis County, 21% of adults are obese, and 35% of children from low-income families are overweight/obese. Zip codes with high concentrations of individuals with chronic disease risk factors were targeted for educational programs that reached 745 participants. Health and wellness surveys addressing changes in behavior and knowledge were completed by 65 program participants (n=77.4%): $50.8% understood the connection to extra weight and chronic disease; 49.2% knew the difference between a portion and a serving; and 36.9% understood the importance of physical activity.

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Better Living for Texans
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
386 programs were conducted in 2013, with 8,332 SNAP eligible individuals and families participating. Using “hands-on” experiences, BLT participants completed a series of lessons focusing on meal planning, stretching food dollars, decreasing fat and sodium consumption, and adopting selected behaviors that can reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Counts sessions were led for a total of 692 hours of instruction. In 2013, 3,368 contacts were made and 339 Character instructors teach the Six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. All instructors were trained using the Connect with Character curriculum. All participants are encouraged to keep bees! 100% of participants to hear from the experts and a few local beekeepers to learn about beekeeping. A limited number of participants were able to attend the tour and learn about beekeeping in the community.

Dinner Tonight!
Agrilife Extension initiated the Dinner Tonight! program which promotes healthy meal-time habits, healthy meal planning, food preparation techniques, and promotes healthy eating. Texas agriculture by sending out a weekly email with a video demonstrating one of the quick and healthy recipes that are archived on the Dinner Tonight! website (http://healthyliving.tamu.edu) with a link to download the recipe for free. The recipes include nutritional information and price per serving calculations. The recipes are cost effective, easy to prepare, and fit into a healthy meal plan.

705 Dinner Tonight! email recipients receive weekly video webcasts. An estimated 29,652 were reached through the Dinner Tonight! TCTV/Channel 17, AISO monthly newsletters, UT Nutrition Department, and United Way of Greater Austin.

Youth Leadership Program
Youth Leadership is designed for youth ages 12 to 18. The goal of this program is to help youth become more comfortable in developing and delivering speeches, learning how to implement hand signs and voice inflection in their speaking, and peer evaluation. This is a joint program effort between Toastmasters and Travis County 4-H. Sixteen youth received 20 hours of instruction over a three-day period. One 4-H member also received $7,500 in scholarships when he participated in Farm Bureau Speech Contests after completing this seminar.

Youth Science Experiment
Travis County 4-H was the recipient of a $10,000 National 4-H Council Grant that was sponsored by the Philips Company through the Philips Cares Program. Travis County 4-H partnered with Hays and Guadalupe counties to offer a career day. The theme was to host the National Youth Science Experiment on Maps and Apps. Over 40 youth and adults from the three counties toured Philips and learned about careers in production, engineering, marketing, and sales.

Over 200 youth participated in the National Youth Science Day Experiment conducted on October 9th. One event was conducted at the Philips facility in which three employees assisted with the Maps and Apps – create your own park utilizing a layering experiment. Several events were also conducted at local schools in Travis and Hays counties. The youth were competitive in park designs and excited about the opportunity to be creative while learning the importance of GIS/GPS.

4-H CAPITAL After-School Science Programs
4-H CAPITAL engages youth in hands-on engineering and design to teach low-income youth 21st Century skills that they need to be successful. Programs focused on engineering and technology supplement learning during the school day by applying school day learning to real world experiences. Student projects included learning about animal behavior with small mammals, coding with the Maps and Apps – create your own park utilizing a layering experiment. Several events were also conducted at local schools in Travis and Hays counties. The youth were competitive in park designs and excited about the opportunity to be creative while learning the importance of GIS/GPS.

Percentage of each grade level that showed an increase in at least one indicator

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<th>Indicator</th>
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<th>1-2 Grades</th>
<th>3-4 Grades</th>
<th>5-6 Grades</th>
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<td>Percentage</td>
<td>60.31</td>
<td>63.27</td>
<td>69.3</td>
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Supporting Our Agriculture
Winter Forage Program
In the late summer it is important for those with live stock to consider their pasture’s health. During an all-day program offered in cooperation with Bastrop County, 65 ranchers learned the benefits of local testing, planting and maintaining winter forage, laws and regulations for restricted use chemicals. Attendees were made aware of the importance of herd health plans and encouraged to make a goal for 100% of their pastures to have a good understanding of fertilization methods and needs, and 92% felt that information would provided a positive economic benefit to their ranch. One cattleman said: “this was the best program I’ve been in many years.”

Large Scale Rainwater Harvesting
Water is our most valuable natural resource and residents in the area are aware of their best to start capturing our rainfall. Texas A&M Water Resource Specialist, Billy Kniffen delivered a hard hitting program about the capabilities of rainwater harvesting. He explained to the 45 participants that when they install their large scale rainwater harvesting systems, they will have harvesting potential of 600 gallons for each inch of rainfall on a 1,000 square foot roof. Participants were land owners that were looking to install tanks larger than 500 gallons.

Workshop attendees toured a landowner’s home that had the ability to hold up to 36,000 gallons of rainfall in tanks. Thanks to recent rainfall, the tanks were all full; creating much excitement for future plans. Of those that participated in the hands-on program, 85% will implement a large-scale rainwater harvesting system.

Beekeeping 101
The buzz is here to stay with the help of our local entomologists in the beekeeping community. A limited registration class offered the chance for 30 starting beekeepers to hear from the experts and a few local beekeepers about what it takes to get started.

The program provided the basics of bee biology and behavior, tools of the trade and setting up your hive. The open interactive forum enabled participants to understand exactly what it takes to start up a hive – both financially and physically. Individuals also learned about bee health and forage, and the new exciting options for agriculture valuation in Travis County by keeping bees! 100% of participants felt they strongly benefited from hearing extension personnel coupled with local beekeepers. Due to demand, additional programs will be scheduled for 2014.

In 2013, over 8 tons of coffee grounds were diverted every month, for a total of almost 96 tons.

Ground to Ground Program
Ground to Ground is a first-of-its-kind partnership program between Extension in Travis County and Compost Couture in Austin. The program brings in new business, dramatically reduces the volume of their landfill waste, and stimulates environmental consciousness (and composting) among consumers and employees.

Community-wide Fire Ant Management
In 2002, Riggs et al showed that community wide fire ant management programs can help reduce red imported fire ant populations and reduce pesticide costs for community residents. By forming community wide programs for neighbors, fire ant reinestation can be reduced or delayed.

Two community wide fire ant programs were continued in 2013. These programs cover over 1,800 acres and include over 1,400 homes. The mean reduction of pesticides after the program effort was 67%. The mean spent on fire ant control before and after the program effort was $45.52 and $10.91 respectively, providing a mean savings of $34.61.

Pesticide Applicator Licensing
Learning how to use pesticides safely and effectively, with minimal effort on the environment is important. Pesticide applicator licensing is regulated by the Texas Department of Agriculture. Extension continues to work extensively with the TDA in providing educational programs for individuals wishing to obtain their pesticide applicator license. In 2013, Extension provided the four-hour required training program to 149 participants.

Ground to Ground supplies participating businesses with a bucket exchange system, marketing materials, employee training, and program support during the initial few months of participation. Ground to Ground also maps participating businesses online, so that community residents can find coffee grounds in their neighborhood. Travis County Master Gardeners play a key role in business’ successful transition into the program. They volunteer as “captains” for each coffee shop, serving as supportive store liaisons and providing important community outreach and education.

Coffee shop owners are very enthusiastic about Ground to Ground, saying that the program brings in new business, dramatically reduces the volume of their landfill waste, and stimulates environmental consciousness (and composting) among customers and employees.

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