



Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities

Highlights 2007

**Practical Knowledge
for Practical Living**



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On the cover is the new Alabama 4-H Environmental Science Education Center.

Foreword

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System is approaching its second century of service!

Extension provides education that allows citizens to make better decisions that will improve their lives. In short, Extension is committed to providing **practical knowledge for practical living**.

This is not a new mission for Extension, which is a joint outreach effort of the state's public land-grant universities, Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. In fact, this has been one of the central tenets of Extension throughout our history.

Consider these words from Extension Director P.O. Davis in a 1956 address to the Association of County Commissioners and Probate Judges in Mobile:

“Together, we're engaged in the finest type of education anywhere and by any people. In brief, it is scientific and technical information for sound and practical people where they live and work.”

This was Extension's passion at our birth in 1914. It was our passion in 1956. And it remains our passion today.

Our professionals touch thousands of lives as they fulfill Extension's mission of making available to all Alabamians the latest research-based information. With ever-evolving technologies and partnerships, Extension helps the citizens of Alabama and enhances the lives of people in the region and in the nation.

One critical element of the Extension mission has never wavered—our commitment to the individual. Extension recognizes the importance of helping people transform their lives in a positive way.

In the past, Extension's work focused on rural Alabama and those involved in agriculture. But today, Extension's work affects the lives of children and adults in every area of the state—small communities and towns to the state's largest urban areas. While we continue to work closely with the agricultural community, our program content has broadened as Alabama has become more diversified.

Practical Knowledge for Practical Living

In the next few pages, you will get a sense of how Extension provides practical people with practical knowledge they can use in their daily lives. This is just a brief glimpse into Extension and our work.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve the citizens of Alabama, and we look forward to many more years of sharing that scientific and technical information Director Davis valued so highly.

Your Extension Administrative Team

Alabama Cooperative Extension System Administrative Team

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Water, Water Nowhere

Water, water, water. After almost 2 years of drought conditions, water—or the lack thereof—has been on everyone’s mind. In many areas of the state, watering the landscape has been prohibited or severely limited.

How can I conserve water? How can I water my lawn and plants more efficiently under restrictions? These are just two of the many questions that homeowners asked in 2007.

To help educate citizens about efficient, water-saving landscape irrigation systems, Extension agents were trained on the uses, tools, and installation of drip irrigation systems. They then distributed the knowledge through a series of seven demonstrations around the state.

County and regional Extension agents and Master Gardeners provided hands-on training to civic groups and to the public by showing how drip irrigation works and then by installing a system. These systems help conserve water, a resource that is becoming more and more precious.

During one workshop, a parched parking area at the Cane Creek Community Garden in Anniston was transformed into a colorful garden by the installation of a drip system.

At historic Fendall Hall in Eufaula, landscape irrigation systems are limited because digging is prohibited around the building. However, a drip irrigation system was installed under the mulch layer, creating a resourceful solution to the problem.



Regional Extension agent Stan Roark checks water pressure before installing a drip irrigation system.

Drip irrigation systems are installed either under mulch or just under the soil surface, providing a more efficient delivery of water to landscape plants than overhead irrigation provides. These systems supply water at a low rate to prevent runoff, and they drastically reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation.

During periods of water restrictions, like those imposed on many north Alabama residents last summer, drip irrigation helps homeowners get the most out of their watering times. Soaker hoses, which are another efficient and less expensive irrigation alternative to emitter-type systems, have also been approved for use in most areas.

Fresh Fruit, Big Dollars

Fresh fruit is big business in Alabama, generating about \$15 million in cash receipts annually.

And it is not just peaches. Alabama producers grow and market a number of other fruits including apples, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and satsumas. With the exception of peaches and apples, most of the fruit is grown on small plantings and sold directly to consumers.

A significant number of small- and limited-resource growers are also involved in fruit production.

Over the years, members of Extension's commercial horticulture team have aided Alabama's fruit producers in diverse ways, including variety selection, disease control, and other management practices.

In 2007, Extension provided critical support for a problem that neither growers nor Extension professionals could avert—an early spring killing freeze.

Weather models and forecasts were shared with growers so preparations could be made to reduce, if possible, some of the anticipated damage. Team members offered advice on how to reduce damage; they also tracked temperatures and wind conditions during the 3-day freeze.

As with any disaster, questions about damage and its extent start coming in almost before the crisis ends. Regional Extension agents and specialists handled dozens of local, state, and national media inquiries following the spring freeze.

Questions from growers took priority, for these were the people who would lose vital income. Next were questions from state agencies that might be able to provide disaster relief.

For more than 2 weeks, Extension's commercial horticulture team surveyed fruit orchards and fields to determine the scope of the damage. While severe freeze damage can be determined in 2 to 3 days, it may take several weeks to determine the extent of less severe damage. Hundreds of fruits were cut, many growers were contacted, and results were shared with state and federal agencies.

The team discovered that about 3,000 acres experienced freeze damage, costing the state's producers more than \$8.3 million in cash receipt losses.

Following the spring freeze, Extension's commercial horticulture team worked closely with Alabama's producers, advising them on ways to best manage their orchards and fields to ensure productivity in 2008.



A plum shows signs of severe freeze damage.

Strong Marriages Equal Strong Families

Research confirms that marital instability has a negative impact on both adults and children.



Joan Weaver trains teachers in the Relationship Smarts curriculum.

In the past, limited work has been done to systematically address the problem. This effort is especially critical in Alabama because for the past 63 years the state has ranked in the top five or ten for highest divorce rate.

Extension's family and child development professionals serve as the primary facilitators of a statewide consortium of more than eighty groups tackling the problem in Alabama.



The consortium's Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative reaches citizens through a variety of research-based programs.

The programs aim to strengthen family bonds by raising public awareness of the importance of healthy marriages for child, family, and community well-being. The programs increase citizens' access to healthy marriage resources through the Internet (www.alabamamarriage.org), publications, workshops, and seminars.

Extension professionals emphasize the dynamic nature of the initiative. Data gathered from pre- and post-workshop evaluations enable them to fine-tune curricula to specifically meet Alabamians' needs.

The partnerships of diverse organizations enhance the initiative as well. These partnerships allow the programs to reach new and previously underserved audiences.

In 2007, more than 700 adults and 2,500 young people participated in a lesson series during multiple sessions. Another 5,000 people attended 1-day events.

This year, the initiative offered five free training opportunities, preparing professionals and community members to implement the program curricula in their communities.

In the coming year, *The Alabama Marriage Handbook* will be made available to couples seeking wedding licenses in every Alabama county probate office.

A federal grant of more than \$8 million will support the initiative's efforts during the next 5 years.

Synthia Williams works with teachers who partner with Extension in this program.

Assessing the Bottom Line

Every year Extension economists involved with the Alabama Farm Business Management and Financial Analysis program take the financial pulse of each farmer and agribusiness professional served through the program.

The result is the *Alabama Farm Analysis Association Summary Report*. Few other Extension publications are as comprehensive or deal with such a wide range of subject matter.

Farmers and agribusiness professionals who participate in the farm analysis program and who represent Alabama's major crops provide these economists with their financial records. What emerges from the intensive number crunching that follows is a clear and concise picture of the financial health of their farming operations—one that helps economists and farmers alike chart their futures.

The data is organized depending on the region of the state and the type of farming enterprise involved.

Among many other features, the summary provides a 5-year average of farm expenses, crop returns, and profits—"practically everything associated with the financial bottom line of farming," according to Steve Brown, one of several economists throughout the state who help compile the information for the booklet.

The summary also has served to drive home a few sobering truths to farmers, including the role government support continues to play in the viability of many Alabama farming and agribusiness operations.

Without this support, many Alabama farmers would be in dire straits. Based on 5-year data, cotton farmers who did not have federal support were profitable in only one of those years. Likewise, operators of cow-calf operations would not have been profitable in any of these years without some measure of federal assistance.

"But perhaps most important," Brown says, "is that by comparing their own profitability with counterparts in their region, farmers can assess the health and viability of their operations and identify ways to improve their operations' profitability."



Extension economists gather vital data each year for the state's farmers and agribusiness professionals.

4-H ATV Safety Education Saves Lives

More than 140 deaths from all-terrain vehicle accidents have been reported in Alabama since 1982. Sixty-one of these deaths were children under age 16.

It is not uncommon on Alabama highways to see people of all ages riding on ATVs. These vehicles are not always properly sized to the riders, and riders are often without proper protective clothing. On many occasions, people ride double.

This past year, Alabama 4-H launched the Alabama Motorized Outdoor Adventures program. Goals are to help youth recognize the importance of being well trained, wearing safety gear, riding at appropriate speeds, and avoiding risks.

Jamie Freeman, a 4-H volunteer leader and ATV instructor from Walker County, was hired as the state 4-H ATV coordinator.

She implemented a seven-step nonriding training program designed to educate and inform preteen, teen, and adult riders about safe riding techniques and practices, proper sizing of ATVs to riders, and legal places to ride.

The program helps preteens and teens increase their critical thinking, develop life skills, and enhance their abilities to assess risk and solve problems regarding the use of ATVs. It also educates parents and caregivers on protecting young riders through supervision and monitoring, and it helps communities address issues related to safe use of ATVs.

Freeman trained regional and county Extension agents, agent assistants, 4-H teen leaders, and adult volunteer leaders to conduct the National 4-H Council's Preriding ATV Adventures Fit to Ride awareness

programs on the local level. After completing the training, they conducted thirty-three programs for 10,920 participants throughout the state.

Governor Bob Riley signed a proclamation commending Alabama 4-H for its ATV safety initiative.



Youth learn about ATV safety at a program in Houston County.

Birds of a Blue Feather

Extension's Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs tackled two very different challenges with a single program.

One challenge addressed was the continuing decline of eastern bluebird populations caused by increasing urban sprawl. The other challenge was to provide young people living in group home settings with activities that promote problem solving and independent thinking.

The solution—a unique partnership among Extension and a number of public and private organizations—was to establish a bluebird trail in Montgomery County.

Extension provided educational information on the history and preferred habitat of eastern bluebirds and developed a management and monitoring plan for the trail. Other partners contributed funds to purchase nest boxes and materials. Youth from Group Homes for Children assembled and placed the nest boxes in suitable habitats to attract bluebirds.

Then the young people monitored the boxes from spring until early fall, checking each several times a week. Using Extension's monitoring plan, they recorded vital data including the number of eggs laid, the number of eggs hatched, the number of young bluebirds fledged, and the possible reasons for failed nests.



Urban sprawl has caused a decrease in the eastern bluebird population.

In 2007, the young people installed ten nest boxes at an area golf course. They also built and installed nest boxes in eight new public parks in Montgomery County.

The program will continue in 2008 with plans for increased participation of youth from group homes as well as the placement of additional nest boxes.

While the effort is only a small step in the recovery of the bluebird population, it provides a beneficial environmental impact by bringing the birds back into areas where their habitats have been threatened. The program also fosters a sense of purpose and environmental stewardship in the youth.

Doggone Good

Extension has traditionally worked closely with farmers, providing the latest information on the care and management of their livestock. As more Alabamians are now living in urban and suburban settings, Extension is providing programs targeting dogs.

The role of dogs in American society has transformed as people have moved from rural communities to large, metropolitan areas. In addition to serving their traditional role of human companions, dogs today serve as therapy animals, as part of search and rescue teams, and as participants in physical rehabilitation and psychological recovery programs.

Extension's Urban and New Nontraditional Programs led the way developing publications and workshops to enhance dog owners' knowledge and confidence.

In 2007, Extension hosted the North Alabama Dog Expo to provide dog owners and fanciers with research-based information and to provide an opportunity for people to learn more about the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership.

Held at Alabama A&M University's Agribition Center, the expo attracted more than 100 participants from north Alabama and south central Tennessee. Demonstrations and talks covered topics such as dog obedience, agility, therapy, search and rescue, and animal adoption. Those

attending the expo received a packet that included Extension publications on dog nutrition, reproduction, health management, behavior, and training.

Partnerships with various local businesses and organizations provided a solid foundation for the expo, and the event was heavily promoted by the media.

The expo is just one facet of Extension's growing educational effort targeting dog owners and their companions. And both reap the benefit of enjoyable and long-lasting relationships.



Extension offers publications and workshops to help educate dog owners.

Good News for Deer Hunters

More and more property owners have a growing interest in effectively managing wildlife on their land—particularly whitetail deer.

Extension wildlife professionals conducted a number of activities throughout 2007, providing landowners with effective deer management tools and techniques.

Forestry, wildlife, and natural resource team members conducted a day-long Advanced Deer Management seminar in north Alabama to teach eighty area landowners about effective deer management.

The workshop was a combined effort of the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, the Alabama State Chapter of the Quality Deer Management Association, and Extension.

Mark Smith, Extension forestry and wildlife specialist, said the program was developed “to combat incorrect information.”

“We wanted a program that would help people focus their time and resources on proven methods for enhancing deer quality or populations on their property,” he said. “First, we wanted to provide solid, science-based information on deer management and

then to provide information on things average landowners can actually do to improve deer quality on their land.”

Some landowners, particularly those who are interested in managing their deer populations, dislike feral pigs. Feral pigs multiply rapidly and do considerable damage to deer habitats. Team members

worked with federal agencies on trapping feral pigs in the Bankhead National Forest. Extension wildlife professionals learned a lot in this joint effort, and they shared information about designing and placing traps with Alabama landowners who deal with the problem.



From left, Lewis Tapley, Derek Bryan, and Ronald Britnell participated in the Deer and Turkey Expo in Birmingham.

Wildlife specialists also offered a continuing education workshop for foresters in 2007. The program’s goal was to enhance foresters’ understanding of deer and to teach effective timber management for deer.

The Deer and Turkey Expo in Birmingham was one of the largest efforts of the team. Extension agents and specialists visited with more than 1,200 people about managing their land for hunting uses. These contacts will continue to receive regular information from Extension on forestry, wildlife, and natural resources.

Fishing for an Advantage

Global competition. It's the dominating issue staring Alabama fisheries producers squarely in the face.

One Alabama Extension fisheries specialist has resolved to cut this problem down to size.

Alabama growers can't compete with some of the built-in advantages many developing world growers enjoy, such as a year-round growing season. Alabama producers, by comparison, have only a 5-month growing season.

But Jesse Chappell, an Alabama Extension fisheries specialist, reasoned that there had to be "creative, innovative ways to work around these advantages"—ways that could help producers contain fuel and feed costs and even extend their growing season.

Working with other researchers, he developed a greenhouse system for raising fish that is powered by corn—corn producers could grow along with their fish. He estimates that with only 7 acres, producers could raise enough corn to heat five greenhouses, which could be used to grow not only fish but also other potentially lucrative sources of income.

But the energy source doesn't have to be limited to corn. Chappell says wood pellets, switchgrass, and biodiesel byproducts—all of which Alabama has or likely will have in abundance in the foreseeable future—could serve equally well.

Chappell believes this approach could prove highly profitable to small-scale growers, especially in western Alabama, who need to slash operating costs and supplement their fisheries operations with other sources of income.



An aerator and a greenhouse, fitting symbols of the marriage Jesse Chappell has envisioned for the Alabama catfish and horticultural industries.

Coping With the Specter of Herbicide Resistance

A specter is haunting Alabama row-crop farmers—the specter of herbicide resistance.

The growing specter of resistance in Georgia associated with pigweed is what concerns growers and scientists the most—pigweed that has developed resistance to glyphosate and ALS herbicides. Now that same pigweed appears to have spread into two neighboring Alabama counties.

Why is it such a threat? Because Alabama growers, by and large, are now deeply invested in weed control strategies built on one of the herbicides to which pigweed has developed resistance—glyphosate.

That includes 95 percent of cotton and soybean acreage, though corn growers also are making a rapid transition to a similar weed-control strategy.

“With a glyphosate-resistant weed, like Palmer pigweed, in a field grown with glyphosate resistant crops, farmers face the real risk of having their yields reduced to about zero,” says Michael Patterson, an Alabama Cooperative Extension System weed scientist who has been closely monitoring the problem in neighboring Georgia. Patterson thinks it’s all but inevitable that more of this pigweed will turn up in Alabama.

For now, all that he and other Extension educators and researchers can do is to impart as much sober advice as possible to growers.



Palmer amaranth is a threat to crops because of its resistance to herbicides.

Patterson and other Extension educators and researchers already have developed a monitoring program to trace the spread of this highly adaptive weed.

Patterson says, “What we’re trying to do is educate people that if this thing is in your neighborhood and you depend totally on a Roundup Ready system, you need to get off that wagon to a degree and add some of the older but still active forms of products in the program.”

Practical Efforts, Far-Reaching Results

Laryngotracheitis—a big word for an exceptionally big threat facing Alabama poultry growers.

LT, as it is commonly known, is a rapidly spreading viral respiratory disease of chickens.

A commonly held view is that disinfection, which involves heating a poultry house to 100 degrees F for about 100 hours after poultry removal, kills any residual effects of the virus.

Two Alabama Extension poultry scientists challenged that view. Their research revealed the LT virus managed to survive in the bottom of the chickens' bedding material, known in the industry as litter, in spite of this disinfection method.

They discovered that a more effective form of disinfection, involving windrow composting—heaping the litter into long piles to induce a heating effect—deactivates the virus in a matter of hours rather than days.

“Yes, dealing with litter is dirty business,” says Ken Macklin, who, along with Joseph Hess, a fellow Extension specialist and faculty member in the Auburn University Department of Poultry Science, is involved in the effort. “But most growers usually deal with litter between flocks anyway, and this extra effort could go a long way in reducing the threat of LT.”

Hess and Macklin describe their efforts as “practical Extension-oriented research.” But they’ve not limited their efforts to the laboratory. They’re also taking their message on the road, sharing their findings with industry representatives and growers alike.

They’ve also worked with the industry to advise a taskforce charged with controlling the spread of LT.

The two scientists also believe their finding could better prepare the industry to deal with another potentially serious threat—avian flu, a virus that resembles LT in many ways.



Laryngotracheitis threatens Alabama's poultry industry.

Keep on Digging

At times, it seemed more like an example of how NOT to garden than an Extension demonstration project.

But the challenge—a compilation of terrible, clay soil and rocks, along with watershed erosion and flooding problems—pushed Alabama Cooperative Extension System urban agent Jerry Chenault to keep digging for success with the garden project at the Bill Stewart Center for the Developmentally Disabled in Moulton.

The garden project is part of a bigger effort focusing on developing sustainable community vegetable gardens, coordinated by Extension horticulturist Cathy Sabota at Alabama A&M University.

In its first year, the garden was anything but sustainable.

After a disappointing spring and summer with minimal production and sales, Chenault recommended the addition of more organic matter and a retesting of the soil. Sulfur was added to lower the pH of 7.5 to a successful range, but lowering the soil pH with sulfur required reaction time. Success was still far away. The spring and summer garden also faced rains and flood waters that caused the organic matter to hold too much moisture.

Chenault admits that many times he wanted to remove the Extension demonstration project sign in front of the plot.

By planting time for the next garden, the residents at the Stewart Center might have lost hope, but they found success instead. With a \$2,000 grant from Alabama's Mountains, Rivers and Valleys Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc., structures and beds were built to halt



Residents of the Bill Stewart Center in Moulton enjoy working in the vegetable garden.

the erosion and flooding problems. More soil was brought in to create a fresh start for the garden. It is now a well-landscaped, geometrically designed garden with raised beds accessible to wheelchair-bound individuals and others with limited mobility.

“Helping in the garden makes our residents feel like they are part of the community,” says center director Donna Dutton. “And it makes them feel like they are contributing. Being a part of this project is great for their self-esteem.”

But the garden had to be more than that, according to Chenault.

The garden successfully produces vegetables that are sold or used by the group home residents. The project is now a dream come true for the Stewart Center and a happy ending to a long battle with what was once an embarrassing, nonsustainable vegetable garden project.

Alabama Catfish—Best in the World

The calls from Alabama catfish growers to Extension educators are loud and unambiguously clear—help!

Like many other commodity producers, catfish growers find themselves increasingly facing stiff competition from foreign countries, particularly Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, blessed with longer growing seasons and cheaper labor costs.



Homegrown catfish remains a favorite with Alabama consumers.

Small wonder why these growers are asking Extension educators for all the help they can give in improving their financial bottom line—especially ways to enhance the consumer appeal of their products through better marketing and packaging.

Jean Weese, an Extension food safety specialist and coordinator of Extension's statewide food safety team, was one of the experts enlisted in this effort. She and her team decided that the first step should be assessing the current standing of Alabama-grown catfish among consumers. They began with eighteen surveys throughout the state, involving focus groups that were asked all types of questions about the quality of this Alabama product.

What they found was that Alabama consumers love homegrown catfish and that they intend to stick with the product through thick and thin, even when prices rise.

“The overwhelming response from the consumers was that when they want Alabama catfish, they go out and buy it—regardless of the price,” Weese said.

Another major focus of the team's effort is packaging—finding ways that homegrown products can be better packaged to increase their shelf visibility.

The team also learned that fried catfish remains the overwhelming favorite among consumers. Some of those surveyed even expressed surprise that there were other ways to cook catfish.

With this in mind, a major focus of the team's effort in 2008 will be developing a recipe book replete with a variety of ways to cook Alabama-grown catfish—another effort aimed at enhancing its market appeal.

Helping People Secure Their Futures

All adults, married or single, should have a plan in place to secure their financial futures and estates. Unfortunately, far too few bother with such plans or even know how to make them.

Realizing the public's need for education in this area, Extension regional agents in Consumer Science and Personal Financial Management coordinated an estate planning program and, with the help of other agencies in Alabama, implemented training sessions throughout the state.

The program began with two 2-day conferences—one in Huntsville and the other in Montgomery—designed to educate consumer science teachers, adults, senior citizens, and limited-resource and farm families about estate planning and the importance of investing.

Workshops covered various components of planning for a financially secure future. These included estate planning basics, making informed investment decisions, retirement, savings, finances involved in health care and insurances, long-term care, free prescription drug programs, social security, farm transfers, leasing property for income, living wills, housing repair, and mortgage fraud and scams.

Later, the seminars were changed from 2-day to half-day in an effort to make them more convenient for citizens to attend county by county. The overall program was also shortened to focus on topics dealing with investing, credit, estate planning, important papers, and tax incentives based on participants' needs. Information on heir property issues also was added.



Educated planning is an important part of securing financial futures and estates.

In 2007, the program was presented to more than 820 participants statewide. A random selection of data collected from evaluations shows that 100 percent of the participants said they would recommend the seminar to their family and friends. More than 97 percent said they now understand the importance of having an estate plan.

Approximately 93 percent of the participants stated that they would complete an estate plan, including an advance directive and power of attorney, within 6 months to 1 year. Two percent said they would complete a plan as soon as possible, and 5 percent were not sure when they would complete a plan.

One 79-year-old participant stated, "This information is so important. I have a will, living will, and a revocable trust, but I want to review all of them in view of this worthwhile workshop and use the notes I took to compare information."

Another participant said, "We need more of these workshops so more people can be informed about these important issues."

Practicing What We Preach

As the red-tailed hawks took flight at the conclusion of the dedication ceremony for the \$5 million Alabama 4-H Environmental Science Education Center, the dream of providing a unique setting for teaching the children of Alabama about the environment was fulfilled.

U.S. Senator Richard Shelby was the keynote speaker as more than 250 people gathered at the Alabama 4-H Center in late November to help open the first planned gold-certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) environmental education building in the eastern United States. The 17,500-square-foot facility sets a new standard in teaching Alabama's children about being environmentally responsible and energy efficient.



Water collected from the roof is reused as part of the building's sustainability practices.

The facility was built with funds raised by the Campaign for Alabama 4-H through the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc. More than 700 corporations, foundations, organizations, and individuals have given \$5.7 million to date. Funds

from the campaign have also supported a \$2 million, 20-room addition to the hotel lodge space at the 4-H Center and the endowment of 4-H programs statewide.

“This facility is an investment in the future of our great state and in our children,” according to Jack Odle, chairman of the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, the fundraising arm of Alabama 4-H.

The LEED Green Building rating system is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings established by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

Horsing Around—With a Purpose

About one in twenty Alabama families has some connection to horses.

That number continues to grow, especially around the state's urban centers. While many



Gerry Thompson demonstrates how to take a forage sample.

of these horse owners have access to pastures, their knowledge of pasture and forage management is limited.

The forage component of recent equine education efforts generated a great deal of interest in

2007. Regional Extension animal science agent Gerry Thompson says the majority of the questions they received from horse owners had to do with forage management.

To effectively meet the demand from equine enthusiasts, Thompson and fellow regional Extension animal science agent Kent Stanford, developed a 1-day Grazing Management School for Horse Owners. The school is modeled after the highly successful grazing schools that Extension has conducted for cattle producers over the last several years.

Held in two locations in North Alabama, the schools attracted participants from not only the immediate area but from south and west Alabama, as well. Participants came from twenty-two counties—some traveling more than 100 miles.

The program was a combined effort of Auburn University's College of Agriculture, the Alabama Forage and Grassland Coalition, the USDA's Natural Resources and Conservation Service, and Extension.

A team of eight instructors combined classroom instruction with field exercises to teach different elements of forage management, including species and variety selection, correct planting practices, weed control, and grazing management.

One critical goal of the grazing school was to provide sound, research-based information. Extension learned that horse enthusiasts often get conflicting information. Once these clients discovered the benefits of Extension, they became repeat customers.

Plans are currently under way for more equine grazing schools.



Kent Stanford leads a discussion at the Grazing Management School for Horse Owners.

Turning Over a New Leaf

Lifestyle modification. Perhaps no other state in the nation needs it more than Alabama. Our state has one of the nation's highest rates of obesity as well as chronic obesity-related diseases, such as diabetes.

In the fall of 2006, Extension forged a partnership with the Alabama Department of Public Health to undertake a lifestyle modification program appropriately titled "New Leaf ... Choices for Healthy Living."

Patterned after an effort developed by the University of North Carolina for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Wise Woman Program, New Leaf is grounded on the premise that positive lifestyle modification can radically reduce risks of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Changes reflect dietary modification and weight-loss reduction and management.

"New Leaf is not a diet. Rather, it is a path toward healthier lifestyle practices that can be sustained over a lifetime," says Kajuandra Harris Huntley, an Extension nutrition and health specialist and coordinator of Extension's Human Health and Nutrition priority program team. A major focus of the program is showing participants how to prepare healthier meals, how to make wiser food choices, and how to include physical activity as part of their daily lifestyle.

The program already has been implemented throughout the state, primarily in counties where rates of obesity and diabetes typically are the highest.

New Leaf targets women ages 18 to 64. Why only women? Because many women are the primary caregivers for their families, the ones most likely to affect food choices, food preparation, and the physical activity of their family members. By helping these women, we help the entire family.

Bringing New Life to Rural Alabama

Declining populations, dwindling revenue bases, youth flight—these are just a few of the challenges rural Alabama communities face.

Extension has long played a leading role in revitalizing rural Alabama communities. The Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) grant program, which provides financial support for educational projects that promote rural community and economic development, is evidence that Extension's commitment to rural development is stronger than ever.

In 2007, Extension provided funding for forty-eight projects submitted from rural communities in more than forty counties. The Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI), a partnership of Extension and Auburn University Outreach, administers the grant program.

Grants are available to county Extension coordinators for projects in their counties or for joint projects between Extension and other organizations. For 2007, grants ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000, for an overall total of almost \$500,000.

Funded projects included community and regional adult and youth leadership development programs, workforce development academics, a technology camp for high school counselors, a high school robotics competition, computer skills training for adults, economic development workshops and training programs, and rural tourism and entrepreneurship programs.

"Extension and ECDI are committed to making a positive difference for rural communities in Alabama," said Joe Sumners, ECDI director. "These forty-eight projects will have huge impacts in communities throughout our state."

How Not to Lose the Farm

Are you the sole owner of your land, or do you share ownership with other family members? Do you have a registered deed showing land ownership? Do you have a receipt for taxes paid on your land? Do you have a will and estate plan?

These are just a few of the questions Extension agents may be asking their clients in the coming months as Extension partners with several other agencies to help Alabamians become aware of the disadvantages of being an heir property owner.

Extension agents work with citizens from all parts of the state in both urban and rural settings. This affords the agents opportunities to identify and educate heir property owners and guide them to resources that can help them get clear title to their land.

In 2007, more than forty Extension professionals from around the state received training at a workshop in Montgomery on heir property issues. The workshop was sponsored by the Alabama Agricultural Initiative on Natural and Human Resources Program.

Heir property—land held in common by the descendants or heirs of someone who has died without a probated will—is a common form of landownership among many families in the rural South.

It is also one of the leading causes of land loss for these families because of misconceptions or confusion about legal ownership. The vulnerability of heir property owners compounds with each passing generation that dies without a will because

the number of heirs increases and the size of each heir's share decreases.

“It is vital for people to understand the risks involved in heir property. They must know their rights as landowners and take the proper steps to protect their land,” says Pat Kennealy, a

former Extension program associate in Family and Consumer Sciences who helped coordinate the workshop along with Janice Dyer of the Auburn University Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology.

In 2007, Extension published a booklet on issues involving heir property—HE-852, “Heir Property in Alabama.” Another publication on the subject is available from the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station—“Heir Property: Legal and Cultural Dimensions of Collective Landownership” Bulletin (667).



Extension offers valuable information to heir property owners, who are often in danger of losing their land.

Having Fun While Learning and Losing

Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Program at Alabama A&M have joined forces with Black Entertainment Television to address the problem of overweight and obese youngsters.

Research shows that the number of overweight children has tripled during the past 30 years. Approximately 17.4 percent of children ages 12 to 19 and 18.8 percent of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight.

Black Entertainment Television, the BET Foundation, and Extension sponsored a 2007 summer camp for overweight or obese girls ages 10 to 12. The purpose of the camp was to help the girls lose weight, build self-esteem, learn to prepare nutritional meals, eat healthy snacks, learn about portion control, eat healthy on a 1,600-calorie menu for 7 days, participate in fitness programs, and attend weight management and nutrition classes.

"Extension's partnership with BET and the BET Foundation fits well with Extension's vision to be a world-class educational organization providing real-life solutions to improve the lives of all Alabamians," said Rosalind James, an urban Extension regional agent and coordinator of the camp.

James and urban regional agents Juana Macias, Donna Gullatte, Mary Andrews, Apriell Burgess, Janice Harper, Cynthia Whittaker, Yvette Wilson, and Amanda Outlaw were camp counselors. Urban Nutrition Education Program agents also conducted a nutrition class during the camp and provided "Girls Enjoying Nutrition and Independent Exercise" (GENIE), a nutritional guide for the participants to use when they returned home.



Campers learn to make tasty, healthy snacks.

In addition to the educational aspects of the camp, the campers were treated to guest appearances from celebrities including Mario, Tiffany Evans, and Ms. Black America.

The camp produced many successes: 107 girls representing seven states participated; 81 percent of the girls live in Alabama's metropolitan areas and signed up for the camp through Extension urban centers. A total of 353.8 pounds was lost with an average weight loss of 3.65 pounds. The 10-year-old girls lost 97.2 pounds; the 11-year-olds lost 124.8 pounds; and the 12-year-olds lost 131.6 pounds. While all of the campers lost weight, they also gained valuable insight into what they need to do to be healthy and fit. The campers learned skills that they can incorporate into their everyday lives at home and school.

Regional follow-up sessions for participants from Alabama are being conducted by urban food and nutrition program agents. Sessions include lectures, cooking demonstrations, and exercise for the girls and their parents.

Because of the success of the camp, the BET Foundation and Extension will conduct another summer camp for girls this summer at the Alabama 4-H Center in Columbiana.

Speaking of Speakers

Building on a long tradition of taking its message to diverse audiences and locations throughout the state, Alabama Extension has launched a statewide Speakers Bureau.

The bureau is comprised of educators whose training and expertise reflect Extension's wide range of educational programs. All Extension speakers have a strong professional commitment to improving the quality of life for all Alabamians—a passion that is reflected in their work as well as in their public appearances.

Just a phone call or mouse click away, Extension speakers can provide insight and expertise to ensure that a program is remembered as a highly successful event.

Extension's News and Public Affairs Unit, which coordinates the Speakers' Bureau, also works with members of the local media in to publicize appearances in advance.

For more information, visit the Extension Speakers Bureau Web site at www.aces.edu/speakers.



Charles Mitchell is one of Extension's corps of specialists who participate in the Speakers Bureau.

Look for Us in Wikipedia

The Alabama Extension Cooperative System crossed another historic milestone in 2007.

In April, Alabama Extension became the nation's first state Extension program with an article in Wikipedia, the world's largest and dominant online encyclopedia.



Only one other state Extension program, Texas Cooperative Extension, is featured in the online encyclopedia.

Still undergoing expansion since its April debut, the article was written by James Langcuster, Extension Communications specialist. It features summaries of Extension's key programs; information about the landmark federal court ruling in the mid-1990s that combined into one system Auburn's and Alabama A&M's programs; detailed biographies of Extension's former directors; information about the organization's diverse use of technology throughout the past century; and a comprehensive history of the organization dating back more than a century.

Also featured are a number of historic photos of key Extension leaders and events.

A number of related articles also have been developed to complement the primary Extension article.

Visit Extension's Wikipedia article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama_Cooperative_Extension_System.

Technology to the Rescue

During 2007, Alabama Extension made significant strides in expanding the use of technology throughout the state, both for program delivery and emergency management.

In June, Alabama Extension joined the Emergency and Educational Communications Consortium for the Gulf South and Southern States. This consortium is based on a combination of mobile satellite Internet resources owned and operated by each state's Extension service. These resources will be used in anticipation of and in response to natural or humanmade disasters across the entire region from Texas to Virginia.

For its part, Alabama Extension invested in a TRANSNet TSIS Auto-Deploy Unit, which consists of a small satellite dish and other equipment mounted on a small utility trailer that can be pulled behind many passenger vehicles. The unit is completely automated and can be deployed virtually anywhere in the state to provide Internet connectivity. In addition to wired and wireless access, the unit can be used for video-conferencing connections.

Practical Knowledge— Always Close-at-Hand

Extension's wealth of practical knowledge for practical living is easy to access. For information about programs, to volunteer, or just to ask a question, call or go by your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

To reach state headquarters, call Auburn University at (334) 844-4444 or Alabama A&M University at (256) 372-5710. To send a question to your local Extension agent, visit www.aces.edu/questions/.

For information about charitable contributions, call Nancy Alexander, 4-H Specialist, Volunteerism and Fund Development, at (334) 844-2219.

To order publications or videos, call (334) 844-1592.

Leaders in a Virtual Pack

Alabama Extension is among the leaders in the implementation of an exciting new online resource: eXtension.org. This Internet-based collaborative environment is populated with objective, science-based information and programs. While it has been partially available for more than a year, its public launch occurred in February 2008.

Information is presented on the site in subject areas known as communities of practice. Alabama Extension specialists and communications personnel have been particularly involved with the areas of fire ant control; 4-H science, engineering, and technology; cotton; horses; urban entomology; disaster preparedness; home caregiving; and parenting.

eXtension is available around the clock on any Internet-ready device. Experts answer questions important to the reader. Fact sheets, online chats, topic discussion groups, and educational modules are all created by experts from land-grant universities and related industries.

If you don't find the answer, just ask the question.



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