

# EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

## *Changing Lives*

### IN MERCER COUNTY

Extension provides practical education you can trust by helping individuals, families, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.



*Families working in the community garden.*

### Community Garden

Mercer County, Extension Agent for Horticulture and Bluegrass Community Action partnered to offer a community garden, for 15 families. The Mercer County Nutrition Education Program (NEP) Assistant applied for the community grant to purchase plants, Bluegrass Community Action provided raised beds and the Mercer County Horticulture Agent shared information on planting/care.

The families were asked to try growing something they had never tried, such as squash, eggplant or peppers, with most trying at least two new vegetables. Each month, the NEP assistant would demonstrate how to use the items they had grown in recipes. Over half of the families stated they had tried something new in their diet. Several canned homemade salsa and stated they were interested in growing more items next year, to preserve, so it looks like we will be bring the Mercer County Extension Agent for Family & Consumer Sciences (FCS) into the program as well.

### Program Efforts

- **1817** Number of youth who apply the skills learned in 4-H and in other activities at home, school or in the community
- **275** Number of producers who reported saving money or reducing cost of operation
- **300** Number of participants gaining access to Extension programming at local farmers markets
- **253** Number of youth who use their skills to conserve natural resources
- **755** Number of youth who reported they followed safe practices.
- **270** Number of volunteer service hours completed by Master Gardener volunteers.
- **288** Number of individuals reporting improved financial knowledge (reduce expenses, cut spending, save for emergencies, etc.)
- **375** Number of producers who incorporated best practices recommended by Extension
- **866** Number of hours volunteered to Extension activities and events by individuals who developed core leadership skills through Extension
- **80** Number of people engaged in learning about farm safety and health practices

## Improving Farmers' Health and Safety through Theater

Over the last several years, Extension has been partnering with the University of Kentucky College of Nursing to develop and test the efficacy of a novel intervention, didactic readers' theater, focused on health and safety of farmers ages 45 and over. Initial focus groups with farmers and their spouse that led to development of this program were held in Mercer County. This program, funded by NIOSH and developed by self-defined Agricultural Nurse, Dr. Deborah Reed, debuted in Mercer County originally, and with expansion to other parts of Kentucky. It has reached over 600 participants in eight sites.

Due to success with older farmers, additional funding was secured through NIOSH to test this safety intervention with younger farmers. Extension agents (ANR, HORT, FCS and 4-H) worked to make the theater a special event for the farm community, complete with choreography, backdrops and table decorations. A meal was provided with local farmers and their spouses serving as actors. The ANR agent worked to secure the actors and work with them through practice of scripts.

Scripts, written by Dr. Reed, reflected the farmers' lives, but also included leading health and injury challenges faced by young farmers. Couples were invited to attend in order to create dialogue that would initiate change. One of the challenges with young farm families is they also have children so the FCS and 4-H programs worked together to provide childcare. Over 60 people attended the theater.

Between acts, Dr. Reed led a discussion with the audience on how they may have handled similar situations. Data was collected via phone interviews two weeks and again at two months post theater to learn about response and behavior change. Data is still being analyzed. Initial discussion with attendees has found they were surprised that attending the program was a worthwhile investment and has led to good family discussions.



*Actors and attendees of the dinner theater.*

## Commercial Pumpkin Grower Class

In Mercer County and the surrounding areas many of the commercial horticulture producers grow pumpkins. Some of these producers grow them for their on farm agritourism businesses while others grow them to be sold at local stores and auctions. In order for these producers to raise a healthy and productive crop they need to stay up to date on the latest pest and disease issues occurring in the area.

The Mercer County Horticulture Agent, along with the Anderson County ANR agent, who also has multiple pumpkin growers, came together to offer an Integrated pest management class for pumpkin growers, with the help of three UK Extension specialist representing plant pathology, entomology and horticulture.

One specialist was present in the Mercer county office, while the other two, one being at the Quicksand research station and the other on campus would Lync in to the meeting. With having the ability to Lync in, two other counties that also had a high numbers of pumpkin producers were able to join in on the meeting.

Producers were taught how to identify insects, identify weeds, and diseases they should look out for. Spray schedules were provided for producers to help reduce the risk of diseases spreading throughout their crops. Through the use of technology a class that was originally offered to help five growers ended up helping over 15 through a multicounty program.

## Healthy Aging

Reported by the Pew Research Center, today (and every day for the next 14 years - until December 31, 2031) 10,000 baby boomers will reach age 65. According to Kentucky State Data Center, Mercer County is above state averages for those residents over age 65. In fact, Mercer County is above the state averages for all data set age ranges including: 65 and over, 80 and over, 65-74, 75-84, and 85 and over. For these reasons, Mercer County is an ideal county in which to conduct programming focused on healthy aging. The Mercer County Extension Agent for Family & Consumer Sciences partnered with multiple collaborators to offer three different intensive programs to the families of Mercer County:



**AARP Prepare to Care:** A partnership between University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension

Service Family & Consumer Sciences and the College of Social Work where a two-hour session was offered three times to assist families in beginning dialogue about caregiving and end of life planning.



**Keys to Embracing Aging:** Partnerships between nine other Kentucky Counties through the University

of Kentucky, as well as Kansas State University, and University of Arkansas made it possible to offer the Keys to Embracing Aging Series, made possible by a USDA-NIFA grant. Each month, for twelve months, an interactive session highlighting one aspect of healthy aging was offered.



MANAGING CONCERNS ABOUT FALLS

**Matter of Balance:** Partnering with The James B. Haggin Memorial Hospital Rehabilitation Department, the eight-session series was offered twice a week for four weeks to increase strength and balance through simple chair exercises, as

well as make changes at home to reduce fall risks at home, and through dialogue to view falls as controllable reduce fear of falling for participants.

## Gardening on a Budget

On average a single person will spend around \$20 a week on fresh produce. That may not seem like a lot, but for a new high school graduate getting ready to be on their own for the first time this adds up quickly.

The Mercer County Horticulture agent partnered with one of the Family and Consumer Science teachers at the local high school to teach a class gardening on a budget. All of the students in the four separate money management classes were either juniors or seniors, majority being seniors getting ready to graduate in a month.

The horticulture agent talked about the prices of fresh produce but how the students could reduce their grocery bill by growing their own, even if they lived in an apartment. The basics of gardening were covered followed by how you can stretch your dollar when gardening.

Students were taught they could preserve their fresh produce through canning to enjoy it throughout the winter. They were taught they could grow vegetables in flower pots, in recyclable materials or basically anything that held soil and had drainage. The method of square foot gardening was discussed where you plant in a square foot area to get the max production out of that space. Finally after talking about seed saving and other topics such as integrated pest management the students did a hands on activity of making their own seed tapes to take home and plant in their own gardens or containers.

At the beginning of these classes, students were asked if they planned to grow vegetables in their gardens at home or when they move out on their own. 30% of the students said they were planning on growing vegetables. After the lesson was completed, 50% said they were willing to try to grow vegetables with the knowledge they gained from this class.

## 4-H Citizenship Academy

We all want to see our world become a better place. This is something that cannot happen overnight but can be made with education about or civic duty as American citizen. More than one-third of United States high school students do not have a basic understanding of democratic citizenship and government; therefore, lack the skills to competently participate as an informed citizen. (Schillings & Fox, n.d.)

The Mercer County 4-H Citizenship Academy is an educational program sponsored by the Mercer County Cooperative Extension Service. The program provides selected middle

school aged students an opportunity to learn about local and state government with a "hands-on" approach. 14 students participated this year in which they had the opportunity to engage with local leaders, gain understanding of public issues, and learn how citizens work within government to accomplish public objectives and meet community needs.

The 10-month program met monthly and youth learned how government in the United States is established on the local, state and federal level. Youth participated in field trips to city/county government, state government and KY Department of Agriculture, where they met with leaders and had the opportunity to address issues. A grant from KY 4-H Foundation was secured and youth learned in depth about Ag policy within the state and national level.

## Middle School Leadership Seminar

A middle school leadership seminar was offered to 4-H leadership participants and gifted/talented students. The goal was to strengthen the leadership abilities of youth and help them develop skills needed to be

responsible community members.

The day-long seminar was sponsored by Cooperative Extension, 4-H State Officer and FRYSC Coordinator. Youth participated in identifying their personal leadership qualities, learning to work together as a team and focusing on personal communication skills. Over 75% of the participants noted they had a fear of public speaking. One of the activities youth completed was a "String Talk" activity

that required students to take a large of piece of string, unknowingly what the task they need the string for. Upon getting their string they were instructed to stand up in front of the group and talk about themselves and their goals while wrapping the string around their finger. Once the string ran out they were done,

over 90% of the youth had a feeling a complete terror. Upon completion of the activity, 98% said they enjoyed that activity the most.



2018 4-H Citizenship Academy visit to Kentucky State Capital



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Mercer County

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