

Kentucky Extension Advisory Council Meeting
February 10-11, 2025
Meeting Summary Points

- Delegates participated in an optional tour to the University of Kentucky [School of Arts and Visual Studies](#) and [College of Design](#), both long-term partners with Extension.
- **Kentucky State University administrative updates:** Dr. Marcus Bernard, Dean, College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, and Director of Land-grant Programs highlighted KSU's role as an 1890 land-grant university and mission focused on underserved communities, families, farmers, individuals and youth. He voiced appreciation for the support of Extension volunteers and leaders across the state and for the partnership with University of Kentucky. Dr. Noel Novelo, Interim Associate Extension Administrator for the Cooperative Extension Program showcased Extension programming in various focus areas including the small farm conference; Third Thursday field days; pollinator habitat training; conservation training; food, nutrition and physical activity; Spanish-language programming; ag technology outreach; disaster preparedness; aquaculture; urban agriculture; and STEM education. He shared several recent additions to the KSU Extension team and reviewed positions currently in the hiring process. The Kentucky State University Cooperative Extension Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/kysuCEP>) shares details regarding the monthly Third Thursday workshops, summer 4-H programs for youth, small farm conferences, and more.
- **University of Kentucky administrative updates:** Dr. Laura Stephenson, Vice President for Land-grant Engagement and Dean, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment thanked council delegates for their support of Kentucky Cooperative Extension and the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. She provided brief updates regarding the college's academic programs and research portfolio, and highlighted collaborations with UK HealthCare and the Economic Development Collaborative. Dr. Craig Wood, Acting Associate Dean and Extension Director shared a brief introduction for himself and his new role. He stated that the search for the new Associate Vice President for Land-grant Engagement, Associate Dean and Director for Extension is beginning in March with formation of the search committee and committed to keep the council informed throughout the process. He thanked delegates for their support of the community assessment and plan of work process. He highlighted the Advancing Kentucky Together Initiative, in which Extension is focusing on holistic health (human, plant, animal, environmental, community, etc.) and the Connect120 collaboration focused on community and economic development.
- The meeting agenda included focus on two of the top three priority areas identified in the 2019 Extension Community Assessment: Substance Use and Mental Health and Community Leadership, Engagement and Pride.



- ***Substance Use and Mental Health***

- Dr. Jennifer Hunter reviewed the 2019 assessment findings and the holistic approach to substance use and mental health programming that has emerged in the past five years.
- Dr. Alex Elswick provided trend data related to overdose deaths, deaths of despair, cigarette smoking and vaping, suicide and self-harm for both youth and adults. He reviewed key ways in which Extension is making a difference in the areas of disrupting stigma, fostering recovery capital and supporting mental and behavioral health.
- Dr. Alethea Bernard highlighted Kentucky State University's work focused on mitigating health disparities among flood survivors, in particular around post-trauma mental health. She highlighted new resources and increased capacity to offer disaster preparedness programming and to support community resilience through disaster response.
- Jean Noble shared the Healthy Choices for Your Recovering Body program, a nutrition education curriculum tailored to the special needs of individuals in substance use recovery. The seven-lesson program is typically offered by nutrition education paraprofessionals in partnership with recovery centers or programs.
- Dr. Annette Heisdorffer showcased Daviess County's therapeutic gardening program offered in partnership with a regional recovery center. The 6–9-month program includes nutrition education and a garden partnership that allows clients to learn about and work in a raised-bed garden. Participants experience the therapeutic benefits of gardening while raising fruits and vegetables for use in the recovery center. Evaluations have demonstrated that the program is building confidence in self-sufficiency and leading to lasting behavioral changes.
- Katherine Jury summarized Extension's work in providing Mental Health First Aid and Question-Persuade-Refer training. Mental Health First Aid teaches participants to recognize and respond to a mental health challenge or crisis. The full day training has been provided in eleven counties, reaching more than 300 participants. Question-Persuade-Refer teaches participants to recognize warning signs of crisis and intervene. Extension has nine personnel who are certified trainers and offer in-person sessions. Through a partnership with UK HealthCare, the program is also available online at no cost. More than 1,200 Kentuckians have participated in the online version.
- Ryley Butler-Modaff highlighted the 4-H behavioral health fellowship program, a partnership with UK College of Social Work. The program recruits Master of Social Work students who receive specialized training then serve as members of the 4-H summer camp staff. These trained fellows assess and support emotional, social and behavioral challenges of youth during the residential camping experience, with the primary goal of helping youth have a positive camp experience.
- Jessica Barnes and Jessica Hopkins shared Harrison County's experience in implementing the BARN Program – Bringing Awareness Right Now. The program engaged 4-H, FFA and arts students in mental health training, then the students developed a series of vignettes which were performed at a community dinner theater event. The youth gained knowledge of mental health issues and warning signs, then enhanced community awareness through the vignette performances.
- Following the series of presentations, council delegates engaged in small group discussions focused on Extension opportunities in the next five years related to substance use awareness and prevention, supporting substance use recovery and mental health and wellbeing.

- **Community Leadership, Engagement and Pride:**
 - Melissa Bond reviewed 2019 Extension Community Assessment findings and showcased programming related to community and economic development, leadership development and community engagement.
 - Adriana Palmer articulated the need for community leadership development documented through the 2019 assessment. She highlighted Extension's work to support community leadership development programs, including statewide summits for program coordinators held in 2023 and 2024. The team, with representatives from KSU, UK and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, is planning regional summits for 2025 and have outlined action steps to further support community leadership education.
 - Beth Wilson showcased the Master Gardener Program and the ways in which participants gain leadership skills. She highlighted several examples of community engagement through projects led by Lake Cumberland Master Gardeners, demonstrating community pride and benefit.
 - Dr. Mark Mains and Rick Sellnow presented the Northern Kentucky digital literacy project, a special partnership with the Northern Kentucky Area Development District that led to the development of a Digital Literacy Agent position. Through this position, specially developed digital literacy programming is now available for an eight-county area, a model with potential for replication in other areas.
 - Dr. Chuck Stamper shared the adaptive toy community collaboration, a special partnership with the UK College of Health Sciences that engages youth in adapting toys for use by children who have differing abilities. What started as a single workshop has evolved to multiple offerings with a toolkit for replication in development.
 - Mercedes Fraser showcased the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky's First Impressions program. This program analyzes a community's online presence and utilizes 'secret shoppers' for unannounced visits to record observations and share feedback. Once assessments are complete, reports are shared back with the community for use in addressing identified issues and enhancing community engagement and pride.
 - Following the series of presentations, council delegates engaged in small group discussions focused on Extension opportunities in the next five years related to building leadership capacity and connected and resilient communities.
- The council business meeting included a welcome of new delegates and appointment of bylaws and council engagement committees. Delegates were encouraged to mark their calendars for the summer meeting on August 28, 2025.
- Delegates were asked to share the call for nominations for the 2025 Randall Barnett County Extension Council Award. All counties are welcome to submit a nomination and the winning council will receive a plaque along with a \$500 monetary award. Additional information is available at <http://psd.ca.uky.edu/randallbarnett>.