

Alabama Extension Launches Thriving in Challenging Times Effort

Helping people survive and even thrive in challenging times is something we've been doing for a long time — almost a century.

Only three years after the formal establishment of Cooperative Extension, educators in Alabama and across the country rolled up their sleeves to help Americans meet the many challenges associated with World War I. Extension farm agents worked with row-crop and livestock producers to promote food production and to show them how to become as self-sufficient as possible. Meanwhile, home agents encouraged homemakers to “can all you can” — an effort that proved remarkably successful, resulting in the canning of almost 2 million containers of fruits and vegetables.

From this, a model emerged, one that has been employed time and again to respond to other critical needs: the Great Depression, World War II, the 1970s recession and energy crises, and the farm crisis of the 1980s.

And we're not done yet. Nov. 6 marked the formal launch of Thriving in Challenging Times, a statewide educational effort to provide Alabamians from all walks of life with the tools they will need to weather what may prove to be a trying economic period for many Alabamians.

No, we're not set up to help people rebuild and manage their stock portfolios. But we can provide our audiences with the practical knowledge and skills they need to meet day-to-day challenges, such as learning how to shop on a limited budget, managing and overcoming debt, and saving on energy costs.

Thriving in Challenging Times will also reach the state's row-crop and livestock producers and small-scale forestland owners with the skills they need to save costs and reduce their debt burdens.

Extension personnel at all levels will be involved in the effort. We'll be busy during the next few weeks and months identifying the best ways to respond to critical needs, working across multicounty and multidisciplinary lines, and partnering with other agencies to reach our clients more effectively.

Some of these efforts are already well under way. In Coosa County, for example, Extension educators recently started a series of "Grow Your Own" workshops — a response to the growing number of landowners who have expressed an interest in raising some of their own food.

We have also developed a Thriving in Challenging Times blog on the front page of the ACES Web site. It features readily accessible, frequently updated information about a wide range of topics associated with this issue.

A Thriving in Challenging Times Resource Page providing a list of online publications and other materials has also been developed to complement the blog.

How long do we plan to do this? For as long as there are people seeking knowledge and skills to get through these challenging times.

For more information, visit your local county Extension office or visit our Web site at www.aces.edu.