

# Madison County Extension Newsletter

819 Cook Avenue ❖ Huntsville, Alabama 35801

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

*Anticipating Future Needs, to Better Serve our Community.*



Once again we submit to you our County Newsletter with articles focused both on our continued efforts to bring to you information on the variety of programs and activities that Extension provides. We strive to tailor our programs to meet the needs of the Madison County community.

Thank you, citizens of Madison County, for the opportunity to serve you! We hope you find the articles within this issue useful and applicable in your daily activities.

*Walter Harris*  
County Extension Coordinator

The Meadow Hills Initiative is a neighborhood organization staffed by volunteers. Its major goals are community literacy and crime prevention. In the summer, they have a youth enrichment program. Ms. Shirley Brown, Agent Assistant for the Urban Nutrition Education Program (UNEP), taught nutrition classes at the Meadow Hills Initiative Summer Camp this year, and was awarded a certificate of appreciation, presented to her by the Mayor of Huntsville, in recognition of her valuable contribution of demonstrating to camp participants the proper way to prepare and consume food for a healthy life. Thank you Shirley, for bringing UNEP to this most valuable and needed effort.



## Welcome!

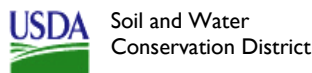
Ms. Emily Harris has joined the Madison County Staff as the new 4-H Agent Assistant. Emily will be primarily responsible for in-school 4-H clubs and county wide 4-H activities. We are excited to have Emily join our staff and look forward to great things happening within our Madison County 4-H Program.



August, 2009

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### State Cost Share Sign-Up

Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District 819 Cook Avenue, Suite 137 in the Charles Stone Agriculture Building announces the first batching period sign up for FY-10 State Cost Share for Farming Operations.

- Starts Monday, July 13, 2009
- Please Visit our office (256) 532-1692 ext. 3 for information

Madison County fruit and vegetable growers battled torrential rains during the spring but conditions are improving and a good crop of wholesome, locally grown produce is expected. Local farmers markets are on the lookout for more producers as demand is increasing. Many growers have successfully developed markets close to home where transportation costs are lower.

Interest in organic or sustainable farming is increasing and those who are attempting these challenging methods of production are being rewarded by higher prices for their fruits and vegetables.

Bulging population growth continues to threaten farm land near urban centers. With this pressure comes new opportunities for local producers however.

Higher costs for fuel, fertilizer, plant protection products and labor will be challenges for local growers but strong markets will make fruit and vegetable production worthwhile.

*Article Submitted By: Lloyd Chapman, Regional Extension Agent - Serving Madison County*



## Urban Youth Farm Day :The Seed That Feeds the World

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System is committed to providing lifelong learning opportunities. The world is changing, and so are our children. The 2007 census of Agriculture profile for Madison County commodities were the bases for planning the Urban Youth Farm Day this year. Youth grades 3-5, from Home Schools, Huntsville City and Madison County schools were invited to participated in the event.

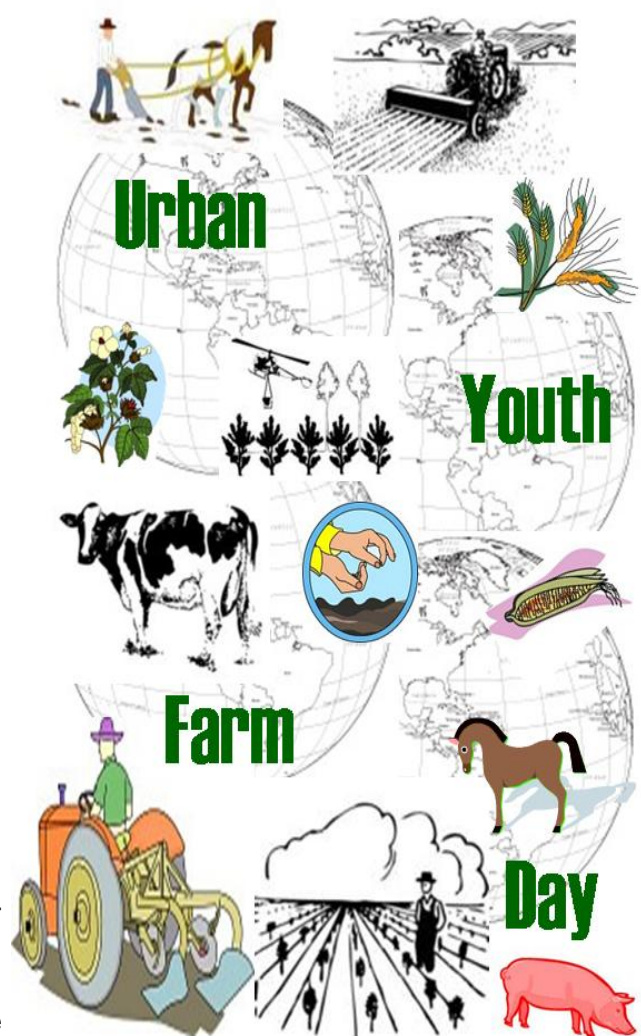
Finding ways to get young people involved in Agriculture at an early age may be the key to a meaningful and viable career for them. The seed that feeds the world concept helped children to understand world hunger, as well as, nutrition and health.

Extension Agents, Community Leaders and Local Farmers planned and implemented a day of fun, for the children to learn more about the food sources around them.

Urban Youth Farm Day was held this year at Alabama A&M's Winifred Thomas Research Station in Madison County and was organized by Sylvia Oakes and Wanda Pharris.

They put together an unusually interesting group of volunteers who taught the kids from local city schools about everything from horses to composting with earth-worms.

Nearly 400 students attended the event this year. Mrs. Oakes explained urban and suburban children are so far removed from the farm they have no concept of what it takes to produce food. She and the others involved felt like something needed to be done to rectify the situation. Urban Youth Farm Day is definitely a step in the right direction.



*Article Submitted By: Sylvia Oakes, Urban Regional Extension Agent*

## Redstone Arsenal 4-H Youth Attend Operation Military Kids Camp



The 4-H Youth from Redstone Arsenal spent the day at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta, Georgia as part of their summer camp activities. The trip was sponsored by an Operation Military Kids Grant (OMK).



The youth from Redstone Arsenal visited the world's largest aquarium. They were intrigued with the wonders of the ocean. Coldwater Quest exhibit is home to many sea mammals from the coldest region of the world spanning from Alaska to Russia. The 4-Her's observed the weedy sea dragon, Beluga whales and the giant Pacific-octopus and the Japanese crabs.

The 4-Her's visit to Ocean Voyager salt water tank made them feel like a Scuba diver in the ocean with thousands of fish swimming overhead and all around. Ocean Voyager is a warm water tank with a constant temperature of 76 degrees and is home to the gentle giants of the sea, including the whale sharks and Nandi, the only manta ray in a United States aquarium ever. There are 8 million gallons of water at the aquarium with a highly sophisticated filtration system to keep it clean and safe with the help of 300 paid staff and 3000 trained volunteers. The youth enjoyed a hands on experience at the Georgia Explorer gallery which is a highly interactive gallery with touch pools full of horseshoe crabs, sea stars, stingrays and shrimp. This is an Aquarium favorite and must do.

A trip to the Aquarium isn't complete without seeing Deepo's undersea 3-D Wondershow this educational show took the audience on a journey under the ocean with Deepo teaching us not to



pollute the ocean and the environment. The 3-D movie brought the undersea to life to realization with great special effects the audience could touch and feel. The movie brought out the fact that what we do above the surface has an effect on every living creature in the ocean.

The day was topped off with a cultural dining experience at the famous Varsity diner to eat before returning. The Redstone Arsenal 4-H youth enjoyed the trip to the Georgia Aquarium; they had a fabulous time.

*Article Submitted By: Wanda Pharris, Regional Extension Agent*



## Master Gardeners of North Alabama

*Impacting our Communities*

Peonies, hostas and lasagna gardening... these were all topics of recent Master Gardeners monthly meetings during the last quarter. But what else have these hard working gardeners been up to as they work in our local communities?

The North Alabama Master Gardeners hosted the Annual Master Gardener Conference for the State of Alabama on April 2-4, 2009. Workshop, tours, garden demonstrations, and internationally known speakers were some of the highlights of the annual conference. The Master Gardeners also managed to raise almost \$5,000 for the Huntsville Botanical Gardens during their annual plant sale.



### Planting Efforts in local Communities

Other projects include:

- ◆ planting and maintaining Demonstration Vegetable Garden distribution of harvest to CASA
- ◆ plant and maintain roadside triangles in downtown Huntsville at the south end of Big Springs Park with plants donated by Bennett Nurseries
- ◆ landscaped six Habitat for Humanity houses with plants donated by local Master Gardeners from their own gardens.
- ◆ Conducted Homeowner Education workshops to teach maintenance of lawns and gardens.

### Education Efforts

- ◆ "Garden Chat" on sustainable gardening given at the Huntsville Botanical Garden.
- ◆ Talk given on growing fruits and vegetables for family use at Ridgecrest PTA.
- ◆ Huge number of questions answered by Master Gardeners at the Madison County Extension Office and during the Master Gardener Weekend at the Huntsville Botanical Garden.
- ◆ "Neighbor to Neighbor" program hosted by Ken Creel at a community program on soil testing, lawns, and fertilizers in Madison neighborhoods.

The Master Gardeners provide on-going help in the Madison County Extension office by manning the phones and answering the public's horticulture and plant questions on both the local and regional hot lines. Patricia Lanza, a speaker at the AMGA conference, donated copies of her two books on Lasagna Gardening to the County Extension office library as reference tools for client questions.



*Article Submitted By: Gear Nelson, North Alabama Master Gardener Association*

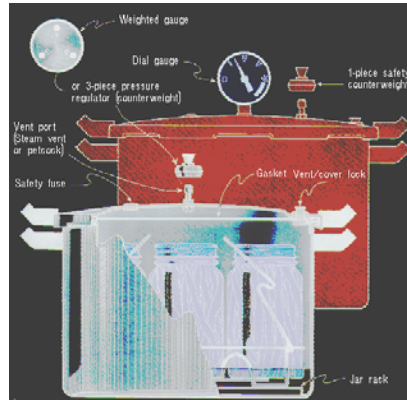
## County Tid-Bits

# Are you In To Canning?

Your pressure canner should be kept in proper working condition to ensure safe food preservation. Pressure gauge testing is available at the Madison County Extension Office. Please call **Ms. Shirley Whitten**, Regional Extension Agent, to make an appointment to bring your lid and gauge in for testing. We are open 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

**Call (256) 532-1578.**

This service is free of charge.



## How to Lower the Radon Levels in Your Home.

There is no known safe level of radon. There can always be some risk. But the risk can be reduced by lowering the radon level in your home.

There are several proven methods to reduce radon in your home, but the one primarily used is a vent pipe system and fan, which pulls radon from beneath the house and vents it to the outside. This system, known as a soil suction radon reduction system, does not require major changes to your home. Sealing foundation cracks and other openings makes this kind of system more effective and cost-efficient.



Similar systems can also be installed in houses with crawl spaces. Radon contractors can use other methods that may also work in your home. The right system depends on the design of your home and other factors.

Ways to reduce radon in your home are discussed in EPA's "Consumer's Guide to Radon Reduction." Visit the Madison County Extension office to pick up a copy.

*Submitted By: Walter Rodgers, Urban Regional Extension Agent*

## The 6 "A"s Of Good Parenting



Parenting is all about relating. The better our relationship with our children, the better our chances at effective parenting. Youth expert Josh McDowell believes there are six factors that play into good parenting. He calls them the 6 "A"s. They are derived from the book *The Disconnected Generation*.

### Affirmation

When we affirm a child's feelings it gives them a sense of authenticity. Even when we don't agree with our children, we can still affirm them as individuals.

### Acceptance

When you give unconditional acceptance you give a child a sense of security. This basically comes down to one principle that must be conveyed to our children: I don't love you because of what you do or achieve, I love you because you're my child. Our love and affections should not be based on grades, behavior or achievements.

### Appreciation

When we express appreciation it gives a child a sense of significance. Appreciation is one of the most powerful motivations for right behavior. So, the more we "catch" our children doing things right, and we express our appreciation, the more motivated they will be to behave better.

### Availability

When we are available to our children it gives them a sense of importance. We can say all we want about how important our children are to us. But if we're not giving them our time, our words will ring hollow. Our children should come before our TV-watching, our hobbies and our desire to make money. Children spell love.

### Affection

When we show our children affection it gives them a sense of lovability. All children want to feel like they are lovable. If they don't get love from you they will get it somewhere else.

### Accountability

When we hold children accountable it gives them a sense of responsibility and self-control. Children need the disciplines of responsibility and self-control to function successfully in life. As parents, we must create a context for rules and boundaries. Once those guidelines are set, we must be consistent in enforcing them.

*Submitted By: Donna Gullatte  
Urban Regional Extension Agent*



### Food Ads: Fact or Fiction

As a part of the ongoing struggle to combat rising rates in child obesity and the health problems associated with it, parents, educators and health care providers are constantly trying to determine the cause and to find ways to reduce the problem. Marketing of kid-favorite food products which are high in sugar, fat and sodium is only one of the factors, but with the amount of television and internet many children are exposed to, it's a very important factor. While most children can describe commercials for fast food, sweetened beverages, energy drinks and junk food in great detail, they can rarely recall any ads for fruits, vegetables, dairy or protein foods. Television, magazine, internet, and even packaging on kid-favorite foods provide a steady stream of advertising for foods marketed toward children, but most ads do not even mention nutrition or health.

Shirley Whitten, Regional Extension Agent for Human Nutrition, Diet and Health, partnered with faculty at Ridgecrest Elementary School in Huntsville to present "Food Ads: Fact or Fiction?" for sixty-nine fourth-grade students. Students learned to identify common advertising strategies used to market foods toward children. Students viewed magazine ads, television commercials and food packages to identify marketing strategies such as using cartoon characters, famous athletes or stars, jingles, slogans, music, familiar logos or trademarks, freebies, and weasel words such as "limited time only" or "made with real fruit." They also learned how store displays and product placement in grocery stores are planned to influence choices made by consumers.

Additionally, students were taught to use the Nutrition Facts and ingredient listings on food labels to help them select healthy foods and beverages.

Following the presentations, students were allowed to work in small teams to create an advertisement for a fruit or vegetable. The project could include any of the marketing strategies they had learned about, but the message had to be health or nutrition-related. They were allowed to prepare an advertisement for any type of media outlet they wanted and were encouraged to be creative. The final products were proof that the students had learned to identify marketing strategies and apply them to the promotion of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Even the four teachers involved indicated they had no idea that advertising had such an influence on food selections made by their students.

*Article Submitted By: Shirley Whitten, Regional Extension Agent*



### Strengthening the Family and Making Family Time Count

In the wake of present situations, and hardships it is hard not to feel some degree of depression or stress. This can be a time when families can reflect and reevaluate their goals. Family time together can become more valuable, quality time. Take this time to teach the children some very powerful lessons of caring and concern. And, the parent can set the best example. Below are some examples.

- ♥ Re-examine your standards
- ♥ Volunteer to help someone in need
- ♥ Adopt an elderly person
- ♥ Volunteer at school
- ♥ Go for a walk in your neighborhood to find out who your neighbors are
- ♥ Create a family tradition
- ♥ Put together jigsaw puzzles
- ♥ Make a family collage
- ♥ Make a family book of quotations – sayings from your kids or other family members you don't want to forget
- ♥ Worship together

*Article Submitted By: Judy Edmond, Regional Extension Agent*

## Managing Your Finances



Have you ever thought about how much time and money you spend paying your monthly bills? Have you considered paying your bills online? By doing this, you can simplify your life and save money. The following are suggestions for managing your finances more efficiently.

### **Deposit your paycheck directly into your bank account.**

This saves you a trip to the bank each pay period and it keeps the money from creating a temptation since you will not actually handle your paycheck. Another advantage is that the money shows up in your account the day the check is issued, even if you are out of town or home sick. Most employers offer direct deposit. You just need to fill out a form in your human resources department and provide a voided check from the account into which you wish to have your money deposited.

### **Save without thinking.**

You may have the best of intentions to start saving, but by the end of the month, all your money is spent. The trick is to pay yourself first without having to make a conscious decision to do so. There are two easy ways to do this: Arrange with your employer for a direct deposit of a portion of your paycheck into your savings account and the rest into your checking, or make the arrangement through your bank.

### **Fully fund your retirement plan that may be available through your employer.**

If you do not pay into a retirement account, you are walking away from free money. Arrange to have a portion of your pay diverted into an investment of your choice. Remember that you pay into these accounts with pre-tax dollars.

### **Pay your bills online.**

You can pay most recurring bills automatically, including credit cards, utilities, phone lines, cable, and student loans, without having to mess with deposit slips, stamps, and envelopes. In addition, you will never miss a payment. Everything sticks to the schedule you set. You can arrange for automatic bill pay directly with each company. This can be time consuming at first, but it is usually free. Once you have got it set up, you can forget about it. Another way to pay online is to consolidate your bill paying with a single service from your bank, credit union or broker, or go through an online provider such as AOL, MSN, Quicken, or Yahoo. Make sure you read the fine print about fees, though. Some may provide the service free with no strings attached. Others may require a minimum account balance or regular bill-paying activity to waive fees.

### **Track your spending.**

There are many tools available to help you set up a budget. If you need some help in creating your budget, stop by your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System office and pick up a Money Management Calendar. You can also use computer software such as Excel, Microsoft Money, or Quicken. Some banks provide a free online spending report for customers. It tracks your online bill payments, credit and debit card purchases then divides them up into categories for you to see where your money is going.

Try putting some of these suggestions into practice see if you have more time to do things you enjoy!

*Article Submitted By: Theresa Jones, Regional Extension Agent*

## WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?



We all wish to lead an active life, but for those people with physical disabilities each day holds a number of obstacles that have to be overcome. For many of us, these are things we take for granted. We may not fully understand the frustrations, for example, of attempting a task in darkness or not being able to hear the phone when it rings. Have you ever considered the idea of “employing” a dog as a helper? There are a number of organizations across the county that has seen the need to increase independence for those people who are blind, deaf, or who have physical disabilities. The belief behind these programs is that instead of having to be taken care of, persons with disabilities are being given opportunities to take charge of their own lives.

Dogs have long been recognized as man’s best friend because they are non-judgmental, loyal and provide unconditional love and affection. After receiving assistance dogs, many individuals will tell you of the numerous benefits they have experienced in addition to the obvious physical ones. Some people gain the self-confidence to go back to work, school or simply to involve themselves with social activities.

There are four main types of trained assistance dogs, each with its own area of specialization. These types are service dogs, hearing/signal dogs, seeing Dogs, and social/specialty dogs. A very attractive aspect is that these dogs are willing and specially trained to serve the needs of their masters, and can relieve the feeling of guilt or dependency that individuals with a disability may have if they continually have to ask another person to assist them.

### SERVICE DOGS

Service dogs are trained to help people with a wide range of physical disabilities. Service dog candidates are carefully selected for their temperament and are matched with the personality of their future owner. Then they are carefully trained to meet the specific needs of the individual they will be working with. Some of the tasks that a service dog can be trained to do may be retrieving a dropped object, pulling a wheelchair, opening doors, turning on a light switch, pushing an elevator button, or carrying things like books, bags and shopping baskets.



### HEARING DOGS



Silence or peace and quiet is something we seek from the noisy world we live in. Yet you could feel lonely and isolated as a deaf or hearing impaired person who could not hear the telephone ring, a newborn’s cry, or an alarm clock, and how anxious you would be if you were unable to hear warning sounds alerting you to danger.

Professionally trained dogs are now able to ease the burden plus offer companionship. This kind of friendship comes without the concern of whether or not you will be able to communicate effectively with your new friend, because dogs speak the universal language of love and are trained to respond to an individual's own set of cues and commands.

Dogs can be trained to alert their owners to such important sounds that occur in their environment as a telephone call, a knock at the door, or a buzzer, a smoke alarm, on-coming traffic, a baby's cry, an alarm clock, or other sounds that indicate emergency or danger.

Many of the options available to the deaf are mechanical devices that flash or vibrate, which are not always effective. The other option is the reliance on family, friends or aides in the home. These are not always the best arrangements for a person who wishes to live an independent life, because it does not allow either party much personal space or freedom.

#### SEEING DOGS

For someone who is blind or who has a severe visual impairment, the ability to get around freely is one of the most important factors contributing to independence. Leader dogs have allowed blind people to choose among a greater variety of job opportunities. They are helping many students move freely around campus and to travel between home, work or school. In addition, leader dogs are chosen for their intelligence, gentleness, sound temperament and compatibility with their owners. These are all qualities that we would ask for in someone on whom we rely and spend a great deal of time.



#### SOCIAL DOGS

Social dogs are primarily trained to assist people with developmental disabilities, and the elderly by providing the loving interaction known as animal assistive therapy, or pet facilitated therapy. They can play a therapeutic role by, for example, providing sensory stimulation to an individual who pets them. They also provide affection and physical contact to people who lack physical closeness with others. Many hospitals and nursing homes have integrated animal therapies into their schedules because they see what a difference animals make to the lives of the people with whom they are working.

For more information about Dogs as Companion Animals, please make plans to attend the next North Alabama Dog Expo, sponsored by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs.

*Submitted By: Tyrone Smith, Urban Regional Extension Agent*

*Madison County Extension Office...Moving Forward Into The 21st Century*

# Buen día!

**Extensión, Hacia adelante dentro del vigésimo primer siglo!**



The number of Hispanic students in Huntsville City Schools has doubled in five years to reach 1,143. However, the sudden growth has mostly been clustered in southwest Huntsville, with populations doubling and tripling over the last few years in the schools that feed into Butler High School.

Last year more than a third of the students at McDonnell Elementary were Hispanic, as were a quarter of the students at Ridgecrest Elementary. The numbers have been steadily increasing at University Place, Whitesburg and Morris Elementary schools. More than half of the new students require extra lessons to learn English. Huntsville schools are only the latest to face a growing number of students who don't speak English when they enroll. School officials say they are adjusting lessons and seeking more bilingual teachers to meet the shifting population.

The need to improve communication with Hispanic students and parents in the K-12 school system is a growing concern not only in the Madison County but also statewide and nationally. The Madison County Extension Office, and University of Huntsville in Alabama Division of Continuing Education is providing training to area K-12 educators to help them communicate more effectively, on a basic level with Spanish-speaking students and their parents. It is also an ideal program for the growing number of 'English as a Second Language' educators.

The program is designed to quickly bring participants up to speed on knowing relevant terms and phrases for daily class activities, speaking with parents, handling problems or emergencies. There is no grammar to learn, no rules to memorize, and no prior Spanish experience is necessary.

The first offering of the program was during the summer of 2008. It was opened to all K-12 educators regardless of school affiliation. The program was well received by eleven participants; therefore, another session was requested and grant funds were solicited by the Extension System and Ann Marie Batista of Huntsville City Schools. The Alabama Mountains, Rivers and Valleys RC & D Council granted \$2,300 toward the class and Ms. Batista was successful in receiving \$4,900 to help offset the costs of the program for the winter 2009 Session. A class such as this is so needed that most of the educators paid the \$360 for the course from their own personal funds. The Extension Office and Ms. Batista continue to look for funding so teachers don't have to use their own funds to pay for this class. Educators received continuing education units for completing, at least, 80% of the course work.

There are 20 participants enrolled in the January 2009 session, with approximately 12 more on a wait list. Those on the wait list are being contacted to see when another session would be desirable.

*Article Submitted By: Walter Harris, County Extension Coordinator*

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Please visit our website!  
<http://www.aces.edu/counties/Madison/>



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