Looking Back, Stepping Ahead

Extension Highlights

2006
Greetings from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. We hope 2007 is off to a good start for you, as it is for us. We had an outstanding year in 2006, and the stories that follow are just a few of the many we have to tell.

Our stories are stories about people and how we help make their lives better. We continue to reach individual Alabamians, young and old, in rural communities and in major cities, with programs that make a difference. Extension has helped in times of flood and drought. We have taught people to combat invasive plants, raise goats, protect their investments, beautify their landscapes, and much, much more!

We value our rich heritage and are ever mindful that Extension was created to serve the people of Alabama. That is still our primary goal, and the bulk of our work benefits you and your neighbors. But our impact is increasingly regional and even worldwide. Stepping ahead in the twenty-first century means stepping beyond our borders—physically and virtually. As you will see, some of the stories clearly have global themes.

We appreciate you, the citizens of Alabama. You are our partners in making many good things happen. Thank you for your interest, your support, and your questions. Let us know if you have suggestions for how we can serve you better. See the back page of this report for phone numbers and contact information.

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Extension expertise goes global.
Alabama’s coastal marshes are important for feeding the world. If that sounds strange, think about how the tiny plants that grow in these marshes support the vitally important—but rapidly dwindling—fish population. And fish are a critical food source on the local, national, and even global scenes. Plus, sport fishing is worth more than a billion dollars a year to the Alabama economy.

In addition to supporting marine life, marshes help control erosion, protect the land from waves and storms, provide migratory bird habitat, suppress exotic and invasive plants, and provide seed stock for commercial production of aquatic vegetation—not to mention their aesthetic value. Quite a list of responsibilities for Alabama’s marshlands!

Extension has been working since the 2005 hurricane season to help restore and protect this critical resource. Urban regional Extension agent Tami Wells assisted with the construction of wetland grass nurseries at Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Fairhope and at Wolf Bay Waterwatch in Miflin. She helped build a greenhouse at Wolf Bay where native plants are being germinated for further research. Both sites will be models of how to grow marine vegetation including upland native, emergent wetland, salt marsh, and submerged aquatic vegetation.

Currently, the Weeks Bay nursery alone can grow 800 trade-gallon containers of wetland plant species in one growing season. The estimated wholesale cost of wetland plant material generated is $4,800, with the potential to restore 1,422 square meters of coastal marsh habitat within three years after planting. But this is at just one site—and at just the beginning of it. The implications are tremendous when these processes are replicated over time and at many other locations.

According to Wells, the Weeks Bay and Wolf Bay nursery sites annually host more than 500 visitors with decision-making responsibilities in coastal recovery after hurricanes. National and international marine scientists and educators are also visiting—and taking the lessons they learn back to their own laboratories, classrooms, and restoration projects.

In addition, the Weeks Bay nursery is part of Baldwin County’s Grasses in Classes program, which provides education in environmental sciences to future decision makers in coastal Alabama and to a selected group of minority children.

Through this work, Extension also realized that residents want and need to be able to handle their own restoration projects without depending on government agencies. The vegetation produced at these nurseries will help them do that.

Taken together, these efforts will help local individuals and agencies restore and maintain critical marsh habitat, provide education in coastal habitat regulations and conservation strategies, allow for community involvement in strategic planning and long-term recovery, and—ultimately—help feed the world.
**Fresh Oysters**

Hurricanes have not only destroyed habitat, but they also have severely challenged the Gulf Coast seafood industry. But not all the industry’s challenges are due to weather.

One of the perpetual challenges of the oyster industry, with its $11.5 million impact on Alabama’s economy, is how to increase the shelf life of oyster products.

The issue of rapid degradation of post harvest–treated oysters has been a problem for the seafood industry for many years. Although PHT oysters are treated to kill harmful bacteria, the process often creates other problems, including off-flavors and a cloudy appearance of the oyster liquor approximately one week after harvest.

Extension specialist Rick Wallace, regional agents Amelia McGrew and Kristin Woods-Williams, and Auburn microbiologist Covadonga Arias collaborated with Chris Nelson at Bon Secour Fisheries to study one of the biggest challenges in the oyster industry—the rapid degradation of PHT oysters compared with fresh-shucked oysters.

The purpose of the study was to investigate additives that might improve the shelf life of PHT oysters. Using a protocol similar to the warm-water industry processing method, they evaluated sodium chloride, grape seed extract, ascorbic acid, citric acid, and EDTA for their effectiveness on off-colors, aromas, and flavors in oysters.

The treatments were compared to commercially available fresh oysters. The subjective aroma and appearance evaluations were conducted by Woods-Williams and McGrew.

The results of the project indicate that the citric acid treatment may be useful as a preservative in PHT oysters. Further testing is necessary, but the preliminary findings are positive.

Increasing shelf life and retarding microbial growth will increase consumer acceptability of oyster products and thus increase the value of the oyster. Whenever a better product can be offered for a fair market price, everyone wins.

This is how Extension works: educate the producer and benefit the consumer. This is how we help Alabama.
Deep in the Delta

What started as a simple question, why no big fish? has turned into a wealth of answers—answers that will have big consequences.

Frustrated bass anglers in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta wanted to know why they seldom caught big fish despite overall good catch rates. They turned to two Auburn University researchers for answers.

Russell Wright, an Extension fisheries specialist and associate professor of fisheries and allied aquacultures, and his colleague, fisheries professor Dennis DeVries, think they’ve discovered why this is the case. They attribute much of the problem to the Delta’s unique aquatic ecosystem, one that combines both freshwater and marine characteristics. The fish simply don’t live as long in this environment, and over time that has produced subtle behavioral changes in the fish.

“Because the bass don’t live as long, they devote more of their energies to reproducing at a young age,” Wright says, adding that one of the inevitable byproducts of this behavior is smaller fish.

However, the two researchers had an even more ambitious mission in mind besides accounting for smaller bass. They wanted to do careful research, and through the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, with funding through Federal Aid in Sport Fish Recreation, they were able to do it. Their goal was to construct a finely detailed blueprint of the Delta’s entire aquatic ecosystem, one that could provide a clear picture of the water system’s strengths and weaknesses.

In the course of their research, Wright and DeVries have examined more than 75,000 fish and verified that more than 100 different species are found within the Mobile Delta, making it one of the most diverse water systems in the state. They also established the presence of a nonnative species of Daphnia, which may have major implications for fish that depend on zooplankton as a food source.

The study also has helped them gain a better understanding of how natural events, such as hurricanes and prolonged drought, can affect an entire aquatic system.

Most significantly, the researchers have compiled a massive baseline of data that will provide policy makers with better tools for assessing the impact of future development within the Mobile Bay region, particularly how this development will affect the Delta’s vulnerable aquatic ecosystem.

The two fisheries researchers are far from done. They plan to continue building this research and expanding it into other regions of the Delta.
In Time of Drought

If it's not a flood, it's a drought! And the drought of 2006 took a tremendous toll on Alabama.

Some livestock producers had to sell portions of their herds because there was no forage for the animals to graze. Some row crop growers lost the bulk of their corn, cotton, and other crops to the blistering heat. Estimates are that the drought will cost Alabama row crop farmers more than $250 million in lost sales alone. This drought will continue to affect the state's agribusiness community for years to come.

Extension professionals recognized the diverse problems that the drought created and stepped in to help producers make the best management decisions possible. Extension provided advice and expertise on wide-ranging subjects, from crop insurance to corn silage. Farmers turned to Extension for assistance in everything from determining if feeds were safe for livestock to deciding on the practicality of additional pesticide applications on drought-stressed row crops.

Bob Goodman, the Extension agricultural economist who organized the event, said the live video-conference offered a rare opportunity.

“This video-conference gave farmers the chance to speak directly to many of the policy makers at the state and federal level,” he said.

Extension developed a new Web site focused solely on the drought. It provided a variety of information covering all areas of agricultural production as well as weather information and other topics.

Extension's efforts did not end when rains began to come more regularly in late summer. Farmers still had tough decisions to make that could affect their farms' viability in coming years. Through workshops and video-conferences as well as farm visits, Extension ensured that the assistance kept flowing.
Getting Your Goat

Extension is helping people who want to do something different. In farming, it's called alternative agriculture. And more and more people are practicing alternative agriculture in Alabama and throughout the world.

One prime example is goats—Alabama is getting more goats! With more than 43,000 meat goats and 1,800 dairy goats in the state, Alabama is ranked among the top twelve states in meat goat production. Extension is working closely with this increasing number of goat producers, paying special attention to the needs of small-scale and underserved farmers.

Julio Correa, an Extension animal scientist at Alabama A&M University, says Extension is working to better educate producers in wide-ranging elements of goat production, including reproduction, health and nutrition, safety, and quality assurance.

“As demand continues to grow for goat products, we want to be sure our producers have the very best information and tools so they can better manage their herds,” said Correa.

In 2006, a number of activities held across the state directly benefited goat producers. A two-day meat goat conference in Auburn drew more than 100 people. Single-day workshops were conducted, with an average of more than 70 participants at each one.

Also in 2006, a joint effort between Extension and the Alabama Farmers Federation created The Small Ruminant Pocket Guide. The free guide covers a wide range of topics crucial to managing sheep and goats.

Diego Gimenez, an Extension animal scientist at Auburn University and the coordinating author, says the new guide should be valuable to the state’s goat and sheep farmers.

“Small ruminant production is expanding in Alabama,” says Gimenez. “We think this comprehensive publication will put important information right at growers’ fingertips.”

Topics covered in the guide include a management calendar, forages, genetics, health, reproduction, carcasses and cuts, livestock markets, and contact information of experts available to help Alabama producers.

Extension is helping a lot of people get their goats—getting them healthier, better managed, and more profitable.
Avian Flu, a Bad Surprise

Fate threw the Extension poultry science team an unexpected curveball in 2006.

Team members had planned to focus most of their energies on working with the poultry industry to address the growing challenge of managing and disposing of poultry waste. As it turned out, growing public fears about the recurring H5N1 flu strain, popularly known as avian flu, in poultry flocks across the world forced a radical change of plans.

Fears of a worldwide avian flu outbreak presented the team with several special challenges. In addition to allaying public fears, they also had to address concerns within the poultry industry, especially among workers at poultry processing plants, hatcheries, and feed mills, many of whom speak only Spanish. Unwarranted fears among these workers about handling poultry threatened serious work stoppages, possibly sending ripples throughout Alabama’s $2.7 billion poultry industry.

Team members developed a series of educational products in English and Spanish designed to alleviate these fears. Many of these were duplicated and distributed in other poultry-producing states.

Extension poultry scientists also spearheaded statewide efforts to provide the public with a clear assessment of the risks associated with the H5N1 virus. Comments by poultry team members Joe Hess, Ken Macklin, and Robert Norton were featured widely by print and broadcast outlets throughout the state. Team members also spoke with civic groups across the state through Extension’s new Speakers Bureau and other organizations. Their observations on continuing efforts to monitor for and contain the spread of avian flu outbreaks were also featured on the Web log “Extension Daily,” and other timely information was posted on the Extension Web site.

While public fears associated with avian flu abated somewhat in late 2006, team members still perceive their educational efforts as work in progress. Outbreaks of ordinary seasonal flu will likely spark renewed fears of the H5N1 virus. For that matter, so would the positive detection of H5N1 in a sample of migratory birds.

Educating the public about avian flu continues to be a challenge. But for members of the Extension poultry team, it’s all in a day’s work.
Gauging the Farmer’s Pulse

Every five years, Extension economist James Novak and a team of farm policy experts from land-grant universities throughout the country strive to get a clear picture of what U.S. farmers want in the new farm bill. This involves surveying tens of thousands of farmers from a wide range of backgrounds across the United States. The latest round of surveying included 64,000 farmers in 27 states, representing a broad distribution of regional interests, types of agricultural production, and levels of historic farm program participation. Almost 1,500 Alabama producers were included in the survey.

The results are compiled into a booklet published by the Farm Foundation and the National Public Policy Education Committee. American Farmland Trust and other groups are already using the results. Producer input may be more critical than ever in this farm bill cycle, as Congress prepares to deal with a full plate of contentious farm-related issues ranging from global trade to budget deficit reduction.

Energy costs are another major concern. U.S. farm income was projected to drop substantially in 2006, partly because of steep rises in energy costs. All of these concerns were reflected in the farm surveys, though Novak and other team members turned up some surprising findings. For example, farmers expressed support for continuing free-trade agreements and even foresaw potential problems if current negotiations fail.

Perhaps not so surprising, producers opposed phasing out or reducing commodity program payments. “They like the current program and generally would like to see it continued,” Novak says.

Alabama farmers also expressed strong support for food traceability, a system through which food items can be traced all the way from the plate back to the farms where they originated. A majority of Alabama producers included in the survey also supported more efforts to develop the state’s emerging biofuels sector, especially in ways that benefited farming.

The booklet has traditionally served as a reliable and comprehensive source for members of Congress and other policy makers as they debate and formulate U.S. farm policy. In fact, it was cited 12 times by lawmakers on the floor of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives as debate ensued over the 2002 Farm Bill. The new booklet could have even more far-reaching effects.
**Beware: Aggressive Plants!**

Alabama forestlands are under relentless attack. Who would have thought the aggressors would be landscaping plants—trees, shrubs, and vines people imported into the United States with the most innocent intentions?

Innocent or not, the stakes are high. Kudzu, the so-called “plant that ate the South,” is often cited as the archetype of what can follow the introduction of an exotic plant. Brought to the United States in the nineteenth century to serve as a shade cover for Southern porches and later promoted for erosion control, kudzu has aggressively extended its dense, tangled, climbing vines over more than 7 million acres.

But many more exotic species are invading Alabama, including tallowtree, privet, and Japanese climbing fern. They are just as destructive as kudzu, only more subtle.

“The damage often occurs in the soft, vulnerable understory of the forest,” says Ken McNabb, an Extension forester working to educate Alabamians about the dangers associated with many of these common invasive exotic species.

As McNabb explains, the species “simply take over the ecosystem under the existing tree canopy.” What follows over time is a radically altered ecosystem, often in the form of a dense, virtually impenetrable barrier of privet hedge or a thick stand of tallowtrees, commonly known as popcorn trees. The potential economic and environmental toll on Alabama forestland is incalculable.

McNabb held a series of workshops throughout the state in 2006 to educate professional foresters, herbicide applicators, and landowners about the potential ecological disaster caused by invasive exotic plants. “What is sorely needed,” he says, “is greater public awareness of the threat these species pose to the state’s native ecosystems and what can be done about it.”

Landowners need to be vigilant, he warns. “In some cases, if you see a cogongrass stand or some other invasive species, you can talk to someone and control it before it’s too late. Granted, in some cases control will be difficult, but it pays to remain vigilant,” says McNabb, adding that it also pays not to plant invasive exotics in the first place.
The Master Gardener Program, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2006, is designed to recruit people with an interest in gardening who will commit to 40 hours of intensive horticultural training and, upon completion of the class, return at least 40 hours of volunteer service to the community.

Volunteers staff horticulture hotlines, coordinate environmental and planting projects, run demonstration gardens, do research, manage existing public gardens, work with school groups and other special populations, publish newsletters, and broadcast radio and television programs.

They also foster healthy eating through home and community gardens, which provide fresh vegetables and fruits for homeowners and for food banks, churches, and other civic groups. Their assistance also gives Extension agents more time and greater flexibility in responding to other needs.

And, of course, Master Gardeners improve their own gardens, thus providing additional beauty to their neighborhoods.

In 2006, almost 500 Intern Master Gardeners completed their training, joining a total of more than 2,000 currently active Certified Master Gardeners.

"Combined, the Master Gardeners interacted with 200,000 people in their communities and gave 135,000 hours of volunteer time during the year," says Kerry Smith, the program coordinator. "They are a tremendous resource to the state."

"The program has trained more than 7,000 Master Gardeners over the years," Smith adds. "It's a testament to the program's value that we have ongoing participation from more than 2,000 volunteers annually."

Master Gardener just keeps growing and growing and growing.
Helping Alabamians live healthier lives has always been a priority for Extension. In 2006, Extension took a new step in health education by becoming the national office for the Healthy Homes Partnership.

The partnership focuses on reducing housing deficiencies and risks associated with childhood diseases and injuries. Partners directly assist families with addressing mold issues, preventing lead poisoning, maintaining safe drinking water, preventing carbon monoxide poisoning, and addressing many aspects of environmental health.

Extension associate Patrick Kennealy coordinates the national program, which reached more than 1.5 million consumers and trained more than 1,000 professionals between January and June.

The Alabama office is facilitating state-level projects through various mechanisms, including holding workshops, developing educational materials, and producing literature such as the Help Yourself to a Healthy Home book used by Extension programs, health departments, community-based organizations, and individuals around the world.

Extension is updating and preparing the book in both English and Spanish for mass production and distribution. More than 30,000 copies will be distributed in the next year. Both versions will be available electronically on the partnership Web site, www.healthyhomespartnership.net.

An Alabama version of Help Yourself to a Healthy Home was also printed through a generous contribution from Legacy, Inc., and is available on the Extension Web site.

Alabama’s Healthy Homes project staff, coordinated by Laura Booth, produced and displayed a model of a radon mitigation system at an annual building, home, and remodeling show in Huntsville last March. Booth also worked with Paula Peek and the Auburn University College of Human Sciences Consumer Affairs Department to coordinate six teams of interior design students in developing an affordable and healthy interior design and layout for the Tuskegee Healthy Home.

The Healthy Homes Partnership includes resources of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; state land-grant universities; and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Healthy Homes Partnership is an outstanding example of how Extension joins forces with others and leads the way into a healthier, more prosperous future, not just in Alabama but throughout the nation.
Family Connections

Extension’s concern with health is not confined to homes or individuals. Relationships, including marriages, need to be healthy too.

Stable, healthy relationships contribute tremendously to people’s quality of life—better mental and physical health, greater happiness, higher income, and the opportunity to build a stable environment, including financial security, for children.

Professionals in Extension’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional unit are partnering with a number of organizations to help couples build healthy marriages through the Family Connections in Alabama—Special Improvement Project.

Family Connections is a multiyear grant program aimed at promoting and increasing healthy marriages. Extension is holding the program in Madison County at its satellite facility, the Family Life Center. Donna Gullatte, an Extension agent at the Family Life Center, manages the program.

The Family Connections Project is designed to promote healthy development for children while offering relationship education to a specially targeted group of people: ethnically and culturally diverse couples, whether married or unmarried, who have at least one child together under the age of five.

The project has four key goals. The first is to help participants become more independent and believe they deserve and can maintain a healthy relationship. The program also strives to improve a couple’s knowledge about the importance of stable relationships, marriages, and families. Another goal is to emphasize the importance of two-parent involvement in children’s lives. Finally, the program stresses the importance of consistent and reliable support for children by both parents.

Couples participate in 12 two-hour sessions. Workshops are interactive and designed to give parents the tools they need to make their relationships work, both with each other and with their children.

The workshops are offered throughout the year at various times of the day to reach people who may have scheduling conflicts. Clients are also treated to an evening meal and babysitting services if needed. In addition to these incentives, couples are offered assistance to complete an affidavit of paternity, offered amended birth certificates when needed (fee waived), and awarded Baby Bucks.

Couples receive the Baby Bucks gift card when they complete the 12-week course. The gift card can be used to buy different items the family needs. Baby Bucks, along with other gift items donated from local businesses, serve as incentives for couples to participate in the sessions and to help initiate couple and family time together.
Not Getting Older, Getting Smarter

Thanks to Extension and other partners, Alabamians over the age of 50 have had new opportunities to gain skills to survive in the world of investment and personal finance.

In 2005, after a national survey indicated that the majority of U.S. investors did not seem to have important investor survival skills, the Alabama Securities Commission partnered with Extension and AARP Alabama to create Investor’s University. This program brought personal finance and investment training to Alabamians ages 50 to 65.

Two hundred participants met at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens in February 2006 for the first Investor’s University. Speakers discussed different investment products, estate planning, fraud prevention, reverse mortgages, insurance, and other areas concerning personal finance. Bernice Wilson, an Extension specialist in consumer science and personal financial management at Alabama A&M University, coordinated the program.

In April, a second Investor’s University was held in Huntsville with 103 participants. The majority of the attendees were retired females between the ages of 65 and 74. Topics included predatory lending, reverse mortgages, home equity loans, investment fraud, and retirement and pension issues.

Financial losses reported by those attending the seminars were high. Through participation in this Extension effort, many have now learned new strategies to improve their investor and financial survival skills so they can catch and prevent future losses.

The first Investor’s University seminars were conducted in urban areas, but in 2007 they will be held in rural areas as well.

Future programs will include more topics such as housing opportunities, college education plans, annuities, retirement investment options, Individual Retirement Accounts, Roth IRAs, stocks, bonds, Social Security and disability benefits, health insurance options, self-employment, small business plans for entrepreneurs, and nursing home financial preparation and payment plans.

Participants in the 2006 program said it helped them learn how to achieve financial security in retirement and make better financial decisions. Investor’s University underscores Extension’s commitment to helping Alabamians at all ages and stages of their lives.
Addressing a Dubious Distinction

We’re right up there at the top of the list! Great news, right? Problem is, it’s the obesity list. Alabama ranks just behind Mississippi as the nation’s fattest state. According to the nonprofit Trust for America’s Health, records from 2003 to 2005 show that almost 29 percent of Alabamians are obese.

Obesity has a high correlation with many health problems including diabetes, a chronic disease that is afflicting a rising generation of overweight, increasingly sedentary young people.

For the past five years, the Extension-sponsored Alabama Diabetes Conference has provided a forum through which many of the state’s leading public health authorities and researchers can share cutting-edge information with those involved on the front lines of this raging epidemic: dietitians, nurses, and childcare providers.

Underscoring growing concerns about the rising tide of diabetes among the nation’s young people and the disease’s close link with obesity, the focus of the 2006 conference was expanded to include childhood obesity.

Several new faces were featured among this year’s speakers, including Dr. Stephen Ponders, a nationally renowned pediatric endocrinologist who explored the close relationship between childhood obesity and a common sweetening agent known as high-fructose corn syrup.

A speaker from the Alabama Department of Education, Nina Hollingsworth, also outlined the state’s first major initiative to address childhood obesity in the public schools. The initiative is based on the recommendations of a statewide task force commissioned by the Alabama State Superintendent of Education.

Reflecting the wide range of topics typically covered at the conference, an ophthalmologist also discussed the close correlation between diabetes and eye diseases.

According to Helen Herndon-Jones, a regional Extension agent and the principal conference organizer, the event continues to draw high marks from participants. Many have described it as one of the most effective annual conferences dealing with the twin epidemics of diabetes and obesity.

Participants receive continuing education credit for attending.

Held this year at Auburn University Montgomery, the conference attracted more than 90 professionals from across the state. These people, in turn, will help educate Alabamians, young and old, about these serious health issues.

We are working to bring Alabama down—on the obesity list, that is.
What do many of Alabama’s top economic and community development professionals have in common? Most have been through the two-week Intensive Economic Development Training Course originated by Extension and now operated through a new institute that combines the resources of Extension and Auburn University Outreach.

Following the creation of the new Economic and Community Development Institute in May, the 2006 class, the largest in the 21-year history of the seminar, was just one of the institute’s many projects.

Directed by Joe Sumners, the new institute’s mission is to improve the quality of life of all Alabama citizens by promoting continuous improvement of economic and community development policy and practice through communication, education, research, and community assistance. ECDI seeks to play a leading role in revitalizing Alabama communities, especially in the state’s rural areas.

In June, Sumners and institute staff facilitated a statewide rural economic and community development strategic planning process that brought together 55 state and community leaders. In a round table format, they discussed the needs and opportunities in rural development in Alabama. Information from the round table is being used to help the Southern Rural Development Center and ECDI develop strategic plans.

The rural round table was followed by the annual two-week Intensive Economic Development Training Course in July and September, with its record total of 57 participants. The course has more than 700 alumni, including most of Alabama’s top local and state economic and community development professionals.

ECDI recently published the results of its 2006 Alabama Local Economic Development Survey. This report provides information about the economic development planning, organization, practice, and needs that exist in Alabama cities and counties.

ECDI staff members are actively involved in a variety of state projects where they are providing direction and technical assistance. Some of these projects include the I-85 Corridor Alliance, the Alabama Communities of Excellence Program, and the Alabama Black Belt Action Commission.

Based on the institute’s very strong start, the people of Alabama can expect many more positive contributions to the state’s economic well-being, especially in its rural areas.
Booster Shot of Leadership

Students in some of the state’s urban areas are at serious risk for failure in school and beyond. The schools simply have little time or resources to teach them much beyond the basic core requirements.

Thus was born the idea for the Urban Teen Leadership Academy. Amanda Outlaw, an urban regional Extension agent, was awarded a $7,500 Extension grant to conduct the program for students in Baldwin and Mobile counties. Her goal was to provide leadership skills training that would benefit participants not only in the immediate future but later as they apply for college and for jobs, as they move into the world of work and careers.

Participants attended the educational workshops and seminars held monthly in Mobile County at various locations. The program ran from October 2005 to June 2006 and included leadership seminars, educational workshops on etiquette and personal financial management, a college tour, and community service projects for 30 youth.

The students also attended a Youth Entrepreneurship Symposium held in Dothan by the Houston County Extension Urban Center. In all, some 250 students attended the symposium, coordinated by urban agent Rosalind James, which featured motivational speaker and author Stedman Graham of Chicago. Graham is the author of the bestselling book "Teens Can Make It Happen: Nine Steps to Success." That talk, along with the rest of the symposium, was a high point of the Academy.

“More people should learn from Graham’s books about leadership and pass it on to others,” said Jaren Wilson, a senior at Daphne High School. Whitney Simmons, a senior from Mobile, said the symposium was an inspiring and encouraging experience.

Cornecia Buchanan, an eighth grade student from Mobile, said Graham’s presentation inspired her as well. She cited his comments on being independent, developing a good business, and making a profit—not only to benefit yourself but also your employees.

The Urban Teen Leadership Academy program also helped the young people gain new technology skills that not only will help them through the rest of their school careers but into the future.

Frankly, it will look good on their resumes too. Thanks to the Academy, these students are in a better position to demonstrate their potential to college recruiters and employers.
4-H Says, “Just Move”

Did you know that the four H’s of 4-H stand for Head, Hands, Heart, and Health? One of the key reasons for this nationwide program’s success is its multilayered approach to promoting the well-being of young people.

A new program developed by a team of Extension experts, Just Move Alabama, will have a strong impact on the lives and health of our state’s youth.

Originally the brainchild of Extension 4-H agent Denise Legvold, Just Move Alabama was taught to all Alabama Extension 4-H staff in January 2006 and to adult and teen 4-H volunteers in February. It has since been incorporated into all 4-H programs and activities.

According to Molly Gregg, an Extension 4-H and youth development specialist, the program helps young people increase their level of physical activity, teaches them to make healthy food choices, and helps them appreciate and value all body types. One goal of the program is for youth organizations such as 4-H to contribute 10 minutes of physical activity toward a target of 60 minutes of activity daily for each young person in the state.

To assist volunteer leaders, three kits were created: “Jumping for Health”; “Frisbee Fun and Food”; and “Volley Vitals and Vittles.” Each kit teaches a physical activity—jump rope, Frisbee, and volleyball—along with a lesson on nutrition and food safety or body image.

In addition, a deck of cards has been designed for youth ages 9 to 13. The Just Move Alabama card deck features a 10-minute activity and a fun fact on one side. A nutritious recipe, a nutrition facts label, and a food safety tip or fun fact are on the other side.

Extension created the program to help fight Alabama’s growing population of overweight youth. “Obesity and adult onset diabetes have their origins in such factors as sugared beverage consumption, long hours of television viewing, and reduced physical activity,” Gregg said.

The Just Move Alabama program materials are being made available statewide, and any youth organization can contact county Extension offices to find out how they can get the materials.

Just Move Alabama is for all youth in the state of Alabama and can be delivered in a variety of ways, including public school classrooms, scouting programs, church youth activities, and home-school associations.

Extension doesn’t want the young people of Alabama to be couch potatoes. We want them to “Just Move!”
Music Measures Up

If you wanted to see 100- plus young people have the time of their lives—and benefit in ways too numerous to count—you should have been at the Ruben Studdard Music Camp in Dothan last summer.

Extension partnered with the Ruben Studdard Foundation for the Advancement of Children in the Music Arts, Wallace Community College, Southeast Alabama Educational Outreach, the City of Dothan, WOOF Radio, and Coca-Cola to present the camp, which was developed by Studdard, the 2003 American Idol winner.

But why should Extension sponsor a music camp? Research shows that music has many benefits. It allows people to express their creativity, solve problems, improve their standards of quality in work and school, develop self-esteem, conquer fears, improve coordination, and enhance discipline—just to name a few. Group experiences such as the camp add a social dimension and promote teamwork.

Beyond enjoyment and personal development, music provides rewarding careers. As with any career, talent must be coupled with perseverance, good work ethics, and interpersonal skills. Aspiring musicians must be high achievers but also understand that great performances do not always lead to stardom.

For the young people ages 12 to 19 who attended the week-long Ruben Studdard Music Camp, the benefits of music needed no justification. They just had a ball!

Coordinated by urban regional Extension agent Rosalind James as a part of her career development assignment, the camp provided intensive training in stage and voice performance and music theory as well as practical advice about the music industry from professionals such as Harold Lilly, an arranger for artists Alicia Keyes, Jamie Fox, Kanye West, and others.

James attributed much of the success of the camp to the diverse team of 45 adult and student volunteers who helped make every part run smoothly. They helped with everything from serving meals to stuffing music folders to sewing dresses for the finale, a concert where camp participants performed with Studdard on stage. More than 2,500 people attended the concert.

As a result of the camp, a busload of students from the Wiregrass traveled to Birmingham to audition for the 2007 American Idol competition.

The Studdard Foundation will cosponsor another camp with Extension in 2007. Thanks to yet another Extension partnership, music is really measuring up for the young people of Alabama.
Breaking New Ground

An environmental education center with a “green” building—what a concept! That idea has just taken concrete form with the groundbreaking for the new facility at the 4-H Youth Development Center in Columbiana.

U.S. Senator Richard Shelby joined Extension personnel, Auburn University President Ed Richardson, Alabama 4-H Club Foundation board members, 4-H’ers, and others for the groundbreaking of the 4-H Environmental Science Education Center on October 17. The new center is the first in the Southeast specifically designed to teach environmental issues using sustainable practices.

“Alabama 4-H brings national prominence to the state with this new facility,” said Jack Odle, chairman of the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc. “It will be the first gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design commissioned 4-H environmental education building in the Southeast and will be an example of sustainable awareness.”

The LEED Green Building rating system is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings. 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.

The $7 million facility, designed by Davis Architects of Birmingham, will be constructed by B.L. Harbert International, also of Birmingham. It is being built with funds raised by the Campaign for Alabama 4-H through the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc.

“More than 500 corporations, foundations, organizations, and individuals have supported the Campaign for Alabama 4-H to date, giving $5.8 million,” said Beth Lawrence, who directs Extension’s development office and is coordinating the campaign, which also supports 4-H programs statewide.
With this new facility, the Alabama 4-H Natural Resources and Environmental Education program will be better equipped to teach Alabama youth and educators about protecting and enhancing the environment in a facility unlike anything currently in Alabama.

The Environmental Science Education Center will have 17,500 square feet of interior space covering two floors. Two large laboratory classrooms will support the 4-H Center’s Environmental Field School, along with a shared laboratory preparation area. Both laboratories will have direct access to the outdoors so children can explore outside and come inside to laboratories filled with technical and audiovisual support. A large multifunction room seating 350 and three seminar rooms will also be available for classes, meetings, and conferences. Other interior features include displays highlighting lake and land habitats.

The building is designed to meet the latest in air quality and indoor environment guidelines and to be energy efficient, using natural light for daytime lighting. Water collected from the roof and stored in a cistern will be used for the toilets throughout the building and for the fire protection sprinkler system. It will be constructed of stone, concrete, wood, glass, and steel. An additional 1,050-square-foot observation deck will be nestled in the treetops and accessible from the main floor.

The new, green 4-H Environmental Science Education Center is a concept whose time has come. We in Extension are proud to be a partner in turning the concept into reality for the young people of Alabama.
Extension’s first mandate is to serve the people of Alabama. This means not only working within the borders of our state but considerably beyond them, both physically and virtually. Here are five of the many ways we are stepping into the global community.

The Extension Disaster Education Network—EDEN

Disasters and potential disasters continue to capture headline space. Extension is working to help you prepare for disasters—whether natural or of human origin. The potential for avian influenza to make the leap to humans, misery from foodborne illnesses, and stress in the aftermath of disasters were major concerns in 2006. Extension faced them all. Our Extension poultry specialists, human health specialists, and communicators produced curriculum to help teachers and counselors assist children in coping with disasters, taught food handlers how to screen donated food, taught emergency planning to seniors, facilitated contingency planning sessions with local businesses, produced news stories, published timely information, and arranged speaking engagements around the state. In addition, Extension continued to help our Mississippi and Louisiana neighbors recover from the devastation of the 2005 hurricanes. They gathered supplies then headed to areas where help was needed to rebuild barns, mend fences, clear debris, and accomplish other tasks.

LEADERS in Food and Fiber

In 2006, Extension’s Alabama Agriculture and Forestry Leadership Development Program (known as LEADERS) graduated its eighth class, comprised of 27 members. The two-year program included three-day study institutes in both Birmingham and Auburn, a 16-day study tour in New Zealand and Australia, and finally the graduation in Prattville to conclude the 50-day course. The members of this outstanding class came from across the state and represented a broad spectrum of Alabama’s food and fiber industry. The new graduates join other alums in being better spokespersons for the industry and for Extension. The oldest program of its kind in the Southeast, LEADERS has graduated more than 200 individuals, who have consistently become more involved in a greater number of organizations and become much more politically aware. The director of the program, Dennis Evans, was presented the 2006 Director’s Award by the International Association of Programs of Agricultural Leadership.

(continued on back cover)
eXtension, the New Online Information Network

Alabama citizens can now take advantage of a nationwide network called eXtension. Pronounced “e-Extension,” this electronic resource is a collaborative effort among Extension services throughout the country. Rather than being arranged by state, the network revolves around communities of interest. You can go directly to the Web-based community you’re interested in and find answers to frequently asked questions, participate in online learning and scheduled chat sessions with Extension experts, and much more. The first three communities created focus on personal finance, horses, and wildlife damage management. You can access them through www.extension.org. The network is brand new, so watch for lots more communities of interest to appear in the coming months and years.

A World of Alabama Extension Resources

Our main way of reaching the world beyond Alabama is through the World Wide Web. Our Web site, www.aces.edu, has more than 4 million visitors each year, about three-fourths from within the United States and the rest from around the globe. Some of the Web audience’s most popular topics are exercise and weight issues, fleas, tomato plant diseases, honeybees, poison ivy, brown recluse spiders, cucumbers, nut sedge, and foods that lower cholesterol. People find unbiased, research-based information about these and thousands of other topics every day through our Web site.

Technology for Expanded Program Delivery

In addition to Web delivery of Extension material, we have 33 videoconference sites around the state in county offices and regional centers. Nowhere in Alabama is a citizen more than an hour’s drive from one of these centers. Through videoconferences, Extension provides educational and certification programs to people in many locations at the same time. Statewide experts as well as Extension educators from other states lay the groundwork, and regional or county experts address local issues—all in the same conference. Plus, programs are available to wide audiences in small-group settings, with minimal travel time and expense for learners and educators both.

Give us a call ...

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 (334) 844-4444 (Auburn University) or (256) 372-5710 (Alabama A&M University).

For information about charitable contributions, call Beth Lawrence, assistant to the director, development, at (334) 844-2247.

To place orders for publications or videos, call (334) 844-1592.

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