Welcome

We live in interesting times—interesting and challenging times that are forcing us to rethink some of our day-to-day decisions and even how we support our families.

Our 2009 annual report, Working Knowledge in Challenging Times, features a few of the many accounts of how Alabamians are carrying on with life in these challenging times, with help from Extension educators.

Our Thriving in Challenging Times effort was launched in November 2008 to assist people in the midst of one of the most severe economic downturns in U.S. history. Extension personnel at all levels representing 14 priority program areas have been involved in the effort, often working across multi-county and multidisciplinary lines. We are showing Alabamians, among other things, how to shop on a limited budget, manage and overcome debt, and save on energy costs.

But these challenging times are not limited to the immediate effects of the economic downturn. To an increasing degree, our efforts focus on helping people deal with the competitive pressures of a global, knowledge-based economy.

Throughout our almost 100-year history, using many different approaches and working in many different contexts, we have equipped Alabamians with the knowledge they need to weather challenging times.

Of course, making knowledge work for the people we serve is what we do. It’s our mission, our specialty, and, most of all, our passion.

We hope you enjoy reading these stories. It’s our great pleasure to bring them to you.

Sincerely,

Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Administrative Team

Gaines Smith, Extension Director
Virginia Caples, 1890 Administrator
Chinella Henderson, Associate Director, Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs
Paul Brown, Associate Director, Rural and Traditional Programs
Stacey Bozeman, Financial Services Director
Chris McClendon, Human Resources Manager

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Milestones
We’re Working for you

From our history
How to find us

W E L C O M E
Virtually from its beginning in 1914, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System has been helping individuals and families cope with economic challenges.

**World War I**

Only 3 years after the formal establishment of Cooperative Extension, educators were called on to help Americans deal with many of the challenges associated with the nation’s involvement in World War I.

- Extension farm agents helped producers deal with acute labor shortages and stressed the importance of becoming self-sufficient.
- Home agents urged homemakers to plant gardens and “can all you can”—an effort that resulted in the canning of more than 2 million containers of fruits and vegetables.
- War kitchens and community canneries were established.
- Agents conducted wartime cookery training in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile.
- Agents developed a statewide effort to produce more school-raised pigs.
- Agents sponsored an effort dubbed the Saturday Service League, which encouraged Americans to work 6 days a week. More than 10,000 Alabamians were enlisted.
- A statewide Extension initiative known as Safe Farming focused on making every farm self-sustaining and conservation conscious.

**The Great Depression and World War II**

The Great Depression forced a major evolution in the work of Extension agents, particularly home demonstration agents who undertook a statewide effort to show women living on farms how to produce supplemental income. Following the outbreak of World War II less than a decade later, Extension agents were enlisted to assist with the maximum output of food and fiber.

- Extension home demonstration agents provided homemakers with equipment to can surplus fruits and vegetables. Agents also taught homemakers how to develop curbside markets through which they could sell farm products and crafts.
- Extension agents worked with the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to assist tenant farmers who qualified for FSA assistance.
- Following the outbreak of World War II, agents worked to promote Victory gardens and also participated in scrap metal drives and defense bond sales.
- Extension personnel assisted in farm and labor recruitment efforts for the nation’s expanding military-industrial sector.
- Alabama 4-H assisted with food production, salvage collection, and bond sales.
- A live-at-home effort was developed to help residents save money and to reduce the drain of supplies from marketing and distribution channels.

Today Extension is working harder than ever to help Alabamians thrive in the face of adversity. From publishing the “Thriving in Challenging Times: The Road Ahead” manual to providing one-on-one guidance, Extension is empowering the people of Alabama with working knowledge, support, and all the makings of a resilient community. How do we build resilience?

* teach to assess and accept * develop and identify strengths * train how to learn from mistakes * turn problems into problem solving * fulfill people’s need to be helpful * provide positive feedback and encouragement.

How resilient are your friends and neighbors around the state? Keep reading to find out.
M orris believed she had only one card to play—a lifelong passion for and skill in crocheting. Could she turn passion and skill into income?

Determined to give it her best shot, Morris enrolled in a workshop on entrepreneurialism conducted by Carol Centrallo, an Extension consumer science and financial management specialist.

That experience changed everything.

From Centrallo and Wanda Jurriaans, the county Extension coordinator, Morris learned that any entrepreneurial undertaking first requires a business plan. She also learned the value of dogged persistence—the hallmark of a successful entrepreneur. “Even if I had a setback, I learned to keep going forward,” Morris recalls.

And she has Jurriaans’ work with the local Talladega Farmers Market to thank. Jurriaans, a long-tenured Extension educator, has a passion for showing people how to “make a little money to keep life going.” As part of her ongoing efforts, Jurriaans encourages local craftspeople to sell their products at farmers markets—to keep the enterprise operating beyond the growing season.

“... I think what Extension is doing makes a lot of sense.”

—Rita Weiss, President of the Crochet Guild of America

Centrallo and Jurriaans secured some $4,450 in funding from Auburn University Outreach to develop an entrepreneurial program dubbed Realize Your Potential, which is targeted to people like Morris and others looking for creative ways to supplement their incomes.

“People have a hobby or skill and often wish to develop this into something that is profitable,” Centrallo says. “But they often don’t know how to get started.”
Realize Your Potential specializes in helping clients focus on basic industry start-up, providing them the information and resources they need to get their home businesses up and running. Morris’s business is still in its infancy, but already she sells everything from crocheted hats and scarves to dresses, tops, sweaters, and key chains. She even embellishes items such as socks and flip-flops with decorative crochet.

At the recommendation of Centrallo and Jurriaans, Morris recently started teaching to bring in extra income. She’s also working on her crochet certification from Craft Yarn of America to make herself more marketable as a teacher.

Lucky for Morris, there is a market for knitting and crocheting teachers. A growing number of young people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s have picked up the pastimes in recent years, many of them reaching out to more experienced teachers like Morris. With careful marketing and networking, perhaps Morris will spin her hobby into a lucrative business.

For now, though, Morris’s priorities are expanding her product line and learning how to impart to her customers the value of what she does. “It’s letting people know that if you make stuff and put in quality time, it will last,” Morris says. “And it can be passed on and on.”

She also learned the value of dogged persistence—the hallmark of a successful entrepreneur. “Even if I had a setback, I learned to keep going forward,” Morris recalls.

Rita Weiss, president of the Crochet Guild of America, is impressed by Extension’s work with Morris. “Teaching crochet can be a good way to earn money,” Weiss says. “You really do almost need a certification to teach it, though. It’s a good thing she’s working toward that.” Weiss sees a future for crochet teachers like Morris, particularly in the current economy. “You don’t need to be a terrific crocheter to make something wonderful,” she says. “And it’s not an expensive hobby. You can buy yarn for very little money. I think what Extension is doing makes a lot of sense.”
But actually, it gets a lot more complicated when prospective goat dairy producers try to develop that technique into a successful business operation.

Just ask Robert Spencer, an urban Extension specialist, who works to instill prospective growers with an appreciation of those realities. “People often don’t know what they’re getting into,” Spencer says. “They start accumulating animals before they even know how to care for them.”

Aside from breeding and raising the animals, there are additional concerns, such as land requirements and health issues. Prospective goat producers should realize that there is a bigger picture, Spencer says.

“The fundamental concept I try to convey to growers is that goat production comprises a total management system,” he says. “They can’t just look at one aspect of goat production—feed or pasture management, health care, or nutrition. They have to look at the total management picture.”

Paul and Leslie Spell, a husband and wife team, heeded Spencer’s advice and ended up building a highly successful dairy operation. Like most newcomers, they started out with questions—lots of questions. Spencer answered their questions, and he also helped them lay the groundwork for their operation.

“Robert not only brought us to a local dairy show but also introduced us to a group of goat dairy farmers,” Paul recalls, adding that he was able to buy his herd from one of these producers.

Spencer also connected the Spells with Extension dairy specialist Boyd Brady and Mike Clinkscales of the Alabama Department of Public Health. Brady and Clinkscales helped the Spells comply with the health requirements associated with operating a commercial dairy operation.

Within only a year of start-up, the Spells were selling milk to a local gourmet cheese maker, who supplied upscale markets across the United States, including the White House. And in time, the Spells decided to become gourmet soft cheese makers themselves.

Successfully producing a niche product such as goat cheese requires creativity and an open mind. How can the product be produced more inexpensively? How can it be distinguished from similar products?

For example, goats love kudzu, and this led Leslie to question whether this pervasive vine could be used as a cheap feed source. “Goats like it, but unfortunately, it doesn’t do anything for the milk,” Paul learned, after running the question by Spencer.

Spencer continues to assist the Spells in other ways, too, such as helping them find buyers for their male goats, which, aside from breeding, don’t serve much purpose in a commercial dairy operation.

And Spencer regularly clarifies information the Spells acquire from extensive reading of trade journals and through Web surfing. “Just being able to call somebody and ask him if some idea seems feasible—that means a lot,” Paul says.
Hoop houses are high-tunnel greenhouses—unheated greenhouses built over vegetable, flower, or herb production areas. They differ from other greenhouses in that the plants are grown in the soil rather than in containers.

What do hoop houses have to do with marketing? It’s simple. Hoop houses allow growers to harvest and market high-value crops roughly a month ahead of conventional growers. “You can’t afford to be average,” says vegetable producer Larry LouAllen. “To make a living in this business, you have to do your thing to stay ahead in marketing.”

LouAllen, who learned about hoop houses from Extension Urban Agent Jerry Chenault, has found that his greenhouse provides a distinct marketing advantage: the potential for supplying the area’s fried tomato aficionados with the earliest green tomatoes.

Chenault first discovered the benefits of hoop houses while attending a professional meeting several years ago. He was so taken with the greenhouses that he began spreading the word to vegetable growers across the state. “You can expect to harvest more than 15 pounds of tomatoes from each plant, and many growers routinely harvest 20 to 25 pounds from each plant,” Chenault says.

Producers can also grow varieties that otherwise couldn’t be grown in a field because of the cracks and splits associated with uncontrolled rainfall. And they can intercrop around their tomato plants, growing other lucrative vegetables such as lettuce. The comparatively inexpensive greenhouses also protect plants against damage from weather and disease.

Urban educators like Chenault are demonstrating the benefits of hoop houses all across the country. In fact, these greenhouses received national attention in 2008 when former pro basketball player Will Allen received the $500,000 MacArthur Foundation grant for his work developing community food systems in urban areas.

Hoop houses are easy to rave about. The one difficulty LouAllen has encountered so far is the thickness of the tomato plants—a factor that makes harvesting more challenging. But with business booming, he considers this only a slight inconvenience.
Reconnecting With the Land

David Bevly left his family’s south Texas row-crop farm more than a decade ago to pursue an academic career—a career that began at two of the nation’s top universities: MIT and Stanford. But his passion for growing things and for connecting with nature never left him.

Two years ago, Bevly’s passions led him back to the land. In this case, the land he acquired was densely forested Alabama timberland rather than sprawling Texas cropland. And this presented some challenges to the Texan, a mechanical engineer who had little, if any, experience with timberland.

For starters, there are radical differences between row-crop farming and timber production. Row-crop farming is seasonal, with crops managed over spring, summer, and early fall, followed by harvest and, most importantly, profit. With timber production, harvest comes years—even decades—later and only after countless days, weeks, and months of careful maintenance.

All of this was new to Bevly, who operates 200 acres in planted pines and an additional 20 acres of low-density hardwoods.

Thinning was also new to Bevly. As he learned, the process isn’t to earn income but to ensure that you get wood over the long term. Add to that tax issues—the notion of capital gains separately applying to land and timber—and Bevly had a slew of questions.

For answers, Bevly turned to Becky Barlow, an Extension forestry specialist who has developed a program to reach part-time timberland owners.

Barlow has been answering queries from many Alabamians just like Bevly—people who want to reconnect with the land and who view this as more than just a way to earn additional money.
“I do think that many people I’ve worked with view it as a lifestyle choice,” Barlow says. “They’re getting into it because they like some aspect of timberland ownership and management, but also because they want to get back to the basics—to return to something that is simpler and that involves less technology and fewer gadgets.”

Barlow is developing an agroforestry outreach program with just these kinds of small-scale private landowners in mind—people who want to grow trees and also diversify their operations so they can raise cattle or produce, a practice known among foresters as silvopasture.

“They’re getting into it because they like some aspect of timberland ownership and management, but also because they want to get back to the basics—to return to something that is simpler and that involves less technology and fewer gadgets.”

The program follows a three-pronged approach, beginning with showing landowners how they can manage for both timberland and cattle. Next, the program focuses on understory: growing native grasses such as gamma grass or traditional pasture grasses such as Bahia to support free-range cattle. Finally, Barlow’s program teaches landowners how to manage their timberland in a way that could allow them to raise a garden among rows of young trees before cattle are introduced.

“You can have a timber component and a crop too,” Barlow says. “It’s a way to go back to an original practice that really makes a lot of sense.”

Agroforestry Across the Globe

Richard Straight, lead agroforester for the USDA National Agroforestry Center, defines agroforestry as “the intentional mixing of trees and or shrubs into crop–animal production systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits.”

Environmental benefits can include air quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Economic benefits primarily have to do with creating stability for the producer. “Tree crops often take many years before we can harvest nuts, fruits, or wood, and so most farmers have a cash flow problem,” Straight says. “With agroforestry, you would also have an income from your row-crop operation.”

Straight’s description of the social benefits of agroforestry is somewhat surprising: “We have some research that talks about how agroforestry practices can actually be used in that transitional interface between rural and urban landscapes.” He explains that bare dirt blowing around can be offensive to some urban homeowners, and trees can provide year-round windbreaks and thus reduce tension between rural and urban landowners.

What does agroforestry mean on a global scale? “The research has been looking at the practice of agroforestry in impoverished countries,” Straight says, “and what they’re finding is that it can yield a lot of produce off a smaller piece of land because you are using the vertical space. You’re integrating the annual crops and the tree crops on the same space.”

He explains that agroforestry uses human labor, so the cost of fertilizer is eliminated. “It’s labor intensive, but it’s not necessarily input intensive,” he says. “Agroforestry fits in well with the ideas of sustainable agriculture.”

According to Straight, folks in Alabama are fortunate to have Extension specialist Becky Barlow working with them. Straight is familiar with Barlow because he recruited her to create a video on silvopasture that will be released nationally in 2010. “She’s extremely knowledgeable, and she has great experience communicating with the public,” Straight says. “We saw that she has the connections and background that we don’t have. It’s just been a really good fit.”
Fashionably
Home gardening, once a common if not indispensable lifestyle practice among earlier generations, is making a resounding comeback.

And Sanders hopes that this newfound passion will spread throughout the country as more people choose to become self-sufficient food producers.

For his part, Sanders practices what he preaches. With the help of his seven younger siblings, 20-year-old Sanders is raising his own produce and livestock and selling some of what he produces at the Birmingham Farmers Market.

Sanders is doing it all on a 100-acre plot in rural Coosa County, where he’s raising fruits and vegetables as well as some 300 laying hens in a cotton wagon converted into a chicken coop. For Sanders, it’s as much of an avocation as it is a vocation—“a way to provide people with something they need.”

“Farming takes a lot of thinking,” he says. “It requires thinking about how much to plant and how much the market will bear. It builds character.”

Other Coosa County residents are also pressing ahead with efforts to raise some or all of their food. Roger Vines is one of several Extension educators who have taken notice of this emerging trend. After attending an in-service training session on backyard poultry production, he was inspired to offer one of his own in Coosa County.

In time, Vines discerned more than just an interest in home food production: He saw a passion in many people—much like the passion in Sanders. This inspired Vines to develop a comprehensive training course that focused on all aspects of food production.

In addition to backyard poultry production, Vines’ Grow Your Own training sessions address fruit and vegetable production; food preservation; beef, goat, and catfish production; and beekeeping. Some 40 people attended the first training.

Vines perceives that concerns about worsening economic conditions are only one factor among many behind the resurgence of home gardening.

“A growing number of people simply want to know where their food is coming from,” he says. According to Vines, a spate of recent outbreaks associated with processed food products has also influenced this resurgence. Other factors, Vines says, include a desire for fresh produce and a zeal for the exercise that gardening typically affords.
Alabama 4-H military programming began in 2001. Since that time, Alabama 4-H has been on the forefront of programming that supports military youth and families. Widely recognized on the state and national levels, Alabama 4-H has received the prestigious Seven Seals Award from the U.S. Department of Defense and the Above and Beyond Award from the Alabama National Guard.

Heroes at Home

Help for Heroes at Home

One day at a time. For the hubbets and millions of other military families, daily tasks often seem insurmountable when one of the parents is actively deployed.
Routine tasks such as evening baths can sometimes seem insurmountable to a single parent.

These days, Angie Eberhardt is feeling a lot like a single parent. With her husband, Brian, completing his assignment in Iraq, Angie tackles the nighttime routine on her own.

Mother of a 10-month-old and stepmother of two young children, one of whom is disabled, Eberhardt describes bath time simply as one of the “day-to-day challenges of making life work without a spouse.”

Sharon Hubbert also has insight into these challenges, both as the spouse of a former active duty member of the Alabama Air National Guard and as a readiness coordinator who works with families of individuals assigned with the 187th Fighter Wing of the Alabama Air National Guard.

While her husband, Edgar, was overseas, Hubbert was left to care for their two middle school–aged children and to deal with the first term of her pregnancy. She remembers assisting with homework as one of her biggest challenges.

This is not surprising to Charlene Hines, an Extension 4-H Program outreach administrator. “Among some kids you’re going to have acting out, declining grades, and even some anger against the government or against things in general,” says Hines. Emotional turmoil often accompanies a parent’s departure, Hines explains, and the parent at home sometimes needs assistance in helping the child.

“Why is this happening again?” This has been the perennial question for Eberhardt’s 11-year-old stepchild, Caitlin.

In addition to enhancing their coping skills, 4-H and OMK programs provide opportunities for the children to become kids again—which Hines says is a necessity because many of the children now have added responsibilities around the home.

To date, 4-H and OMK have touched the lives of more than 1,500 military youth in Alabama. And the programs assist families in other ways too. For example, social workers are routinely on hand to provide families resources they might be unaware of. Efforts also have focused on helping families maintain contact with their overseas family members and helping them reintegrate following completion of these tours of duty. OMK and 4-H programs also address the concerns of families with special needs children.

Perhaps most importantly, the programs seek to demonstrate to kids how much their own sacrifices are appreciated. “They didn’t raise their hands and take an oath like their parents,” Hines says, “but they’re affected by this and making a sacrifice. They’re heroes too.”
A.

And that’s precisely what the people of Henry County experienced when West Point Stevens, an Abbeville textile plant, closed in the autumn of 2007.

West Point Stevens was a major force in Henry County’s economy, employing 700 of the county’s 7,060-member workforce and comprising half of its manufacturing base.

“Many of these workers assumed that life would go on as it always had and that the plant would never close,” recalls Mary Claire Wilson, one of several community volunteers who began organizing a response. “But following the closing, many of these people, some of whom included husbands and wives, were in a state of shock.”

Many of them were second-generation employees. Some had even quit high school to secure work at the plant, assuming some kind of immunity from the global economic tide that had flattened so much of the Southeast’s textile industry.

Henry County Extension Coordinator Jimmy Jones set out to develop a multifaceted crisis response.

In the best of circumstances, crises bring out the best in people.
He and other response team members secured two Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) grants, which enabled them to hold a job fair to show unemployed workers how to find new work. The grants also enabled team members to provide former employees basic and advanced computer training and to help them acquire GED certification, both crucial employment credentials.

But this is only part of the story.

Months in advance, Jones and community leaders in Headland perceived the coming crisis and enlisted the help of several players, including Extension’s Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI).

Acting on the time-honored premise that the best defense often calls for a strong offense, Extension personnel and these community leaders began taking a series of proactive steps to improve the community’s educational system and infrastructure in a way that positioned it for economic growth.

A workforce development council was already in place 4 months before the plant’s closing. Using RAI grant money, the council developed the Henry County Workforce and Leadership Academy, which immediately began addressing the unusually high student dropout rate of 24 percent and improving job skills for underemployed workers.

But Jones and other Headland team members envisioned something even bigger: They wanted to acquire designation as an Alabama Community of Excellence (ACE)—a community primed not only for recovery but also for sustained economic growth.

ECDI Director Joe Sumners captained this effort. With assistance from ECDI’s Mike Easterwood, Headland community leaders also began drafting a community strategic plan. ECDI member Amelia Stehouwer designed a series of economic development courses for community leaders, while Extension Specialist Arturo Menefee assisted with community leadership programs.

In Headland, community members are already seeing the fruits of their labor. “Storefronts are returning, and so are shoppers,” Jones says. “We’re beginning to see signs of sustained economic growth.”
Outreach Through New Web Technology

The year 2009 has been a year of change. And many would argue that changes in Web technology have been among the most exciting. Extension has always held the opinion that education is for the people—free of charge. This is still true today, except now disseminating information is even easier. Extension specialists can communicate through e-mail, blogging, podcasts, online video clips—the old adage “the possibilities are endless” might well have been written with this in mind. Web technology as a tool for teaching and outreach has become something of an obsession around here—and around the globe.

Curtis Bonk, professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University and author of several widely used books, including the recent The World Is Open: How Web Technology Is Revolutionizing Education, says Extension is perfectly positioned to take advantage of this global phenomenon and use new Web technologies in its marketing and education plan. He even goes so far as to say that educators have an ethical obligation to consider using technology because it enables people to learn.

A team of ACES marketing and communication and IT specialists has been gathering regularly to discuss new Web technologies and share ideas for practical uses and applications. Bonk’s position—as well as Extension’s—is that by creating a strong Web presence and making use of these new technologies, we will be able to reach more people around the globe.

And this is exactly what we’ve been doing.

Something else we’ve been doing is reaching out to the younger generation. We realize that we need a strategic plan to attract the young people who are accustomed to networking, learning, and researching online. We’re not the Extension of the past—the black-and-white photo of an Extension agent in overalls talking to a farmer on a country road. We’re the Extension of the future—it’s a full-color Web page, and today’s Extension agent can educate an infinite number of people. And we will always be here to educate one-on-one, as well.

“Extension and outreach to me are the most important aspects of a university,” Bonk says. “And with online learning, the status of Extension will become even more important.”

We agree.

In 2009, Alabama Extension’s Precision Agriculture Team stepped up efforts to help Alabamians from diverse professional backgrounds understand the practical uses of geographic information system (GIS) technology.

The team is showing, for example, how a customized Google Earth application known as Virtual Alabama can be used to improve work performance in a variety of ways. Team member Shannon Norwood foresees almost unlimited uses for this technology, not only for many professions but also for educational institutions.

MILESTONES

Cotton Scouting—50 Years
This year marks the 50th anniversary of Alabama cotton scouting—a massive effort organized in response to an intractable problem: the boll weevil.

EFNEP—45 Years
For 45 years, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has been working to help low-income families acquire knowledge and skills to improve their lives through enhanced eating habits.

We’re Working for You
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 Auburn University at (334) 844-4444 or Alabama A&M University at (256) 372-5710. To send a question to your local Extension agent, visit www.aces.edu/questions/.

For information about charitable contributions, call Nancy Alexander, 4-H Specialist, Volunteerism and Fund Development, at (334) 844-2219.

To order publications or videos, call (334) 844-1592.