

Extension Reaches Diverse Audiences

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System has a strong commitment to diversity in employment and programming. The unified system is unique in its combining of the Extension programs at two universities—the Extension Service at an 1862 institution, Auburn, and the Extension Program at an 1890 institution, Alabama A&M. The system also works cooperatively with Tuskegee University's Extension Program. Our broad variety and range of audiences are evidence of Extension's commitment to diversity. The sketches below reflect some of our many successes in 2005.

- More than 10 percent of Alabama children are raised by a grandparent or other relative. In some counties, the rate is as high as 20 percent. Extension's **Grand RAPP (Grandparents and Relatives as Parents Program)** gives grandparents and relatives resources to improve their parenting skills and provides forums to share ideas and concerns. Grand RAPP has expanded from one local group to many groups and a statewide coalition.
- Increasing debt and personal bankruptcies among young people led Extension to offer **Reality Check, a real-life-simulation money management program** for eighth- to twelfth-grade students. The program fast-forwards students to age 25 and allows them to see what it's like to pay bills, budget money, purchase a car, buy groceries, handle emergencies, and make other financial decisions. It's an eye-opener, leading students to the conclusion "I'd better get a good education and a good job!"
- Alabama has more than 100,000 **food stamp recipients**, and Extension nutrition educators are teaching them to **shop smarter and eat better**. Impact data show they are learning that leaner foods, less sugary foods and foods higher in fiber mean better nutrition. And better nutrition means better health.
- State regulations require that **school dietary managers**—those responsible for the **safety and nutrition** content of the state's school lunch programs—receive yearly training in food safety. Extension provided this training for all 1,200 of them in 2005, and tests showed that participants increased their food safety knowledge by more than 50 percent. Following this success, Extension has been asked to develop a training program for dietary directors, the people responsible for managing multiple child nutrition programs.
- Extension is providing outreach to the **fastest-growing minority group** in the state, the **Hispanic-Latino** community. In addition to local programs addressing a variety of needs, Extension's Web site, www.aces.edu, has special areas translated for Spanish-speaking Web surfers as well as resources for Extension agents and other educators. In addition, an Alabama Extension specialist is one of two specialists developing a bilingual site on fire ant management that will be part of a national Web initiative.
- Web logs—or **blogs**—allow educators to provide access to up-to-the minute information. Extension's blog has a strong focus on issues such as childhood obesity, diabetes, epidemiological concerns, and other issues prevalent among minority and low-income populations as well as in society at large.
- Alabama's **Black Belt**, one of the poorest regions in the nation, has been the focus of intense Extension efforts. **Youth education programs** in Hale and Dallas counties are among Extension's Black Belt success stories. In the Hale Bopp Comet Youth Leadership Program, high school juniors learn about human development, public policy, and leading through service, and they work together to improve their schools and communities. Classes from public and private schools are balanced to represent diversity in race, gender, and perspectives of thought. Dallas County students from public, private, home-based, and church schools learn about diversity, conflict resolution, peer mediation, etiquette, dining skills, and interview skills, and have real-life practices in what they have learned. Both programs are in their ninth year of operation.
- After the devastation of **Hurricane Katrina**, Extension showed where its heart is: In addition to focusing much of their regular work toward educational relief efforts, Extension employees responded by volunteering—on their own time and "on the clock." Each employee was granted five days of official time to volunteer through recognized agencies such as the Red Cross or churches, and they reported almost 2,300 hours.

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