



At a Glance:

Working Knowledge in Challenging Times

Alabama Cooperative Extension System • Alabama A&M University and Auburn University

Working knowledge—putting knowledge to work for the people we serve—is both a passion and a commitment among Alabama Cooperative Extension System educators and professionals.

The current challenging economic climate has forced Alabamians to take a closer look at their finances, which includes their lifestyles and the choices they make daily. Extension specialists have been there to help with research-based expertise. Following the launch of our Thriving in Challenging Times effort in 2008, Extension personnel at all levels representing our 14 program priority teams have been involved in this statewide initiative—in many cases, working across multicounty and multidisciplinary lines.

Below are a few of the many examples of how Extension workers throughout our state put knowledge to work in these challenging times.

Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs

In these challenging times, more Alabamians are searching for new and lucrative sources of income. Extension educators throughout the state are helping people not only identify new ways to earn income but also how to build viable businesses.

For example, an urban Extension specialist is underscoring to goat dairy producers the importance of seeing the total management picture associated with production—feeding, pasture management, health care, and nutrition—and how these are interrelated. With his help, one husband-and-wife team has made the complicated transition from goat milk producers to gourmet soft cheese makers, supplying upscale markets across the United States.

Likewise, an urban Extension agent has helped several commercial growers adopt hoop houses—unheated, high-tunnel houses built over vegetable, flower, and herb production areas—that enable them to harvest and market high-value crops roughly a month ahead of their competitors.

Family and Individual Well-Being

Forced by health problems to leave her job, a Talladega woman is now back on her feet, thanks to the efforts of her local Extension coordinator and a consumer science and financial management specialist. She has learned how to develop her life-long passion for crocheting into a lucrative business—part of a statewide Extension effort known as Realize Your Potential, which shows people how to develop creative ways to supplement their incomes.

Forestry and Natural Resources

These hard economic times have accelerated a trend that sociologists have noted for years: an impulse to invest in rural land, especially timberland. An Extension forestry specialist has developed an agroforestry outreach program with small-scale 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.

Agriculture

The growing interest among many Alabamians in raising their own food inspired a county Extension coordinator to develop a comprehensive training course that focuses on all aspects of food production. The course, known as Grow Your Own, emphasizes fruit and vegetable production, food preservation, beekeeping, and beef, goat, poultry, and catfish production.

4-H and Youth Development

“Why is this happening?” is a common question among some 34,000 Alabama children whose parents are away in active military duty. Alabama 4-H is doing its part to reach out to these youngsters with Operation Military Kids. Through a series of camps and efforts, the program seeks to enhance their coping skills—and, equally important, to provide them the opportunity to become kids again. OMK has already reached more than 1,500 children.

Community and Economic Development

The closing of the Abbeville-based West Point Stevens plant in the autumn of 2007 sent tremors throughout Henry County’s economy. Working with local community leaders and volunteers, the local Extension coordinator spearheaded a multifaceted response by means of a Rural Alabama Initiative Grant provided by Extension’s Economic and Community Development Institute. The effort included a job fair and a series of proactive steps to improve the community’s educational system and infrastructure in a way that primed it for future economic growth.

For more information about how Extension translates the research and knowledge of our land-grant universities into practical solutions for Alabamians, see the complete edition of “[Thriving: Working Knowledge in Challenging Times](#),” our 2009 annual report. www.aces.edu/go/111



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