



AgriLife Extension
South Region



South
District
12



Making a Difference... ...in Cameron County

District Extension Newsletter for Commissioners' Courts in South Texas



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Natural Resources



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4-H & Youth
Development

Dear Court Members,
In 2007, Texas Cooperative Extension celebrated the 100th anniversary of the County Extension Agent and of the Texas 4-H Program. I hope you find this newsletter helpful in updating you about the difference Extension education is making in Cameron County and the public benefits these differences mean economically, socially, and environmentally to the community. We feel strongly that these preventive, educational approaches to community issues provide present and long term value to the County and its residents. Again, thank you for your support and please call whenever we may be of service.

Dr. Ruben J. Saldaña
District Extension Administrator

Supporting Agriculture and Natural Resources

Crop Nutrient management in Cameron County has always been an important economic and environmental issue which affects soil and water quality. The Cameron County Agriculture Production Committee sponsored various educational programs to address this issue of concern. In response a survey was mailed out to Cameron agriculture producers on soil testing. A grant was obtain to conduct a county wide Soil Testing Campaign. Free Soil Testing was made available to agriculture growers in Cameron County. The Soil Testing Campaign has generated 2,394 samples representing 96,840 acres since it's inception in 2003. The primary crops: cotton, grain sorghum, corn. Agriculture producers in Cameron County have benefitted from this Soil Testing Campaign by reducing the nutrient applications in crop fields. Cumulative projected fertilizer savings 1,742,321 lbs of nitrogen, 2,345,310 lbs of phosphorus. These reductions in nutrient loading represented a reduced threat to our surface and ground water resources. Agriculture producers saved \$9.47 to \$27.07/acre by utilizing soil testing practices.

This past year September 07 to September 08 the Cameron County Master Gardener Volunteer program reached approximately 2000 youth and adults through their educational efforts direct and non-direct contact. All Master Gardener educational programs implemented this year focused on environmental stewardship. Extensive horticulture education has taken place at school campuses, youth groups, and adult groups. Also this year, the MG program clocked approximately **5500 volunteer hours**, with an estimated time value on volunteers to Cameron County residents of **\$107,305.00**. The Cameron County Master Gardener Association obtained a grant for \$30,000 from the Rio Grande Valley Development Council to promote composting demonstration gardens. At present an Arboretum has been established with an outside classroom.

Strengthening Families & Improving Health

One program Cameron county held was Money Smart. Nineteen participants completed the pre-workshop survey. The mean age of the group was 42. Nine of the 19 participants had completed high school or the equivalent. The remaining 10 participants had completed less than high school. Participants were asked a series of questions to assess their current financial management behaviors. 63% (12 of 19) of participants indicated they did not currently use a budget; 37% (7 of 19) participants indicated they never save any money; 79% (15 of 19) had not reviewed a copy of their credit report in the last year and only 37 % indicated the felt comfortable doing business with a financial institution. The most common method used to pay bills was cash (11 of 19) followed by personal checks/debit cards (11 of 19). Also, Cameron county has been able to provide the Strengthening Family program for the Department of Child Protective Services. CPS has sent me 25 parents. The seven week program allowed the participants to:

- Increase parents' knowledge of appropriate child rearing practices, supervision, relationship skills, family risk and protective factors, and developmental expectations.
- Improve parenting and relationship skills.
- Decrease children's alcohol, tobacco, and drug use and/or intentions to use.
- Decrease children's intermediate risk factors (e.g., coping skills, communication family relationships and parenting skills).



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2008 Educational Outreach

Education in Group Settings	
Number of Sessions	721
Number Contacts	49,445
Hrs Instruction	1,350,731
Education for Individuals	
Office Visits	2,413
Site Visits	12,451
Phone Consultation	5,869
Mail/Email	2,763
By Volunteers	6,704

Visit us at:
<http://cameron-tx.tamu.edu>

2008 4-H Enrollment

Number of Clubs	18
Club Members	1182
School Enrichment	3,679
Special Interests	3,924
Total Enrollment	8,785



Community Development & Economic Development

Cameron County held Improving Health and Wellness Introduced and implemented **Walk Across Texas** in the San Benito School District's Parental Involvement Centers. The Parental Center had **42** participants take part in the WAT Program. This effort was through a collaborative venture with Mr. Joe Villarreal, Director, his staff and the FCS agent as well as the Program Assistants for Better Living for Texans. The WAT program developed 5 walking teams of 8 or more people and Mr. Villarreal's goal for his parent volunteers was to get involved in a physical activity project for a healthier way of life and to encourage their own children, grandchildren, etc. to adopt a healthy habit by participating in the Walk Across Texas Program. This program is specifically to promote wellness due to the alarming increase of obesity in South Texas and the nation. Another project that was completed was the **Pasos al Mercado/ Entrepreneurship**. "Pasos al Mercado" is a dual county effort in which a core group of women of 20 has been established to take part in a comprehensive training on how to start a "Home Based-Business". The program allows these women to identify their strengths and weakness, realize their abilities, and to become self sufficient. Income Generation Volunteers as part of Pasos al Mercado and the Master sewing volunteers, have taught over **1500** participants through out the County.

4-H and Youth Development

Cameron County 4-H had a very successful year! They hosted a **4-H Food Show**. Through the Foods & Nutrition - Over 30 youth were reached and educated on the My Pyramid and the nutritive value of foods, fat and sugar contents in foods. Food Show Clinics were scheduled to educate the youth on Foods and Nutrition in preparation for the Food Show competition. They learned about My Pyramid, how to prepare the recipes and how to present their dish at the Food Show Competitions. They competed at the County, and District level competitions. They also held a **4-H Fashion Show**. Through Clothing and Textiles - 15 Youth were reached and educated on sewing skills to construct an outfit that fit in one of 4 categories such as casual, specialty, dressy or formal for competition at the Fashion Show. Approximately 5 of the youth made the choice to enter the competition in the buying division. This experience allowed the youth to increase in their abilities in comparison shopping and decision making. These youth competed at the county level, most advanced to District and one advanced to the State competition at Texas A&M, College Station in Construction and in Fabric Design. A few other 4-H accomplishments include: 4-H Fund raiser profits \$11,000. 50 4-H members and leaders planned and implemented the Cameron County 4-H Council Bay Fishing Tournament. Proceeds from this event went to 4-H programs, activities, leadership camps, and a newly formed scholarship fund. We currently have 90 registered 4-H volunteer leaders that contribute an average of 150 hours a year valued at **\$315,000** dollars to the county. Cameron County 4-H had 15 members who advanced to State 4-H Roundup in College Station. In order to accomplish this, they had to have place 1st at the county and district contests. Cameron County had the most members represented at State Roundup out of our 20 county district. Georgia Loop placed 2nd with their horse in method demonstration. Joshua Aguilar placed 1st in the State and his sister Kaysey Aguilar placed 2nd with her illustrated talk. Cameron County 4-H members submitted 38 record books this year of which 28 of them advanced to the District Record Book competition. We had the most books competing at the District



Extension Staff with Members of Cameron County Commissioners Court

Coastal & Marine Resources

The marine extension program focused on commercial fishing, aquaculture, recreational fishing, youth education, and the Bahia Grande and Arroyo Colorado restoration efforts. Emphasis on by catch reduction for sea turtles and red snapper was taught through a series of port visits to Brownsville and Port Isabel. There were also several Demonstrations with super fibers funded by Cameron County showed the potential for increased efficiency by the shrimp fleet by using a new type of polyethylene netting for shrimp trawls. A 7.5% savings in fuel consumption has been demonstrated using this new net material and another 25% savings can be attributed to a new door (device which spreads the shrimp trawl open) design we introduced to the fleet. It is estimated that our fleet saved \$1.29 million by adopting these new technologies and implementing better quality control methods for their product. Over 300 youth were educated on marine issues through marine field days, slide shows, talks and demonstrations. Our Rio Grande Valley Texas Master Naturalist Program has 100 members this year and each member must complete 40 hours of volunteer work annually. Last year they completed 8,406 hours of volunteer time in Cameron County valued at \$157,780.62.