



Extension Education in Hidalgo County

Making a Difference

2015

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and its partners have long been dedicated to educating Texans. Extension education evolved nationwide under the 1914 federal Smith-Lever Act, which sought to extend university knowledge and agricultural research findings directly to the people. Ever since, Extension programs have addressed the emerging issues of the day, reaching diverse rural and urban populations.

In Texas, all 254 counties are served by a well-organized network of professional Extension educators and some 100,000 trained volunteers. Extension expertise and educational outreach pertain to the food and fiber industry, natural resources, family and consumer sciences, nutrition and health, and community economic development. Among

EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE *Providing Solutions*

those served are hundreds of thousands of young people who benefit annually from Extension's 4-H and youth development programs.

Texans turn to Extension education for solutions. Extension agents and specialists respond not only with answers, but also with resources and services that result in significant returns on the public's investment. Extension programs are custom-designed for each region of the state, with residents providing input and help with program delivery. Here are just a few highlights of Extension impacts on this county and its people.

Hidalgo County – Summary of 2015 Educational Contacts

Total Contacts: 199,865

Total Educational Events: 130,087

Total Contact Hours at Educational Events: 148,076

4-H Clubs: 27

4-H members: 647

4-H Adult Leaders: 151

Master Volunteers: 166

Volunteers: 894

Web Page Views: 62,840

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Rio Grande Valley Beef Development Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Hidalgo County and County Agriculture Extension Agents in Cameron, Willacy, and Starr Counties

Relevance

Beef producers can improve their herd or the herds of their customers through more rigid sire selection. Replacement heifers will perform to higher levels when in optimum body condition. Beef producers want to increase the value of bulls by collecting feedlot performance data and carcass characteristics. The Rio Grande Valley Beef Improvement Association identified the need to conduct a bull gain test and heifer development program to support the beef cattle industry.

Response


Texas A&M Agrilife Extension conducted an official 112 day bull gain test and a 126 day heifer development program. Numerous data are collected on all animals including: initial and final weights, average daily gain, body condition score, scrotal circumference, sheath score, reproductive tract score, pelvic area measurements, hip height and ultra-sound measurement of back fat thickness and ribeye area. All data is provided to consignors.

Results

A total of 7 group methods were conducted. A bull gain test and heifer development program has been conducted each year from 1998 through 2015. Participants indicate a positive economic benefit to their beef cattle operations as a result of their participation.

A total of 1247 bulls, 996 heifers and 142 steers have been entered in the 18 years the program has been conducted. Currently, 77 bulls and 22 heifers are entered in the program by cattlemen participating from throughout south and central Texas.

Recognition events are conducted during the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show in order to recognize the award winners in front of their beef cattle producer peers. The Santa Gertrudis breed awards were presented during the Open Santa Gertrudis Show and the Simbrah breed awards were presented during the Open Simbrah Show at the Livestock Show. A feeder pen of steers is also offered and adds a different dimension to the program.

V A L U E	
Livestock Production	
	<p>Texas A&M AgriLife Extension programs targeted to large- and small-scale livestock producers help generate safer food and fiber products with maximum efficiency. The result is quality, consistent, affordable products and industries that support the state's rural economies.</p>

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Important collaborators were: Dr. Joe Paschal, Extension Livestock Specialist, Rio Beef Feed Yard management and personnel, Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show officials & volunteers and the members of the Rio Grande Valley Beef Improvement Association.

Future Plans

In cooperation with the Rio Grande Valley Beef Improvement Association, plans are to continue the program and perhaps consider marketing alternatives for participants. Another future possibility will be to offer an artificial insemination program for heifers.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Multi-County Crop Production Program Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy Counties

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Hidalgo County; Dr. Enrique Perez, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Cameron County and (position vacant), County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Willacy County

Relevance

Each year approximately 400,000 acres of grain sorghum are grown in the Rio Grande Valley. The Sugarcane Aphid, a potentially damaging insect was identified for the first time in 2013. The Hidalgo and Cameron County Crops Committees determined that educational efforts should be initiated to address this damaging insect. The Cotton & Grain Producers Association of the Lower Rio Grande Valley supported continued educational efforts going into 2015 to insure that growers would be ready to save their crop from severe damage if insect populations threatened to cause economic damage.


Nutrient management is an important economic and environmental issue that affects water quality, soil quality and crop productivity. The Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership and The Texas Water Resources Institute determined a continued need to stress soil testing as a best management practice.

Producers continue to need locally produced information on the performance of crop varieties. Also, new and underutilized crops, such as soybeans and sesame, need to continue to be investigated. County Crops committees and the Cotton & Grain Producers Association of the Lower Rio Grande Valley continue to support the need for crops result demonstrations.

Response

Nine (9) educational group presentations were conducted and resulted in a total of 2452 contact hours of education. Ag producers were educated on the sugarcane aphid, fertility management, variety performance data and a host of other timely topics. Educational events included the Annual Cotton & Grain Pre-Plant Conference, sunflower producer meetings, field days, Sugarcane Aphid Meeting and the Spring Crop Options Meeting. Other tools utilized included: publications, use of print and broadcast media, information posted to the County Extension Office web site, close communications with crops committee members, input from members of the board of directors of the Cotton & Grain Producers Association of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and involvement of Extension Specialists.

A three county soil testing program was conducted for the 15th consecutive year in 2015. This year, a total of 191 soil samples representing 4,976 acres of agriculture production fields were submitted to the soil testing laboratory in College Station for analysis. Fertilizer recommendations were provided to the

V A L U E	
Crop and Forage Production Education	
	<p>Extension programs in crop production promote best practices that lead to reduced irrigation, safer pest management, and improved profitability of agricultural enterprises. This benefits Texas as a whole by contributing to the quality and quantity of water resources and enhancing both agricultural competitiveness and rural economies.</p>

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growers for the specific crop to be grown. Over the past 15 years, 5864 samples have been submitted by local producers from a total of 219,404 acres.

Research demonstrations conducted on producer farms were used to produce an unbiased source of performance data that are used by growers to help determine the most profitable varieties to select for this area. Ongoing efforts to increase producer profits also included rating grain sorghum variety trials for differences among varieties in their tolerance to the sugarcane aphid and its damage.

Results

An educational effort by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to battle the sugarcane aphid was credited with a net savings to grain sorghum producers of \$66 million in 2014. Although the aphid did not cause widespread damage in 2015, producers were ready due to ongoing educational outreach by Extension. A survey of the Spring Crop Options meeting indicated that 83 percent of respondents anticipated an economic benefit as a direct result of what they learned and 91 percent of respondents said that the information and programs provided by Extension were quite or extremely valuable to them.

The economic impact of the RGV Nutrient Management Education Program was measured in terms of potential fertilizer savings that have resulted from increased adoption of soil testing. Reduction in fertilizer application rates translates into an average cost savings of \$25 per acre, depending on crop and management history. This is a potential savings of \$124,400 in 2014. The total potential economic benefits to producers since the program began in 2001 are estimated at \$5.5 million. This analysis does not include the value of environmental benefits. Local water bodies, including the Arroyo Colorado benefit from producer efforts to match the application of fertilizers to crop fertility requirements through scientific soil testing. A survey documented that 91 percent of participants plan to follow the recommended fertilizer rates and 93 percent of participants felt that the test results are accurate.

Performance data from four result demonstrations conducted to evaluate grain sorghum, cotton and sunflower variety performance under local commercial conditions were shared with producers to assist them in making more economical choices for their next crop season. Of special significance this season was the county sunflower hybrid trial and the Soil & Crop Sciences Department small plot hybrid trial. Both trials provided important documentation concerning issues with seed set in this year's sunflower crop and are being studied closely by many involved in the production of sunflowers including growers, seed companies, Extension specialists, marketing companies and buyers.

Important collaborators included: Dr. Josh McGinty, Dr. Gaylon Morgan, Dr. Mark McFarland, Dr. Calvin Trostle, Dr. Tom Isakeit, Dr. John Robinson, Dr. Ronnie Schnell, Dr. Mark Welch, Dr. Paul Baumann, Dr. Luis Ribera, Dr. Roy Parker, Dr. Raul Villanueva, Dr. Femi Alabi, Danielle Sekula, Victor Gutierrez, Dr. Samuel Zapata, Rio Farms, Inc., Cotton and Grain Producers Association of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Grain Sorghum Association, National Cotton Council, Texas Water Resources Institute, the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation and numerous local ag industry company representatives.

Future Plans

Continue to keep producers up-to-date with new information on the sugarcane aphid and its management. Continue the soil testing campaign contingent upon funding. Continue important hybrid

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trials for the major crops in cooperation with local producers, seed companies and Extension Specialists. Continue monitoring the local agriculture arena for emerging issues.

Emergency Management Education Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture & Natural Resources

Relevance

Texas is subject to numerous disasters, whether they are natural, accidental or intentional. These hazards are somewhat unpredictable. Texas experiences the effects of hurricanes, drought, wildfires and other incidents. Animal insect and disease outbreaks are also possible.

Hidalgo County agriculture production is very extensive and diverse and is always impacted by weather. One of the duties of the Agricultural Extension Agent is to always have current and accurate local information.

Response

The need to develop a Rio Grande Valley Animal Emergency Action plan was identified several years ago. The plan will insure that Emergency Management personnel in Cameron, Willacy and Hidalgo counties communicate and are prepared in a time of emergency involving animals. The plan will also provide an opportunity for individuals, families, businesses, and communities to learn how to better prepare for unexpected events, mitigate to reduce risk, and how to recover from whatever event they may have experienced.

I made contact with the County Judges Office and delivered a supply of Extension publications on recovering from disaster after local rains flooded an area north of Edinburg.

I assisted with development of a media story on recent rainfall received and the impact on agricultural operations.

I stayed abreast of local production agriculture operations and provided a report to the Agricultural Marketing Service upon their request to summarize local excess rainfall and it's detrimental effect on cotton planting operations. I also kept informed on the prevented-planting situation in cotton and grain sorghum.

In April, I tried something new by forwarding a weather alert for hail damaging wind, possible tornadoes and local flooding that Barry Goldsmith, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Brownsville had issued.

Results

Persons impacted by flooding received timely information that should assist their response to that situation.

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USDA Ag Marketing Service, market news reporter had accurate information impacting crop planting as a result of the information that I provided.

I received thanks from several Ag producers for informing them of a severe alert which may adversely impact Ag producers.

Important collaborators were: Dr. Enrique Perez, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Cameron County, Josh Ramirez, Health Director, City of McAllen and Bart Stockbridge, Texas Animal Health Commission

Future Plans

The Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service in Hidalgo County will continue to stay engaged in the Rio Grande Valley Animal Issue Committee and stay current on how weather impacts local production agriculture.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Water Education Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture & Natural Resources

Relevance

Water quality and quantity have emerged as the preeminent issue across the state including the South Region, as indicated through local input, legislative efforts, and numerous other indicators. Agriculture is the largest water user in the state, and agriculture is under close scrutiny because of the potential for negative environmental (water quality) impacts. Water use in the municipal environment including irrigation of athletic fields, in parks, and home landscapes, as well as, in the home proper constitutes a significant portion of water used in Texas. Programs designed to educate all adult and youth water users on water conservation will help reduce overall water use and increase water use efficiency.

Locally, water was identified as a major local issue at the March, 1999 Texas Community Futures Forum and has continued to be identified as a continuing problem at subsequent futures forum events held since.


Water conservation in production agriculture continues to be a priority issue for this area due to the importance of irrigated agriculture to this area and the critically low irrigation supplies available from the Rio Grande River, the primary source for this region.

Response

I taught an extensive session to the Hidalgo County Master Gardener class on water conservation topic so that they can pass that information on to others, including water well testing and irrigation district issues.

Results

A total of 2 group methods resulted in a total of 47 contact hours of education. I taught the use of water conservation technologies and turf grass management to the master gardener class. Water Conservation- Topics included: principles of xeriscaping, water quality issues, how to test for water quality, drip irrigation design, drip irrigation hardware, how to install drip, anti-backflow devices, use of pressure regulators, types of drip products and hands-on activity to become familiar with drip installation. Turf grass Management- Topics included: establishment- variety selection, planting methods; mowing practices; water management including

V A L U E	
Water Conservation Education	
	<p>Texas A&M AgriLife Extension programs that teach farmers, homeowners, and business administrators to conserve water are helping reduce demand on the state's limited water resources. Texans benefit from a safer, more reliable water supply at no additional cost.</p>

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water conservation; fertility- nutrient needs of turf, spreader calibration, watershed protection; insect problems; weed control; management of shady areas and thatch management.

A new educational outreach effort for 2015 was to bring a water well testing program to the Valley for the first time. 18 samples were submitted for testing. Well owners were provided results and were invited to an educational program on water quality and well water safety. 11 attended the program and others were provided information on water wells.

I continued to be active in the Arroyo Colorado Ag Workgroup and attended meetings to provide input into the ongoing efforts to improve water quality in the Arroyo through voluntary efforts by homeowners and agriculture producers located within the watershed.

Upon request, I attended the June meeting of the Board of Directors of Hidalgo #6 Irrigation District in Mission. I provided an update on local ag issues and received current information on irrigation water supplies.

I attended the August meeting of the RGV Irrigation District Managers Association to provide a report from Extension and learn of current issues impacting local irrigation districts.

Important collaborators were: Barbara Storz, County Horticulturist(retired), RGV Irrigation District Managers Association, John Smith, Water Well Testing Program, Jaime Flores and Victor Gutierrez.

Future Plans

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Hidalgo County will continue to provide education on both water conservation techniques and water policy.

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Pesticide Safety Program Hidalgo and Cameron County

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Hidalgo County and Dr. Enrique Perez, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Cameron County

Relevance

Agriculture producers have a statutory requirement to obtain and maintain a pesticide license issued by Texas Department of Agriculture in order to use some crop protection chemicals. These are important tools for agricultural producers and Extension is relied upon to provide the education needed in this process. In addition, many school district, city, county, state and federal employees need to have a pesticide license for their work. Local training is provided for those needing to obtain a pesticide license and continuing education is provided to local license holders in order for them to be knowledgeable in the safe and efficient use of crop protection chemicals and to be able to meet the requirements to renew their license.

Response

Educational training events were planned and conducted to meet statutory requirements for producers to be able to obtain a license. Continuing education units were also provided to all participants at educational events conducted which contained applicable subject matter. A listing of continuing education opportunities was kept on the Extension Office web page as a tool for local producers to learn of these meetings. Also, an extensive email list of local license holders is maintained to use as a primary communication tool to inform license holders of continuing education opportunities. In addition, this agent generated and maintains an extensive list of cell phone numbers of license holders which is used to send text messages to remind license holders of upcoming meetings.

Results

642 persons attended 24 group methods which resulted in a total of 1,922 hours of continuing education contact hours. The economic value of the CEU's earned is estimated to be over \$48,000. In addition, four Pesticide Safety Training meetings were conducted in 2015. A total of 61 persons attended the five hour course which is required in order to obtain a private pesticide license issued by Texas Department of Agriculture. This resulted in a total of 305 contact hours of classroom instruction.

Aerial applicators have specific requirements for continuing education and those needs were met by conducting an educational training meeting specifically for them. This allowed them to obtain their required training without traveling outside of the local area. The aerial applicators are very appreciative of being able to obtain the training from Extension.

The 24 group method events were each reported to TDA by submitting the required documents to the state regulators.

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Important collaborators were: members of the Crops Committee, board members of the Cotton & Grain Producers Association of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Dr. Don Renchie and Dr. Mark Matocha, Agricultural & Environmental Safety Specialists and state & local personnel with Texas Department of Agriculture.

Future Plans

This effort will continue in the future to meet the needs of local agricultural producers and others needing a pesticide license.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities Hidalgo County

Developed by Ashley Gregory, County Extension Agent-Horticulture

Relevance

In Hidalgo County, an estimated 248,112 individuals receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), historically known as food stamps. Studies have shown individuals who live in poverty (including SNAP recipients) have dietary intakes that are not in agreement with current recommendations especially when it comes to consuming vegetables and fruits. In addition, low-income families often live in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods (i.e. food deserts), compounding the challenge of eating a healthy diet.

Response

The Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities (GNHC) program is a cooperative endeavor among Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA. A component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), GNHC works with local partners to establish community gardens in communities identified as a food desert. Targeted towards SNAP recipients (and those eligible for benefits), the program's goal is to improve availability and accessibility of vegetables and fruit in the home by teaching participants (1) how to build gardens and (2) the skills needed to successfully grow and harvest fresh produce. The community gardens also serve as an outdoor classroom for participants who want to apply their knowledge at home (i.e. backyard garden). The program also includes nutrition education from Extension Better Living for Texans (BLT) educators to help participants learn how to incorporate their fresh produce in healthy and budget-friendly recipes. The program is evaluated by assessing the amount of produce harvested and participant feedback via a pre and post survey. During 2015, 93 Hidalgo County adults completed the GNHC program; 35 participants completed the pre and post surveys.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Participants were primarily female (97%) and Hispanic (94%). More than 25% of the participants (n=9) had not completed high school; 43% (n=15) had completed high school and 28% (n=10) had completed some college or a college degree. Average household size of the participants was 5.5 and the average age of participants was 43. More than half (51%; n=18) of the 35 received SNAP benefits while 37% (n=13) reported having children living in the household who received free or reduced price meals at school. Participation in other federal programs varied. Six (17%) participants were enrolled in WIC and TANF but less than 6% participated in head start or received food from food pantries. More than 71% (n=25) reported they had grown vegetables or fruits before and more than 82% of the participants (n=29) identified the GNHC program as the first Extension program they had attended.

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Gardens

A total of 6 community gardens have been established in Hidalgo County through the GNHC program yielding more than 1300 pounds in 2015 (Table 1). Cucumbers, eggplant, kale, Swiss chard, and tomatoes were the vegetables grown most often.

Table 1. Pounds of Produce Harvested, by Garden Location

CROP	Alamo	Dallas Ave. (McAllen)	Elsa	Lantana Apts. (Edinburg)	Progreso	San Carlos	Totals
Broccoli	12	38	7	11	3	6	77
Cabbage	1	24	6	2	0	4	37
Cilantro	0	1	2	2	2	1	8
Cucumbers	0	89	0	48	5	0	142
Eggplant	27	31	3	15	7	29	112
Kale	24	37	21	22	4	15	123
Lettuce	9	28	19	7	1	4	68
M Spinach	8	6	29	2	5	5	55
Okra	5	14	7	2	2	2	32
Peppers	16	27	7	3	33	6	92
Squash	0	7	0	2	5	0	14
S Chard	70	41	9	27	17	45	209
Tomatoes	114	87	5	53	0	34	293
W Melon	0	24	0	0	0	5	29
Melons	0	12	0	0	1	9	22
Total	286	466	115	196	85	165	1313

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Impact of the Gardens on Availability and Accessibility of Vegetables and Fruits in the Home

Compared to when the program ended, there was statistical increase in the frequency of having more vegetables and fruits in the home and also having more vegetables available to have as a snack. (Table 2). There were also trends in having more vegetables served with meals, and having fruit available as a snack.

Table 2. Availability and Accessibility of Vegetables and Fruits in the Home

Question	Average Response* Pre	Average Response Post	Significance
We have fruits and vegetables in my home.	3.1	3.4	.05
In my home vegetables are served at meals.	3.3	3.4	NS
In my home, fruit is served for dessert.	3.1	3.3	NS
In my home, there are vegetables available to have as a snack.	3.1	3.4	.026
In my home, there is fruit available for a snack.	3.3	3.5	NS
In my home, there are cut-up vegetables in the fridge for me and my family to eat.	3.1	3.1	NS
In my home, there is fresh fruit on the counter, table or somewhere else where I and my family can easily get them.	3.4	3.3	NS

*Based on a 4-part Likert scale: 1=hardly ever; 2=sometimes; 3=often; 4=almost always. **NS means no change from a statistical standpoint although an upward trend is always encouraging.

Summary

These results suggest that the GNHC program is playing an important role in improving the availability and accessibility of fresh produce (particularly vegetables) in the home of the GNHC participants. Although not statistically significant participants who had gardened before reported an increase in self-perceived knowledge/skills related to gardening. Overall, More than 83% of the participants (n=29) rating their gardening knowledge and skills as either “good” or “very good” at the end of the program.

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Junior Master Gardener Teacher Training – Learn, Grow, Eat, & GO! Hidalgo and Cameron County

Developed by Ashley Gregory, County Extension Agent-Horticulture, Hidalgo County and Jennifer Herrera, County Extension Agent-Horticulture, Cameron County

Relevance

Childhood obesity is linked to negative health consequences such as higher rates of asthma and diabetes. The high prevalence of childhood obesity in Hidalgo County is an issue that schools are uniquely positioned to address through education and physical activity. Vegetable exposure plus school gardening has been shown to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables. While adding more physical activity during school hours results in improved fitness and weight. The greater the frequency of vegetable consumption and physical activity by parents, the greater the consumption of these foods and exercise by their children. With child obesity rates among low-income children in Texas ranging from 10% to over 20%, engaging schools and families in prevention efforts is critical.

Response

Learn, Grow, Eat, & GO! is a research and evidence-based school enrichment project from the International Junior Master Gardener program. This multifaceted garden, nutrition, and physical activity curriculum is shown to increase student vegetable consumption, physical activity, family gardening, and decrease student BMI. The curriculum has a solid correlation to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards so teachers can easily work it into their existing lesson plans.

In order to expand our reach on May 8, 2015, the Hidalgo and Cameron County Extension hosted a LGEG Teacher Training Workshop. By training the teachers on how to implement the curriculum we are able to reach more children. Since this curriculum is new the training was open to teachers in all of South Texas as well as County Extension Agents who wanted to implement the program in their counties. In addition to covering the curriculum the training included a number of hands on activities and demonstrations:

- Know and Show Sombrero – paper sombrero decorated with what plants need to grow
- Greasy Grid Evaluation – compares grease from baked chips vs. regular chips
- Kitchen Cotton Conversion – helps kids understand portion control
- Composting – how to make your own compost
- Building a Raised Bed – simple steps to build a raised garden bed
- Square Foot Gardening – activity to help kids space out plants in the garden

We took advantage of the County Extension Agents participating in the training and had them pair up with teachers to brainstorm on how they would implement the curriculum, involve parents, and get

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community support with starting the garden. All participants took home a bag full of resources on gardening and healthy eating. After the workshop we sent all teachers a school gardening calendar to help them stay on track with planning and growing their garden.

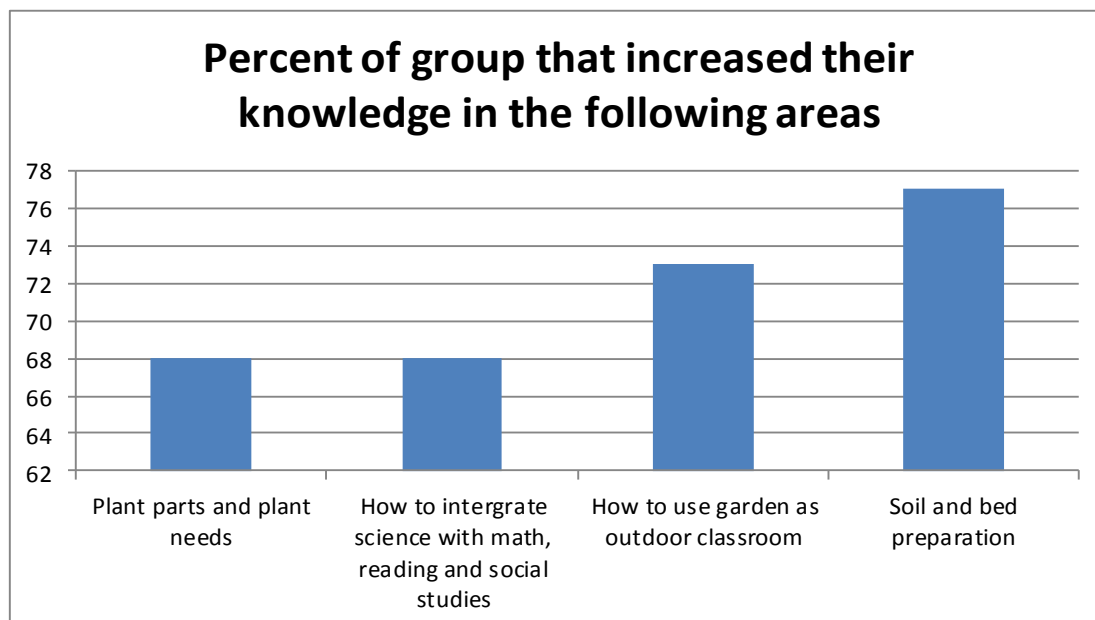
County Extension Agents	Hidalgo County Teachers	Other Counties	Total
16	34	25	75

Results

Table 1. Make up of Participants

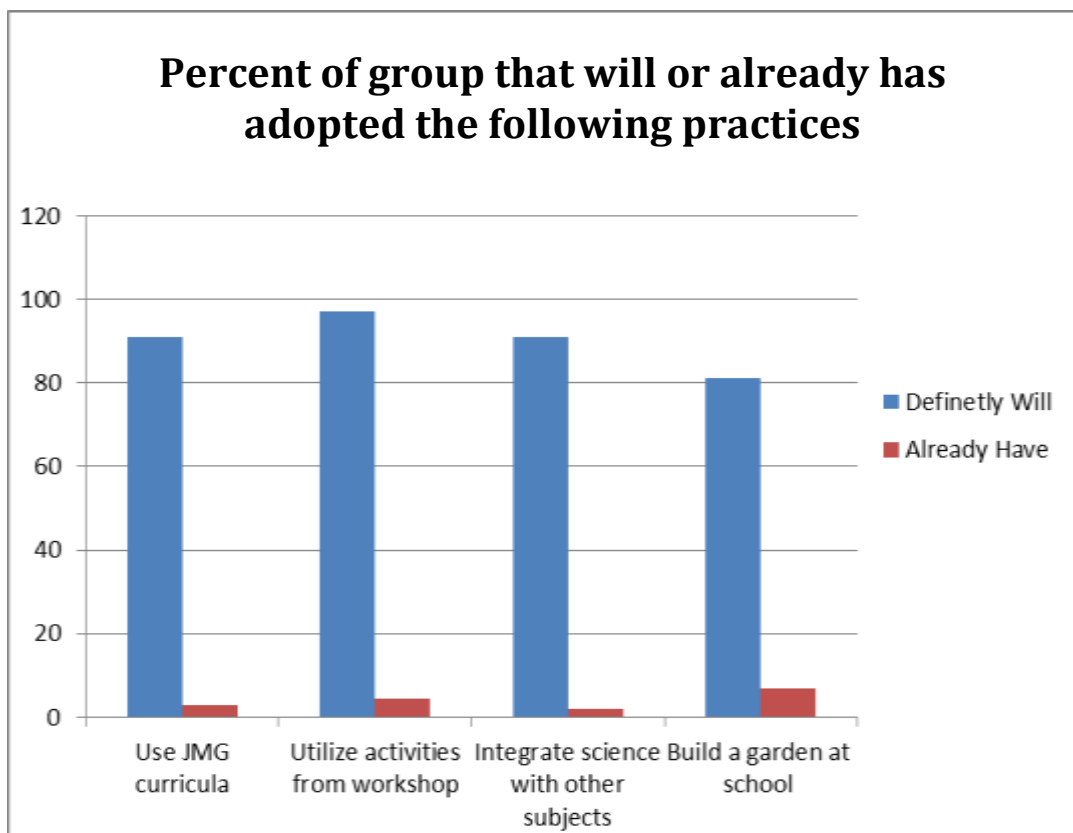
The workshop was a success with 79% of participants saying that they were completely satisfied with the program. Charts 1 and 2 show that the majority of participants increased their knowledge and plans to adopt the practices that they learned about.

Chart 1. Knowledge gained



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Chart 2. Behavior change



Since the workshop I have been contacted by 7 schools for help with starting school gardens:

- Idea Public Charter School
- Lyndon B. Johnson Elementary
- Bentsen Elementary
- Edith and Ethel Carmen Elementary
- Pharr San Juan Alamo Southwest
- Sotto Mayor Junior High
- Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD

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I've worked with these schools to select the location of their gardens, provided them with seeds, and helped them make a plan for starting their gardens. At the Idea campus in Edinburg we will be constructing their raised garden beds before the students go on Christmas break. I have dates set with 2 other schools for garden bed construction in January.

Future Plans

This training was a great success and I see lots of collaboration in the future to work with these and other schools on starting school gardens. Gardening is a fun activity that has potential for kids to learn healthy eating habits while getting physical activity, but it involves a lot of work. I've purposefully started with a small group because I'd like to see these school gardens become sustainable and provide fresh fruits and vegetables to students for many years. By working with a small group we are more likely to see this goal accomplished and be able to show successful examples for other schools wanting to start gardens.

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Livestock and Forage Plan Hidalgo County

Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program- Farm Advisor

Relevance

Agricultural producers from Hidalgo and Starr counties have been in a tough economic situation for many years due to weather related events such as extended drought. Because of this, they have endured large production and financial losses. A series of educational presentations were conducted by 1890 Extension Agents to address new and existing risk management products and services.

Response

We collaborated with USDA-Risk Management Agency, USDA-Farm Service Agency, 1862 Land Grant University, local Extension Ag Advisory Committees and local agribusinesses to make producers aware of the risk management programs that they could utilize to protect their farm and ranch investments.

The following educational activities were organized, with the input and assistance of the Hidalgo County Small Farm Advisory Committee.

- We organized a task force to discuss educational programming efforts and individuals involved to address issues. (Crop insurance agents)
- Hosted a Farm Bill Workshop in McCook, Texas to educate farmers on the provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill.
- Provided outreach on USDA-Farm Service Agency's loan programs at a SWCD Field Day Ranch Tour in Zapata, Texas on April 8, 2015.
- Provided outreach on USDA-Farm Service Agency's loan programs at the Starr County Ranchers Program at RY Livestock Sales in Rio Grande City, Texas on July 1, 2015.
- Utilized local crop insurance agents from the Rio Grande Valley to provide outreach on USDA-Risk Management Agency's Pasture, Range and Forage Insurance Program.
- Provided outreach on the sign-up deadlines for the Pasture, Range and Forage crop insurance program at various producer meetings held throughout the county.
- Utilized USDA-Farm Service Agency staff to provide updates on government disaster assistance programs and cost-sharing programs.
- Hosted a Small Farm Production, Marketing and Food Safety Workshop in Weslaco, Texas on May 7, 2015.
- Hosted an Agricultural Opportunities for Veterans & Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in the Rio Grande Valley workshop in Edinburg, Texas on August 13, 2015.
- Agents evaluated data that was gathered by program participants, task force members and other stakeholders which will be used to evaluate the program.

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- Agents shared the results with local County Commissioners Court and Leadership Advisory Board and other stakeholders.

Evaluation Method - A one-page retrospective post-test evaluation form was administered to each participant. The survey was used to determine the level of clientele knowledge change required by the educational programming.

Collaborators – The following businesses assisted with resources to make this program possible:

- USDA-Farm Service Agency
- USDA-Risk Management Agency
- RY Livestock Sales, Inc.
- Starr Soil and Water Conservation District
- Texas-Mexico Border Coalition
- Starr County Farm Bureau

Results

The following results are shared from the program evaluation to indicate the achievements of the project:

- 91% of participants gained knowledge of USDA cost-sharing programs.
- 91% of participants gained knowledge of beef cattle management practices.
- 77.3% of participants gained knowledge of range management tools to maximize forage production.
- 91% of participants gained knowledge of internal/external parasite control in livestock
- 91% of participants gained knowledge of USDA-RMA Pasture, Range and Forage Insurance Program (Rainfall Index)
- 81.8% of participants gained knowledge of USDA-FSA programs and services

Summary

This program appeared to build knowledge and change perceptions concerning risk management and ranching practices. Producer responses indicate that they have a better appreciation for USDA-Risk Management Agency, USDA-Farm Service Agency and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation programs. This program will continue, addressing new government programs as they become available.

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Financial, Marketing and Production Management Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program- Farm Advisor
Serving Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy and Starr Counties

Relevance

The Rio Grande Valley, which is composed of Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy and Starr counties have gone through major agricultural disasters in the last few years. The nature of these disasters has been mainly drought that has caused loss of income to the agricultural producers of the area. Many socially disadvantaged and limited-resource agricultural producers and rural youth face numerous challenges in obtaining financial resources through commercial lending institutions because of the risk involved in farming and ranching and the local banks unwillingness to lend during these times of economic uncertainty. Many of these producers qualify for financing through USDA-Farm Service Agency, but are not aware of their programs or are overwhelmed by the paperwork involved in USDA's loan applications. Knowing that operating loan funds are available through USDA-Farm Service Agency, it is important that Extension offer support in financial planning and management to fill out the necessary paperwork correctly and remove all of the obstacles that impede agricultural producers from applying for these loans.

Response

The purpose of our program is to enhance the business management and marketing skills of agricultural producers who utilize our services. Targeted clientele will learn how to keep and improve production and financial records and generate personal and farm financial statements for their use in financial resource acquisition. This plan will address a wide range of activities such as livestock production, crop production, and financial management, marketing and applying for assistance under USDA programs.

The Cooperative Extension Program's Small Farm Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Program in Hidalgo County developed the following activities to address this relevant issue:

- Hidalgo County Small Farm Advisory Committee provided direction for our 2015 programming efforts and assisted in marketing, evaluation and interpretation of the program.
- I held a Farm Bill Training in McCook, Texas on January 28, 2015. We had speakers who addressed the Farm Bill, the RGV Crop Analyzer, FSA loan programs and the sugarcane aphid and head moth.
- I hosted an event called, Small Farm Production, Marketing and Food Safety. This program was held in Weslaco, Texas at the District 12 Texas AgriLife Extension headquarters on May 7, 2015.
- I hosted a farm programs outreach meeting that was designed to give Veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers a look at the types of programs that are offered by the State and Federal departments of agriculture. Representatives from agencies such as the: USDA-Farm Service Agency, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Texas-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas Department of Agriculture and Texas AgriLife Extension Service, spoke of their programs and offered their services to the participants. We also had our District 12 Livestock Specialist, Dr. Joe Paschal speak about Raising Livestock Options for Small Acreage Land

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Owners and Mr. Ricardo Carranza, Community Garden Program Assistant, spoke about Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service & Master Gardener Program. After the meeting, participants were now able to know which agency to go to for their farm or ranch needs.

- I provided a commodity report for the members of the Starr County Farm Bureau at their annual membership drive dinner in Rio Grande City, Texas. The commodities included cattle, cotton and grains.
- Provided outreach on USDA-Farm Service Agency loan programs at many Extension events, workshops and field days throughout the Rio Grande Valley.
- Collaborated with the Rio Grande Valley Agricultural Extension Agents and Ag Science Instructors to provide outreach on USDA's Youth Loan Program to 4-H and FFA members and parents.
- Provided outreach on our program and programming efforts in the local media for promotion. Assisted 12 USDA-Farm Service Agency borrowers in completing the FARM ASSIST program which helps them to satisfy the Borrower Training Requirements imposed on them by the USDA-Farm Service Agency.
- Collaborated with the County Extension Agricultural Agents in Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties by providing educational program focused on sustainable agriculture. Programs ranged from best management practices to control brush, nutritional practices for beef cattle and performance testing on bulls and heifers.
- Sixty-three (63) one-on-one financial planning and management sessions for producers and youth seeking agricultural loans from USDA-Farm Service Agency.

Collaborators

The Small Farm Advisory Committee of Hidalgo County provides direction for the program and we have collaborated with the following agencies to make this program successful: Texas Farm Credit, Elsa State Bank, Ry Livestock Sales, Inc., Hidalgo and Starr Counties Farm Bureau, Texas-Mexico Border Coalition, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and USDA-Farm Service Agency.

Results

A two-page retrospective post evaluation form was administered to a cross section of the program participants. The survey was used to determine the level of clientele knowledge gained by the educational programming that was provided.

The following results were shared from the program evaluations to indicate the achievements of the program:

- 96% of the program participants gain knowledge of USDA-Farm Service Agency's Direct and Guaranteed Loan Programs.
- 94% of the program participants gained the knowledge to develop a farm operating budget for their operation in 2014.
- 90% of the program participants said that they gained the knowledge necessary to keep production and financial records for securing financing for their farming and ranching operations.
- 100% of the program participants found out what their net worth (owner's equity) was at the end of the Program.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

- 75% of the program participants said that they gained the ability to fill out a USDA-Farm Service Agency loan application properly, without any assistance needed, but would continue to use the Program's services if still available.
- 100% of the program participants were provided the technical assistance necessary in filling out the necessary paperwork involved in preparing their loan applications to submit to USDA-Farm Service Agency.
- 98% of the program participants were satisfied with the Program and would recommend it to other producers needing technical assistance in financial planning and management.

The breakdowns of the loan types applied for are as follows: 5-Youth Loans, 55- Operating Loans and 5-Farm Ownership loans.

Benefits/Impacts

All of the program participants that were able to submit a complete direct loan application to USDA-Farm Service Agency because all of the obstacles that impeded their full participation in the Program were removed. They were able to save a 2% fee on their loan requests by not utilizing the services of a private loan consultant. The total money requested for 2015 amounted to \$5,698,415. This amount multiplied by 2%, totals \$113,970, which is the amount that an independent loan consultant would have charged. This was an average savings of \$1,777.30 for each of the sixty three participants.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Food Protection Management Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences

Relevance

Each year, an estimated 1 in 6 people become ill from the food they eat. Common symptoms of foodborne disease include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, fever, and headache. While some people may view this as a mere case of “food poisoning” foodborne illness has serious health and economic consequences. In fact, foodborne illnesses from five pathogens alone (Campylobacter, Salmonella, Listeria monocytogenes, E. coli O157:H7, and E. coli non-O157:H7 STEC) cost more than \$6.9 billion in medical expenses, lost productivity, and even death. All of us are at risk for foodborne illness, but older adults, pregnant women, young children, individuals with chronic disease, and those with a compromised immune system are at an increased risk. Because nearly half of our food dollars are spent on foods eaten away from home, it is imperative that employees who work in retail food service handle food safely. This program addresses previously identified Texas Communities Futures Forum (TCFF) issues and FCS committee priorities.

Response

To meet the need for quality food safety education in Texas retail food establishments, the Food Protection Management (FPM) program was developed. Our two-day certified food manager program prepares food service workers to sit for the state Certified Food Manager exam. Our 2-hour food handler program, which is accredited by the Department of State Health Services, trains front-line food service workers on the basic principles of food safety. Both programs are conducted at the county level by Extension agents. In 2015, a press release was submitted to *The Monitor* newspaper for placement in the community events section. It continues to run as the new class dates are scheduled monthly. A total of 9 food handler classes were held in 2015.

Results

Participant Demographics	2014		2015 (as of July 31, 2015)	
Female	55%		67%	
Hispanic	86%		91%	
English as Primary Language	>51%		52%	
Less than High School Education	>53%		34%	
No experience in Food Service	>54%		31%	
Total Participants	131		122	
Question	2014		2015	
	% correct pre*	% correct post	% correct pre	% correct post
1. Which of the following statements about serving food is true?	47	84	81	91

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2. Which of the following best describes proper hand and arm washing?	74	92	88	97
3. The removal of dirt, soil, food or grease is known as:	37	86	60	71
4. Which of the following statements about a hand washing sink is true?	76	95	90	98
5. Which of the following foods would not be considered potentially hazardous?	46	95	55	71
6. Cross contamination happens when safe food comes into contact with:	65	86	80	86
7. Which of the following statements best describes the temperature danger zone?	25	78	53	80
8. Which of the following is an example of cross contamination?	70	93	89	94
9. All of the following are acceptable tools for handling ready-to-eat foods except:	52	94	71	83
10. Which of the following is the best example of maintaining personal hygiene?	31	85	61	84
11. A foodservice employee should immediately tell his/her supervisor if he/she has:	34	86	51	52
12. Generally speaking a foodborne outbreak involves how many people?	63	95	29	82
13. Food can be contaminated by:	25	95	75	86
Mean Score	48	89	69	83

The client satisfaction survey was given at the end of the training while the survey that assessed client characteristics was given separately (at the beginning). Instructor satisfaction scores are based on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied). In other words the lower the number, the more satisfied the participant. Scores of 0 (not applicable) or 6 (no response) were not included in the analysis.

Summary

The food handlers program was successful in helping participants (foodservice employees) increase their knowledge about food safety as it pertains to the retail setting.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Walk Across Texas Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences with partnership from Hidalgo County Commissioner's Court and Hidalgo County employees

Relevance

Physical activity is one of the 10 leading health indicators in Healthy People 2010. Physical inactivity is associated with an increased risk of a number of chronic health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers, high blood pressure, as well as overweight and obesity. In Texas, 26% of Texans are obese.

Between 1988-1994 and 1999-2002, the prevalence of obesity among adults increased from 23% to 30%. The adult obesity rate for Hidalgo County is 31% and is only increasing. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the last 20 years. In 1999-2002, 16% of Americans ages 6 to 19 years were overweight. Nationally, sixty-one and a half percent of children aged 9 to 13 years do not participate in any organized physical activity during their non-school hours and that 22.6% do not engage in any free-time physical activity. Locally, Hidalgo County has a physical inactivity statistic of 22%. Additionally, research indicates that only 25% of adults and 27% of high school students get regular, moderate exercise. 29% of American Adults are not physically active at all.

Walk Across Texas is an eight week program designed to help people of all ages support one another to establish the habit of regular physical activity. Regular physical activity and controlling weight can significantly reduce the incidence and impact of chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, and depression and is associated with a longer healthier life. A large number of school children are overweight and school staff feel that if we get them involved in walking we can help them. The idea of asking the children to invite their parents will be addressed and hopefully the entire family will be involved. This program continues to be a driving force in the Family & Consumer Science program portfolio as obesity has been steadily identified as an issue in Hidalgo County by community coalitions and the Texas Communities Futures Forum in 2015.

Response

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service in Hidalgo County partnered with the Hidalgo County Government and its employees to offer Walk Across Texas to them as a solution to addressing health and wellness and potentially lowering health care costs long term. This program was identified and offered by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent, as an option to the county employees.

The following activities were conducted:

- Planning meetings between County Agent and county employee designated to oversee Walk Across Texas
- Walk Across Texas marketing to county departments

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- Walk Across Texas Kickoff (February 2015)
- Completion of (3) 8-week rounds of Walk Across Texas

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service would like to recognize the partnership with the Hidalgo County Judge, Commissioner's and county employees for their participation and support. They were instrumental in the success of this program.

Results

- 202 adults in Hidalgo County registered and participated in Walk Across Texas
- 143 adults in Hidalgo County completed the 8 week program
- **If the 143 participants completing the 8 week program continue walking at the same level as during Walk Across Texas, they have the potential to save a collective \$1,802,136 in future health care costs by avoiding type 2 diabetes and by reducing work absences.**

Feedback and suggestions have been considered and the October 1, 2015 round of WAT brought changes such as discontinued use of the Calculator Converter (to encourage the honor system) and new incentives for individual participants per week. I continue to work with the Hidalgo County Health department on increasing participation for Hidalgo County employees in Walk Across Texas by implementing new ideas.

Program Interpretation:

After every round of WAT, the Hidalgo County health department and I jointly announce the winners at Hidalgo County Commissioner's Court. WAT winners and high score walkers are featured in the HidalgOFIT newsletter that is distributed to every county department and employee and posted online.



This graphic was created by Andrea Valdez and presented at Hidalgo County Commissioners Court in December 2015 as an interpretation tool to show the benefits of Walk Across Texas

Family and Consumer Sciences

Working on Wellness (WOW) Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences; Illeana Garcia and Maritza Salinas, Working on Wellness Program Assistants

Relevance

Obesity in Hidalgo County is a major public health concern, co-varying with other health and social problems. Of the 232 counties ranked in the 2014 county health rankings (University of Wisconsin Health Institute, 2012), Hidalgo County ranks 225th in health factors, 229th in social and economic factors and 209th in clinical care. The high obesity rate in Hidalgo County is related to other poor health and social indicators. According to the county health rankings, 27% of residents have limited access to healthy foods, and 43% have limited access to exercise opportunities. Almost 1/3 of residents in Hidalgo County report fair or poor health. In 2011, 39% of the population was uninsured and 33% could not see the doctor due to costs. Provider shortages in primary physicians, dentists, and other health care professionals further inhibit access to care (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2012). Hidalgo County has a childhood poverty rate of 46%, almost double the national average.

Response

With a 42% obesity rate, Hidalgo County was the only county in Texas that qualified for this particular grant. This grant would also provide the opportunity for a beginning collaboration and partnership between Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M Health Science Center which has a School of Public Health Campus (SPH) in Hidalgo County. With personnel hired and working on the grant from both Texas A&M agencies, Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family and Consumer Sciences would spearhead the local Extension grant team and work together with SPH to disseminate information between our two agencies and coordinate efforts. Forty (40) letters of support were obtained from agency contacts and local Extension contacts such as the County Judge and every County Commissioner. Meetings with every County Commissioner were held to obtain the letters of support, provide further explanation of the grant opportunity, and seek their input on potential communities in each precinct that would possibly be included in the grant. The grant was written and submitted. In September 2014, we were awarded \$2.4 million dollars over 3 years with the 2 goals of the grant being to 1) increase access to physical activity and 2) increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in Hidalgo County. The grant team consists of Extension Specialists: Dr. Carol Rice (since retired), Dr. Jenna Anding, Dr. Jamie Rae Walker, Alice Kirk and Mike Lopez. In Hidalgo County, our staff is myself and 2 full time program assistants, Illeana Garcia and Maritza Salinas. The School of Public Health has 11 staff members on the WOW project. I am in daily communication with the Extension Specialists that work on this project as developments and activities progress.

After discussions of agency resources, the grant team decided to use a community readiness tool from the University of North Carolina to assess the proposed communities and determine if the communities had enough or not enough resources to begin forming community coalitions. As we would begin work in each Hidalgo County Precinct, an SPH representative and I announced the grant funding at Hidalgo County

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Commissioner's Court. In 2015, the WOW grant team proceeded to outline community assessments that were needed including windshield assessments, Physical Activity Resource Assessments (PARA) and Food Store Assessments (FSA) in the targeted grant communities. Training on the PARA and FSA tools were provided at this time. Community member recruitment was utilized to assist the WOW grant team to tour the communities and "windshield drive-by's" were conducted to gain further information on the areas. Along with the previously mentioned baseline assessments, over 60 listening sessions were conducted with various community members and entities including school district personnel, city personnel, churches, grassroots organizations, and others that have an in-depth knowledge of the county and community needs.

In May 2015, I had the opportunity to travel with other members of the WOW grant team from both Extension and SPH to the Centers for Disease Control headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia for the 1416 Grant Awardee Follow up meeting which served as professional development as I was able to attend presentations from various speakers on walkability, coalition development and grant evaluation.

At this point it was imperative that the process of community coalition formation begin. We compiled interested parties from the listening sessions and contacts from the community such as county officials, city officials, parks and recreation departments, nonprofit organizations, civic organization, and school officials. The local Extension WOW team assumed the responsible of contact for the coalitions, meeting agendas and supplies. We moved forward with the outreach and logical planning for forming the coalitions in Weslaco, South McAllen, San Carlos and Penitas. All four coalitions meet monthly with an average of 9 people per meeting per coalition. All coalition members are serving as volunteers on these coalitions and we have representation and partnerships from the following agencies:

- City of Weslaco
- City of Weslaco Parks and Recreation
- Weslaco Independent School District
- Weslaco Farmer's Market
- Hidalgo County Precinct #1
- Hidalgo County Precinct #3
- Hidalgo County Precinct #4
- Hope Family Birth Center
- City of McAllen
- City of McAllen Parks and Recreation
- McAllen Housing Authority
- The Elks Lodge
- Hope Clinic
- Valley Interfaith
- Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas
- The Monitor
- San Carlos Community Center
- Hidalgo County Precinct #4 Parks and Recreation
- City of Edinburg Parks and Recreation
- TAMU Colonias Program

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- Proyecto Desarrollo Humano of Texas
- La Joya Independent School District
- Buckner International Family Health Center
- Community members

We are currently using the Strategic Doing model by Purdue Extension to facilitate the coalition meetings as they identify needs and opportunities in their communities then rank them by ease and impact.

In August 2015, the Working on Wellness coalitions sponsored the "Creating a Culture of Physical Activity in Our Community Event" with Mark Fenton. Mark Fenton is a nationally recognized walkability expert that works with small communities on street infrastructure and physical activity concerns in their community and how to make communities more pedestrian and bike friendly. We had follow up communications with Mr. Fenton on his schedule, presentation content and objectives for his visit. The local WOW team executed an extensive marketing campaign for this event and personally contacted individuals from all Hidalgo County precincts, multiple city governments and managements, and school district administration. Mass media marketing was completed via *The Monitor* newspaper, Facebook and multiple email distributions. We recruited community members and volunteers from each coalition and community to meet Mark Fenton on the community tours during the first day of his visit to Hidalgo County to describe their community and provide insight on how they are or are not able to be physically active. Following the event which hosted more than 70 community members and officials, *The Monitor* newspaper had 2 great full length page features on Mark Fenton and how city infrastructure impacts physical activity.



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The four WOW Coalitions have been meeting monthly working on action steps and consensus on project focus. We are currently in the middle of year 2 of the WOW project. While each coalition is different and the identified needs are different, at this time each coalition is focusing on planning their sustainable events or activities and the WOW Extension team is planning technical assistance workshops to address the countywide recurring needs and opportunities that have been identified from the all coalition meetings. Currently we have planned, designed and will be implementing a “Community Engagement for Safer Parks and Recreation” workshop to provide a free certification to community members and officials in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.

Results

This is a multi-year project and the evaluation process is currently ongoing.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Healthy Baby, Healthy Start Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences

Relevance

According to 2009 data, Hidalgo County has 47% of 16,948 total live births that are without prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy. The teen birth rate in Hidalgo County is 87% which is considerably higher than the national benchmark at 21%. The Texas Department of State Health Services has determined that 31% of fetal and infant deaths were preventable and the maternal care period contributed another 25.6% of excess deaths. Their recommendation is to target maternal health to all race groups and target infant health to teens. The Healthy Baby, Healthy Start program aims to improve the wellbeing of mothers, infants, and children in Hidalgo County. Their wellbeing determines the health of the next generation and can help predict future public health challenges for families, communities and the health care system. Maternal and child health is important because a healthy pregnancy can provide the opportunity to combat many health risks and prevent future health problems such as hypertension, diabetes, inadequate nutrition and unhealthy birth weights. The objectives of the Healthy Baby, Healthy Start program address a wide range of topics including Wellness during Pregnancy, Maternal Health, Cooking for You and Your Baby, Safe Eating During Pregnancy, Feeding Your Baby and Healthy Habits During and After Pregnancy. Healthy Baby, Healthy Start will educate expecting mothers on proper maternal health and early infant health by including healthy cooking demonstrations and educating them on the benefits of local fresh foods for them and their baby.

Response

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences Advisory Board approved this program as an offering in Hidalgo County. During the program planning process, Edinburg Regional Medical Center (ERMC) was identified as a partner to help support this program. At the time, Edinburg Regional Medical Center was hosting the grand opening of their Women's Corner maternity ward. This was beneficial as each time the class was concluded, the participants would be able to take a tour of the new Women's Corner. Multiple planning meetings were held to review the curriculum and flyer for the class. The ERMC marketing department developed the flyer and posters for the class sessions. Advertisements were done in *The Monitor* newspaper and on Good Day Valley FOX Channel 2. An informational session on the program was also filmed and aired on the City of Edinburg Channel 12, Public Information channel. Two series that consisted of two (2) classes were held at ERMC. 22 participants in total were educated with the Healthy Baby, Healthy Start curriculum.

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Results



The 4.7-5.05 scale of rating of satisfaction relates to the Mostly to Completely Satisfied ratings on the Customer Satisfaction Survey. As shown from the graph above, 100% of participants were completely satisfied with the program/activity.



Family and Consumer Sciences

Better Living for Texans (BLT) – Back to Basics Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences; Frances Flores and Yolanda Rios, Better Living for Texans Program Assistants

Relevance

More than 3.7 million individuals receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), historically known as food stamps. Studies have shown individuals who live in poverty (including SNAP recipients) have dietary intakes that are not in agreement with current recommendations (i.e. Dietary Guidelines or MyPlate). This audience, like many, may not recognize their risk for foodborne illness. Having enough food to eat is also a challenge; an estimated 1 in 6 households in Texas experience food insecurity.

Response

The BLT Program is a cooperative endeavor among Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA. A component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), BLT offers food and nutrition education to SNAP recipients, applicants, and other low-income audiences to help improve their ability to plan and prepare nutritious meals, stretch food dollars, and prepare and store food safely. BLT also incorporates the *Walk Across Texas* program to promote physical activity.

During 2015, 484 County adults completed the BLT *Back to Basics* series. This program focuses on meal planning, stretching food dollars, and adopting selected behaviors that can reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Of those participants, 365 completed the 30-day follow-up survey which allows us to assess the extent that targeted behaviors were adopted.

Results

Adoption of Behavior: The adoption of actual behaviors was assessed analyzing the data from 21 of the 35 participants who completed the pre-, post-, and 30-day follow-up surveys.

Meal Planning and Food Resource Management – adoption of behaviors

Behavior	Beginning (pre)		Intent to change (post)		30-day Follow-Up	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Plan meals in advance						
Always	120	25%	399	83%	242	66%
Sometimes	313	65%	79	17%	122	33%
Never	41	9%	1	0.2%	1	0.3%
Not Sure	6	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Shop for food with a list						
Always	163	34%	433	90%	312	86%
Sometimes	238	49%	43	8.9%	48	13%
Never	78	16%	5	1.0%	3	0.8%

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Not Sure	3	0.6%	0	0	0	0%
Compare prices when shopping						
Always	250	52%	436	90%	338	93%
Sometimes	193	40%	49	10%	24	7%
Never	36	7%	0	0%	3	0.8%
Not Sure	5	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Use unit pricing when shopping						
Always	101	21%	378	78%	230	63%
Sometimes	201	42%	94	20%	110	30%
Never	125	26%	9	2%	27	7%
Not sure	47	10%	2	0.4%	0	0%
Run out of food before the end of the month?						
Always	142	30%			69	19%
Sometimes	231	48%			134	37%
Never	89	19%			158	44%
Not Sure	16	3%			0	0%

Food Safety- adoption of behaviors

Behavior	Beginning (pre)		Intent to change (post)		30-day Follow-Up	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
How often do you sanitize cutting boards after cutting up raw meat or poultry?						
Always	380	80%	461	96%	358	98%
Sometimes	68	14%	14	3%	1	0.3%
Never	23	5%	5	1%	7	2%
Not sure	5	1%	0	0%	0	0%
How often do you thaw frozen food at room temperature?						
Always	194	41%	70	15%	6	2%
Sometimes	212	45%	16	3%	16	4%
Never	59	12%	390	81%	342	94%
Not sure	11	2%	6	1%	0	0%
How long did you leave your last meal out after it was prepared?						
Eaten/stored immediately	155	32%	157	32%	156	42%
< 1 hour	217	46%	289	60%	204	55%
1 – 2 hours	51	11%	30	6%	8	2%
> 2 hours	12	3%	1	0.2%	0	0%
Not Sure	42	9%	7	1.4%	0	0%

Other findings:

69% of the participants identified BLT as their first exposure to AgriLife Extension. This suggests that the program is reaching new audiences who otherwise might not have the opportunity to benefit from Extension programs.

Average monthly out-of-pocket food expenses reported by participants**:

Before BLT: \$264.81

After BLT: \$232.57

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** Based on those participants who reported monthly out-of-pocket food expenses at the beginning of BLT and 30-days after the program ended.

For participants who completed the pre, post, and follow-up surveys, the percentage who rated their perceived ability to prepare nutritious meals as either "good" or "very good" was 52% before BLT (pre-survey) and 91% after BLT (30-day post survey).

92% of the participants rated the BLT program as "excellent" while 7% rated the program as "good."

Family and Consumer Sciences

Better Living for Texans (BLT) - Don't Get Bugged From Foodborne Illness Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences; Frances Flores and Yolanda Rios, Better Living for Texans Program Assistants

Relevance

An estimated 1 in 6 Americans is expected to become ill from a foodborne illness this year. Foodborne illness is costly and can strike anyone; however, older adults, pregnant women, young children, and those with a compromised immune system are at an increased risk. Signs of a foodborne illness can range from vomiting and diarrhea to nausea, cramps, fever, and joint or back aches.

Many foodborne illnesses can be linked to poor personal hygiene (lack of hand washing), cross contamination, not cooking food to a safe internal temperature, and not storing food properly (e.g. letting it sit out too long after it is prepared). Studies suggest that while individuals are aware of the behaviors that individuals should adopt in order to reduce their risk of foodborne illness in the home, compliance with these targeted behaviors is less than desired. For example, studies have reported that as few as 12% of adults who own a food thermometer use it to check the temperature of meat, only 60% wash their hands with soap and water after touching raw poultry, and as few as 19% washed and sanitized cutting boards after contact with raw meat or chicken.

Response

Don't Get Bugged from Foodborne Illness is a three-part program that is focused on reducing the risks for foodborne illness. This program focuses on ways to reduce the risk for foodborne illness by adopting sound food shopping skills and safe food preparation and storage techniques both at home and when eating out. The program is evaluated using pre, post, and follow-up surveys that allow for the determination of intent to change behavior and the extent to which those behaviors are adopted. This program is one of the series targeted towards the Better Living for Texans SNAP-Ed clientele. During 2015, 34 individuals in Hidalgo County completed this program series; 27 of the participants completed the pre, post, and follow-up surveys.

Results

All of the participants were female and most (93%) were Hispanic. Mean household size was 4.7 and the average age of the participants was 62. More than 66% (n=18) had a high school diploma or less and one-third were SNAP recipients. Almost half (n=13) of the 27 participants reported that this program was their first exposure to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. In addition, 85% (n=23) noted that they were the one primarily responsible for preparing meals in the home.

Table 1. Frequency with which targeted behaviors were being followed.

Behavior	Pre		Post		Follow-Up	
	Number	%*	Number	%	Number	%
Eat pre-cut, pre-washed salad after "sell-by" date						
Always	7	26	1	4	1	4
Sometimes	11	41	0		0	
Never	6	22	26	96	26	96

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Not sure	3	11	0		0	
Wash hands with soap and warm water before eating						
Always	25	93	25	93	27	100
Sometimes	2	7	4	4	0	
Never	0		0		0	
Not sure	0		0		0	
Wash hands with soap & warm water before cooking food						
Always	23	85	27	100	27	100
Sometimes	3	11	0		0	
Never	0		0		0	
Not sure	0		0		0	
Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables before eating						
Always	20	74	26	96	27	100
Sometimes	6	22	0		0	
Never	0		0		0	
Not sure	1	4	0		0	
Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing						
Always	24	89	27	100	27	100
Sometimes	1	4	0		0	
Never	0		0		0	
Not sure	1	4	0		0	
Wash, rinse, and sanitize cutting boards after cutting raw meat or poultry						
Always	23	85	26	96	27	100
Sometimes	2	7	0		0	
Never	1	1	0		0	
Not sure	1	4	0		0	

* Rounded to the nearest whole number.

As noted in Table 1, a majority of the participants were following most of the targeted behaviors, which included washing hands before eating and preparing food and washing produce before eating and preparing, either “always” or “sometimes.” The exception was the behavior related to eating pre-washed, bagged produce after the sell-by date (only 6 out of 22 said “never”). Immediately after the program ended, nearly all participants reported intent to adopt the targeted behaviors. Thirty days later, nearly all continued to do so. The most significant improvement was in the consumption of bagged produce after the sell-by date (the percentage who reported “never” doing this rose from 22% pre to 96% at the follow-up).

Table 2. Frequency with which targeted behaviors were being followed.

Behavior	Pre		Post		Follow-Up	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Keep raw meat, fish, or poultry covered so juices do not drip on other foods						
Always	24	89	27	100	27	100
Sometimes	1	4	0		0	
Never	2	7	0		0	
Not sure	0		0		0	
Thaw foods at room temperature						
Always	10	37	0		0	
Sometimes	13	48	0		1	4

Family and Consumer Sciences

Never	4	15	25	93	26	96
Not sure	0		1	4	0	
Use a food thermometer to decide if meat, poultry, and fish are done before serving						
Always	3	11	25	93	11	41
Sometimes	5	19	1	4	9	33
Never	19	70	0		7	26
Not sure	0		1	4	0	
How long did your last meal sit out before it was eaten or refrigerated?						
Eaten/refrigerated right away	8	30	8	30	10	37
< 1 hour	8	30	17	63	17	63
1-2 hours	4	15	2	7	0	
More than 2 hours	0		0		0	
Not sure	6	22	0		0	

As shown in Table 2, more than 80% (n=23) of the participants allowed frozen foods/meat to thaw at room temperature “always” or “sometimes.” In addition, 70% never used a food thermometer. Immediately after the program ended, most participants expressed intent to adopt the targeted behaviors. Thirty days later, the percentage of participants who were “never” thawing food at room temperature had risen from 15% (pre) to 96% (follow-up). All participants were eating or storing prepared foods within the recommended 2-hour time when the program began and continued to do so after the program ended. Unfortunately the percentage using a food thermometer dropped but it was higher than when the program began.

Table 3. % of participants who had the following tools in the home:

	Pre % (n) who responded yes	Post (30-day follow-up) % (n) who responded yes
Refrigerator thermometer	9 (33)	22 (81)
Food Thermometer	11 (41)	22 (81)
Separate cutting boards	18 (67)	27 (100)
Vegetable brush	10 (37)	26 (96)

** either they had the item at the beginning of the program or they received it by participating

At the beginning of the program, less than half of the participants reported having thermometers, or vegetable brushes. Thirty days after the program ended, a majority of participants were equipped with the targeted tools (Table 3).

Summary

The *Don't Get Bugged* series appears to help individuals adopt many of the sound food safety practices that can reduce their risk for foodborne illness. This is demonstrated by the marked increase in the reported adoption of targeted behaviors.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Better Living for Texans (BLT) - Three Easy Bites Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences; Frances Flores and Yolanda Rios, Better Living for Texans Program Assistants

Relevance

Two-thirds of the adult population is either overweight or obese. Certain breakfast, snacking and dinner behaviors are associated with achieving and maintaining a healthier weight. Research supports eating breakfast, planning snacks and dinner, as well as having enough fruits and/or vegetables to cover half of a dinner plate are associated with healthy weight.

Response

A three lesson series, *Three Easy Bites*, was developed by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service nutrition specialists. The curriculum promoted diet related best practice behaviors related to breakfast, snacking and dinner. *Three Easy Bites* session goals were as follows. Families would:

- Plan to eat breakfast, include foods from at least two MyPlate food groups, and include breakfast items on their weekly grocery list;
- Plan which snack foods they will eat, eat their snacks away from the television, and compare their snack portion relative to the Nutrition Facts serving size; and
- Plan their dinner meal, include fruits and/or vegetables with every dinner, and include fruit and/or vegetables on their weekly grocery list.

Participants could opt out of the survey evaluation process if desired. Nonetheless, 100 pre/post/follow-up survey sets were received from Hidalgo County. Results below reflect pre/post/follow-up data sets.

All participants (100%) reported that Better Living for Texans (BLT) was the first AgriLife program they had attended. The typical *Three Easy Bites* participant was female (100%), described herself as Hispanic or Latino (94%) and was 28 years of age. All participants identified themselves as white (100%). Educational attainment for most participants (66%) was high school/GED or less. Many participants (33%) had been advised by a health professional they weigh too much.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Results

Self-reported behavior improvements were noted during the time *Three Easy Bites* was taught (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of *Three Easy Bites* participants who answered always or almost always : pre/post/follow-up data sets (n=6).

	Pre-survey %	Post-survey %	Follow-up survey %
How often do you plan breakfast ahead of time?	0%	67%	100%
How often do you include at least two breakfast items from different food groups?	50%	67%	67%
How often do you use a shopping list which includes breakfast items when you go to the grocery store?	17%	66%	33%
How often do you plan snacks ahead of time?	16%	67%	0%
How often do you use the Nutrition Facts serving size information to determine how much of your snack to eat?	0%	50%	33%
How often do you plan dinner ahead of time?	67%	83%	33%
How often do you have enough fruits and/or vegetables to cover half of your dinner plate?	33%	83%	100%
How often do you use a shopping list with fruits and vegetables when you go to the grocery store?	67%	67%	100%


Hidalgo County results (n=6) indicate the *Three Easy Bites* curriculum goals were met by participants. Best practice behaviors with the greatest participant improvement were:

1. Planning Breakfast ahead of time
2. Using the Nutrition Facts serving size information to determine how much snack to eat
3. Fruits and Vegetables covering half of your dinner plate

The leader-facilitated learner-centered *Three Easy Bites* lesson approach may have helped clients internalize information and enhanced skills necessary to improve best practice behaviors associated with healthier weight. Research confirms consistent improvements in eating patterns can help clients achieve and maintain healthier weight.

VALUE

Better Living for Texans



These nutrition programs teach low-income audiences to prepare nutritious meals, stretch their food resources, improve their food-safety practices, and participate in regular physical activity. This not only improves the quality of life and reduces the risk of chronic disease for participants, but also lowers public health care costs.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Friend to Friend Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Andrea Valdez, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences

Relevance

The *Friend to Friend* program's purpose is to encourage women to get regular mammograms and Pap tests for the early detection of breast and cervical cancer, when the disease is most curable. Regular screening significantly increases the likelihood of finding cancer early, when treatment is more successful. Women living in rural areas of Texas are less likely than their urban counterparts to have had a mammogram or Pap test within the past two years. Mortality is also higher for rural women because of the later diagnosis.

Response

The project's goal is to decrease breast and cervical cancer morbidity and mortality for women living in rural Texas counties by improving screening rates and early detection of cancer. Funding was applied for and awarded by the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) to fund screenings and transportation to uninsured and underserved women in need of screening services. The County Extension Agent, regional cancer prevention specialist, and patient navigators plan and implement a *Friend to Friend* event. Women attending are given the opportunity to sign a commitment card to obtain a mammogram and/or Pap test within the next year and the option to complete a help request form for assistance in obtaining screening services. This year's event was held at the San Carlos Community Resource Center. With support from Hidalgo County Precinct 4 and a heartwarming welcome from County Commissioner for Precinct 4, Joseph Palacios, the event was a success with 94 ladies in attendance.

Results

- *Friend to Friend* was implemented in 40 Texas counties in 2015.
- 94 women attended the *Friend to Friend* events on October 1, 2015 at the San Carlos Community Resource Center in the city of San Carlos/Edinburg, Texas.

Demographics of women who attended the events:

- Median age was: 44.
- Ethnic breakdown:
 - African American: 0 %
 - American Indian/Native American: 0 %
 - Asian/Pacific Islander: 0 %
 - Latina/Hispanic: 95.6 %
 - White: 1.1 %
 - Multiple race/ethnicity: 3.3 %

Family and Consumer Sciences

- * Other/missing: 0 %
- 10 total volunteers assisted at party/events.
- A Physician, another Health Care Provider and a Breast Cancer Survivor urged women to obtain a mammogram/Pap screening at the events.
- At the end of the event 93.2% of women, aged 40 or over, correctly identified the need for a mammogram screening every year.
- 90 Women requested help to navigate screening and diagnostic services.
- 38 Clinical sites are contracted statewide for screenings, diagnostics, radiologists and lab services.
- 26 Mammogram screenings and diagnostics were paid for through CPRIT funds.
- 5 Pap screenings and diagnostics were paid for through CPRIT funds.
- Women were referred to other available sources for Breast and Cervical screenings and diagnostics.



VALUE

Cancer Prevention



Participants in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service cancer-prevention programs learn ways to reduce their risk of developing many forms of cancer. When participants adopt behaviors that reduce cancer risks, the public benefits through reduced public health care costs and increased productivity.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Hidalgo County

Developed by Melissa De Leon, Extension Agent-Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program with Program Assistants: Jessica Ugarte, Amanda Rodriguez, Emilia Padron, Iris Villanueva, Rachel Garcia, and Maritza Sanchez

Relevance

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) helps young families and youth with limited resources – those most at risk to suffer from hunger, food insecurity and the inability to connect with available support systems. EFNEP offers practical lessons in basic nutrition, food preparation, food budget management and food safety in settings convenient for the participants. EFNEP also includes a walking program for adult participants. Program graduates reflect significant, lasting improvement in eating behaviors and healthy food habits. Texas has a need for EFNEP – 2014 data show that 20% of Texas families with children under the age of 18 were living below poverty level, compared to 18% of U.S. families.

Response

In Hidalgo County, ethnically diverse EFNEP nutrition assistants reach youth and adult groups whose principal language may be English or Spanish.

In 2015,

- 2,300 families enrolled in EFNEP.
- 19,481 youth contacts were made through the EFNEP youth program.
- 121 EFNEP participants were pregnant and/or nursing.
- 66% of families were at or below 100% of federal poverty level.
- 80% of families enrolled in one or more food assistance programs at entry
- 98% of EFNEP adult participants were Hispanic/Latino.

Results

Adult Program:

Using “hands-on” experiences, EFNEP adult participants complete at least a six-lesson series on stretching food dollars, improving eating habits, and practicing food safety principles. As a result of participation in EFNEP the following food and nutrition behaviors were achieved:

- 94% with positive change in any food group at exit. Specifically, EFNEP participants consumed 0.5 more cups of fruits and vegetables at completion, compared to entry.

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- 88% improved in one or more food resource management practices such as using a list for grocery shopping.
- 95% improved in one or more nutrition practices such as using the “Nutrition Facts” on food labels to make food choices.
- 64% improved in one or more food safety practices such as thawing foods safely.
- 32% of program participants reported a positive change in physical activity.

Youth Program:

The EFNEP – Youth program is directed toward low-income school-age youth. These students participate in a series of fun and educational lessons on good nutrition and food safety as part of summer programs, classroom and after-school activities. The following results show how youth participants’ food behaviors improved after attending EFNEP classes.

- 86% improved ability to choose foods according to the Dietary Guidelines.
- 50% improved their safe food handling practices more often.
- 46% improved physical activity practices.

COST – BENEFITS OF EFNEP

Studies have shown that for every \$1 spent of EFNEP, \$10 were estimated to be saved in health care costs and \$2 saved in food costs by participants. For Hidalgo County, this is \$2.9 million in estimated health care cost savings and almost \$595,610 in food costs.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Child Care Conference Hidalgo County

Developed by Joanne Ureste, County Extension Agent-Family Resources

Relevance

Over 60 percent of children from birth through age 6 (not yet in kindergarten) receive some form of child care on a regular basis from persons other than their parents. The Texas Workforce Commission estimates that there are over 100,000 child care providers caring for more than 760,000 children under the age of 13 in licensed or regulated child care facilities in the state of Texas. Additionally, child care is the 16th largest industry in the state, generating over 145,000 jobs and \$2.3 billion in wages for Texans.

Findings from longitudinal research have clearly established the fact that quality does matter when it comes to childcare. Children who receive high-quality care (e.g., warm sensitive caregiving, well-educated child care staff, low child-to-adult ratios, small group size) develop better language, math, and social skills; exhibit fewer behavior problems; and tend to be better prepared for entrance into school. Having a well-trained child care workforce is essential to providing the high quality child care that children need to develop physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

Response:

On October 24, 2015, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service conducted a child care provider training conference in Edinburg for 19 child care providers and directors who provide care for 408 children enrolled in 2 child care centers or family day homes. Nineteen participants completed a written evaluation of the conference (see Table 1 for participant characteristics). A total of 114 clock hours of training were provided to child care professionals seeking to meet state mandated training requirements established by the state of Texas.

Results: Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 19)*

Variable	Percentage*	Mean
Age (in years)		39.0
Number of Years in Child Care Profession		8.1
Gender		
Female	89.5	
Male	5.3	
Ethnicity		
African American	0.0	
Caucasian	5.3	
Hispanic/Latino	94.7	
Asian	0.0	
Other	0.0	
Education		
Less than High School Diploma	5.3	
High School Diploma	57.9	

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Associates Degree	26.3	
College Graduate	10.6	
Program Type		
Home Day Care	0.0	
Child Care Center (other than Head Start)	89.5	
Other (e.g., Montessori)	0.0	
Program Licensed and/or Registered		
Yes	89.5	
No	0.0	
Attended Extension-Sponsored Training in Past		
Yes	31.6	
No	57.9	
Not Sure	0.0	
* Percentages do not always equal 100% due to missing cases.		

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of items related to the training. Nineteen participants completed written surveys (See Table 2 for participant responses).

Table 2. Child Care Provider Conference Outcomes (N = 19)*

Item	Percent in Agreement*	Percent not in Agreement*
Acquisition of New Information		
Learned new information	100.0%	0.0%
Will utilize new information to strengthen program	100.0%	0.0%
Intent to Use Information		
Will use now	100.0%	0.0%
Will use in future	100.0%	0.0%
Training's Influence on Provider/Program Quality		
Will be more effective provider	94.7%	0.0%
Will lead to improvements in quality of care offered	100.0%	0.0%
Relevancy of Training		
Helped provider obtain required clock hours	100.0%	0.0%
Topics relevant to daily work	100.0%	0.0%
Other		
Training cost-effective	94.7%	5.3%
Plan to attend another Extension conference	94.7%	0.0%
* Percentages do not equal 100% due to missing cases		

In addition to the above items, participants were asked to rate the quality of the conference compared to other child care trainings they have attended in the past by non-Extension organizations/agencies. Table 3 below contains the results.

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Table 3. Perceptions of Quality Compared to Other Non-Extension Trainings (N = 19)*

Item*	Much Worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much Better
Compared to other child care trainings you have attended (not provided by Extension), how would you rate the quality of today's training?	0.0%	0.0%	15.8%	26.3%	52.6%
*Percentages do not equal 100% due to missing cases					

Summary

As can be seen in the tables above, child care providers found the training to be very beneficial. Over 94 percent of participants acquired new information from the conference, considered the training to be very relevant to the work they do, plan to utilize the information gained at the conference to improve their programs, and consider themselves better equipped to work with the children in their care. Moreover, 79% of providers rated the training “Better” or “Much Better” compared to other trainings they have attended that were not conducted by Extension.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Money Smart Financial Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Joanne Ureste, County Extension Agent-Family Resources

Relevance

Many families face the constant challenge of managing limited resources to meet everyday expenses. The increasing complexity of the financial system and the lack of formal financial literacy education further burden families who are trying to make ends meet, particularly low-income families. The recent recession and slow recovery have heightened consumer awareness of the need for financial literacy education. Growing unemployment, foreclosures, and credit delinquencies have contributed to increased interest among consumers in budgeting, saving, and cutting back on spending.

This issue was identified by the Family Resource Program Area Committee (FR-PAC) as a response to the need for financial education for adults.

Response

Money Smart is a financial management program developed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). While targeted at adults outside the financial mainstream, this curriculum can be used with adults who have low financial knowledge and skills. The curriculum helps individuals build financial knowledge, develop financial confidence, and use banking service effectively.

Money Smart class topics include

- Introduction to Bank Service
- Credit
- How to Choose and Keep a Checking Account
- How to Keep Track of Your Money
- Savings
- Your Rights as a Consumer
- How Your Credit History Affects Your Credit Future
- Credit Cards
- Loans
- What Home Ownership Is All About.

Implementation of Program

- Alamo Community Center, Alamo, Texas
- Tropical Texas Behavioral Health, Edinburg, Texas
- Weslaco Housing Authorities, Weslaco, Texas
- J.D. Salinas Middle School, Mission, Texas
- Region One-McAllen Site, McAllen, Texas
- Halfway House, Edinburg, Texas
- Crocket Elementary, McAllen, Texas

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Results

For several years, participant evaluations have been analyzed to determine knowledge gained, skills learned, and intent to change financial management behaviors. Results consistently show a statistically significant increase in participant's knowledge of the program's concepts after the class compared to their knowledge before the class.

A pre-and post-survey are used to determine any changes in participant's financial management practices and attitudes toward money as a result of participating in *Money Smart* classes. Participants have reported adoption of several recommended financial management practices and improvement in their attitudes toward money over the 6 week series, including improvement in the frequency with which bills are paid on time, increased savings, open of savings and checking accounts, and developing a plan for spending.

Evaluation documents were received from 132 participants. Some participants completed a pre-survey, a post-survey, and end of session evaluations for each session they attended; others completed a pre-survey and end of session evaluations only; others completed a post-survey and end of session evaluations only; and others completed only end of session evaluations. The following discussion focuses only on those participants who had a complete set of instruments – the pre and post surveys and end of session evaluations.

13 participants completed both pre and post workshop surveys as well as end of session evaluations for sessions they attended. Although the length of the class series was only 6 weeks long, several participants reported making positive changes in their financial behavior.

Eight of these participants indicated they used a spending plan prior to attending the classes. Of the 5 indicating they did not use a spending plan, 2 responded that at the end of the classes, they were currently using a spending plan. This is a positive result that if continued, can help these participants improve their financial situations over the long-term.

Five participants improved the frequency with which they pay bills on time. Four participants reported that at the beginning of classes they 'Usually' paid their bills on time; at the end of the classes they reported 'Always.' Another participant reported 'Sometimes' paying on time and reported 'Always' at the end of the series.

At the beginning of the classes only 3 participants reported having a savings account. By the end of the classes, 2 more participants reported having savings accounts.

Few changes in how these participants paid their bills were reported. Money orders and cash are the most frequently reported means of paying bills. One participant who reported using check cashing stores at the beginning of the classes reported no longer using them at the end. While all participants reported using cash, an additional 4 participants reported now using money orders by the end of the class. The use of traditional banking/checking accounts is still not the norm with this audience. Perhaps the most positive results were shown in the pre and post questions relating to the participants' attitudes and behaviors about money. Participants were asked if they felt in control of their money.

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While most participants agreed with the statement, one who was not sure at the beginning agreed at the end of the classes. Eight participants indicated at the beginning that they had financial goals they were working towards. An additional 2 participants – who were not sure at the beginning - indicated they did at the end. At the beginning of the class 9 participants answered 'Not Sure' when asked 'I understand the way I spend my money enough to make a budget.' At the end of the class, 6 of them agreed with the statement. And finally, in the pre survey, 9 participants answered 'Not Sure' to the statement "I am comfortable doing business with a bank or credit union." By the end of the class, 6 of the 9 answered 'Agree.' These changes, while small are not insignificant given the short time frame between the beginning and end of the class. If sustained, these changes can result in positive long-term impacts on these participants and their families.

Of those that indicated their income category (11 of the 13) the majority of the group indicated their monthly household income was less than \$1500. The average age of this group was 38; 5 had not graduated from high school, 4 had a high school diploma, 2 had some college and one had graduated from college.

All participants in all of the classes (using all 132 evaluations) increased their knowledge of the concepts taught as shown in the following table (numbers in parentheses are the maximum possible score).



Module Title	Mean Before	Mean After
Bank On It	15.03 (24) n=29	20.79 (24)
Check It Out Part 1	12.37 (20) n=43	19.12 (20)
Check It Out Part 2	14.42 (24) n=35	22.09 (24)
Money Matters	12.32 (20) n=81	17.88 (20)
Pay Yourself First	16.18 (24) n=49	22.28 (24)
To Your Credit	20.34 (32) n=41	30.01 (32)



Family and Consumer Sciences

Child Passenger Safety Program Hidalgo County

Developed by Joanne Ureste, County Extension Agent-Family Resources

Relevance

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for children age 3 and up. For children ages 14 and under, the annual cost of motor vehicle occupant-related death and injury exceeds \$17.8 billion. Although safety belt and child restraint are the single-most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries, nationally more than half of children killed in vehicle crashes are unrestrained. Misuse and non-use of child restraints remains high.

The proper use of child safety seats reduces the risk of injury and death, leading to reduce medical costs, avoidance of lost future earnings, and improved quality of life. These economic benefits are an estimate \$2,238 per child age 0 to 4 and \$2,663 per child age 4 to 7 for new seat distributed, and \$634 per child for seat misuse corrected with an assumed 75% continued used. Based on this formula, the total economic impacts for the 55 inspections from January 2015 through November 2015 is \$77,382.

Response


Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Hidalgo County organized two Child Passenger Safety Events at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Hidalgo County and Alamo Community Center. Educational programs were offer along with car seats. The Child Passenger Safety event was advertised through news releases, media, and through information sent to area child care centers.

Results

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Hidalgo County served 55 inspections. The Family Resource Agent and the CPS Coalition taught families how to transport children correctly. During the car seat passenger event, 13 children were unrestrained. Families received a new car seat because of 3 car seats were recalled, 10 were missing labels, and 16 were old/unsafe.

The total economic impact for the 55 inspections from January 2015 through November 2015 is \$77,382.



VALUE	
Passenger Safety	Participants in the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Child Passenger Safety Program learn how to properly restrain their child in an automobile child safety seat, reducing the risk of severe or fatal injury. The program creates public value by saving lives and by reducing health care costs and long-term disability care costs.
	

Family and Consumer Sciences

Welcome to the Real World! Hidalgo County

Developed by Joanne Ureste, County Extension Agent-Family Resources

Relevance

Welcome to the Real World! is an experiential learning program that allows young people the opportunity to learn about personal finance through real-life learning experiences without the real-world consequences. This interactive, hands-on, real-life simulation gives senior high school youth the opportunity to explore career opportunities and make lifestyle and budget choices similar to those adults face on a daily basis.

While it may be no surprise to most people that high school students have little, if any, experience in managing their finances, it remains critical that teenagers get a better handle on these issues before entering the “real world.” In today’s world, financial education is crucial, but many young people are leaving high school lacking in the basic fundamentals of financial literacy, including such things as managing a simple checking account to buying a car or a home and even dealing with personal taxes. Numerous studies conducted on American youths’ understanding of basic financial concepts consistently reveal that young people don’t possess adequate financial knowledge to be financially proficient in adulthood.

According to a survey from the Hartford Financial Services Group, students and parents agree that college students were not prepared in their High School course to deal with financial challenges that they face in the “real world.” This is an obvious warning that we need to better prepare our young adults to make educated decisions about their financial future.

When youth enter the workforce without a basic understanding of financial literacy, they face a magnitude of troubles ranging from excessive credit card debt, to little or no savings, to an insufficient retirement plan. The financial choices young adults make have a lasting effect on their lives. Their choices can lead to a lifetime of debt and financial stress or economic stability.

The goal of the program is to implement a financial literacy curriculum into the classroom with a capstone experience to engage and educate the youth on financial literacy.

This issue was identified by the Family Resource Program Area Committee (FR-PAC) as a response to the need for financial education for youth.

Response

The *Welcome to the Real World!* program consists of two parts: financial education and a real-world expenditure decision-making opportunity. *Welcome to the Real World!* is an active, hands-on activity that includes career and money management fact sheets and gives young people the opportunity to explore careers and make lifestyle and spending choices similar to those faced by adults.

Family and Consumer Sciences

The Welcome to the Real World program relates to the Texas Learning Standards in the areas of language arts, mathematics, and social sciences. The financial preparedness of our nation's youth is essential to their well-being and of vital importance to our economic future.

The program is used to help young people:

- Explore careers
- Investigate how career choices can be influenced by education and other factors.
- Make consumer choices related to future independent living.
- Learn skills needed to manage their finances.
- Evaluate their success in managing their monthly income and expenses.
- Explore alternative to balance a budget.

In the *Welcome to the Real World!* simulation, students assume they have completed basic educational requirements for their chosen career, are single, 25 years of age, and independent with no financial support from family or others.

The participants select a potential career or occupation that they would like to pursue in the future. After they choose an occupation, they receive a monthly salary for that occupation. They then proceed through the *Real World* activity, deducting taxes, determining a savings amount, paying a student loan, if applicable, and spending their "salary" on necessary and other items that reflect the career and lifestyle they have chosen.

Using sample savings and checking account registers and deposit slips, students learn how to record and manage their accounts. They make the appropriate deposits/deductions and record the amounts in their checking and savings account registers for the following categories: clothing, entertainment, groceries, housing, insurance, transportation, utilities, and miscellaneous. They choose a "Reality" card, which represents the unexpected expenses and incomes encountered in the real world. After each choice, they make a deposit, use a debit card, or write a check and balance their check register.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Hidalgo County developed the following activities to address this relevant issues:

- Implementation of Program
 - Weslaco East High School, Weslaco ISD
 - Economededes High School, Edinburg CISD
 - Buell Central High School, PSJA ISD
 - McAllen Early College High School, McAllen ISD
 - Sharyland High School, Sharyland ISD
 - Sacred Heart Church, McAllen, Texas

During the simulation, students gain an understanding of the expenses and incomes associated with daily adult living. They make lifestyle and budget choices similar to those adults face on a daily basis. At the conclusion of the activities, students evaluate how well they spent/saved their money. They consider the choices they made and discuss what alternatives might be taken in the real world.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Results

- 320 youth participated in 2015.
- 264 (83% of) participants were satisfied with Welcome to the Real World activity as a way to learn about money management.
- Following the simulation, 267 (83 % of) participants increased their knowledge on how to create and follow a spending plan.
- 302 (94% of) youth learned how to balance income and expenses through Welcome to the Real World Program.
- Following the simulation, 280 (87% of) participants will likely open a saving account and 2% of the participants already have a savings account.
- 294 (91% of) youth had mentioned they will likely use and follow a spending plan.





4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Making a Difference in

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Annual 4-H Program Summary

County 4-H Youth Involvement

Chartered Community Clubs
Members Enrolled in 4-H Clubs
Youth Reached through Community-based Programs
Youth Reached through School-Based Enrichment Curriculum

County 4-H Leadership, Advisory, and Support Organizations

Youth Board Members attended Meetings
County 4-H Council Members attended Meetings
Adult Leaders & Parents Organization Members attended Mtgs

Total Youth Reached



of Youth Attending

Participation in County 4-H Events

County Participation in District Events

County Participation in State/National Events

Most Popular Club Projects in the County

Most Popular Curriculum in the County

County 4-H Volunteer Support

Registered & Screened Volunteers Supporting Clubs
Club Managers, Co-Managers, and Project Leaders
Hours Contributed by Volunteers in Support of Clubs

Livestock Show Premium Sale Proceeds*

Includes all projects (4-H and FFA)

Value of Volunteer Time Supporting 4-H



County 4-H Leadership & Personal Development Programs

Attended State-level Leadership & Personal Development educational or competitive events
Attended District-level Leadership & Personal Development educational or competitive events
Attended District Leadership Lab
Received 4-H Scholarships valued at a total of

Local Training Opportunities for Youth and Adults

Significant Leadership & Personal Development accomplishments from county Events & Activities

County 4-H Agriculture & Natural Resource Programs

Livestock Projects (all species)
Participated in County Livestock Shows
Attended State-level Livestock Shows
Attended District-level Agriculture & Natural Resources educational or competitive events
Youth Trained through "Quality Counts" Program

Local Training Opportunities for Youth and Adults

Significant Agriculture & Natural Resource accomplishments from county Events & Activities

County 4-H Family & Consumer Science Programs

Attended State-level educational or competitive events
Attended District-level educational or competitive events

Local Training Opportunities for Youth and Adults

Significant Family & Consumer Science accomplishments from county Events & Activities

Extension Education in Hidalgo County

Personnel

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