



Extension Education in Hidalgo County

Making a Difference

2014

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 2014 Educational Contacts

Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods: 1,361

Total Contact Hours at Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods: 99,459.75

Total Number of Participants in Group Methods: 163,827

Total Number of Youth Participants in Group Methods: 29,831

4-H Clubs: 24

4-H members: 643

4-H Adult Leaders: 70

Youth Curriculum Enrichment Participants: 35,205

Youth Special Interest Participants: 30,503

Master Volunteers: 48

Extension Education Club Members: 40

Leadership Advisory Board Members: 17

Committee Members: 54

Office Contacts: 3,504

Site Contacts: 11,499

Phone Calls: 6,357

Mail/E-Mail Contacts: 24,278

Web Contacts: 9,130

Web Page Views: 25,954

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Earth Kind Environmental Stewardship Program

Hidalgo County – 2014

Developed by Barbara Storz, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – Horticulture

Relevance

Landscape water conservation is critical to Texas and Hidalgo County. Irrigation of landscapes accounts for 60% of water use during Texas summers. Improper use of fertilizers and pesticides result in poor water quality and affect the long term community health. Reduction of landscape water use and protecting water quality is critical to the long term sustainability and growth of South Texas.

Response

27 Educational programs reaching 758 adults were planned with the horticultural committee and conducted by the horticulture agent, Extension Specialists, Master Gardener volunteers and community volunteers and directed toward Earth Kind practices in 2014. These programs were:

- *Collecting rainwater (April, October, December)
- *Using native plants, including grasses, in the landscape (January, March, April, October)
- *Using compost and mulch (March, April, October, December)
- *Water efficient irrigation and drought strategies in the landscape (April, May, September)
- *Earth kind practices, including building soils for plant health (March, October)
- *Using organic insect and weed controls (February, March)
- *Annual tour of homes – low water use landscapes (May)
- *Herb gardening (August, September)
- *Gardening for wildlife (January, April)
- *A Train the Trainer workshop on identifying and reporting invasive plant and insect species was conducted, in Weslaco, for volunteers and city and state park's staffs from Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, in partnership with the Ladybird Johnston Wildflower Center (September)
- *4 educational tours for Master Gardener volunteers to public gardens in Corpus Christi and Victoria and to 2 native plant nurseries were also held (April, May, June, and September)

An article series of 12 articles on Earth Kind practices to conserve water was published in the Monitor newspaper with a total distribution of 180,000 people for each of the 12 articles. Programs were promoted through a weekly newsletter (distribution 1,200), weekly newspaper column, and through a weekly radio program, along with fliers placed at local retail nurseries and at the farmers market.

A grant and donations (\$7,500) allowed Master Gardeners to install a Sensory Garden and to conduct Rainwater Barrel Workshops at the South Texas Educational Garden in San Juan, Texas. Additionally, 4 Master Gardeners completed advanced "Master Gardener Specialist" trainings, in College Station and San Antonio, and renovated the compost demonstration site in the Educational Garden.

Results

Program evaluations showed that 97% of respondents were completely or mostly satisfied with the program they attended; 85% of respondents intend to adopt recommended practices, 74% anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned from the program; and 98% would recommend these educational programs to others.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Future Plans

Master Gardeners are designing a Wildflower Meadow Garden at the demonstration garden, along with a sensory garden, and will continue to offer workshops on composting and rainwater harvesting, along with their Gardening in South Texas series in the winter and their Fall Gardening Festival in October and increase tours of the South Texas Educational Garden.

VALUE

Earth-Kind® Landscaping



The Earth-Kind® program teaches participants how to care for gardens and landscapes with environmentally friendly, research-proven techniques. Instructional topics include water conservation, responsible fertilizer application, and non-chemical options for controlling pests. Use of Earth-Kind® practices benefits Texas by saving water and protecting surface and groundwater resources from potential contaminants.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Citrus Greening Disease Response

Hidalgo County- 2014

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent – Horticulture and Heidi Arteaga, Citrus Greening Outreach Program Coordinator

Relevance

Citrus Greening Disease was discovered in Texas in 2012 in a commercial grove in San Juan, Texas. Additional pockets of the disease have been discovered across Hidalgo County in both residential and commercial citrus. Heidi Arteaga, Citrus Greening Program Coordinator, conducts outreach education for residential citrus, responds to public inquiry, coordinates campaigns to test residential tissue samples, and coordinates public participation and application of biological treatments against the Asian Citrus Psyllid, the insect carrier of Citrus Greening Disease.

Response

- Telephone and e-mail inquiries – Processed 1,350 requests from residents, providing disease information and insect control methods.
- Home visits – Visited 80 sites in Hidalgo County and collected samples for testing, where appropriate.
- Presentations – Provided 37 educational presentations on Citrus Greening and Vector Control for 1,820 residential citrus owners and Winter Texan Park residents.
- Conducted 3 Train the trainer events for volunteers, including Master Gardener volunteers.
- Biological Control – Identified volunteers with 26 suitable lemon/lime trees for outdoor rearing of *Tamarixia radiata*, the biological control agent against Asian Citrus Psyllid. Assisted in establishment of field cages, rearing and releasing approximately 261,300 insects in locations in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties.
- Conducted 22 events, at the farmers market, providing biological control insects for area residents, releasing an additional 198,000 beneficial insects in Hidalgo County.
- Developed bilingual educational handouts for residents on citrus greening that were mailed to 160,000 residents in 2014.

Media Events – Provided interviews in Spanish and English for 3 television stations, 3 radio shows, and 4 newspaper/magazine interviews. In addition, set up booths at events, including the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show, McAllen Home and Garden Show, San Juan Cinco de Mayo Event, Mission Community Agency/Health Fair and Welcome Home Winter Texans with Mission Chamber of Commerce and two events at U.T.-Pan Am.

Results

Biological control has been the preferred method in most Winter Texan Parks and it appears that Asian Citrus Psyllid control has been effective overall. USDA is working to increase production of the beneficial insect that reduces populations of Asian Citrus Psyllid.

Future Plans

Educational presentations will continue, as well as the rearing and distribution of beneficial insects. A bilingual educational mailing is scheduled for 200,000 residents in February 2015. Additional

Agriculture and Natural Resources

methods of biological control are being tested and we will work with scientists to establish these methods as they become available.

Junior Master Gardener (JMG) and Youth Programs

Hidalgo County 2014

*Developed by Barbara Storz, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – Horticulture
and Jennifer Herrera, Cameron County Extension Agent - Horticulture*

Relevance

Research shows providing children with vegetable gardening opportunities, coupled with the implementation of the Jr. Master Gardener (JMG) curriculum, improves nutritional knowledge and motivation to eat fruits and vegetables. Vegetable gardening improves math and science scores, increases vocabulary, and improves overall student attendance. As our area is consistently high in childhood obesity rates and Type 2 diabetes and schools suffer high drop-out rates, it is important to the health and welfare of our community to support teachers in developing JMG health and nutrition programs.

Response

A multi-county, multi-discipline workshop to improve the horticultural skills and nutritional knowledge of school educators is provided annually. Additional support is given to classrooms during the school year by Extension Master Gardener volunteers.

The **Edible School Garden Workshop** attracted 74 (24% increase over 2013) educators from Hidalgo, Starr and Cameron County schools for a day-long workshop with outdoor horticultural demonstrations and classroom activities based on the JMG curriculum, ***Health and Nutrition from the Garden***. This workshop was held on May 9, 2013 at the South Texas Master Gardener Educational Garden in North San Juan.

In addition to the train-the-trainer workshop for educators, a two hour JMG workshop was provided for 23 summer program educators for a regional Boys and Girls Clubs of Texas with participants from 9 counties. Summer camps were also conducted by Master Gardener volunteers for 25 youth in N. San Juan and for 45 children at Su Casa Esperanza in Pharr.

Results

Of the 74 school educators, 65 completed evaluations. 98% of respondents were mostly or completely satisfied with the workshop; 93% said they will utilize activities from the workshop in their schools and 98% anticipate utilizing the Health and Nutrition curriculum in their classrooms. Additionally, 94% of teachers will build a vegetable garden at their schools in the coming year and 98% would recommend this activity to other educators.

Collaborations/Partnerships

The Edible School Garden workshop was a partnership with Cameron County horticulturist, Jennifer Herrera, and was supported by the Hidalgo County Master Gardener volunteers.

Future Plans

The Edible School Garden will continue as an annual event and Master Gardener volunteers continue to assist with workshops and teacher support. Plans are in the works to hold the 2015 workshop at a school district elementary school gardens.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Rio Grande Valley Beef Development Program

Hidalgo County 2014

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.

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 backfat thickness and ribeye area. All data is provided to consignors.

Results

A total of 7 group methods resulted in a total of 279 contact hours of education. A bull gain test and heifer development program has been conducted each year from 1998 through 2014. Participants indicate a positive economic benefit to their beef cattle operations as a result of their participation.

A total of 1170 bulls, 974 heifers and 142 steers have been entered in the 17 years the program has been conducted. Currently, 37 bulls and 10 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 Simbrah 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 new dimension to the program.

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

Hidalgo/Cameron/Willacy County Crop Production Program

Hidalgo County 2014

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

Relevance

Over 100,000 acres of grain sorghum are grown annually in Hidalgo County. It is one of the most important crops grown in the Rio Grande Valley. The Sugarcane Aphid, a new insect pest on grain sorghum in this production area, was identified in the fall of 2013. The Hidalgo County Crops Committee determined that educational efforts should be initiated to address this emerging need.

Response


Independent and prior to local action, a multi-state task force of Extension Specialists and others was formed and research initiated. Locally, ag producers were educated on the sugarcane aphid utilizing a number of different methods. These included field days, meetings and publications: Cotton Pre-Plant Conference, information on the sugarcane

aphid posted to a new page on the County Extension Office web site, Sugarcane Aphid Informational Meeting, Sugarcane Aphid Field Day, Crop Options for Spring Meeting and close communications with crops committee members & Extension Specialists. Topics addressed: awareness of a new insect pest in grain sorghum, identification and scouting techniques, insecticide choices including information on Section 18 approval for Transform®, IPM considerations, honeydew threat to harvesting operations, etc. Research demonstrations conducted on producer farms were used to collect an unbiased source of performance data that will be used by growers to help determine the most profitable varieties to select for this area. New efforts to increase producer profits included rating grain sorghum variety trials for differences in tolerance to the sugarcane aphid and its damage.

Results: A total of 23 group methods resulted in a total of 2,821 contact hours of education. Independent estimates by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Cotton & Grain Producers Association determined that educational efforts by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension resulted in a net savings to grain sorghum growers in Cameron, Willacy and Hidalgo counties of \$66 million in 2014.

Important collaborators included: Danielle Sekula Ortiz, Dr. Raul Villanueva, Dr. Dr. Calvin Trostle, Dr. Luis Ribera, Rio Farms, Inc., Lower Rio Grande Valley Cotton and Grain Producers Association, Texas Grain Sorghum Association and numerous local ag industry company representatives.

Future Plans: Continue to funnel new information about the sugarcane aphid and its management to

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>

Agriculture and Natural Resources

local producers in a timely manner. Continue important hybrid trials for the major crops in cooperation with local producers, Extension Specialists and private industry. Continue the soil testing campaign, contingent upon funding.

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Emergency Management Education Program

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Hidalgo County

Relevance

Texas is subject to numerous disasters, whether they be 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.

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.

Results

Brian Jones, Ray Prewett and I met with Oscar Montoya, County Emergency Coordinator concerning a number of agriculture issues.

I assisted with development of a media story on recent rainfall received.

I participated in a meeting of the Valley Animal Issues Committee which is working on developing a plan for the Rio Grande Valley. I provided input into that process at a meeting of the committee.

I had a visit with the County FSA Administrator about the need to hold a USDA County Emergency Board Meeting to review emergency procedures involving the committee.

I communicated with the County Emergency Management Coordinator at various times during the year.

Important collaborators were: Dr Enrique Perez, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Cameron County, Oscar Montoya, Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator, Josh Ramirez, Health Director, City of McAllen and Bart Stockbridge, Texas Animal Health Commission

Future Plans: Stay engaged in the Rio Grande Valley Animal Issues Committee.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Hidalgo/Cameron County Pesticide Safety Program

Hidalgo County 2014

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

Relevance

Ag producers have a statutory requirement to obtain and maintain a pesticide license issued by Texas Department of Agriculture in order to use crop protection chemicals, important tools for agricultural producers. Extension is relied upon to provide the education needed in this process. Training is provided for those needing to obtain a license and continuing education is provided to local producers in order to renew their license.

Response

Educational training events were 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.

Results

A total of 20 group methods resulted in a total of 1278 contact hours of education. Four Pesticide Safety Trainings were conducted in 2014. For continuing education, 35 events were held, attended by 672 people who earned 1768 CEU's. The economic value of the CEU's earned was \$44,200.

Numerous continuing education credits were provided to ag producers during the course of the year at almost every agriculture-related educational meeting conducted.

New requirements for continuing education for aerial applicators continued to be a problem for local aerial applicators and educational training was provided to meet their specific needs.

Important collaborators were: 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

Water Education Program

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture, Hidalgo County

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.

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

A Master Gardener class was trained on water conservation so that they can pass that information on to others. A Drip irrigation workshop was held to educate homeowners on how to conserve water in their landscape.

Results

A total of 2 group methods resulted in a total of 64 contact hours of education. I taught the use of water conservation technologies and turfgrass management to the master gardener class. Water conservation topics include: 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 a hands-on activity to become familiar with drip installation. Turfgrass management topics include: establishment- variety selection, planting methods; mowing practices; water management including water conservation; fertility- nutrient needs of turf, spreader calibration, watershed protection; insect problems; weed control; management of shady areas and thatch management.

I taught a Drip Irrigation Workshop and the topics included were: Water Conservation- 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 a hands-on activity to become familiar with drip installation.

Important collaborators were: Barbara Storz, County Horticulturist

Future Plans

Continue to provide education on both water conservation techniques and water policy.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Welcome to the Real World

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez, BS, MPH, County Extension Agent- Family & Consumer Sciences with support from Weslaco Independent School District

Relevance

The current financial crisis has had a profound impact on Hidalgo County residents and Americans in general. This is a warning sign that we all need to better prepare our young people to make educated decisions about their financial future. With 35% of residents in Hidalgo County below the poverty level, money management and financial education is imperative. The goal of this program is to intertwine financial literacy education in the classroom with a capstone experience.

The purpose of teaching teens financial literacy skills is to provide youth the opportunity to experience real-life financial decisions without the real-life consequences. The youth will make a connection between education and career, and understand the importance of following a budget and strategies for handling credit and managing debt.

This issue was identified by the Family & Consumer Sciences Program Area committee as a response to the need for financial education for youth.

Response

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

- Weslaco ISD Teacher Training for 11 teachers (January 2014)
- Weslaco East High School- Welcome to the Real World curriculum implemented (374 seniors) (January 2014)
- Weslaco High School- Welcome to the Real World curriculum implemented (70 seniors) (January 2014)
- Simulation exercise at Weslaco East High School (February 2014) (76 seniors)
- Simulation exercise at Weslaco High School (May 2014) (43 seniors)
- County wide Teacher Training for 17 teachers (June 2014)

Both Weslaco East High School and Weslaco High School principals and staff were very proactive and supportive of this program and curriculum, which contributed greatly to its success.

Results

At Weslaco East High School:

- 72% of participants were completely or mostly satisfied with the activity as a way to learn about money management
- 66% increase in knowledge of how to create and follow a spending plan
- 71% increase in knowledge on balancing income and expenses
- 69% increase in knowledge of relationship between education– careers and potential earnings

At Weslaco High School:

- 86% of participants were completely or mostly satisfied with the activity as a way to learn about money management
- 94.4% increase in knowledge of how to create and follow a spending plan
- 83.3% increase in knowledge on balancing income and expenses

Family and Consumer Sciences

- 72% increase in knowledge of relationship between education-careers and potential earnings
- Teacher Training
- 94% of respondents were mostly or completely satisfied with the activity

What the students are saying:

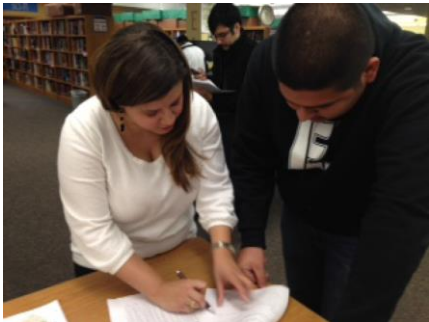
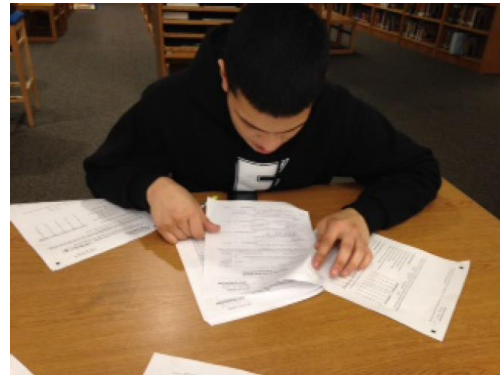
“I LEARNED THE REALITY OF LIVING.”

“IT WAS WAY DIFFERENT THAN I EXPECTED”

“I HOPE TO LEARN MORE, SO I CAN BE PREPARED IN THE FUTURE.”

“...IT REALLY DID OPEN MY EYES.”

“EVERYTHING SEEMED SO EASY, BUT ITS NOT.”



VALUE

Financial Literacy



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service financial literacy programs provide adults and youth with basic financial education and resources to help them set and reach financial goals and plan for the future. When Texans make better financial decisions and implement recommended financial management practices, they increase their ability to achieve financial security.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Walk Across Texas

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez, BS, MPH, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Science with support from Hidalgo County Judge, Hidalgo County Commissioner's Court, and Hidalgo County Departments

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.

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
- Team Captain's meeting (September 2014)
- Walk Across Texas marketing to county departments
- Walk Across Texas Kickoff (October 2014)
- Completion of (2) 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.

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Results

	Round 1 (July-August 2014)	Round 2 (October-November 2014)
Total Team Participants	43	180
Increased Average Mileage from Week 1 to Week 8	6.3 miles	13.5 miles
Total Miles Walked	58,455 miles	70,287 miles
Potential Economic Impact	\$633,482	\$2,377,290



Walk Across Texas!

Congratulations to everyone who participated in the first Walk Across Texas Challenge! The "Walking Warriorz" from the Health Dept. came in first place, walking 3,168 miles! The prize for Most Miles Walked Individually went to Monica Hinojosa with Emergency Management, she walked 645 miles!

Walk Across Texas challenges teams of 8 to walk 830 miles, which is the length of Texas, in 8 weeks. Along with walking you can also perform other types of physical activity, such as running or biking, and convert the time into miles.

Round 2 of Walk Across Texas starts October 6th! To join a team or start your own team, contact Rick Salinas at the Health Department (ricardo.salinas@)

WINNERS!

Walking Warriorz completed 3,168 miles!

MVP!

Monica walked 645 miles!

Participant comments on their favorite thing about Walk Across Texas:

"I enjoyed sharing my activities with the team."


"Pointed out that I need to exercise more."

"Gave me a reason to go walking."

"It was like having a little "good monkey" on my back,
Making me get up and be active."

VALUE

Walk Across Texas



This eight-week fitness and health program challenges participants to adopt a habit of regular exercise. Research indicates that a walking routine of this duration is more likely to lead to continued moderate exercise, which improves quality of life and reduces the risk of chronic disease (including type 2 diabetes). This program yields public value in the forms of reduced public health care costs and a healthier, more productive workforce.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Health Literacy

Hidalgo County 2014

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

Relevance

Healthy People 2010 defined health literacy as the ability to “obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Health literacy and literacy are closely related yet different in that health literacy depends on one’s ability in reading, writing, speech, and comprehension skills (National Institute for Literacy, 2008) combined with the expectations that the health system has of one’s interest in and understanding of health information and services. Health information and services are often unfamiliar, complicated and technical, even for people with higher levels of education. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education estimates only 12 percent of English-speaking adults in the United States have proficient health literacy skills (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin & Paulsen, 2006).

Literacy may influence the ability to access information and understand print materials. When this idea is viewed in the context of health and wellbeing – talking with a health provider, managing medications, understanding benefits and making healthy lifestyle choices – health literacy requires knowledge from many topic areas, including the body, healthy behaviors and the health system. Persons confront decisions about their health and wellbeing daily and in all situations and settings: retail stores, workplaces, health providers’ offices, hospitals and in their own living rooms. Few of these decisions are made in face-to-face consultation with a health provider (Nielsen-Bohlman, Panzer & Kindig, 2004). Persons need information they can understand and use to make informed decisions and take actions that protect and promote their health. Although limited health literacy affects most adults at some point in their lives, some groups are more likely than others to have limited health literacy (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin & Paulsen, 2006):

- Adults over the age of 65 years
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Recent refugees and immigrants
- People with less than a high school degree or GED
- People with incomes at or below the poverty level
- Non-native speakers of English

Adults with limited health literacy skills are more likely to report their health as poor and are more likely to lack health insurance (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin & Paulsen, 2006). Persons with limited health literacy are less likely to use preventive services, such as vaccinations and cancer screenings; less likely to successfully control chronic conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes; and more likely to self-report poor health (Berkman, DeWalt, Pignone, *et al.*, 2004). Additional research links limited health literacy to misunderstanding instructions about prescription medication, medication errors and mortality (Davis, Wolf, Bass, *et al.*, 2006).

Adding to the complexity of this issue, there are few studies which examine the impact of health literacy on costs for health care services. Studies do indicate that persons with limited health literacy have higher medical costs and use an inefficient mix of services. One study estimates the cost of limited health literacy to the US economy to be between \$106 and \$236 billion annually (Vernon, Trujillo, Rosenbaum & DeBuono, 2007).

One of the greatest opportunities for reducing health disparities is empowering persons to take a more active role in their own health and wellbeing. Health literacy is part of a person-centered care process,

Family and Consumer Sciences

essential to the delivery of cost-effective, safe and high-quality health services (Institute of Medicine, 2009).

This program was identified as a need from the Family & Consumer Sciences Advisory Committee.

Response

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension in Hidalgo County developed the following activities to address this relevant issue:

- Multiple marketing outlets were utilized such as the local newspaper, Facebook, and flyers (January 2014)
- 1 class per week for 4 weeks was held in February 2014 at Texas A&M Health Science Center
- Session Topics: Lifestyle Choices and Your Health, The ABCDs of Medicare, Talking with Your Doctor, and Medication Management
- Guest Speakers were Lebby Salinas (The Fooducator), a representative from the Department of Aging, a Physician's Assistant, and Diana Perez (Licensed Pharmacist)

Results

1. The following statements pertain to individual sessions. Please check No or Yes and circle a number in the After and Before columns: 1 is the most negative response and 5 is the most positive response. Please respond only if you attended the session.

a. Session 1: Lifestyle Choices and Your Health (N=8)	Yes
I understand half of my health status may be determined by lifestyle choices.	100%
I can name at least two changes to my lifestyle which may improve my health.	100%
I understand making small lifestyle changes may positively affect my health and finances.	100%

I would rate my confidence in being able to improve my health and wellness through lifestyle changes:

After the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)					Before the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
poor				excellent	poor				excellent
Min: 3 Max: 5 Mean: 4.13					Min: 1 Max: 3 Mean: 2.38				

b. Session 2: The ABCDs of Medicare (N=8)	Yes
I understand that Medicare provides preventive health and wellness benefits.	90%
I will schedule an appointment with my doctor for my annual wellness visit.	88%
I can name at least one local resource where I can get information about Medicare.	80%

I would rate my confidence in being able to understand my Medicare benefits:

After the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)					Before the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
poor				excellent	poor				excellent
Min: 2 Max: 4 Mean: 3.22					Min: 1 Max: 4 Mean: 2.11				

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c. Session 3: Talking With Your Doctor (N=6)	Yes
I understand the importance of being honest with my doctor.	100%
I understand how to prepare for an appointment with my doctor.	100%
I understand how to ask my doctor questions about my health and care.	100%

I would rate my confidence in being able to communicate effectively with my doctor:

After the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)					Before the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
poor				excellent	poor				excellent
Min: 4 Max: 5 Mean: 4.33					Min: 2 Max: 5 Mean: 3.5				

d. Session 4: Medication Management (N=7)	Yes
I understand that my medications may work differently in my body as I grow older.	100%
I understand how to complete my personal medication record.	100%
I will talk to my doctor and pharmacist about all the medications I take.	100%

I would rate my confidence in being able to understand and manage my medications:

After the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)					Before the Program (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
poor				excellent	poor				excellent
Min: 3 Max: 5 Mean: 4.71					Min: 3 Max: 5 Mean: 3.71				

2. The following statements pertain to the overall series. Please circle a number from one to five: 1 is the most negative response and 5 is the most positive response.

Statement (N=7)	Scale (1 = Worst, 5 = Best)				
The value of the material presented was	1	2	3	4	5
	poor				excellent
	Min: 4 Max: 5 Mean: 4.29				
The overall teaching was	1	2	3	4	5
	poor				excellent
	Min: 4 Max: 5 Mean: 4.29				
The teachers' knowledge of the subject matter was	1	2	3	4	5
	poor				excellent
	Min: 4 Max: 5 Mean: 4.43				
I will use the information I learned.	1	2	3	4	5
	strongly disagree				strongly agree
	Min: 4 Max: 5 Mean: 4.29				

3. Please name three things you learned from this series that made your attendance worthwhile.
- Eating the right food; Medicare regiments; Proper medication Management.

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- Taking questions written down to Pharmacist; Eating appropriate veggies & fruits throughout the day; Taking Medications at different times.
 - I will write down questions to ask doctor; I learned to take medications more serious; I learned I can ask Pharmacist questions.
 - When to take meds.
 - Continue to eat fresh fruits and veg; Exercise.
 - Understand better lifestyle choices; Understand how to manage my medications; Better understanding of Medicare.
4. The most effective part of this series was
- Medication management. (x2)
 - Medications.
 - I appreciate the Pharmacist.
 - How to manage my medications and lifestyle changes.
5. The least effective part of this series was
- Medicare. (x3)
 - Sorry I was late for Medicare.
6. Topics I recommend for future programs
- Information about different healthcare agencies: hospice, diabetes control.
 - More health issues.
 - Yoga for seniors, Zumba for seniors.

Selected Demographic Data (N=8)

- Age
 - Min: 64 Max: 77 Mean: 71.5
- Race/Ethnicity
 - Caucasian: 37.5%
 - Hispanic: 62.5%
- Education
 - High School: 25%
 - Some College: 62.5%
 - Graduate Degree: 12.5%

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Better Living for Texans – Eat Smart, Live Strong

Hidalgo County -2014

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

Relevance

In Hidalgo County, an estimated **234,303** individuals receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), historically known as food stamps. Of those participants, 25,453 are 60 years and older. 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 Better Living for Texans (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 2014, 83 Hidalgo County adults completed the BLT *Eat Smart, Live Strong* series. This program is targeted towards older adults and focuses on increasing vegetable and fruit intake as well as physical activity.

This report reflects the analysis of the pre and post surveys for those 83 participants.

Results

Most of the participants identified themselves as female (n=57; 69%) and Hispanic (n=71; 86%). Mean age was 69 years (range 30 to 93). Twenty-five (30%) participants received SNAP benefits; 7 (8%) reported they had received food from a food bank or pantry within the previous 30 days.

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Change in Fruit and Vegetable Intake

Behavior	Before the Program			Post Program	
	N	%		N	%
Frequency of eating fruit					
Never	2	2.4		1	1.2
1-3 times per month	12	14.5		11	13.3
1-2 times per week	21	25.3		14	16.9
3-4 times per week	18	21.7		27	32.5
5-6 times per week	10	12.0		10	12.0
1 time per day	12	14.5		9	10.8
2 times per day	5	6.0		6	7.2
3 or more times per day	3	3.6		4	4.8
No response	0			1	1.2
Amount of fruit eaten					
Less than ½ a cup	27	32.5		21	25.3
About ½ cup	33	39.8		33	39.8
About 1 cup	19	22.9		23	27.7
More than 1 cup	4	4.8		4	4.8
No response	0			2	2.4
Frequency of eating vegetables					
Never	2	2.4		2	2.4
1-3 times per month	12	14.5		9	10.8
1-2 times per week	24	28.9		8	21.7
3-4 times per week	30	24.1		22	26.5
5-6 times per week	9	10.8		11	13.3
1 time per day	11	13.3		11	13.3
2 times per day	4	4.8		8	9.6
3 or more times per day	1	1.2		1	1.2
No response	0			1	1.2
Amount of vegetables eaten					
Less than ½ a cup	24	28.9		19	22.9
About ½ cup	33	39.8		38	45.8
About 1 cup	23	27.7		23	27.7
More than 1 cup	3	3.6		2	2.4
No response	0			1	1.2

Upon entry into the BLT program, nearly 25% of the participants reported eating fruit at least once per day. At the end of the program, that percentage had decreased slightly to 23%. However, the percentage of participants who ate vegetables at least once per day rose slightly from 19% (pre) to 21% (post).

Change in Physical Activity

At the beginning of the program, participants reported that they received at least 30 minutes of physical activity an average of 1 day per week (range 0 to 6). At the end of the program, the average had increased to 1.7 days (range 0 to 7). This noted increase was statistically significant and is very encouraging.

Overall, the *Eat Smart, Live Strong* program is making a difference in the lives of limited resource, older adults by helping them improve their vegetable and fruit intake and by helping them to increase their physical activity.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Better Living for Texans – Back to Basics

Hidalgo County-2014

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

Relevance

In Hidalgo County, an estimated **234,303 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 Better Living for Texans (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 2014, 264 Hidalgo 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. Two hundred six (206) of the 264 participants the pre, post, and 30-day follow-up survey which allows us to assess the extent that targeted behaviors were adopted. This report reflects the data from those 206 participants.

Results

Participants were primarily female (92%) and Hispanic (91%). More than 40% of the participants (n=84) had not completed high school. Average household size of the participants was 4.3 and the average age of participants was 44. One hundred one (49%) of the 33 participants received SNAP benefits.

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Evaluation Results

Adoption of Behavior: The adoption of actual behaviors was assessed analyzing the data from 206 of the 264 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	66	32.0	168	81.6	159	77.2
Sometimes	118	57.3	37	18.0	47	22.8
Never	21	10.2	0		0	
Not Sure	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	
No response	0		0		0	
Shop for food with a list						
Always	83	40.3	183	88.8	186	90.3
Sometimes	94	45.6	21	10.2	17	8.3
Never	23	11.2	0		3	1.5
Not Sure	5	2.4	1	0.5	0	
No response	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	
Compare prices when shopping						
Always	99	48.1	183	88.8	194	94.2
Sometimes	86	41.7	22	10.7	12	5.8
Never	18	8.7	0		0	
Not Sure	3	1.5	1	0.5	0	
No response	0		0		0	
Use unit pricing when shopping						
Always	33	16.0	143	69.4	124	60.2
Sometimes	70	34.0	54	26.2	75	36.4
Never	74	35.9	4	1.9	5	2.4
Not sure	20	9.7	2	1.0	0	
No response	9	4.4	3	1.5	2	1.0
Run out of food before the end of the month?						
Always	48	23.3			18	8.7
Sometimes	114	55.3			71	34.5
Never	33	16.0			115	55.8
Not Sure	6	2.9			0	
No response	5	2.4			2	1.0

With the exception of using unit pricing, most participants were using the targeted food resource management practices either “always” or “sometimes” when they entered the BLT program. Immediately after the program ended there was a noted increase in the percentage of participants who intended to practice all of the behaviors “always.” Thirty days later, the percentage of participants comparing prices and shopping with a list was considerably higher than when the program began. Improvements were made in the other behaviors as well but to a lesser extent.

Immediately after the program ended, 174 (85%) of the 206 participants reported that they felt they would be able to spend less money at the grocery store. More than 63% (n=130) of the participants felt they could stretch their food resources to last the entire month “always.” The percentage of participants who reported “never” running out of food before the end of the month rose from 16% (n=33) to 56% (n=115).

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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	158	76.7	197	95.6	202	98.1
Sometimes	35	17.0	5	2.4	1	0.5
Never	6	2.9	1	0.5	1	0.5
Not sure	3	1.5	1	0.5	1	0.5
No response	4	1.9	2	1.0	1	0.5
How often do you thaw frozen food at room temperature?						
Always	69	33.5	18	8.7	3	1.5
Sometimes	88	42.7	15	7.3	10	4.9
Never	40	19.4	169	81.6	192	93.2
Not sure	2	1.0	2	1.0	0	
No response	7	3.4	3	1.5	1	0.5
How long did you leave your last meal out after it was prepared?						
Eaten/stored immediately	74	35.9	52	25.2	51	24.8
< 1 hour	67	32.5	124	60.2	150	72.8
1 – 2 hours	27	13.1	19	9.2	3	1.5
> 2 hours	12	5.8	3	1.5	1	0.5
Not Sure	16	7.8	6	2.96	1	0.5
No response	10	4.9	2	1.0		

More than 76% (n=158) of participants reported sanitizing cutting boards after cutting up raw meat or poultry when they entered the program. More than 95% (n=197) indicated intent to do so immediately after the program ended and all but four participants (98%) continued to do so 30-days later. The percentage of people “never” thawing food at room temperature rose from 19% pre to 93% at the 30 day follow-up. The number of participants who were eating or storing prepared foods within the recommended period of time (2-hours) was higher 30 days after the program compared to when the program began.

Other findings:

60% (n=123) of the 206 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: \$ 280.28

After BLT: \$ 254.52 Estimated monthly savings: \$25.76

** Based on 169 participants who reported monthly out-of-pocket food expenses at the beginning of BLT and 30-days after the program ended. Changes in out-of-pocket food expenses were significantly different.

If this decrease in out-of-pocket expenses were not due to an unexpected economic hardship, then for these 169 participants, the **annual savings would be an estimated \$52,251.**

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For these 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 51% (n=104) before BLT (pre-survey) and 77% (n=157) after BLT (30-day post survey).


179 of the participants rated the BLT program as “excellent” while 26 rated the program as “good.”

Client Success Stories

One participant stated that she is making more healthy meals for her and her family and she had even lost some weight.

One boy from a Boy’s & Girl’s Club asked Yolanda Rios, Better for Living for Texans Program Assistant, if she remembered what she had told him last summer. He went on to say that he was pre-diabetic and Yolanda had told him to eat more vegetables and to stop eating things like junk food and when he was hungry to have a vegetable or a green apple instead. He said that he is no longer pre diabetic and has lost weight.

Several female participants have voiced their new understanding of “unit pricing”. They stated “they didn’t know what those numbers meant.” At class the next week, several participants stated they had used that information in the grocery store in the past week.

V A L U E	
Better Living for Texans	
	<p>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.</p>

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Better Living for Texans-Get the Facts - Evaluation of Curriculum on Nutrition Label Reading

Hidalgo County-2014

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

Relevance

Health disparities among low income populations are well documented. Obesity, heart disease and hypertension are conditions which are more prevalent in low income populations. These health conditions can be improved thru consumption of a healthy eating plan as affirmed in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. However, dietary behavior change can be difficult and requires knowledge, skills, motivation and an environment conducive to change.

Response

Basic food buying skills enable clients to consider more healthful food choices when shopping. *Get the Facts*, a three-lesson series on the Nutrition Facts food label, was developed by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service nutrition specialists to enhance participant skills necessary for positive dietary behavior change. The skills-building series focused on comparing serving size, fat and sodium information when selecting food choices. These three items were specifically selected as they relate to obesity, heart disease and hypertension.

Session goals were:

- Serving size: Understand the difference between a serving and a portion; estimate common serving sizes; use serving sizes to create healthy, balanced meals using the plate method.
- Fat: Gain knowledge of the basic components of the Nutrition Facts label; understand the health consequences of consuming saturated and trans fat; compare food labels to select products lower in saturated fat and trans fat.
- Sodium: Explain that most (more than 70%) of the sodium in the American eating plan comes from processed foods; understand the effects of sodium on blood pressure; compare food labels to consistently select products with less sodium.

The evaluation of knowledge and intent to change behavior among *Get the Facts* participants was accomplished thru the use of pre/post/follow-up survey instruments. *Get the Facts* participants could opt out of the evaluation process if desired. Nonetheless, 81 *Get the Facts* pre/post survey sets were received.

The typical *Get the Facts* participant (n=81) was Hispanic (95%) and female (91%). Participants described themselves as white (96%), black (1%) or Asian (1%). Many participants (77%) had a high school diploma, GED or less. Many participants (44%) had been told by a health professional they needed to lose weight. The typical household had 4.7 members, of which 2.3 were children. Participants reported other program use: food stamps (49%), free or reduced price school meals (22%), WIC (31%), and food banks or pantries (6%). Many participants (58%) reported Better Living for Texans (BLT) was the first AgriLife Extension program they had attended. Most participants (91%) rated the *Get the Facts* lesson series as excellent.

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Results

Change in Knowledge

There was a statistically significant ($p < .001$) increase in mean knowledge during the time *Get the Facts* was taught. This was noted for the pre/post data sets (Table 1).

Table 1a. Mean correct knowledge scores (out of 6)
Pre/post survey sets (n=81)

Pre-survey	Post-survey
1.5a	2.2b

a and b are statistically different at $p < .001$

Change in Behavior

More participants reported label reading (Table 2).

Table 2a: Percentage of *Get the Facts* participants who reported always or almost always checking the food label while shopping for food.
Pre/post survey sets. (n=81)

Behavior question	Pre Survey %	Post Survey %
How often do you use the information about <u>SERVING SIZE</u> on the food label to determine the amount of food you will eat?	19	85
How often do you use the information about <u>FAT</u> on the food label when shopping for food?	31	90
How often do you use the information about <u>SODIUM</u> on the food label when shopping for food?	24	90

Self-reported behavior improved ($p > .001$) regarding serving size, fat and sodium food label usage during the time this lesson series was taught (Table 3).

Table 3. Mean food label usage scores (5=never thru 1=always)
Pre/post survey sets (n=81)

Behavior question	Pre Survey	Post Survey
How often do you use the information about <u>SERVING SIZE</u> on the food label to determine the amount of food you will eat?	3.3a	1.4b
How often do you use the information about <u>FAT</u> on the food label when shopping for food?	3.1a	1.4b
How often do you use the information about <u>SODIUM</u> on the food label when shopping for food?	3.4a	1.3b

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Answers coded: 5=never; 4=almost never; 3=sometimes; 2=almost always; 1=always
a and b statistically different at $p > .001$

Positive behavior change was reported by participants (Table 4).

Table 4. Selected Statewide Comments

Participant responses to: "What changes have you made?"
<i>Always reading nutrition labels and we're including our children in the process.</i>
<i>I now check the amounts of salt in food that I buy.</i>
<i>Shop for healthier foods.</i>
<i>I prepare menus and a shopping list that include more produce. I read all nutrition labels of food.</i>
<i>I check the nutrition label for calories and don't eat as much as I did.</i>

Get the Facts is a Texas SNAP-ED approved curricula available to help meet the needs of local county Extension agents. Evaluation results suggest *Get the Facts* curriculum was effective ($p > .001$) at improving participant knowledge and enhancing behavior related to nutrition label reading for both the pre/post ($n=2888$) and the pre/post/follow-up ($n=1597$) data sets. At the end of the series, an additional 44% of *Get the Facts* clients reported label usage while grocery shopping.

Because label reading skills are necessary for clients to make healthful food choices, the Food and Drug Administration has proposed significant changes to the Nutrition Facts panel to enhance consumer understanding when evaluating and selecting food items. The revised food labels may be released during 2015; food manufactures will have two years to comply with revised labeling regulations.

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Friend to Friend

Hidalgo County-2014

Developed by Adelita Munoz (Retired Agent); Program Continued and Reported by Andrea Valdez, BS, MPH, 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.

Results

- *Friend to Friend* was implemented in 44 Texas counties in 2014.
- 191 women attended the *Friend to Friend* events on March 28, 2014 at the Mission Community Center in the city of Mission, Texas.

Demographics of women who attended the events:

- Median age was: 47.
- Ethnic breakdown:
 - African American: 0 %
 - American Indian/Native American: 0 %
 - Asian/Pacific Islander: 0 %
 - Latina/Hispanic: 96 %
 - White: 0 %
 - Multiple race/ethnicity: 1 %
 - Other/missing: 3 %
- A Physician, and Other Health Care Professional urged women to obtain a mammogram/Pap screening at the event.
- At the end of the event 91 % of women, aged 40 or over, correctly identified the need for a mammogram screening every year.
- 177 Women requested help to navigate screening and diagnostic services.

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- 67 Clinical sites are contracted statewide for screenings, diagnostics, radiologists and lab services. Avg. monthly payments for screenings and diagnostics thru the contracts is \$32,636.00.
- 309 Mammogram screenings and diagnostics were paid for through CPRIT funds.
- 305 Pap screenings and diagnostics were paid for through CPRIT funds.
- 9 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.

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Family & Consumer Sciences Community Outreach

Hidalgo County-2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez, BS, MPH, County Extension Agent- Family & Consumer Sciences with Carmen Avila, Family & Consumer Sciences Program Assistant

Relevance

In order to increase healthy literacy and financial knowledge, it is important to educate the residents of Hidalgo County on healthy practices and basic financial knowledge. The US Census Bureau estimates the poverty level in Hidalgo County to be 34.8% with 62% of persons graduating from high school. Multiple programs were implemented in an effort to educate the community on a variety of topics including: Test taking & Study skills, Memory workshop, Sewing, Budgeting, Cancer prevention, Goal Setting, Fall Prevention, Green Living, and Bullying.

Response

The Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service in Hidalgo County developed the following activities and lectures to address these topics.

- Memory Workshop (1)
- Test Taking & Study Skills (1)
- Goal Setting (1)
- Budgeting (5)
- Sewing & Crafts (14)
- Cancer Awareness (5)
- Fall Prevention(1)
- Green Living(2)
- Bullying (3)

Results

Results indicate that Hidalgo County citizens attended numerous educational events and activities of increasing knowledge. Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service Hidalgo County would like to thank and recognize the cooperation of multiple school districts and parental involvement coordinators. Working with the Family & Consumer Sciences Advisory Board, the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service Hidalgo County will continue to offer programs that address the needs of the community. The results of these programs will lead to more educated citizens.

	Number of Sessions	Total Contacts
Extension Faculty	30	373
Extension Faculty & Volunteer	20	230
Group Methods	50	603
Individual Methods	-	241
		1447

Family and Consumer Sciences

Food Protection Management – Food Handler’s Program

Hidalgo County-2014

Developed by Adelita Munoz (Retired Agent); Program Continued and Reported by Andrea Valdez, BS, MPH, 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.

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.

Results

During 2014, 131 people in Hidalgo County participated in the FPM program and completed the food handler program. Change in knowledge (pre vs post) was used to evaluate the food handler program. In addition, client (customer) satisfaction surveys were collected from participants.

Food Handler Course – Participant characteristics

More than 55% of participants were female; 86% were Hispanic, and from a variety of age groups. More than 51% (n=68) identified English as their primary language. More than 53% (n=70) of the participants had a high school degree or less; the remaining participants reported completing some college or a college degree. More than half (54%; n=71) had no foodservice experience.

Mean score and % score were both rounded to the nearest whole number.

There **was** a statistically significant increase in test scores (comparing pre vs post) suggesting an increase in knowledge regarding food safety.

Mean score pre: 48

Mean score post: 89

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Percentage of respondents who answered survey questions correctly, pre and post.

Question	% correct pre*	% correct post
1. Which of the following statements about serving food is true?	47	84
2. Which of the following best describes proper hand and arm washing?	74	92
3. The removal of dirt, soil, food or grease is known as:	37	86
4. Which of the following statements about a hand washing sink is true?	76	95
5. Which of the following people is most likely to contract a foodborne illness?	21	86
6. Which of the following foods would not be considered potentially hazardous?	46	95
7. Cross contamination happens when safe food comes into contact with:	65	86
8. Which of the following statements best describes the temperature danger zone?	25	78
9. Which of the following is an example of cross contamination?	70	93
10. All of the following are acceptable tools for handling ready-to-eat foods except:	52	94
11. Which of the following food service employees must wear a hair net/restraint?	56	91
12. Which of the following is the best example of maintaining personal hygiene?	31	85
13. A foodservice employee should immediately tell his/her supervisor if he/she has:	34	86
14. Generally speaking a foodborne outbreak involves how many people?	63	95
15. Food can be contaminated by:	25	95

*Percent rounded to the nearest whole number

Family and Consumer Sciences

Client satisfaction with Food Handler course instruction

		Average Score (n=126)**
Client satisfaction with instructor's knowledge of the subject.		1.1 ± .41
Client satisfaction with instructor's presentation of course material.		1.2 ± .38
Client satisfaction with instructor's response to questions.		1.2 ± .45
Client satisfaction with instructor's involvement in discussion and questions regarding course material.		1.2 ± .44
Overall client satisfaction with instructor performance.		1.1 ± .33
Overall client satisfaction with the program.		1.1 ± .33


** Based on participant surveys received and entered as of 10/1/2014. 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.

VALUE

Food Safety Education



Both those who work in food-service establishments and those who simply cook in their own kitchens benefit from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's food-safety education programs. The resulting improvement in safe food handling benefits consumers by helping prevent food-borne illnesses and the public health care costs they cause.

Family and Consumer Sciences

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

Hidalgo County-2014

Developed by Melissa De Leon-Extension Agent, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

SUPPORTING TEXAS FAMILIES WITH GREATEST NEED SINCE 1969

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 – 2011 data show that 20% of Texas families with children under the age of 18 were living below poverty level, compared to 16% of U.S. families.

EFNEP REACHES DIVERSE AUDIENCES IN HIDALGO COUNTY

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

In 2014,

- 1,592 families enrolled in EFNEP.
- 19,559 youth contacts were made through the EFNEP youth program.
- 45 EFNEP participants were pregnant and/or nursing.
- 76% of families were at or below 100% of federal poverty level.
- 86% of families enrolled in one or more food assistance programs at entry
- 99% of EFNEP adult participants were Hispanic/Latino.

VOLUNTEER STRENGTHEN EFNEP

In 2014, 217 adult volunteers donated 1,788 hours of work to EFNEP in Hidalgo County. At the Texas rate of \$23.40/hour, this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of \$41,858. Volunteers make a difference in their own communities, and contribute to EFNEP's continued success.

EFNEP MAKES A REAL DIFFERENCE

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:

- 97% 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.

Family and Consumer Sciences

- 86% improved in one or more food resource management practices such as using a list for grocery shopping.
- 93% improved in one or more nutrition practices such as using the “Nutrition Facts” on food labels to make food choices.
- 63% improved in one or more food safety practices such as thawing foods safely.
- 31% 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.


- 88% improved ability to choose foods according to the Dietary Guidelines.
- 40% improved their safe food handling practices more often.
- 45% 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 \$3.3 million in estimated health care cost savings and almost \$657,218 in food costs.

VALUE

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program



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 lowers public health-care costs.

4-H and Youth Development

4-H Family & Consumer Sciences Program

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez-Family & Consumer Sciences Agent; Joey Gutierrez-4-H & Youth Development and Joanne Ureste-Family Resources Agent

Relevance

The Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service's 4-H & Youth Development Program places great value on the 4-H Family & Consumer Sciences projects. These projects expose 4-H members to the academic disciplines of family and consumer science and help them gain valuable skills and knowledge that can be applied to daily life. These projects also teach leadership skills. Youth Healthy Lifestyles programs, and related youth health and nutrition programs, are one of the cornerstone programs of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service. Nationally 19% of children ages 6-11 years old are obese. Childhood obesity is associated with an increased risk for diabetes, high blood pressure and adult overweight/obesity. The Food and Nutrition project teaches youth to eat balanced meals and the importance of fruits and vegetables to our diet. This is just one project of many available that teach valuable life skills. The goals of this program are to allow the Hidalgo County youth the opportunity to learn about living a healthy lifestyle and learn new life skills.

Results

County 4-H Family & Consumer Sciences Programs:

- 5 Youths attended State-level educational or competitive events
- 10 youths attended District-level educational or competitive events
- 65 youths attended County level educational or competitive events

Local Training Opportunities for Youth and Adults:

- 1 Fashion Show Clinic
- 2 Food Show/Food Challenge Clinics

Significant Family & Consumer Science Accomplishments from County Events & Activities:

- 1 County Food Challenge Team advanced to State
- 7 Fashion Show participants advanced to state
- 1 Hidalgo County 4-Her advanced to the National 4-H Fashion Show competition

4-H and Youth Development

4-H Leadership and Personal Development Programs

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez- Family & Consumer Sciences Agent and Joey Gutierrez-4-H & Youth Development

Throughout the year, 4-H youth participate in a number of leadership and personal development programs. In the past year 48 youths attended state-level education or competitive events and 193 attended District-level educational or competitive events and 40 youths received 4-H Scholarships valued at \$200,000.

County Leadership & Personal Development Programs:

- 15 Youths attended state level leadership & Personal development educational or competitive events
- 33 Youths attended District 12 Leadership Lab
- 130 Youths attended District level Leadership & Personal Development education or competitive events

Local Training Opportunities:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Recordbook Training | 16 (total participation) |
| • 4-H Ambassador Training | 14 (total participation) |
| • 4-H County Council Officer Training | 8 (total participation) |

Significant Leadership & Personal Development accomplishments from County events & activities:

4-Her's across Hidalgo County have attended prospect shows, including: Sharyland Rattler Round Up, Bobcat Show Down, Cowboy Classic, Cougar Classic, and Gilt by Association. The prospect shows are examples to the youth of responsibility, leadership and professionalism.

VALUE

Character and Leadership Development



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's 4-H Youth Development Program teaches participants leadership skills and character traits. Participating youth become mentors, role models, and leaders in their schools and communities.

4-H and Youth Development

4-H & Youth Development

Hidalgo County 2014

Developed by Andrea Valdez, B.S. M.P.H-Family & Consumer Sciences Agent; Brad Cowan- Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent; and Joey Gutierrez- 4-H & Youth Development Agent

The 4-H Program provides youth in every Texas County the opportunity for personal and mental growth. Youth who get involved in 4-H build their self-esteem and skills, by attending leadership camps, meeting new people, giving presentations, competing in various County, District and State competitions, holding officer positions in clubs, attending clinics and workshops that build their knowledge in various subject areas and by giving back to the community in the form of community service. There are a total of 24 4-H Clubs throughout the county with 643 club members enrolled and 244 registered and screened volunteers supporting the clubs, and 72 club managers, co-managers, and project leaders.

The Hidalgo County 4-H program serves youth throughout the county. Alone, this year there was a total of 35, 205 youths reached or participated in 4-H. This includes the 4-H members in the county, school-based enrichment curriculum, and community based outreach.

The Hidalgo County 4-H Program carries its own leadership through the County 4-H Council (Youth organization) and the Adult Leaders & Parent Organization (ALPA). These two organizations provide support for the 4-H program and opportunities for the youth.

Top County 4-H Events:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • 4-H Photography contest | 156 |
| • 4-H Recordbook Contest | 104 |
| • 4-H County Round-Up | 25 |
| • 4-H County Fashion Show | 35 |
| • 4-H County Food Show and Food Challenge | 55 |

Top Club Projects:

- Food & Nutrition
- Photography
- Rabbits
- Goats (Meat)
- Swine

Community Economic Development

Cooperative Extension Program- Livestock and Forage Plan

Hidalgo County-2014

Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-Cooperative Extension Program (Farm Advisor)

Introduction

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 methods were conducted by 1890 Extension Agents to address new and existing risk management products and services.

Program

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 Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee and 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)
- 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 several programs which provided outreach and education on USDA-Risk Management Agency's Feeder and Fed Cattle Price Risk Management Program, Brush Control Management and Beef Cattle Management.
- Agents evaluated data that was gathered by program participants, task force members and other stakeholders which will be used to evaluate the program.
- 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

Community Economic Development

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-RMA and USDA-FSA programs. This program will continue, addressing new government programs as they become available.

Community Economic Development

Cooperative Extension Program- Financial, Marketing and Production Management

Hidalgo County- 2014

Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-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 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:

- The Hidalgo County Small Farm Advisory Committee provided direction for our 2014 programming efforts and assisted in marketing, evaluation and interpretation of the program.
- 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 twelve USDA-Farm Service Agency borrowers in completing the FARM ASSIST program which helps them to satisfy the Borrower Training Requirements imposed on them by USDA-Farm Service Agency.
- Collaborated with the County Agricultural Agents in Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties by providing educational programs 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.
- Fifty-seven, one-on-one financial planning and management sessions for producers and youth seeking agricultural loans from USDA-Farm Service Agency.

Community Economic Development

Evaluation Methods/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.

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

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

- 95% of the program participants gain knowledge of USDA-Farm Service Agency's Direct and Guaranteed Loan Programs.
- 98% of the program participants gained the knowledge to develop a farm operating budget for their operation in 2014.
- 92% 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.
- 72% 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 breakdown of the loan types applied for are as follows: 6-Youth Loans, 19-1 yr. Operating Loans, 27-Capital expenditure loans (multiple year terms), 7-Farm Ownership loans and 16 Microloans.

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 having to utilize the services of a private loan consultant. The total money requested for 2014 amounted to \$7,587,650. This amount multiplied by 2%, totals \$151,753, which is the amount that an independent loan consultant would have charged. This was an average savings of \$2,662.33 for each of the fifty-seven participants.

Community Economic Development

Small Acreage Horticultural Crop Plan

Hidalgo County – 2014

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent – Horticulture with Vidal Saenz, Farm Advisor, and Ronnie Zamora, Cooperative Extension agent for Community Development in Willacy County and Jennifer Herrera, horticulturist, in Cameron County.

Relevance

South Texas has a population of 1 million people in an area well known for commercial crop production for over 100 years. There is growing interest in small acreage crops, as well as small animal production, as large farms give way to development and direct sales opportunities, such as farmers markets, expand. Often these small acreage producers have little or no knowledge of farming and ranching. This activity has generated a demand for basic production programs, as well as, programs on the business of agriculture.

Response

A variety of programs were planned with the Sustainable Ag Program Planning Committee and conducted for a total of 553 participants during 2014. These included:

- Strawberry production with a field day and tasting event (multi-county grant) (April)
- Wine Grape Field Day partnering with Rio Farms (March)
- Wine Grape Field Day partnering with Monte Alto Vineyard (July)
- Aquaponics Webinar with Dr. Joe Masabni, College Station (February)
- Aquaponics Workshop and Tour, Weslaco, with Andy McArdle (October)
- Backyard Laying Hens (July)
- Pollinator Program (June)
- Beekeeping Workshop (June)
- Meat Goat Workshop (July)
- Goat Reproduction Workshop in cooperation with Bradford Farms, Progresso (October)

Several specialists from both AgriLife Extension, A&M Kingsville and Extension in Corpus Christi and staff from the International Goat Research Center, A&M, Prairie View, provided program delivery for the Goat Workshop and the Goat Reproduction Workshop. The Meat Goat Workshop included several presentations on the business side of animal production and loan and grant information, along with production information. This was the third year for the goat workshops and Extension continues to get requests for programs on commercial goat production, both meat goats and dairy.

The strawberry grant is a multi-county grant project funded through a grant with the University of Arkansas and Wal-Mart Foundation. Hidalgo County initially hosted a program with Dr. Russ Wallace on strawberry production through a grant from NCAT (National Center for Appropriate Technology) in 2012. In 2013, Dr. Wallace secured the grant with the University of Arkansas for research on varieties that would work well across Texas, in two different production systems.

Results: Overall program evaluations indicate participants for small acreage programs were 48% female and 62% Hispanic. There was an 85% increase, over all programs, in understanding of the material presented; and 74% of participants expected to gain economically from what they learned. One participant reported, “I expect to gain financially just in knowing what to do and not spending money on things I do not need.”

Community Economic Development

The strawberry tasting identified three varieties that were most favored and these results were consistent with similar programs conducted in other parts of the state. The strawberry field day was heavily promoted and attendance (85) at this field day was the largest of several such events held in the state. One greenhouse grower commented that this “was a great workshop as I am trying to get ideas on new ways to utilize our greenhouse space to make up for the slow months.”

Future Plans

These multi-county programs will continue in 2015 with support from Prairie View specialists/agents and Extension staff across the state.

- The strawberry grant has been renewed and local small acreage growers are currently growing these strawberries and reporting their progress with each variety. These farms will sell the strawberries and report on their sales results and production in early 2015. Additionally, we will conduct a field day in Weslaco lead by Dr. Juan Anciso, Vegetable Specialist.
- Evaluations of both Aquaponics programs indicate that attendees for these two programs were more interested in small home systems, rather than commercial systems. This may indicate that commercial growers are not yet considering aquaponics as an alternative production system for south Texas.
- Additionally, a large percentage of attendees (67%) expressed personal, rather than commercial, interest in the information on laying hens. This program was very well received with 99% percent of attendees expressing they valued the information provided. Only 31% percent expressed that they would benefit economically. Their comments including appreciation on feeding and diet supplement information, as well as the information on diseases, shelter, and safety. One person commented that they were “just planning on enjoying having chickens, not making money on them.”
- Interest in wine grapes continues to expand, as does acreage, in south Texas. We now have acreage in Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties. We have one commercial winery that has opened and another vineyard and winery that will be opening for tours and wine sales in 2015. This new winery has grown grapes since 2010 and is a totally organic operation.

V A L U E	
New Landowner	
	<p>Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service programs for new and small acreage landowners teach participants the best practices to effectively manage the natural resources on their property. These practices help to conserve water, soil, and wildlife resources for all Texans. They also help to build local tax bases by increasing property values.</p>

Extension Education in Hidalgo County

Personnel

Andrea Valdez, B.S., M.P.H : County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences, Hidalgo County Coordinator

Brad Cowan, B.S., M.A.: County Extension Agent- Agricultural & Natural Resources

Vidal Saenz, B.S., M.S.: Cooperative Extension Agent- Farm Advisor

Joey Gutierrez, B.S.: County Extension Agent- 4-H & Youth Development

Joanne Ureste, B.S.: County Extension Agent- Family Resources

Melissa De Leon, B.S: Extension Agent- Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program

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