



**Extension Education in Hidalgo County**

*Making a Difference*

**2012**

*Improving Lives.  
Improving Texas.*

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has been dedicated to educating Texans

for nearly a century. In 1915, the agency was established under the federal Smith-Lever Act to deliver university knowledge and agricultural research findings directly to the people. Ever since, AgriLife Extension programs have addressed the emerging issues of the day, serving diverse populations across the state.

Through a well-organized network of professional educators and some 100,000 trained volunteers, Extension delivers practical research-based knowledge to Texans in all 254 counties. Our 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 those served are the hundreds of thousands of young people who benefit annually from Extension's 4-H and youth development programs.

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

## **Hidalgo County – Summary of 2012 Educational Contacts**

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**Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods – 1,958**

**Total Contact Hours at Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods – 102,363**

**Total Number of Participants in Group Methods – 77,337**

**Total Number of Participant Youth in Group Methods – 52,551**

**4-H Clubs – 23**

**4-H Members – 572**

**4-H Leaders – 50**

**Youth Curriculum Enrichment Participants – 16,264**

**Youth Special Interest participants – 28,020**

**Master Volunteers – 112**

**Extension Education Club Members – 85**

**Leadership Advisory Board Members – 22**

**Committee Members – 136**

**Task Force Members – 20**

**Office Contacts – 2,997**

**Site Contacts – 7,688**

**Phone Calls – 5,003**

**Mail/E-Mail Contacts – 19,289**

**Web Contacts -3,944**

**Web Page Views -26,338**

## Agriculture and Natural Resources

### Rio Grande Valley Beef Development Program

*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 5 group methods resulted in a total of 92 contact hours of education. A bull gain test and heifer development program has been conducted each year from 1998 through 2012. Participants indicate a positive economic benefit to their beef cattle operations as a result of their participation.

A total of 1,099 bulls, 899 heifers and 142 steers have been entered in the 15 years the program has been conducted. Currently, 62 bulls, 93 heifers and 33 steers 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 prior to the breed sale held at the Livestock Show and the Simbrah breed awards were presented during the Open Simbrah judging at the Livestock Show. A feeder pen of steers is in its third year and adds a new dimension to the program.

Important collaborators are: 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

*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:** Nutrient management is an important economic and environmental issue that affects water quality, soil quality and crop productivity. Sugarcane, cotton, grain sorghum and corn are important agronomic crops for the Rio Grande Valley. An estimated 70 percent of sugarcane producers could improve their yields which could enhance the profitability of this crop for all producers. New/underutilized crops need to continue to be investigated such as soybeans and sesame.

**Response:** AgriLife Extension provides educational resources for crop producers to gain knowledge which gives them the information necessary to become more efficient, economically sustainable and environmentally friendly. The Rio Grande Valley Nutrient Management Education Program is a multi-county soil testing program conducted by specialists and agents with Texas AgriLife Extension Service. The primary objective of the program is to educate producers about the economic and environmental benefits of soil testing and proper nutrient management. Over the past eleven years, this project has collected over 5,200 soil samples representing a total of more than 202,000 acres of crop land in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties. In addition, through educational workshops and field days, growers have received training enabling them to implement effective nutrient management strategies.

**Results:** A total of 37 group methods resulted in 2,542 contact hours of education. The economic impact of the RGV Nutrient Management Education Program was measured in terms of potential fertilizer savings that have resulted from increased adoption of soil testing. Using soil test recommendations and producer-planned fertilizer rates, the potential savings in nitrogen and phosphate are estimated to be 5.1 and 6.1 million pounds, respectively. Reduction in fertilizer application rates translates into an average cost savings of \$25.77 per acre, depending on crop and management history. Total potential economic benefit to producers since the program began in 2001 are estimated at \$5.2 million. This analysis does not include the value of environmental benefits.

Ag producers were educated on a wide variety of topics using a number of different methods. Topics included cotton, soybean, grain sorghum, corn, sesame, sunflower and guar production; conservation tillage; risk management; fertility management; marketing and many others. Methods included field days, educational meetings and publications. These included: Cotton Pre-Plant Conference, Grain Sorghum, Corn and Sunflower Field Day, Cotton Defoliation Field Day, Cotton and Sesame Field Day, Sugarcane Field Day and a Fall Corn Field Day. Research demonstrations conducted on producer farms are used to collect an unbiased source of performance data that is use by growers to help determine the most profitable varieties to select for this area. New efforts to increase producer profits included conducting an irrigated sunflower hybrid result demonstration and conducting a Guar Production Meeting.

Important collaborators included: Dr. Dan Fromme, Dr. Gaylon Morgan, Dr. Mark McFarland, Dr. Calvin Trostle, Dr. Tom Isakeit, Dr. John Robinson, Dr. Mark Welch, Dr. Paul Baumann, Dr. Luis Ribera, Dr. Roy Parker, Dr. James Grichar, Allan Berthold, Donnie Valdez, Rio Farms, Inc., Lower Rio Grande Valley Cotton and Grain Producers Association, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Grain Sorghum Association, National Cotton Council, Texas

## Agriculture and Natural Resources

Water Resources Institute, numerous local ag industry company representatives and the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation.

**Future Plans:** Continue soil testing campaign, contingent upon funding and continue important hybrid trials for the major crops. Conduct guar variety trials in cooperation with Rio Farms, Inc., local producers and private industry.

### Hidalgo/Cameron County Pesticide Safety Program

*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 10 group methods resulted in a total of 1130 contact hours of education. Five Pesticide Safety Trainings were conducted in 2012. Ninety-two percent of the 38 students received a passing grade on the exam administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture. The average grade for all students was 86.

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

We also provided Certified Crop Consultants (CCA) continuing education through the CCA certification program. 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; local personnel with Texas Department of Agriculture and Donnie & Kay Dippel with the Texas Certified Crop Advisor Program.

**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

### Earth Kind Environmental Stewardship Program

*Developed by Barbara Storz, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – Horticulture*

**Relevance:** Landscape Water Conservation is critical to our state and to Hidalgo County. Irrigation of landscapes has been shown to account for 60% of water used, especially during summer months. Improper use of fertilizers and pesticides result in poor water quality and affect the long term health of our community. Reduction of landscape water use is important for the long term sustainability and growth of South Texas and protecting the quality of our water is critical.

**Response:** 78 Educational programs reaching 1,054 adults were conducted and directed toward water conservation in 2012. These programs addressed conserving water by collecting rainwater, using native plants, using compost and mulch, and water efficient irrigation. In addition, 3 educational demonstrations were set up at local events to show the path of rainwater through different environments.

In addition to programs, an article series of 8 articles on Earth Kind practices to conserve water was published in two newspapers with a total distribution of 180,000 people for each of the 8 articles. These articles included information on native and well adaptive landscape plants, drip irrigation, mulch and compost.

Two grants (\$3,500) allowed Master Gardeners to begin work on a 1 acre educational garden, in San Juan, that demonstrates water conserving practices, rainwater harvesting, use of wind energy, recycling and use of native plants. A native grass trial and turf trial continue to be maintained as demonstration gardens by volunteers.

**Results:** Program evaluations showed that 97% of respondents were completely or mostly satisfied with the program; 83% of respondents felt they had learned what was necessary to adopt the recommended practices; 60% anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned from the activities. 99% would recommend these educational programs to others.

**Future Plans:** We will continue to offer these programs and expand our partnership opportunities. The educational demonstration garden will add numerous opportunities for outreach when it is complete (2014). Additionally, our Master Gardener association continues to sponsor advanced "Specialist" training for volunteers and this supports and sustains our program.



## **Small Acreage Horticultural Crops**

*Developed by Barbara Storz, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – Horticulture*

**Relevance:** 34 educational sessions, including a two day small farm conference, a four-part soils workshop; a goat workshop, a hydroponics/aquaponics program; a marketing workshop and a business planning workshop; along with a goat products class and a canning class were conducted for 661 adult participants.

This program enables small-scale agricultural operators to become more knowledgeable in effectively identifying and evaluating diversification strategies to reduce risk, improve their economic sustainability based on total management goals and optimal resource base use, increase knowledge of understanding the importance/value of business planning, marketing and best management practices for horticultural enterprises, including irrigation strategies and fertilization practices.

**Results:** Program evaluations indicate that 91% of respondents felt that the information was extremely or quite helpful to them and 100% would recommend Extension programs to others. Overall, 82% of growers expected to benefit economically from the information provided. Nearly 40% of participants were between the ages of 45 to 59 years of age, with 89% having some college or a degree. Only 34% of participants live on a farm with the balance living in cities. 36% of participants in these meetings were female.

**Future Plans:** A small grant from the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) will allow us to provide several workshops that have been requested in program evaluations, including more programs on goats and home food preservation; small fruits; marketing & business planning and a poultry workshop. In addition, we have a request for alternative orchard crops for growers who would like to diversify their citrus operations, in light of the recent discovery of citrus greening disease in south Texas. We are also working with NCAT to provide a small farm beginner program for veterans and a business planning meeting with Sam Houston State University.



Small Acreage Farmer, Rey Anzaldúa  
clears a new patch on his 1.5 acre farm.

### Outreach of Risk Management Programs

*Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-CEP (Farm Advisor) and Rolando Zamora, Extension Agent-CEP (AGNR)*

**Introduction:** Agricultural producers in south Texas have been in a tough economic situation for many years due to weather related events, such as extended drought, and have endured large production and financial losses. A series of educational methods were conducted by 1,890 Extension Agents to address new and existing risk management products and services, collaborating 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 to protect their farm and ranch investments.

The following educational activities were organized with the Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee and the Hidalgo County Small Farm Advisory Committee:

- Utilized local crop insurance agents to provide outreach on USDA-Risk management Agency's (RMA) Pasture, Range and Forage Insurance Program.
- Utilized USDA-Farm Service Agency staff to provide updates on government assistance programs and sign-up dates.
- Hosted several programs which provided outreach and education on USDA-RMA's Feeder and Fed Cattle Price Risk Management Program, Brush Control Management and Beef Cattle Management.
- Agents evaluated data gathered by program participants, task force members and other stakeholders. Agents used the data to evaluate the program and shared results with Commissioners Courts' and other stakeholders.

**Evaluation Method:** A one-page retrospective post test evaluation was administered to each participant to determine the level of clientele knowledge change.

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

USDA-Farm Service Agency

USDA-Risk Management Agency

RY Livestock Sales, Inc.

Starr Soil and Water Conservation District

Texas-Mexico Border Coalition

Starr County Farm Bureau

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

91% of participants gained knowledge of buffelgrass varieties in South Texas

91% of participants gained knowledge of the beef cattle market outlook through the year 2014.

77.3% of participants gained knowledge of range management tools to maximize forage production.

91% of participants gained knowledge of internal parasite control in livestock



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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 builds knowledge and changes 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.

## Global Food Security and Hunger-Agribusiness Technical Assistance

*Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-CEP (Farm Advisor)*

*Serving Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy and Starr Counties*

**Introduction:** The Rio Grande Valley has especially gone through major agricultural disasters in the last few years. Drought has caused an enormous loss of income to agricultural producers. Many agricultural producers and rural youth face 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 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.

**Program:** The purpose of our program is to enhance the business management and marketing skills of agricultural producers. This plan includes livestock production, brush management, financial management, marketing, and applying for assistance under USDA programs. The Hidalgo County Small Farm Advisory Committee provided direction for our 2012 programming efforts and assisted in marketing, evaluation and interpretation of the program. The cooperative Extension Program's Small Farm Outreach Training in Hidalgo County developed the following activities:

- Provided outreach of USDA-Farm Service Agency loan programs at Extension events, workshops and field days throughout the Rio Grande Valley.
- Collaborated with the local Agricultural Extension Agents and Ag Science Instructors to provide outreach on USDA's Rural Youth Loan Program to 4-H and FFA members and parents.
- Provided outreach on our program in the local media. Assisted ten USDA-Farm Service Agency borrowers in completing the FARM ASSIST program which helps them to satisfy the Borrower Training Requirements the USDA-Farm Service Agency.
- Collaborated with County Agricultural Agents in Starr and Hidalgo counties to provide educational programs on sustainable agriculture, including best management practices to control brush, feed and nutritional practices for beef cattle and performance testing on bulls and heifers.

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- One-on-one financial planning and management for producers and youth seeking agricultural loans.

**Evaluation Methods/Results:** A two-page retrospective post evaluation form was administered participants. The survey was used to determine level of clientele knowledge gained.

**Collaborators:** The Small Farm Advisory Committee of Hidalgo County provided direction for the program and collaborated with the following agencies: Several local banks, Texas Farm Bureau, USDA-Farm Service Agency, Ag Credit and Commodities, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and local Livestock Auctions.

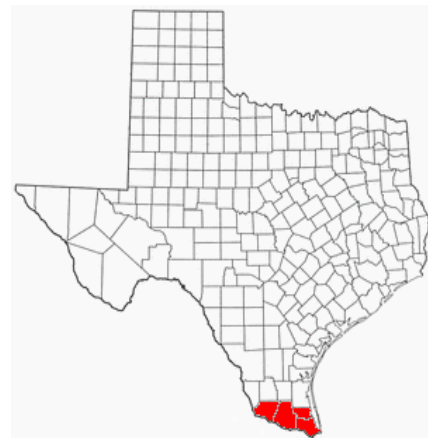
### Outcome/Results:

- 98% of the program participants gained knowledge of USDA-Farm Service Agency's Direct and Guaranteed Loan Programs.
- 96% of the participants gained knowledge to develop a farm operating budget.
- 92% of the participants gained knowledge in keeping production and financial records.
- 98% of the participants gained knowledge of their net worth or owner equity at the end of the program.
- 65% of the participants gained the ability to fill out a USDA Farm Service Agency loan application properly, without any assistance needed.
- 100% of the program participants were provided the technical assistance 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.

**Benefits/Impacts:** All of the program participants were able to submit a complete direct loan application to USDA-Farm Service Agency. They were able to save a 2% fee on their loan requests by not utilizing the services of a private loan consultant. The total amount of money requested for 2012 was \$5,279,260. This amount multiplied by 2% totals to \$105,585.20, the amount that an independent loan consultant would charge. This was an average savings of \$2,400 for each of the forty-four participants.



Participants in a risk management program listen attentively.



Local counties benefiting from Extension Services.

## **Chronic Disease Prevention and Management**

*Developed by Adelita Muñoz, County Extension Agent – Family & Consumer Sciences*

**Relevance:** CANCER is the second leading cause of death in Texas and the United States and is expected to become the leading cause of death within the next decade. Early detection is an important way to reduce the impact of cancer. Up to two thirds of cancer cases can be prevented if behavioral changes are made. Hispanics and African Americans have the highest rates of mortality for several kinds of cancer including breast cancer. A big number of Hispanic women in Hidalgo County are uninsured and lack the financial means to get routine checkups, including mammograms. 12,100 new cases of breast cancer and 2,700 new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed annually in Texas. Many cases of skin cancer are increasing among teenagers. Skin cancer is the seventh-leading cancer in Texas adolescents, age 15-19 years.

**Response:** FCS Agent and FCS program assistant met with program committee members to plan program schedule and develop local partnerships with doctors, dieticians and clinics to assist with programming.

- 234 Participants attended **CULTIVANDO LA SALUD** and gained knowledge on how to do self breast exams and learned the importance of doing self breast exams and annual check-ups.
- 50 Women listened to an oncologist on the importance of self-breast examinations and mammograms.
- 50,000 Radio Esperanza listeners learned the importance of annual check-ups, self-breast examinations and were invited to attend Cultivando La Salud classes.
- 407 youths attended a SUN SAFETY class and learned the importance of using sun screen. Many of the youth shared their knowledge with family who are field workers.
- 107 Participants attended the *Yo Puedo Controlar mi Diabetes* Program (Spanish curriculum)
- 50,000 Radio Esperanza listeners gained knowledge on diabetes programs offered by Extension.
- 7 *Yo Puedo Controlar Mi Diabetes* Classes were held. This Spanish program is accompanied with novellas that reinforce the diabetes concepts that were presented.
- Provided program with an ophthalmologist diabetic eye care.
- Provided a program with a podiatrist on diabetic foot care.

### **Results:**

- Women who attended *Cultivando La Salud* will continue practicing what they learned, and many have taught others. These women will be notified if there is grant money available for them to have free mammograms. The program will continue in 2013. The Head Start Program has already requested the program for all of their centers, in 2013.
- The Sun Safety will continue in the summer at the Boys and Girls Clubs. It is successful because children do not realize the precautions to take to protect themselves.
- Participants attending the Do Well Be Well with Diabetes program reported that they were able to better control their diabetes after having participated in the classes and their A1C results improved.
- Participants found it easier to make healthier food choices after the diabetes educator explained how carbohydrates, protein, fats and vitamins function.
- According to participants the novela format made learning easier.

**Future Plans:** All programs will continue for 2013.

## Family and Consumer Sciences

### Better Living for Texans (BLT) – Back to the Basics Program

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences*

**Relevance:** In Hidalgo County, an estimated 237,572 individuals receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Studies show individuals who live in poverty have dietary intakes not in agreement with current recommendations (i.e. Dietary Guidelines or MyPlate). This audience may not recognize their risk for foodborne illness. Having enough food to eat is also a challenge; an estimated 1 in 6 households in Texas experience food insecurity.

**Response:** The BLT Program is a cooperative endeavor with Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of USDA, a component of SNAP, BLT offers food and nutrition education to SNAP recipients, applicants, and other low-income audiences to 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.

**Results:** 6,024 adults and 15,185 youth participated in the BLT program with classes in meal planning, stretching food dollars, and adopting behaviors that reduce the risk of food borne illness. Evaluations reflect that 96% of participants believe they will save on out of pocket expenses and avoid running out of food.

### Walk Across Texas (a part of the BLT Program)

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences*

**Relevance:** This 8 week program helps people of all ages, support one another to establish the habit of regular physical activity. Walk Across Texas is recognized as a Best Practice Physical Activity Program by the Texas Department of State Health Services to reduce obesity and improve health.

**Response:** For eight weeks, teams, school groups, or individuals walk 830 miles across a map of Texas. Site managers are trained by Extension Staff and participants register and log their progress online at: <http://walkacrosstexas.tamu.edu/about/index.php>. The team walking the most miles and those reaching their goals are recognized.


#### Results:

- Walk Across Texas significantly increases participants' physical activity.
- 145 participating students and parents walked a total of 11,367 miles, 13.7 times across Texas.

#### Economic Comments:

- Medical research shows that exercise and weight loss can permanently or temporary delay the onset of type 2 diabetes in 58% of people.



VALUE	
Walk Across Texas	
	<p>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.</p>

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- Annual health-care costs for people without diabetes are estimated between \$2,560 and \$5,642 and at \$13,243 for people with diabetes.

### Participants' Comments

- "If I had known that I was going to feel this good I would have done it a long time ago."

"I feel so good that now I have convinced my husband to start walking with me and my son."

## Food Protection Management

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Science*

**Relevance:** Each year, an estimated 1 in 6 people become ill from the food they eat. 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. Older adults, pregnant women, young children, individuals with chronic disease 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:** A two hour food handler program, accredited by the Department of State Health Services was provided for front-line food service workers on the basic principles of food safety.

**Results:** 213 participants in Hidalgo County received their Food Handler Certification. Change in knowledge (pre vs post) was used to evaluate the food handler program. There was a statistically significant increase in test scores with 64% of questions answered correctly in the pre-test and 93% in the post test.

**Summary:** The food handlers program was successful in helping foodservice employees increase their knowledge about food safety, helping keep South Texas restaurant customers stay safe.

## Strengthening Families

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences*

**Relevance:** Positive Parenting practices play an essential role in children's development and later in life success. Parents are responsible for several key care giving tasks to help ensure that proper physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development occurs for their children. Research indicates that children who grow up with actively involved nurturing parents reap numerous benefits, including better school performance, increased self-esteem, greater access to financial resources and healthier relationships with peers. Parents with healthy marriages ensure the emotional developmental of the children. Families that communicate and that encourage the children to express their feelings are going to have high self esteem, good mental health, and be well rounded individuals. This also teaches children to have self control of their emotions. Parents that model good conflict resolution techniques teach their children to discuss vs. using violence. Caregivers also play an important role in the child's life. Research shows that an estimated 13 million children younger than six spend some or all of their day in a day care.



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**Response:** Seven major program efforts were implemented to support Strengthening Families: Healthy marriages/Ten Great Dates, Parenting Skills, Anger Management, Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED), Child & Adult Care Giving, Senior Summit, Communication Skills, and Leadership in Parenting.

### Results:

- 165 Strengthening Families/Parenting Classes were held throughout Hidalgo County and 494 participants gained knowledge & skills on anger management.
- 975 participants gained knowledge on conflict resolution, communication skills, developmental stages of children, respect, discipline, redirecting behavior and much more.
- \$37,000 in fees and the average cost for similar programs was saved by participants enrolled in the Strengthening Families Program.
- 424 plus families were reunited with their children when they presented Child Protective Services with their Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Strengthening Families Program Certificate of Completion.
- 178 Fathers were ordered to leave their homes, with restricted access to their children, until they actively participated in the Strengthening Families Program and presented a certificate of completion.
- 45 Fathers began seeing their children on unsupervised visits after having completed the program.

### Survey Results:


- 100% of participants were completely satisfied with the quality of course materials, responses to questions, relevance of examples, and the helpfulness & accuracy of the information presented.
- 97% reported that the information was extremely valuable to them and they would recommend or program to others.
- 90% of respondents plan to take actions or make changes based on the information presented.

**Fathers Reading Everyday (FRED):** Children whose parents read to them frequently are more likely to excel on reading proficiency tests. FRED encourages fathers to make time to spend reading with their children.

**Response:** Twelve presentations were made at schools and public libraries.

### Results:

- A total of 205 fathers from 5 different schools participated in the FRED Program.
- 90% of participants indicated that they were not reading to their children at the initiation of the program.
- 85 % indicated that were now reading daily to their children.
- 85 % of fathers indicated that FRED had

V A L U E	
Parenting Education	
	<p>Parenting programs from the Texas A&amp;M AgriLife Extension Service increase participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities, which are essential to a child's development. Parents who are consistent, respectful, involved, and serve as positive role models increase their children's potential for success and help prevent delinquent behavior during the adolescent and teen years.</p>

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brought their family closer together.

- 20 fathers said they never read to their children before this program.

**Comments:** A father said, "I thought I knew who my children were, but I really did not. This program has given me the opportunity to really get to know my children."

One father said he was very proud because his children were calling him "My Hero".

### Child Care Trainings and Adult Care

Presentations on discipline, developmental stages of children, nutrition for toddlers, nutritious snacks for pre-school aged children, proper hand washing techniques were presented to 165 child care providers. Customer satisfaction evaluations showed that everyone was completely satisfied with the overall training, completeness, accuracy & helpfulness of the information they received. The beneficiaries are the 1,400 children and adults enrolled at these child and adult day care centers.

### Healthy Marriages

This program incorporates two curriculums, Loving for Life & 10 Great Dates, in an eight hour program to help couples or individuals enhance their relationships and explore new ways to establish good communication, conflict resolution and learn about commitment. Participating couples enhance their relationships and explore new ways to communicate and resolve conflicts.

- 110 Participants attended a ten hour workshop.
- 7 Couples indicated that they have learned conflict resolution and how to communicate more effectively and are no longer contemplating getting divorced.
- 20 Couples that were going to get married received a 60% discount on the marriage license; a total of \$1,200 in savings.
- 15 Couples participated because they had heard the program was excellent and that it would help them.
- 15 Couples were able to work out their differences and became Extension volunteers because they were so grateful and accredited Extension and the county agent for saving their marriages.

**Comments:** One couple said, "We had never really communicated. We never talked about how to resolve conflicts. We were so angry that we would give each other the silent treatment and that doesn't work. This is an excellent class and we are telling everyone about it."

### Elder Care

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences*

### Senior Summit

Extension has conducted this event for the past three years in partnership with Congressmen Hinojosa and Cuellar, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the City of McAllen. 305 Senior citizens from across Hidalgo County come together to listen to topics, such as diabetes, social security, identity theft, nutrition, health care

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reform. The program is followed by a question and answer session with the congressmen. A variety of free services are available prior to the event including screens for: vision, hearing, dental, cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis and body mass index (BMI). Participants save money and more importantly gain knowledge on these timely issues.

### Master of Memory

Mastery of Memory is a six lesson series that empower the elder with knowledge and skills to understand how the memory works. 45 participants attended the series and gained knowledge on how memory works.

### Additional FCS Programs

*Developed by Adelita F. Muñoz, County Extension Agent-Family & Consumer Sciences*

**Relevance:** Schools, community centers, adult day care facilities, the Head Start Program and Extension staff request programs on learning and developing proper communication skills, time management, etiquette, stress management and team work to reduce work place issues.

### Response:

- 883 students participated in the goal setting and time management program.
- 2,975 students & adults gained knowledge on etiquette
- 130 participants attended 8 stress management workshops.
- 76 people participated in 3 team building workshops.
- 101 persons participated in workshops on communication skills.
- 95 adults, attending adult day care center workshops, learned emergency preparedness skills.
- 65 teachers in Lyford ISD attended team building workshops and gained knowledge & communication skills.

**Results:** A survey of teacher team work and stress management indicated:

- 95% of participants attending the stress management program felt they had gained enough knowledge to handle their stress.
- Most participants reported they never been trained on stress management.
- One principal reported that teachers were working well together after a team building workshop.
- 85% of teachers felt that the teamwork lesson was something that they needed to hear.
- 90% felt that they could apply every point on teamwork that was presented.

## VALUE

### Elder Care



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service elder care programs focus on "aging in place," an approach to using resources that allow the elderly who need assistance to continue living in their homes. Aging in place keeps elders engaged in their local community and supports property values and local tax bases.

## Family and Consumer Sciences

**Future Plans:** The FCS Committee has recommended that all programs continue into the next year. Workshops will continue to be conducted upon request.

### Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

*Developed by Luisa Colin, County Extension Agent–Expanded Food & 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 – 2010 data show that 20.6% of Texas families with children under the age of 18 were living below poverty level, compared to 17.9% 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 2012,

- 1,846 families with 3,594 children enrolled in EFNEP.
- 26,603 youth contacts were made through the EFNEP youth program.
- 45 EFNEP participants were pregnant and/or nursing.
- 90% of families were at or below 100% of federal poverty level.
- 85% of families enrolled in one or more food assistance programs at entry
- 100% of EFNEP adult participants were Hispanic/Latino.

#### **Volunteers Strengthen EFNEP**

In 2012, 269 adult volunteers donated 2,080 hours of work to EFNEP in Hidalgo County. At the Texas rate of \$21.91/hour, this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of \$45,572. 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:

- 96% with positive change in any food group at exit. Specifically, EFNEP participants consumed 0.2 more cups of fruits and vegetables and 0.2 additional cups of milk at completion, compared to entry.
- 79% improved in one or more food resource management practices such as using a list for grocery shopping.
- 88% improved in one or more nutrition practices such as using the “Nutrition Facts” on food labels to

## Family and Consumer Sciences

make food choices.

- 60% 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% now eat a variety of foods.
- 88% increased their knowledge of the essentials of human nutrition.
- 92% increased their ability to select low-cost, nutritious foods.
- 94% improved practices in food preparation and safety.
- 96% improved physical activity behavior or attitude.

### 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 \$658,354 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 Program

*Developed by Christina Perez, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – 4-H & Youth Development*

The 4-H Program provides youth in every Texas County 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 23 4-H Clubs throughout the county, with 572 club members enrolled, 300 registered and screened volunteers supporting the clubs, and 50 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 44,856 youth participation. This includes the 4-H members in the county, in-school 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 (Adult organization). These two organizations provide support for the 4-H Program, to provide opportunities for the youth.

#### Top County 4-H Events:

- |                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| • 4-H Photography Contest | 170 |
| • 4-H Record book Contest | 150 |
| • 4-H County Roundup      | 52  |
| • 4-H County Fashion Show | 30  |
| • 4-H County Food Show    | 25  |

#### Top Club Projects:

- Photography
- Beef
- Goats
- Rabbits

### County 4-H Leadership and Personal Development Programs

*Developed by Christina Perez, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – 4-H & Youth Development*

Throughout the year 4-H youth participate in a number of leadership and Personal Development Programs. In the past year 23 attended state-level educational or competitive events and 110 attended District-level educational or competitive events, and 50 received 4-H Scholarships valued at \$108,850.

#### Local Training Opportunities:

- Recordbook training – total participation: 60
- 4-H Ambassador training – total participation: 28
- 4-H Factor – Hidalgo County Officer Retreat: total participation: 70

## 4-H and Youth Development

### County 4-H Agriculture and Natural Resource Programs

*Developed by Christina Perez, Hidalgo County Extension Agent – 4-H & Youth Development*

Throughout the year 4-H youth participate in a number of Agriculture and Natural Resource Programs. In the past year there were 300 4-H livestock projects, 200 4-Hers participated in county livestock shows, and 46 attended State-level livestock shows, and 50 youth were trained through the “Quality Counts” Program for their animal projects. There were 20 4-H youth who attended District-level events in the shooting sports project.

#### Local Training Opportunities:

- 4-H Poultry workshop – total participation: 20
- 4-H Rabbit workshop – total participation: 40
- 4-H Beef, lamb, and goat project clinic – total participation: 15

#### Events and Activities

- Fort Worth Livestock Show – total participation: 2
- San Antonio Livestock Show – total participation: 35
- South Texas Agriculture Roundup – total participation: 40
- Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show – total participation: 250
- State Fair of Texas – total participation: 5

### Jr. Master Gardener (JMG) and Youth Programs

*Developed by Barbara Storz, Hidalgo County Extension Agent - Horticulture*

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

**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 56 educators from Hidalgo, Willacy 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 May 13, 2011 at the N. San Juan Community Center and Park.

In addition to the train-the-trainer workshop for educators, a one hour workshop was provided for 110 nurses attending the annual Health Ministry Symposium in San Antonio for Wesley Nurses.

## 4-H and Youth Development

This workshop was approved by the Texas Nurses Assoc. for Continuing Nursing Education Credits. Also, an Introduction to the JMG workshop was provided for a regional meeting of school district dietitians. One summer camp was conducted by Master Gardener volunteers for 34 children at the Su Casa Esparanza program in Pharr.

**Results:** Of the 56 school educators, 47 completed an evaluation. 91% of respondents were mostly or completely satisfied with the workshop; 80% anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned from this Extension activity; and 98% would recommend this activity to others. Although over 80% of teachers indicate they will develop a school garden, follow up visits during the year; show that only half this number actually installs gardens. A school dietitian, with Mercedes ISD, did install a garden with teachers and students that started in October, 2012.

**Collaborations/Partnerships:** The Edible School Garden workshop was supported by Precinct 2 of Hidalgo County, the Master Gardener volunteers, and was conducted in partnership with Cameron County Extension.

**Future Plans:** The Edible School Garden will continue as an annual event and Master Gardener volunteers continue to assist with workshops and teacher support. A children's garden is under construction at the North San Juan Park by the Master Gardeners and by 2014 this facility will be available for summer and weekend youth programs. In 2013 we will hold the teacher training at Hilltop Gardens in northern Hidalgo County.



## Community Economic Development

### Grow'n Growers Community Development Program

*Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent-Horticulture*

**Relevance:** The TCFF process identified Community & Economic Development as the number one issue in Texas. Locally, this issue, along with adult education and health, were identified as important community needs.

**Response:** In 2007, Extension partnered our horticultural committee, and Extension specialists to design a program to develop horticultural skills, food safety awareness and improve marketing and finance skills of participants. The first farmers market opened in (2/2008) with class members producing in backyards.

This 9 month educational program, with an 8 month market season, is offered each year. A weekly newsletter is sent to customers and a Facebook page is updated several times a week. Other agents and staff participate in food demonstrations and provide presentations on health and nutrition. Local chefs provide demonstrations.

**Results:** Beginning November 2012 the City of McAllen is hosting the Grow'n Growers Farmers Market and promoting events at the market. The number of producers has grown by 5 to 7 additional producers each week and sales for the Market more than doubled in the first weekend and has continued to climb in the new location from the previous season.

Customers are surveyed at markets to determine shopping preferences. 98% of customers value local production; freshness, and the fact that all food is produced by organic methods.

33 classes and field trips were provided for class members. Growers who adopted most practices (82%) increased their production and income significantly. Income of growers is being tracked so that we have comparisons. Producers are earning between \$600.00 per month to \$1,700.00 per month depending on the product they are selling (vegetables, fruits, nuts, meat, eggs and goat milk soap), and participation consistency and the effort they put into marketing and display.

All growers (100%) have increased the amount and variety of vegetables in their own diets and share recipes with customers, for radio, television and Facebook postings. Growers are participating in overall marketing efforts with one grower handling contact with radio and television stations and two other producers are keeping up with the Facebook® postings.

**Future Plans:** In 2013, we will develop a web page to offer more information about classes, markets and producers and continue to work with the City of McAllen to offer promotional events, as well as our own staff to bring programs on health and nutrition.



# Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Hidalgo County

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Vacant Position, CEA-Family Resources

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