



Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference

The Rio Grande Valley Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference was held at Rio Farms in Monte Alto. This was a free program for producers who were looking to learn more about cotton and grain production before the planting season.

- There were 5 CEU's that were offered to pesticide applicators.
- Topics included: Boll Weevil Update, Sorghum Production Supply and Demand, Corn Trade, RGV Cotton and Grain IPM Update, and a Cotton Management Update.
- Over \$5,000.00 in sponsorships was raised to cover the luncheon and door prizes

Rio Grande Valley Advanced Ranch Management Series

Beef cattle producers from throughout the Rio Grande Valley participated in a four-part series of educational programs called the Advanced Ranch Management Program. Participants learned about Reproduction and Genetics, Wildlife and Habitat Management, Marketing Strategies, and Agricultural Law as it relates to Ranching.

- Thirty-Five Beef Cattle Producers Participated in this Program.
- The first session was held at La Muneca Cattle Company, and it focused on Cattle Breeds and Genetic Selection.
- The second session was held at Texas A&M University in McAllen, and it focused on Marketing Resources, Risk Management Tools, Market Timing, and a Retail Market Tour.
- The Third Session was held at Pena Farms in McCook and the program focused on Wildlife Management and Population Surveys.
- The last Session was held at St. Anne's Parish Hall in San Manuel and the program focused on Agricultural Law, Land Leases, and Owner Liability.

Women in Agriculture Workshop

Cameron County Landowners attended a Women in Agriculture Workshop that was held at the South Texas Ecotourism Center in Laguna Vista. There were over 30 participants who attended this educational program.

- Promotional Booths Included: The Valley Land Fund, Cameron County 4-H, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and the Cameron County Master Naturalist – Pollinator Project.
- The following topics were discussed: Wildlife as an Ecotourism Business, Overview of the South Texas Ecotourism Center, USDA-FSA and NRCS Programs, and Agricultural Use Tax Exemptions.

Marine and Coastal Resources



Texas Master Naturalist

Our Texas Master Naturalist volunteers continued the rescue of pelicans and cold stunned sea turtles affected by winter storms. They helped recover **99** sea turtle nests on County beaches during nesting season. We graduated **48** new Naturalists in **2023**. Outreach and education events reached **19,772** youth and **19,433** adults with **12,749** hours of volunteer service to our community valued at **\$405,418!** We have now trained 691 Master Naturalists in the Valley.

Fisheries

Our shrimpers are testing several new devices that may reduce the capturing other sea life or bycatch. The Cameron fleet faces a bleak outlook attributed to high fuel costs and low shrimp prices due to imports. Our efforts in reducing fuel consumption have helped some. We trained 18 fishing tournament weighmasters and 70 marine safety drill instructors. The Bahia Grande restoration is valued at \$219 million annually for ecosystem services derived from 3000 acres of ever-expanding seagrass meadows. Cameron County can take credit for this historic wetland restoration!

Horticulture



RGV Small Acreage Program

The RGV Small Acreage Committee received a grant of over **\$500,000** from the USDA in 2021 to facilitate outreach and support for socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers. Over **210 participants** attended the educational programs Topics offered included a four-part RGV grape and wine Series, business planning, agribusiness marketing, USDA FSA Farm Loan, Ag Exemptions qualifications, ecotourism, mushroom cultivation and microgreen production. Programs include educational presentations, workshops, and field days, utilizing both face-to-face and online formats

- **Participants (n=164)** estimated an average **economic benefit of \$200**.
- Participants reported an increase in knowledge across all workshops and **88%** indicated this helped them make decisions for their own businesses.

Earth-Kind

Over **15** Earth-Kind presentations were provided throughout Cameron County. Topics included healthy lawns and healthy waters, herbs, rainwater, butterfly gardening, composting, native plants, container gardening, and many more. We participated in the Annual Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo and at **3** Earth Day events reaching over 500 participants.

- Horticulture newspaper articles were published weekly.
- Master Gardeners also provided several educational tours at the Education Garden.

Master Gardeners Training Program

This year I trained **14** new Master Gardener Volunteers. The classes consisted of **75 in-person** educational hours. This program is geared towards both residential and commercial audiences.

- Master Gardeners provided over **1,608** service hours valued at **\$51,134.40**.
- **100%** of respondents indicated that they definitely will or have already adopted Earth-Kind Horticulture practices learned from the Master Gardener Training Program
- **100%** anticipate an economic benefit between **\$50 to \$349** as a direct impact from the Master Gardener Training program.



2023



4-H & Youth Development

Cameron County 4-H Awards Banquet

- 30 Cameron County 4-H members and families gathered to celebrate the successful 2022 - 2023 4-H Year.
- 12 4-H Members received 4-H Awards for their achievements and involvement on a county, district, and state level of 4-H.

Cameron County 4-H Kitchen Safety Workshop

- 19 Cameron County 4-H members, 4 Adults Leader Volunteers attend our Food Show / Food Challenge Kitchen Safety Workshop.
- The members and leaders learned how to fight bacteria, kitchen tools, and knife safety to ensure a safe experience in the kitchen and contests we host on a county, district, and state level of 4-H.



2023



CEP 4-H & Youth Development

Heroes 4-Health

The goals of the Heroes 4-Health program are to mobilize underserved youth to take action around nutritional deficiencies, healthy food choices, and physical activity. CEP Family & Community Health agent and CEP 4-H & Youth Development agent collaborated to implement the Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness curriculum (3rd-12th grade), which includes 8 nutrition lessons, food demonstrations, and physical fitness activities. The target audience was afterschool youth in various schools within Harlingen, San Benito, and Brownsville school districts. Across all program sites, 339 youth participants were reached. After the program, 82.7% of youth reported that they will drink the recommended amount of water, 90.8% said they learned healthy food choices, 76.5% said they will stay physically active, and 90.8% learned how to follow a recipe. In addition, 10 Heroes 4-Health program ambassadors were recruited from Porter Early College High School, to implement nutrition programming in their school.

Juntos 4-H Program

Juntos 4-H is a 5-year college and career readiness program that engages a new group of 8th grade students and their families from Berta Cabaza Middle School (San Benito, TX) each year and offers them a variety of program opportunities. Since August 2022, 38 youth and 31 parents have participated in Juntos program in some capacity. After a series of family workshops in the fall semester, families (28 participants) continued with 3 more family nights beginning in January 2023, where speakers were brought in from the community to educate youth and their parents on various education and career pathways.

Other Juntos activities implemented during the school year included 4-H club activities, Navience College Assessments, and success coaching. In June 2023, 16 youth and 3 program volunteers participated in educational field trip to Isla Blanca Park-South Padre Island. Partnering with Texas A&M AgriLife Marine Agent, Tony Reisinger and UTRGV Coastal Studies Lab, youth were able to tour the lab and the coastline, learning about marine life and natural resources.

On July 23-26th, 15 Juntos youth and 7 parents participated in 2023 Juntos Summer Academy, a 4-day event in San Antonio, TX, where students were exposed to many learning opportunities in the areas of leadership, college and career readiness, 4-H projects, and teambuilding. Students also toured two college campuses, Texas State University and University of Texas San Antonio.



2023

Family & Community Health

Strong Bodies

The **Strong Bodies Program**, also known as **Strong Women Strength Training**, is a nationally (and internationally) disseminated evidence-based community strength-training program that aims to improve the health and well-being of adults by increasing access to structured, safe, and effective strength training programs. Individuals in the program **meet twice per week for six-months** to strength train using basic equipment such as dumbbells and ankle weights.

Participant Demographic Information for Cameron County

Twenty-eight adults enrolled in the **Strong People Strong Bodies** program from **January 17, 2023 – June 14, 2023**. Only **twenty-three** participants completed the program. **Ninety-nine** percent were satisfied with the program. **Ninety-eight** percent said their health improved because of the program and **95%** said they are more active. From the fitness test there was an improvement from **two inches to six inches**.

Childcare Provider

Childcare Spanish Annual Conference. The conference targeted approximately **692 childcare centers** and their staff in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. **Nine childcare centers** enrolled, there were **forty-four** participants, serving **441 children**. Participants received **four clock hours** towards their licensing, an overall total of **176 clock hours** were given at the childcare conference.

Walk Across Texas

Walk Across Texas program. For **8 weeks** **ninety-nine** participants walked, swam, and danced a total of **50131.8500 miles**. Participant benefits helped lower their A1C, their physical, mental and health improved. The economic impact was **\$609,805**.

Dinner Tonight

Dinner Tonight Program aims to provide healthy recipes for Texans and increase self-efficacy in meal planning. The program Dinner Tonight was implemented in Partnership with **Commissioner Sofia Benavides** and **Bob Clark Social Services** in **Brownsville**. **Judge Eddie Trevino, Commissioner Sofia Benavides**, and **Rosa Guel** led the cooking demonstration. We had **eighty-four participants** and **ten vendors**.



2023

Family & Community Health



Health Aging

I partnered with Cano Health, a senior-focused primary care group, to provide lessons to educate their health center participants regarding the following topics:

*Fall Prevention, *How to Cope with a Serious Illness Diagnosis, *Healthy Vision, *Arthritis, *Dementia and Alzheimer's disease, *Heat stroke & heat exhaustion prevention, *Elder Abuse, *Crohn's and Colitis disease, *Medication Management, *Isolation & Depression, *Shingles, *Nutrition, *Physical Activity, *Diabetes, * Blood pressure

The sessions were held weekly from February **2023** to the present. A total of **291** participants from both locations have attended the weekly programming. Program participants report positive feedback after attending the classes. They report that they are eating healthier, moving more, and are more aware of and practicing disease prevention & management due to attending the CEP/FCH Healthy Aging programming at Cano Health centers in Cameron County.

Heroes 4 Health: Youth Nutrition

HCISD Teen Cuisine – CEP: Agent Carter trained nine staff members from the Harlingen Consolidated School District's Afterschool Centers for Education program on implementing the Teen Cuisine youth nutrition program. The staff members taught the lessons over ten weeks at their respective campuses, wherein the students learned vital concepts about nutrition, food preparation, food safety, and physical activity. Approximately **225** students participated in the program.

A Taste of Latin American Heritage

A Taste of Latin American Heritage is a plant-based nutrition & cooking program created by Oldways: Health Through Heritage. Oldways believes the best way to inspire healthy eating is to introduce participants to their ancestors' traditional healthy foods and flavors. Over **50** adult participants from La Feria ISD, Brownsville ISD, and San Benito ISD parent centers completed the program.

2023



Better Living for Texans

Better Living for Texans (BLT) is a nutrition education program grant-funded by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the Texas Health and Human Service Commission (HHSC). The BLT program helps individuals increase their food security practices, cook healthier meals, become more physically fit, spend less money on groceries, and grow their own food. While attempting to prevent obesity, all BLT programs place a major emphasis on nutrition, physical activity, and gardening.

Walk N Talk: Rethink Your Drink!

An 8-week physical activity program for all ages that teaches about different types of beverages that can help with hydration, nutrition, and maintaining a healthy weight. The emphasis is on beverages with little or no added sugar and promotes physical activity by tracking miles walked toward the goal of 832 miles. The program was implemented at Combes Community Center, Burns Elementary School in Brownsville, and with community outreach groups with 21 adults completing the program.

Color Me Healthy for SNAP-Ed

A 9-session nutrition and physical activity program for four and five-year-old children. It is intended to stimulate young children's senses, including touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste. It teaches children that healthy eating and physical activity can be enjoyable using color, music, and sensory exploration. The program was implemented at La Encantada Elementary School in San Benito and IDEA-Harlingen with 53 youth graduates.

Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities

The Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities Program was held throughout Cameron County in 2023. Participation continues to increase at 79 total participants this year, as well as, expanded locations. This year the program was held with La Feria ISD, Brownsville ISD, Brownsville Wellness Center, La Feria Recreation Center, and New Hope Community church. Most locations have installed garden beds and have harvested potatoes, kale, swiss chard, tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, and other vegetable varieties. Participants learned how to care for and grow vegetables, the importance of vegetable consumption and ways to increase their daily physical activity.

Early Childhood Learn, Grow, Eat & Go!

The newly introduced Early Childhood Learn, Grow, Eat & Go! is a 4-week program with daily sessions and lessons. This program was held in the Summer at Lamar Elementary Dual Language Academy with Harlingen ISD Multi Language Department. Nidia Garcia, BLT Extension Agent Cameron County, and Gloria Carter, Praire View A&M University Cooperative Extension Agent, who implemented and delivered the program to about 90 Pre-Kinder and Kindergarten Students. Students learned about the roots and stems of plants, planting carrots, tasted different vegetables and sang songs related to gardening and basic gardening concepts.

Be Well, Live Well

A five-session series that assists older adults in achieving the goal of successful aging. Reduced disease risk, high cognitive and physical capacity, and active participation in life have all been defined as signs of successful aging. The program promotes nutrition and physical activity for older adults and sessions were implemented at Senior Community Centers in Harlingen and Senior Living Apartment Complex in Brownsville with 27 older adults completing the program.

A Fresh Start to a Healthier You!

A four-session series is a holistic adult-learning series that uses real-world knowledge and experience to help change lives and promote wellness. Encourages increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, ensuring the safety of food, and managing food resources. The program was implemented at Brownsville ISD, San Benito CISD, and La Feria ISD with 92 adults completing the program.

Healthy Carbohydrates

A four-session course designed for people interested in learning more about how to prevent chronic disease (specifically diabetes and obesity) through nutrition. Encourages a healthy eating pattern to prevent or delay the onset of diet-related chronic diseases. The program was implemented at the First Baptist Church of Los Fresnos, La Villita Apartments, and Huntington at Paseo de la Resaca Apartments with 21 adults completing the program.

Choose Healthy

A four-session program for middle school students. The goal of this series is to help young teenagers understand fundamental nutrition and wellness concepts. The curriculum was created to encourage young people to adopt healthier eating habits. The program was implemented at Stillman Middle School and Oliveria Middle School in Brownsville with 289 middle school students completing the program.



2023

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. Program graduates reflect significant, lasting improvement in eating behaviors and healthy food habits. Texas has a need for **EFNEP—2023** data show that **20%** of Texas families with children under the **age of 18** were living below poverty level, compared to **17%** of U.S. families.

EFNEP REACHES DIVERSE AUDIENCES

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

During year of 2023:

- **516** participants were enrolled in EFNEP, with **2,004** family members and **789** children
- **340** participants graduating from the program
- **2,623** youth contacts were made through the EFNEP Youth program;
- **2,278** youth contacts graduated from the EFNEP Youth program;
- **100%** of EFNEP participants have children under **19** years of age;
- **95%** of the Adult participants showed improvement in one or more diet quality indicators; and
- **87%** of the Youth participants showed improvement in diet quality indicators

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**, participants will learn to prepare more meals and snacks at home, be more active, control portion size, and have more energy.

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 and classroom and after-school activities. Through fun and engaging activities, youth learn to build a healthy plate, set limits on sugar, fats, and sodium, be active, food safety, and to practice healthy behaviors.

COST-BENEFIT OF EFNEP

Studies have shown that for every **\$1** spent on EFNEP, **\$10** were estimated to be saved in health care costs and **\$2** saved in food costs by participants. For Texas, this is **\$43 million** in estimated health care cost savings and almost **\$8.6 million** in food costs.

VOLUNTEERS STRENGTHEN EFNEP

EFNEP also were supported by **101** volunteers donating **1,106** hours of assisting EFNEP in Texas. At the Texas rate of **\$29.95/hr**, this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of **\$48,758.60**. Volunteers make a difference in their own communities and contribute to EFNEP’s continued success.

For more information visit efnep.tamu.edu.

