

# REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

## 2020 in Review

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
ALLEGHANY COUNTY CENTER  
90 S. MAIN STREET; P.O. BOX 7  
SPARTA, NC 28675  
336.372.5597

### STAFF

*Amy Lucas*

COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTOR  
EXTENSION AGENT  
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
AMY\_LUCAS@NCSU.EDU

*Carmen Long*

EXTENSION AGENT  
FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCE  
CARMEN\_LONG@NCSU.EDU

*Aaron Ray Tompkins*

EXTENSION AGENT  
AGRICULTURE  
AARON\_TOMPKINS@NCSU.EDU

*Brad Edwards*

PROGRAM ASSISTANT  
BMP TECHNICIAN  
BRAD\_EDWARDS@NCSU.EDU

*Jill Cockerham*

PROGRAM ASSISTANT  
LOCAL FOODS COORDINATOR  
JILL\_COCKERHAM@NCSU.EDU

*Alex Kissinger*

PROGRAM ASSISTANT  
EMPOWERING YOUTH & FAMILIES  
PROGRAM  
ALEX\_KISSINGER@NCSU.EDU

*Michele Hamm*

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT  
MICHELE\_HAMM@NCSU.EDU

2020 was a year for the record books. It was an extremely busy, productive year that was full of opportunities for the Alleghany Center Staff. The Extension staff consists of one full time Administrative Assistant - Michele Hamm. Amy Lucas is the County Extension Director/ 4-H Youth Development Agent who focuses on youth ages 5-18 learning life skills. Aaron Ray Tompkins serves as the Agriculture Agent covering livestock and horticulture. Carmen Long is the Family & Consumer Science Agent - shared with Surry County.

She works with nutrition and healthy eating, chronic disease reduction, food safety and food preservation. Carmen also serves as a liaison to the Extension and Community Association (ECA) volunteer organization. Jill Cockerham, Local Foods Program Assistant, is shared between Alleghany & Ashe counties. Jill covers local foods and the newly operational commercial kitchen located in Ashe County. Her primary focus in Alleghany is the Farmers Market though she delves into other areas of local foods including assistance with marketing and opportunities for producers. The office also has a shared Integrated Pest Management Technician, Brad Edwards. Brad is shared between Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties and covers Best Management Practices concerning Christmas Trees. The newest addition to our office is Alex Kissinger. Alex is a recent graduate of NC State University and serves as our Empowering Youth and Family Program Assistant - shared with Ashe County. Alex will be working with families on opioid prevention education for youth and their caregivers. Alex began work at the Alleghany/Ashe Centers in January of 2021.

With all of the challenges of 2020 and only being able to provide limited programming in the past year due to Covid 19, staff were able to reach more than 3,800 direct contacts and had more than 40,000 digital contacts via social media and live streaming events.

Alleghany County Cooperative Extension helps to strengthen our community by providing opportunities that enhance agriculture and the local economy, develop leadership, citizenship and life skills in youth and improve the health and well-being of families and provide education on local foods. Our mission and work are dedicated to improving the quality of lives of all individuals. We utilize research-based information to help us to develop quality educational programs to meet the ever changing needs of our county's citizens. We have the ability to link resources and expertise of North Carolina State University and NC A&T University with the citizens of our county.

- 3,858 total face-to-face contacts
- 14 news articles published
- More than 200 Facebook posts and tweets
- 6 radio programs presented

**NC COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION**





## Allegheny Farmers Market

COVID brought new challenges to Jill Cockerham's, Allegheny Extension Local Food Coordinator, first season as the Allegheny Farmers Market manager.

Due to safety restrictions and distancing guidelines, the market opened in 2020 as online only, until late June, when the market returned to in-person shopping. The online market provided a safe and efficient way for customers to place orders online and drive through to pick up their bags.

This hub-based market model also provides additional sales opportunities for vendors selling at other markets or customers who prefer the ease of online ordering and quick pickup. This enabled the farmers market to attract more customers and vendors, increasing economic impact for small growers and producers.

## Cattle Product Bulk Orders

Due to Covid-19, cattle vaccine pricing and availability had some producers concerned about getting necessary cattle health products in the best time frame and bid out the vaccine/wormer/cattle health products to bid for maximum savings for producers.

NC Cooperative Extension, Allegheny Center, partnered with the Allegheny County Cattlemen's Association and through a bid process from multiple vendors, ordered over \$52,000.00 in vaccine, wormer and cattle health products. This order is typically placed the 1st of March but due to Covid, changes in availability of vaccine and pricing, we were able to shift our bidding process to be the most economical option for our members.

The ordering of those products allowed cattle producers and members of the Allegheny Cattlemen's Association to save \$7,152.15.

# Storytime Cooks

## Learning about food through books

The Allegheny County Library expressed interest in partnering on some programs for families with young children. After thinking about previously successful in-person programs, which were no longer an option due to COVID-19, Carmen Long suggested a virtual storytime cooking program. StoryTime Cooks - Learning About Food Through Books was created. This has been a very positive experience.

Every week a new segment is shared on various social media sites from a recorded YouTube video that is taped at the library. Stories and recipes related to seasons and seasonal foods are used when possible. We talk about where/how foods are grown, colors of foods, and different ways foods can be prepared in quick, easy and nutritious recipes. The response to the program has been very positive. The videos have been viewed over 2500 times for an average of 140 views a week. This number is much higher than the number would be for individuals attending a program in person. There have been many positive comments from families who look forward to the videos each week and trying the new recipes.



## Allegheny 4-Hers Go Virtual



With the inability to meet youth in face-to-face settings, due to COVID-19, Allegheny 4-H was forced to find a way to help youth stay actively engaged in the 4-H program.

Though difficult, and many of our youth facing burnout from an ending school year that was virtual, we were able to keep several youth engaged in programming throughout the summer.

Fortunately, the Allegheny Center of Cooperative Extension has several electronic devices that allowed youth to have a device if one was not readily available after the school system had collected their loaner devices.

As a result all of those that had previously signed up for face-to-face Teen Retreat were still able to participate and in fact, we were able to recruit additional youth that had previously not been able to attend. We also had 7 youth participate in District Activity Day and 6 youth went on to participate at the state level presentation event. Youth were also able to participate in NC 4-H Congress and we were able to recruit additional youth that have not been actively involved in the teen program prior. The hope is this may provide an additional avenues to engage involvement and expand our programming possibilities to youth that may not be able to attend events otherwise. In all, we saw an approximate 15% increase in teen programming with the hopes of retaining these youth in face-to-face programming.

# Faithful Families Virtual Walking Challenge

Covid-19 resulted in many individuals seeking ways to improve their physical and mental health, increase their physical activity and enjoy socializing in a fun but safe way. Sparta Presbyterian Church had previously participated in Faithful Families with much success. Carmen Long continued to work with members of the congregation to let them know of related opportunities and promoted & encouraged the Faithful Families Virtual Walking Challenge during the summer of 2020.

The Virtual Walking Challenge ran for four weeks from Monday, June 8 – Sunday, July 5, 2020. The challenge was designed as a way for people to stay connected and be physically active while being socially distanced. Sparta Presbyterian Church formed a team of 6 members and started walking

The team from Alleghany County finished the competition with the third most total challenge points in NC and had the first-place national winner with the most individual challenge points, Susan Thomas. Susan won a FITBIT FLEX as her prize for her walking efforts. Susan shared that the experience encouraged her to utilize local trails and made her grateful for each day, the beautiful surroundings, and the time spent with friends. These are the things that encouraged her to get up and WALK! As a whole, participants reported the walking challenge helped them to walk more and to continue with their physical activity after the challenge ended.

**FAITHFUL  
FAMILIES** Thriving  
Communities

# Growing for Good



Jill Cockerham has been working with Jan Shaw and Christine Burns-Fazzi, Growing for Good Mushrooms, located in Glade Valley, to expand their business through new market channels, including sales to High Country Food Hub in Boone, as well as assist with the recruitment of additional employees as production scaled up. Most recently, Jan started using the High Country Commercial Kitchen in Jefferson to produce components for their value-added product line. Growing for Good Mushrooms are a featured local grower in the Alleghany Farmers Market online market.

# Learning New Tricks of the Trade

With all the changes and negativity that came with a pandemic, some positives did evolve. Since Allegheny 4-H was not able to do programming in person, many of our technical skills were forced to improve. Staff learned about new software including Zoom, Adobe Creative Cloud, and Canva. We also improved greatly on our videography techniques learning about different camera and microphone types as well as editing and filming software.

We were able to film 4-Hers individually for their 4-H Presentation competitions where we had seven youth participate at District Activity Day and six of those youth being Gold and Silver winners went on to participate at State level presentations. At the state level from our Allegheny 4-Hers we had one gold winner, one silver winner and three bronze winners.

In addition to our youth activities, we were also able to work on new curricula that was published and made available to youth state wide. Allegheny 4-H worked to develop and record programming on macroinvertebrates and water quality. A series of videos were planned, recorded and published teaching youth skills and techniques needed to assess local water quality including how to build a seine, identifying macroinvertebrates and testing chemical properties of water.

Without the adaptability of our staff and youth, we would not have been able to participate in these types of events during 2020.



## Virtual Dairy Show

Due to Covid-19 the NC Spring Dairy Show had to be cancelled and was not able to be rescheduled.

With the support from a committee of 5 parents from across the state and financial support from the NC Dairy Youth Foundation a plan for a virtual show was made available for youth to exhibit their project animals. A platform was created for youth to be able to submit pictures and video of each project animal for judging. Judges from Ohio, Wisconsin, and Iowa were able to place the animals and give feedback on type and showmanship classes.

32 youth of all ages, in 4 categories, exhibited 62 animals in the NC Virtual Dairy Show. To announce the awards, a zoom celebration was held where the placings and comments from the judges were announced to all youth. Youth were able to select prizes based on their needs for the upcoming show season.



# Color Me Healthy. at Piney Creek Preschool

Childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States putting children at risk for future health concerns. In North Carolina one in three youth are overweight or obese. Eating healthy and staying active is key to preventing health problems later in life.

Carmen Long, the Area Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences in Alleghany County partnered with the Piney Creek Elementary School preschool classroom to offer Color Me Healthy. This program was developed to reach children with fun, interactive learning opportunities on healthy eating and moving more. Through the use of colors, music, and exploration of the senses, Color Me Healthy was taught to 16 pre-k children.

The classroom teacher shared that at school 100% of the students were more willing to taste fruits and vegetables after participating in the program. Also 100% of the students increased their physical activity. 93 % of the parents observed an improvement in their child's willingness to taste fruits at home. 87 % of parents observed their children were more willing to taste vegetables. 93% of the children have increased their physical activity at home. Parents shared that kids are asking for vegetables, have shown an interest in cooking, are more interested in trying new foods and wanting to exercise. One child is now evaluating her family's plates each meal for color and another was very proud of the colorful plates he made in his "play" kitchen.



## Alleghany Farmers Market

The Alleghany Farmers Market will reopen May 1st as both an online and in-person market this year. Several events and collaborations with other community partners are in the works. A significant number of new vendors have applied for the 2021 market season, and there has been a dramatic increase in community members interested in improving issues of food security in the county.



# Mental Health Awareness

2020 was a hard year for most of us. Many times the signs and symptoms of youth struggling with mental health issues including depression, isolation, suicidal tendencies and stresses involving education are often overlooked. We have seen this especially during 2020 when the world has been surrounded by a number of additional concerns.

Amy Lucas contacted numerous agencies and contacts to acquire mental health data that had been collected during 2020 on youth. Amy partnered with the local newspaper editor to construct an article that highlighted this data and research and also provide outlets and contact information for those agencies that can assist youth and parents in dealing with these stresses.

Some of the tips included being a good listener and letting youth express themselves in various ways including writings, drawings and playing. Subtle cues are often expressed during these types of activities. Also allow kids to ask questions. Many times the door to communication can be opened by simply asking questions. When dealing with the pandemic perhaps ask teens if they understand what that means. We know the restriction caused numerous changes in adults way of life but be sure to talk to youth about how it is affecting theirs. We see increased screen time, additional assignments, separation anxiety when youth are not able to spend time with friends.

Other staggering statistics included:

- 81% of teens say mental health is a significant issue for young people and 64% of teens believe that the experience of COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their generation's mental health.
- In this stressful climate, 7 in 10 teens have experienced struggles with mental health.
- 55% of teens say they've experienced anxiety, 45% excessive stress, and 43% depression.
- 61% of teens said that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their feeling of loneliness.
- 82% of teens believe that America should talk more openly and honestly about mental health issues in this country.
- 79% of teens surveyed wish there was an inclusive environment or safe space for people in school to talk about mental health.

Numerous parents and teen youth expressed their appreciation for addressing an issue that is often overlooked or ignored. Several parents were astounded by the data and had not considered that youth, including elementary age youth, were also under new and increasing pressures. Youth mental health is an issue that Amy plans to spend additional time on in 2021, as well as working to provide additional tactics, outlets and programming for those struggling.

# Portable Cattle Handling Equipment

Most beef farms in Alleghany County are smaller cow-calf operations where producers also have off-farm jobs or larger operations with cattle on multiple farms in various locations on rented and owned land. Due to economics of scale, it is difficult to justify spending tens of thousands of dollars for handling equipment that allows the producer to implement management practices such as vaccination, castration, pregnancy diagnosis and fly control, so many times they are done at undesirable times or even left undone completely.

Alleghany Extension partnered with the Alleghany County Cattlemen's Association and received a grant thru Ag Ventures in the amount of \$7,000.00 to purchase portable headgate, palpation cage and lane for working cattle. This equipment is available for rent to members at low-cost rate.

As a result from the 1st producer that utilized the equipment stated: "This is the most useful piece of equipment that I have been able to rent and use on my operation. It is cost effective, time saving and has increased my farm's efficacy as well as the safety for my employees while working cattle. This equipment has saved us time and money while allowing us to do a better management of our beef cows and in return will generate higher revenues for the cattle we are marketing." Our goal is to have this increased result in 2021 with a larger number of producer/members.



# Cook Smart, Eat Smart Virtually.

Eating meals at home can be a challenge under normal circumstances. People struggle with knowing what to cook and how to prepare it for an affordable price. Covid-19 has made feeding families even more challenging. With many of our restaurants closed for months and lack of income due to pandemic related job situations, families had to get back into the kitchen in order to eat. School teachers moving to remote teaching in the spring of 2020 had additional stress added to their already full plates

Carmen Long was contacted by the school psychologist of the Alleghany County School system to provide basic cooking classes for school personnel. The staff had been surveyed as to their needs and cooking was identified. I worked with the school personnel to offer a 4 week virtual Cook Smart Eat Smart series to address these needs.

Participants have reported that they and their families have really liked the recipes which were demonstrated and shared. Post evaluations show 62% are preparing and eating more meals at home, 88% are planning meals for the week, 75% are getting their families more involved in planning, 100% are trying to consume less sodium and 75% are eating more fruits and vegetables. Many new cooking skills were learned and 100% feel more confident in using planned overs to make meal preparation easier. 75% say they are saving anywhere between \$15 - \$75 a week on their food costs by eating out less, meal planning, avoiding food wastes and using what they have on hand. One participant proudly reported that they had made and frozen spaghetti sauce and soup for future use. They enjoyed the opportunity to be part of a virtual group, saying the classes were fun and a stress reducer.