

2022

REPORT
TO THE PEOPLE

Alleghany County Center



OUR TEAM

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
IPM TECHNICIAN
brad_edwards@ncsu.edu

Jill Cockerham

PROGRAM ASSISTANT
LOCAL FOODS COORDINATOR
jill_cockerham@ncsu.edu

Michele Hamm

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
michele_hamm@ncsu.edu

2022 was an exciting year 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 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 offering educational 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. Kyle Hood also is based out of the Alleghany Office and is our Regional Nutritional Extension Associate. Kyle works with Extension Agents and EFNEP Educators in the Northwest part of the state to aid them in implementing direct education programs and PSE initiatives and covers 15 counties.

With carry over changes from 2021 into 2022 we are continuing to offer both face to face and virtual programs. By doing this we were able to reach more than 2,500 direct contacts and had more than 50,000 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.



EXTENSION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Cooperative Extension is, and always has been, a volunteer-driven organization. From its earliest days, Extension has been trusted to share research-based information with the public for them to put it to use. One component of how this works can be seen with our advisory council system. We have local citizens work with local staff members to brainstorm on local issues and create local solutions. For more than 100 years this is how Extension has operated. We work to understand local needs and respond with solutions.

Having a county advisory council is a most effective way to get input for needs assessments and priority goal setting. Many of our advisory members are appointed to two or three year terms and have strengths or knowledge within program areas in Extension programming (like youth development, food and nutrition, agriculture, etc.)

The County Extension Director (CED) and staff members lead the search for recruiting and placing members on the local advisory council, that often includes 12 to 18 members, though that number can vary from one year to another. The Alleghany Advisory system elects a Chairperson to serve as the leadership for meeting management.

Our local advisory group meets quarterly, most often in a face-to-face delivery method. Communicating with this group of volunteers is vital to our group's success. This includes mailed newsletters, emails and simple phone calls.

Our council members are people who have local connections and can help Extension with connecting to businesses and stakeholders in the community. They serve as advocates to share their stories about Extension's successes, help county faculty better plan programming and market what we do to help others know about Extension.

Another important task for council members is connecting the local Extension advisory system to the State Advisory Council (SAC). This happens with assistance from SAC volunteers, who are assigned to a small group or cluster of counties with a very specific task of communicating directly with the volunteers on the CAC. As the SAC volunteers link to local volunteers, they are positioned to share information directly with the NC State Extension Director at NC State University.

This type of system helps our Land Grant Universities keep local voices heard.

The Alleghany Advisory Leadership Committee is comprised of: Chairman, Ken Richardson, Bob Bamberg, Lisa Bottomley, Yvonne Burdick, Susie Gambill, Kyle Hood, County Commissioner Bobby Irwin, Coby LaRue, Gerald Leftwich, Veronica Riley, Charles Rudy, Gary York and Mark Whittle.



NC 4-H CONGRESS

4-H Congress is an annual educational event sponsored by North Carolina 4-H and planned by the State 4-H Council and Congress Advisory Committee. North Carolina 4-H'ers, ages 13-18, are invited to participate in this annual event held for four days on the Campus of NC State University. Alleghany County youth attend Congress each year. Not only do youth gain valuable leadership and communication skills, they build friendships and lasting relationships that can last a lifetime.

Why do youth attend 4-H Congress?

To perpetuate the reputation of 4-H as a major state-wide educational program. To improve delegates knowledge of current issues through educational experiences such as speakers, discussion groups, workshops, and activities. To provide an opportunity to develop and exercise leadership skills through serving on committees and participating in certain programs. To provide an opportunity for delegates to participate in the democratic process through campaigning for and electing state 4-H officers. To provide recreational and social experiences for delegates. To select winners in presentations and certain activities through state contests. To provide recognition for project, activity, and scholarship winners.

In 2022, Alleghany 4-H had four youth attend Congress and participate in a variety of activities, workshops and service projects.

Pictured below (left to right): Tori Dillard, Abbie Joines, Amy Lucas (4-H Agent/CED), Colleen Cassell and Hogan Dillard.



CHRISTMAS TREE SEED CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

On Friday, November 18th a ground breaking was held at Upper Mountain Research Station (UMRS) for a new building that will house the Christmas Tree Seed Center of Excellence. The event was sponsored by NC Farm Bureau.

Rich Bonanno, Associate Dean, CALS and Director, NC State Extension and Steve Troxler, Commissioner of NC Agriculture, along with several politicians and legislators, attended. The focus was to educate lawmakers about North Carolina Christmas Trees. The building will be funded by grants from the Tobacco Trust Fund. NCDA and NC Cooperative Extension have committed to help staff the facility.



The facility will consist of a couple of offices and mainly lab space. The facility will focus mainly on genetics in Fraser Fir trees. By crossing the right trees, there is hope in genetics to create a more advanced Christmas Tree. Trees could be bred to improve insect and disease resistance, have a more fragrant aroma, better needle retention and growing characteristics. The UMRS already has a seed orchard, created 7 years ago, that is the most advanced Fraser Fir orchard in the world. It is also home to a clone bank. By utilizing the advanced orchard, as well as the clone bank, much of the work will be able to be done in Laurel Springs instead of Raleigh.

At the event, NC Cooperative Extension also released some updated numbers that shows the value of Fraser Fir to the state. With Christmas Trees being valued higher than ever, the numbers have changed considerably.

Christmas Trees from NC are now valued at \$337,500,000 and the greenery business comes in at 75,000,000. The combined total of trees and greenery is over \$412 million dollars.



NEW YEAR, NEW WAY WITH ECA

Social isolation and loneliness pose a serious public health risk, especially to older adult populations. According to the Centers for Disease Control, many adults age 50 and older are socially isolated in a way that puts their health at risk. Social isolation can increase the risk of premature death, dementia, heart disease, stroke, and mental illness. North Carolina and Alleghany County has a growing aging population. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reported that by 2031 there will be more senior citizens in N.C. than people under 18 years of age.

In an effort to reach community members isolated for various reasons, Family & Consumer Science Agents in the North Central District teamed up to provide monthly virtual programming. Program topics were varied from nutrition and cooking skills, personal finance, and physical activity. Agents chose topics based on feedback from a 2021 program evaluation of the New Year, New Way with ECA series. Each month a different agent from one of the participating counties lead a virtual program, for a total of 12 programs in 2022, with 578 registered participants.



A comprehensive program evaluation was conducted after the program completion. Of those who participated in the evaluation, 83% reported “very satisfied” with the relevance of information to their needs. As a result of the program 80% of respondents intend to utilize effective life skills of self-care, financial management, and keeping a healthy home. Responses from participants regarding lifestyle changes included: “I have found more healthy recipes that I enjoy and try to walk every day. Best of all I have gotten my A1C down to 5.7.”; “I have added more vegetables and fruits to my diet, along with daily exercise.” Regarding the overall At Home with ECA program participants responded: “I appreciate that ECA emphasizes ideas that are low-cost and easy to do at home, there’s something for everyone” and “I appreciate that programming is accessible to participants at a later time through recorded video.” FCS Agents in the North Central district have evaluated this program and plan to continue the monthly format in 2023 based on program suggestions provided in the evaluation.



FARM SAFETY

Alleghany County, NC and Grayson County, VA are extremely rural counties with many small family farms still in place. Many Spanish-only speaking farm workers in both counties need information that can be translated and utilized in the area of farm work. Keeping farm workers safe is a priority of the whole community. Health and safety training is an essential skill needed to empower people, of any age, to take action and put preventative measures in place where hazards are present in order to protect themselves and others.

Many organizations including local fire and rescue departments, NC Forest Service, NC Agromedicine partnering with Alleghany and Grayson County, Virginia Extension come together every fall to offer local farm safety training. The event is held at Upper Mountain Research Station (UMRS), owned by The North Carolina Department of Agriculture. The UMRS staff are critical to the success of the rotational style safety day. Farm workers are split into groups and sent to a variety of different stations.

The following areas have been covered: speed on roadways, signage and flashers, lighting on roadway, managing your load, seatbelt and roll over protection, dealing with wide loads and oncoming traffic. Other areas that are covered include how many individuals can ride on a tractor, PTO (Power Take-Off) and attachment safety dangers around a PTO shaft, how to check for hydraulic leaks, securing your load, adjusting or clearing jams on equipment, what to do when you lose your cargo, hearing, eye and skin protection along with cell phone usage with farm equipment.

A total of 783 farm workers from four different farms attended the event held this past fall. The stations are interactive, allowing farm workers to ask questions at any point. Local stories of farm accidents are shared about people in the community that failed to use safety precautions on the farm. Each 20 minute rotation is an educational opportunity that could save lives. There is no way to establish a dollar amount to the value of this event. Informal interviews with farmworkers indicated a significant increase in knowledge on preventing accidents and recognizing safety issues.



HIGH COUNTRY COMMERCIAL KITCHEN



As part of Jill's work with NC Cooperative Extension, she manages the High Country Commercial Kitchen in Jefferson, NC. HCCK is a shared-use commercial kitchen available for rent for value-added food entrepreneurs, farmers who need additional storage, educators, caterers and serves as a commissary kitchen for food trucks. This kitchen serves a multi-county area, with the closest other rentable kitchens being located in Winston-Salem, Lenoir and Independence, VA. Approximately 90% of the current users produce baked goods and other value-added products, and these items are sold primarily at area farmers markets, including the Alleghany Farmers Market, and retail stores in the High Country area.



Jill helps kitchen users navigate the oftentimes complex nature of regulatory guidelines, labeling requirements, and assists food entrepreneurs find additional market channels, product and business development. These skills also translate easily into assisting farmers, producers and other market vendors seek out new ways to add value to farm products, address potential food waste/excess issues and fill gaps in what customers are looking for at markets.



Nutrition Program
for Adults

TAKE CONTROL

6 in 10 Americans live with at least one chronic disease, ex. heart disease, stroke, cancer, or diabetes. Two-thirds of chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease, can be prevented by lifestyle changes, specifically diet and exercise. Group support is helpful in making changes while providing accountability.

Steps to Health Take Control was offered virtually and coordinated through the Alleghany Senior Center for an eight-week series in February and March.

Post evaluations show the majority of participants are eating 2+ servings of fruit and vegetables each day, water 3 or more a day, sweetened beverages only once in a while, low fat milk 3 or more times a day, are eating more than one kind of fruit and vegetable each day, are using the nutrition facts label to make food choices, are choosing whole grains, at least sometimes and most of the time are shopping with a list and comparing prices.

One participant shared that because of the class, she practiced what she learned. She stated that she was more active, which increased her energy, drank less soda and more water, she chose more healthy snacks like nuts, and avoided eating after 7:00 pm. All of her hard work resulted in a reduction in her blood sugar and triglyceride levels and her A1C went from 9 to 5.5.



TREES FOR TROOPS

The first of two Trees for Troops events for the state of NC was held at the Upper Mountain Research Station in Laurel Springs on November 29th. The 2nd event was on December 1st in Newland.

With the help of volunteers, there were over 650 trees (375 over the goal) loaded at the research station alone. Those trees were sent to NAS Meridian-MS, Ft. Stewart-GA, Hunter Army Airfield-GA and Fort Bragg-NC.

Growers from Alleghany that donated trees were Wishon Evergreens, Kathy Shore Nursery and Smokey Holler Tree Farm. Smokey Holler Tree Farm also sent a crew to help load the truck. The Ag classes from Alleghany High School also came to give a helping hand, thanks to Mr. Vestal and Mr. Hash.

The North Carolina Christmas Tree Association, in partnership with the National Christmas Tree Association and Fed-Ex, are the sponsors of the event.



EXPANDED FOOD & NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) program offers free nutrition classes to help youth be more active and adopt positive eating habits to help maintain a healthy lifestyle. Programs like EFNEP are especially important as the rates of childhood obesity in the United States continue to climb.

This past year Rhonda Church, who serves as an EFNEP Educator, partnered with teachers at Sparta Elementary School to teach EFNEP classes to 2nd-grade students. Rhonda also partnered with Carmen Long to deliver EFNEP lessons to children enrolled in the Allegheny Literacy Program. In total Rhonda and the EFNEP program reached 69 children in Allegheny County in 2022.

88% of the children who took Rhonda's EFNEP classes improved their overall diet quality. 54% of the students improved their daily physical activity practices while 68% improved their knowledge of food safety practices. As a result of Rhonda's EFNEP lessons, many children in Allegheny County have a better understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle.



CATTLE WORKING CONTESTS

The availability of hands-on livestock related events for FFA participants and Youth Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training opportunities are limited for youth. There are no NC FFA sanctioned BQA trainings or contests designed to educate and evaluate the students on the proper handling and care of cattle. Allowing students a hands-on and competitive method of demonstrating what they have learned will enhance knowledge retention and promote learning of beef cattle related topics.



In an effort to provide a safe, effective, hands-on method of reinforcing cattle handling, best management practices and the National BQA recommendations, the Cattle Working Contest was created. Alleghany, Iredell and Alexander county Agricultural Agents worked together to create the program and then work and train high school agriculture teachers and students.

This is a collaborative partnership between NC Cooperative Extension, North Carolina Department of Agricultural (NCDA) Research Stations and North Carolina FFA across the state. This partnership allows us to hold multiple, regional contests and a state-wide contest each year. Since the creation of this program, we have been able to slowly increase our impact by bringing new agents, counties and schools together to host new regional contests. In the 2022-2023 school year, we will again expand our impact into western North Carolina counties with a new regional contest hosted at the Mountain Research Station, located in Waynesville, NC.



As a result of these contests, we annually reach 85-95 student participants. Those students are able to become BQA Certified (with a 100% passing rate for 2022), learn proper handling techniques of cattle, and they are able to visit local NCDA research stations. They also gain experience and learn from industry experts, who volunteer as event judges, and are ultimately more qualified for real-world cattle handling. Providing education and evaluation of youth working directly with livestock is taking a proactive approach to ensuring a healthy and safe beef product. Keeping animals safe, healthy & comfortable is the ultimate goal of the BQA program.



WE POWER EMPOWERMENT EXPO



After several months of planning, the first WE Power Empowerment Expo was held in Boone, NC, on September 13th. WE Power is non-profit organization that helps women food entrepreneurs develop targeted resources and support networks to benefit women in food businesses. It supports members through collective problem solving, recognition and promotion and resource sharing. Check out WE Power Food at www.wepowerfood.org

The WE Power Empowerment Expo invited women food entrepreneurs for a day-long conference featuring guest speakers Carol Coulter (Heritage Homestead Goat Dairy & Appalachian State University), Dani Black, Sue Ellsworth and Kat McGee (WE Power Food), and Jill Cockerham (NC Cooperative Extension: Alleghany Farmers Market & High Country Commercial Kitchen). Attendees brought food product samples from their own businesses for all to try and got free headshots taken by food photographer, Stacey Spreng, as well as a short class on DIY food business photography.



Approximately 25 women from several counties in the High Country region and beyond participated. Due to the success of this Expo, additional plans are in the works for expanding this conference into other areas in NC.



SCHOOL ENRICHMENT: BUTTERFLIES EMERGING

With teachers consistently being pulled toward improving test scores we are seeing an increase in requests for school enrichment opportunities being brought into our school system. Teachers simply do not have the time or resources to provide additional opportunities to youth.

Alleghany 4-H is partnering with all local elementary schools to bring a variety of school enrichment opportunities to various grades including 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. We are doing this by providing Embryology, Winged Wonders, Power of the Wind, Steps to Health and more.



Winged Wonders is an amazing STEM program where second grade youth learn about the life cycle of the Painted Lady Butterfly.

Classrooms are equipped with all materials and supplies as well as curriculum that meets teaching standards. Teachers are then trained on delivering the program and equipped with a variety of supplemental activities (arts, writing and engineering) that can be used to have deeper discussions. Youth are able to observe painted lady butterflies from larva through adulthood. Youth get to experience the mystery of the butterfly life cycle while engaging in hands-on activities that explore concepts of insect structures and functions, compare insect behaviors and life cycles, and demonstrate the role everyone can play in environmental stewardship. At the end of this program many classrooms have a "release party" for their butterflies and we have seen further engagement with several schools working on pollinator gardens.

During 2022 Alleghany 4-H was able to work with 12 classrooms at all three elementary schools as well as the exceptional students at Alleghany High School with the Winged Wonders Curricula. We were able to reach more than 262 youth participants and train an additional 14 adult volunteers.

We are continuing to expand our school enrichment opportunities and are hoping to be able to add additional classrooms in the coming year. We are not only increasing STEM knowledge and increasing awareness of healthy eating and physical activity but also expanding the reach of Alleghany 4-H and Alleghany Extension.



STORYTIME COOKS

Childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States putting children at risk for future health concerns. According to the most recent NC Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) data for Alleghany County, 37% of 2-4 year olds are overweight or obese. Eating healthy is key to preventing health problems later in life. Children often do not know where their food comes from. Sharing easy, nutritious recipes with families is a way to get kids more involved in the kitchen and more likely to try new foods.

For the second year, Alleghany County Library and Cooperative Extension have partnered to offer Storytime Cooks, virtually, for families with young children. Each week Carmen reads a story and then shares/demonstrates a quick and easy child friendly recipe. We talk about where and how food is grown, seasonal foods, the colors of foods, textures, and tastes. Basic food safety and food preparation tips are shared.

Storytime Cooks - Learning About Food Through Books is a positive partnership. Each Tuesday a new segment is shared on various social media sites from a recorded YouTube video that is taped at the library. The response to the program has been very positive with over 4197 views in 2022. The average views per week is much higher than the number would be for individuals attending an in-person program. There have been many positive comments from families who look forward to the videos each week and trying the new recipes. Children who help in the kitchen are much for likely to try new foods, resulting in improved eating habits with life-long benefits.



LITTLE LIBRARY CHEFS



As a follow up to Storytime Cooks, Carmen partnered with Second Harvest Food Bank to offer in person programs for children and caregivers at the Alleghany County Public Library. To meet families where they already were comfortable, Little Library Chefs provides nutrition and basic cooking to children and their caregivers once each month during the library's on-going weekly preschool story time. During the 7 months Little Library Chefs has been offered, 112 children and caregivers have attended. The lessons are also taped and shared on the library's social media sites to reach participants who aren't able to attend in person.

Post evaluation data shows an 88% increase in caregiver's knowledge to help them handle mealtime frustrations with their children and help make mealtime a positive experience. They received new recipes, time and money saving tips, and food preparation skills. Knowledge was gained in portion control, ways to get kids involved in the kitchen, making wise beverage choices, and ways to encourage children to eat more fruits and vegetables. Parents shared they appreciate the new ideas and ways to make trying new foods fun and adventurous. This knowledge has the potential for long-term positive health benefits for the whole family.



ALLEGHANY FARMERS MARKET

The 2022 Alleghany Farmers Market season proved to be a successful one for both vendors and customers. The customer base, number of vendors and products offered continues to grow each year. With a total of roughly 50 regular weekly and seasonal vendors, we were able to provide a robust variety of fresh produce, handmade goods, meat and value-added products. Having that direct connection with farmers and producers, consumers are able to build solid relationships with vendors by having face-to-face conversations about farming practices, through consistent purchases and special orders, and provide important feedback for new and established businesses. Alleghany residents who financially support farmers market vendors play a huge role in building small businesses and help keep money in the county.

In 2022, the market received approximately \$2500 in grant monies from AppHealth for market infrastructure, including a propane outdoor cooktop and supplies for food demos and kids' shopping carts. With the help of the market manager, Foothills Nature Farm received a NC AgVentures grant, totalling \$6000, to build a sorghum mill and processing facility. This past summer was their first trial run in sorghum syrup making with the new facility, and they plan to increase growing capacity in the coming years.

We are looking forward to the 2023 season and all the new community-driven infrastructure developments happening at Crouse Park. With the prospect of wifi access at the market for next year, we will be able to accept EBT/SNAP benefits and provide market "cash" in the form of tokens for credit card users, along with developing other market-related programs.



SHOWMASTERS CIRCUIT

The purpose of the North Carolina Dairy Youth Foundation (NCDYF) Showmasters Circuit is to provide the opportunity for youth of all ages to develop their showmanship and animal management skills, while encouraging sportsmanship, ethics and a growth mindset when showing dairy cattle.



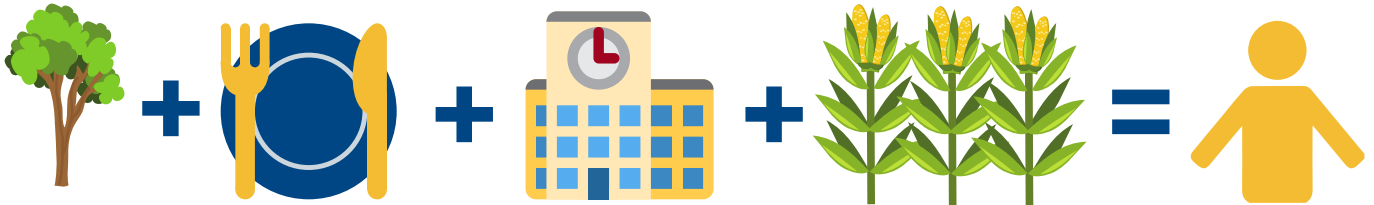
Through a partnership with NC Cooperative Extension and the NCDYF we formed a committee to oversee the implementation of what is now a statewide project. This involved youth from across the state of NC that participated in showmanship at local, state and national contests to improve their cattle showmanship skills, which includes overall knowledge of their animal, equipment, breeds, nutrition and more. Youth also learned how to properly prepare their animal and themselves for competition. This has enabled youth to compete at all levels in exhibiting their animals.



2022 was the first year of this program and there were 29 youth that registered from 14 counties. Of those, 26 of the youth completed the requirements for an end of year recognition. Providing education and evaluation of youth working directly with dairy cattle is taking a proactive approach to ensuring a healthy and safe dairy product. At the end of the season a banquet was held to award the youth on their placings and encourage improvement for the 2023 year.



2022 YEAR END REPORT



52,917

CONTACTS BY
EXTENSION
PROFESSIONALS IN
2022

550



Improved knowledge
of local food and
agricultural systems



562

4-H members involved in community-
based clubs, camps, special interest &
school enrichment programs

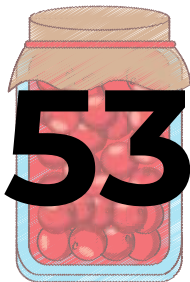
120

Number of clients who
earned pesticide
continuing education
credits



50,000+

TOTAL DIGITAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS



53

Increased knowledge of
safe food handling,
preservation, or
preparation techniques



75

Youth certified in 2022



Adults increased their
fruit and vegetable
consumption

8

RADIO PROGRAMS PRESENTED

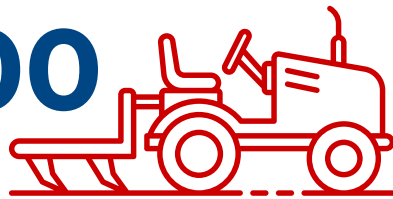


425

Youth increased knowledge in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)

Number of acres where Extension-recommended nutrient applications were used

4,000



9

News articles published

EFNEP Sessions delivered to empower families to prepare healthy meals

13



2,500+

Total Direct Contacts

14

Number of animal waste management credits earned



783



Participants trained in Farmworker Safety Trainings



22

Participants increasing their physical activity