

Alleghany County Center



2023

**REPORT
TO THE
PEOPLE**

THE TEAM

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2023 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. Kyle is our Regional Nutritional Extension Associate & 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.

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 185,000 digital contacts via social media and live streaming events.

Alleghany County Cooperative Extension works to strengthen our community. We do this 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.

CAMP MAKES A COMEBACK

For more than 80 years, North Carolina 4-H camping has taught youth life skills through centers located from the mountains to the sandhills to the coast. Each year, more than 7,000 youth from across the state participate in 4-H camping programs at North Carolina's 4-H educational centers. Camp is such an important part of learning life skills and finding out who they truly are and what they are capable of. Many youth are not able to attend camp due to numerous barriers including socio-economic status, comfort and location.



This past year Allegheny 4-H worked very hard to raise funds and open the door to youth that would have otherwise not been able or would normally not have a desire to attend 4-H camp. Numerous fundraisers were done to help offset costs and advertisement was shared over social media and in print to try to encourage youth to be involved and learn more about camp.

22 Allegheny youth had an opportunity to attend a week-long residential camp at Betsy-Jeff Penn 4-H Camp in Reidsville during 2023 at a significantly reduced price. Five of these were first time campers and over half indicated they hope to attend camp in 2024.



WOOL POOL

Sheep producers have been receiving low prices and have not been able to adequately get a fair or market driven price for their product.

Wool Price Drops: Extension in NC and VA addressed this problem continuing to pool and bale wool for their producers to market wool. For the 2023 year after multiple meetings and discussion, we felt that we must continue this program as it meets the needs of many producers to garner a high price and receive payments from the FSA wool program.

The Results: Producers were allowed a later delivery date, received a bid on their wool and received at least 300% increase in the amount received per pound of wool by many other producers across the country. Continued education on bagging, grading and maintaining high wool quality will encourage producers to garner a high price paid for their product. This year we were able to ship just over 25,000 pounds of wool to Chargers Wool Processors for a premium price for local farmers.



ALLEGHANY FARMERS MARKET

The 2023 Alleghany Farmers Market season continued to be another highly successful one for both vendors and customers. The opening of the Crouse Park Splash Pad helped boost sales and increase the number of families visiting the market. With a current total of over 50 regular weekly and part-time/seasonal vendors (roughly 20-25 vendors each Saturday), we have reached a sustainable and consistent interest in vendors returning to sell at the market over the past four years. This year, Jill Cockerham was able to help a couple of area chefs source hard-to-find produce and unusual ingredients by connecting them with local farmers and producers.

With the continued support of AppHealth, the market received just over \$4,000 in grant monies for market infrastructure. This included a large glass-doored cooler, producer packaging materials from Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and new branded signage for the market shed and roadway (to be installed this winter/early spring). Additionally, the market received a grant from Blue Ridge Business Development to cover the first two years (2023-2024) of secure wifi access from Skyline for market vendors.

Due to increased community interest in food-related educational opportunities, workshops will be offered on starting a food business, fermentation, permaculture and food preservation during the 2024 market season.

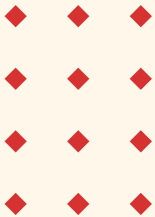


COMMUNITY WALK AUDIT

In the summer of 2023, Carmen Long met with Forrest Pulley of the Alleghany/Sparta Trails Association to discuss the walkability of the Town of Sparta. After multiple conversations, it was decided that it would be beneficial to conduct a walk audit to identify needs and concerns. Cooperative Extension has a curriculum through the Steps to Health program that is designed for this purpose. Results from the audit could be used to pursue grant funds to address identified concerns.

In early fall, a team of interested individuals began meeting and working on the walk audit. The town was divided into three routes. In early December, a training was held for the route leaders. Our Sparta audit day was scheduled for December 19th, which was a cold, but beautiful day. With the help of community partners, over 30 individuals of all ages and stages, showed up to participate in the walk. 30 people would have been a good number on a warm sunny day, but the fact that it was barely 30 degrees makes it even more impressive as to the interest there is for this project.

After the walk, participants met to go over their findings and compile notes. A group of individuals have volunteered to work on the next step of the process. We know we can't address all of the concerns but are excited to determine the priorities and what can be done to make our community safer and more walkable for everyone to enjoy.



THE FUTURE OF FRASER FIR AT THE UPPER MOUNTAIN RESEARCH STATION



The Tobacco Trust Fund Christmas Tree Center is now under construction with phase one of two being completed. The first phase is construction of the building with a concrete floor. The second phase will be finishing of the building, including plumbing and electrical.

The center will be used in conjunction with the Fraser Fir Seed Orchard located at Upper Mountain Research Station. Plans are for extracting seed, cleaning seed, processing seed and selling seed. The seed will be the only nationally certified Fraser Fir seed in the world.

Genetics will play a huge role in producing high quality Christmas trees. Trees will be bred to grow faster, denser and have exceptional needle retention. The seed center will be able to keep certain families of the future “super trees” separated and started into trials such as germination tests, cold tolerant tests, and packaging testing. Once the seed has been through certain tests to maximize the potential of tree genetics it will be offered for sale to hopefully NC Christmas Tree Growers only.

Phase 2 of the building is scheduled to be completed in 2024. There is also more grant monies being awarded in November of 2024 to purchase all of the equipment needed for inside the center. That money will also come from the Tobacco Trust Fund.

CATTLE WORKING CONTEST

The availability of hands-on livestock related FFA and Youth Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training opportunities are limited for youth. There are no NC FFA Sanctioned BQA training/contests designed to educate and evaluate the students on the proper handling and care of cattle.

The Alleghany Extension team along with other county Extension agents, partnered with Zoetis, local volunteer farmers, Ag. Ed. Instructors and the NCDA Research Stations to create three regional contests and a state contest. The top teams from each regional contest were able to go on to compete at the State Cattle working Contest. The competition consists of a written exam on BQA, a nationally recognized program that promotes animal welfare, health and safety. Students that pass the exam will become BQA certified through the North Carolina Cattlemen's Association. The second part of the competition involves hands-on practical application of the BQA program. Students are required to give proper vaccinations that keep cattle healthy and free of diseases. Students are judged on how accurately they read and record product labels, dosages, expiration dates, and withdrawal times. They are also judged on their ability to handle animals in a safe and humane manner.

This past year we had 108 youth participate in the Regional contest and 33 of those youth continued on to the State cattle working contest and became BQA certified. The 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 BQA and life long skill sets.



NATIONAL WHEP COMPETITION

High schoolers representing 15 states from across the United States visited the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory on the shores of West Lake Okoboji near Milford, Iowa to compete in the 2023 4-H and FFA Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) National Contest. Teams from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, Utah, and Pennsylvania competed and learned together in the three-day event.

On the first day of the event, participants met and mingled with one another, sharing facts and souvenirs representing their respective states at a welcoming ceremony and share fair. On the second day of the gathering, participants learned about wildlife conservation in Iowa from wildlife biologists, researchers, and educators from the Iowa DNR, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, Clay County Conservation, and Iowa Lakes Community College. Coaches and participants enjoyed hands-on learning experiences related to land and wildlife management techniques including fish shocking, aquatic insect sampling, invasive species management, and radio telemetry. A 40-mile bus trip around the region also took the group to unique ecological sites including a fen, a number of remnant and reconstructed prairies, a kettle hole wetland, and glacial lakes.

On the third day, participants competed in multiple hands-on events related to wildlife and habitat conservation. The competition tested students' wildlife identification skills and their ability to recommend habitat management practices in tallgrass prairie ecosystems for various wildlife species. Participants also worked as a team to write and orally defend a wildlife habitat management plan.

Though our youth did not place in the top 3 teams they gained a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge on habitat and wildlife management and had an amazing opportunity to meet youth from across the nation.



Participants from Alleghany 4-H pictured left to right (coach - Bryan Cassell, Abbie Joines, Ethan Pardue, Jackson Thompson and Brendan McLain)



COLOR ME HEALTHY

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 and Alleghany County statistics are very similar. Eating healthy and staying active is key to preventing health problems later in life.

Carmen Long partnered with the Glade Creek, Piney Creek and Sparta Elementary Schools pre-school and kindergarten classrooms 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, the 9-session series was taught to 174 pre-k and kindergarten children for a total of 1429 contacts.

The classroom teachers love CMH and shared that their students were more willing to taste fruits and vegetables and have increased their physical activity after participating in the program. Parents have shared that kids are asking for vegetables and healthy foods, have shown an interest in cooking, are more interested in trying new foods and wanting to exercise. These behavior changes will have a positive influence on not just the student's long-term health, but also the health of the whole family.



2023 GRAND CHAMPION GROWER



The National Christmas Tree Association chose Cline Church Nursery as the 2023 Grand Champion Grower. The NCTA holds a contest every two years in which consumers, industry experts, and growers choose which nurseries will provide trees for the White House and the vice president's official residence, continuing a 58-year-old tradition.

This year marks the 15th time a tree from the Tar Heel State was chosen as the official Christmas tree for the White House, more than any other state in the nation. The last time was in 2021, when a Fraser fir tree was donated from Peak Farms, owned by Rusty and Beau Estes, from Jefferson in Ashe.

This isn't the first time Cline Church Nursery has received a special honor. In 2022, they were selected as Reserve Champion by the NCTA and presented a North Carolina Fraser fir Christmas tree for display in the vice president's residence.

The 2024 White House Christmas Tree will also come from North Carolina. Cartner Christmas Tree Farm, from Newland in Avery County, was selected as the NCTA's 2024 Grand Champion Grower.

HIGH COUNTRY COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

The High Country Commercial Kitchen (HCCK) in Jefferson continues to provide affordable, easy access and support for new and existing food businesses, including value-added producers selling at local farmers markets, food truck operators, educators, caterers and restaurants needing a larger space for prep and farmers needing storage space. This kitchen serves a multi-county area, with the closest shared-use kitchens being located in Winston-Salem, Lenoir, and Independence, VA.

In 2023, we had three new-ish businesses using HCCK with food sales profitable enough they were able to grow and expand by purchasing a food truck (Valencia Flavors), move from a food truck to opening a restaurant (Just Wing It), and start a brick-and-mortar bakery (Driscoll's Bake House).

In addition to managing the daily operations of the kitchen, Jill Cockerham helps new users navigate the oftentimes complex nature of regulatory guidelines and labeling requirements by bridging the gap between regulatory agencies and food businesses. As these businesses grow, she assists food entrepreneurs in pursuing additional market opportunities, expanding product lines and general business development.



DR. KIM INGOLD NC 4-H PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Every year, North Carolina 4-H hosts an exciting photo competition, providing a platform for our talented 4-H'ers and adults to showcase their photography skills.

With more than 300 entries from across the state we are so very proud of our two state winners from Alleghany County 4-H!

Grant Wagoner - Third Place - Nature's Beauty, Junior
"Amber Waves"



Maddie Pipes - Fourth Place - 4-H IN Action, Junior
"Warming Up"



FARM SAFETY DAYS

Alleghany County, NC is a rural county with many small family farms still in place. Many farm workers, who only speak Spanish, need information that can be translated and utilized. 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 where hazards are present in order to protect themselves.

Many organizations come together twice a year to offer training in farm safety. The event this past year was held at Bottomley Farms in Sparta, NC. Station 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, how many people can ride on tractor, PTO and Attachment Safety, dangers around a PTO shaft, how to check for hydraulic leaks, how to secure your load, never clean, adjust or clear jams on equipment, what to do when you lose your cargo, hearing, eye, and skin protection and cell phone usage with farm equipment

A total of 1281 farm workers from four different farms attended the event. 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 education that could save their lives. There is no way to put any kind of worth or 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.

EXTENSION AT HOME

Family and Consumer Sciences educators have served to improve the lives of individuals and families in their communities for over 100 years. However, general knowledge of FCS services remains unknown for many community residents. The National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences hosts an annual campaign, "Living Well" to raise public awareness of Extension FCS services. Increasing awareness of FCS programming will boost overall health of communities in North Carolina.

After the success of New Year, New Way with ECA, a group of 14 agents from the North Central District decided to expand the effort. The team launched a year-long program based on the elements of NEAFCS Living Well. Extension at Home focused on the eight dimensions of living well: physical, emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, social and spiritual. This program was offered once a month via an online format. Participants could tune in for the live session or view a recording. Agents created news articles and social media posts that raised awareness of the monthly topic. 192 individuals attended the live monthly sessions. 408 individuals received a recording of the sessions with accompanying content to view at their own pace.



Participants were surveyed following the completion of the program to evaluate impact and direct planning for 2024. Of the responses, participants reports were: 60% consumed more fruits and vegetables, 80% increased physical activity, 60% utilized effective life skills, and 70% increased knowledge of home food preparation or food safety. Participants commented..."I included more fruit and vegetables in my diet"... "I reduced sodium and added sugar intake"... "I think the programs reinforce what I know to be correct information based on research rather than ideas from social media or the internet that are not based on facts."

4-H PRESENTATIONS

The 4-H Presentation Program consisting of county, district, state and even national level events is one of 4-H's most beneficial and rewarding experiences. It is the one most often credited by 4-H alumni as having given them an edge above their peers in high school, college and their professional careers. It provides a unique opportunity to develop a positive self-concept and poise, gain self-confidence before a group, learn to express ideas clearly, respond spontaneously to questions and gain subject matter knowledge. Through a series of communication activities, youth learn to express themselves and their ideas.

4-H presentations can be done on absolutely any topic a youth has an interest in. This past year ten Alleghany county youth ranging in ages from 8-18 presented on a variety of topics including Blacksmithing, Soil and Water Conservation, Industrial Design, The New River, Country Music and Western Disciplines at 4-H District Activity Day at NC A&T State University. Nine of those ten youth went on to present at the State level competition held at NC State University, where six were awarded medals.



ALLEGHANY GARDEN PROJECTS

In 2023 teachers at all three K-8 schools in Alleghany County started or expanded gardens at their school. At Piney Creek School the Pre-K teacher, Susanne Murphy, had already started a garden on the Pre-K playground. This year, Susanne worked with Kyle Hood to utilize Steps to Health garden funding to expand the existing garden. She used the funding to buy new raised beds, soil and seeds so children in her class could learn more about gardening.

At Sparta School, Danny Jones, the Middle School Tech Ed Teacher, worked with Kyle to purchase gardening supplies for his students. Grow bags, soil, and seeds were purchased to start an outdoor garden at the school. Middle schoolers in his class worked hard to set up the garden space and planted tomatoes and kale in the grow bags. Danny has a hydroponic plant system in his classroom that students were able to start plants in before transplanting them outside.

At Glade Creek School, Lisa Pickens started a garden on the Pre-K playground. She worked with Kyle to plan the garden space and utilized Steps to Health funding to purchase raised beds, seeds, soil and herbs.



STORYTIME COOKS / LITTLE LIBRARY CHEFS

For the third year, the Alleghany County Library and Cooperative Extension have partnered to offer Storytime Cooks virtually for families with young children. Each week Carmen Long 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 also 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 3800 views in 2023. The average views per week is much higher than the number would be for individuals attending an in-person program. Surry County is sharing the Storytime Cooks videos each week on Surry on the Go, the Surry County Government public access channel. This opportunity has the potential to reach thousands of viewers who have cable or internet access.

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 more likely to try new foods, resulting in improved eating habits with life-long benefits.

Little Library Chefs has continued for the second year in partnership with the Alleghany Public Library and Second Harvest Food Bank. This program meets once each month during the library's regular Monday morning story time. Children and childcare providers (parents, grandparents, aunts, etc) each receive information at each session, along with hands on activities and healthy snacks. Post evaluations show childcare providers are more confident in child appropriate portion sizes, reading labels, identifying added sugars, increasing fruit and vegetable consumptions, incorporating whole grains, food safety, making wise beverage choices and ways to get kids more involved in the kitchen. Numbers continue to increase in this group. Because they find the information helpful, in some sessions, we actually had more adults than children which is not the norm for a typical children's story time. Some of this success is contributed to meeting families where they are, which makes life easier and benefits all.



Alleghany County Center

NC COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION



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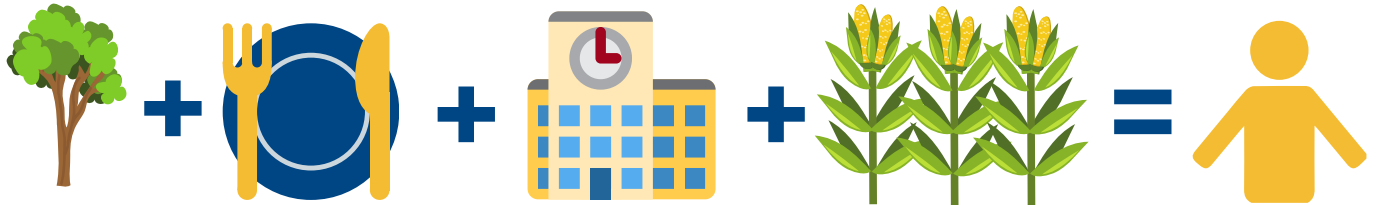
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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



ALLEGHANY COUNTY CENTER

2023 YEAR END REPORT



4,080

FACE TO FACE
CONTACTS BY
EXTENSION
PROFESSIONALS IN
2023

295,210



NEWS MEDIA
COVERAGE



882

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

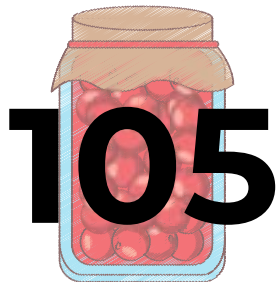
63

Number of clients who earned pesticide continuing education credits



185,595

TOTAL DIGITAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS



105

Increased knowledge of safe food handling, preservation or preparation techniques



33

Youth certified in 2023



Adults increased knowledge in preparing, preserving & cooking food

8

RADIO PROGRAMS PRESENTED

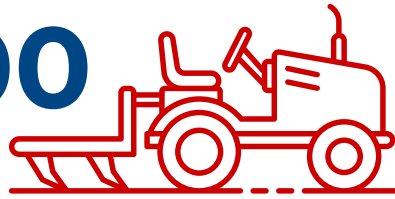


305

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

Number of acres where Extension-recommended nutrient applications were used

5,200



23

News articles published

Children who learned about food systems & gardening at 3 new school gardens



174

12



Number of animal waste management credits earned

873



Participants trained in Farmworker Safety Trainings



46

Participants increasing their physical activity