

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

2021 in Review

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
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2021 brought many challenges and changes, but was also 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 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.

With all of the challenges of 2021 and continuing to be limited on face-to-face programming in the past year due to Covid 19, staff were able to reach more than 2,200 direct contacts and had more than 47,000 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.

- 2,237 total face-to-face contacts
- 47,224 total digital contacts
- 9 news articles published
- More than 344 Facebook posts and tweets
- 6 radio programs presented



Farm Safety

Agriculture is a multi-million dollar industry that has a tremendous impact on the citizens of Alleghany County. Many in our community rely on agriculture for their livelihood, as well as the deep heritage that comes from within farming. With an increase in agricultural practices, unfortunately we also see the devastating accidents that can sometimes happen with farm equipment and machinery. We saw this as an area we could focus on within Extension and have been working on some of these issues for more than 30 years, in an attempt to raise awareness and to increase safety practices within the agricultural industry.

Some of the ways we are addressing these concerns is by offering a series of Safety Days beginning with our 2nd graders. All 2nd graders from across the county are invited to the Alleghany Fairgrounds for Farm Animal Day. At this event, youth learn about farm animals and farm animal safety including animal by-products, veterinary practices and feeds that surround the agricultural industry. This is a great way to introduce farms and farm safety and the impact the agricultural industry has to our youth. Much of the day is spent talking about where our food comes from - other than the grocery store.

The next event we host is for 4th graders who attend a Rural and Community Safety Day. At this event we bring in community partners including the NC Forest Service, Alleghany Volunteer Fire Departments, Partnership for Children, Alleghany Sheriff's Department, Upper Mountain Research Station and other agencies to offer a multi-station event. The youth learn about Fire Safety, Water Safety, Farm Animal Safety, Farm Equipment Safety, Wildlife Safety, and Firearm Safety to name a few and also to give youth some hands-on experience of what to do if put in certain situations.

As our youth get older and progress into high school we then offer a High School Safety Day that is held at the Upper Mountain Research Station. Again, we team up with local organizations including our volunteer fire departments, NC Forest Service, Soil and Water Conservation, Alleghany Sheriff's Department and other agencies to teach about pesticide safety, ATV safety, chainsaw safety, gun safety, first on the scene (basic first aid), along with elevated fire safety. Youth are able to have hands-on experience with a fire extinguisher and with livestock safety. We have found that hands-on experience is crucial because it is the "routine" that individuals get into that can lead to accidents.

The last event that we offer is for adults. Again, we see habits and routines leading to accidents that could have potentially been prevented. The concepts that are taught are extremely important and the fact that within the last few years we have been able to provide these trainings in Spanish has been a major achievement. Many of our larger agricultural operations saw the need and requested training. Fortunately, Alleghany Extension had the resources available to provide this. Ensuring that employees are safe and that there is knowledge on how to correctly operate equipment is of the highest importance, so that at the end of the day, everyone can get home safely.

Farm safety is an area that our office will continue to work on and explore new educational methods and avenues with the hopes of helping to prevent accidents in the years to come.

If you would like to see a video that we made about our Farm Safety programming, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gID8Uv9TIA>.



Storytime Cooks

Learning about food through books

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 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.

The Alleghany County Library and Cooperative Extension began partnering in September of 2020 to offer Storytime Cooks - Learning About Food Through Books, virtually, for families with young children. Each week Carmen Long, Area Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, reads a story and then share/demonstrate 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 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 8,500 views in 2021. The average number of views, approximately 164 per week, is much higher than the number would be for individuals attending an in-person program. Many positive comments have been received 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.

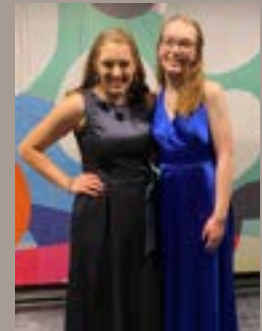


National 4-H Congress

A delegation of 18 North Carolina 4-H youth and 3 adults representing 15 counties including Alleghany county, attended the 100th annual National 4-H Congress, which was held in Atlanta, Georgia. The North Carolina delegation returned home from five days, in which more than 800 youth and adults representing 4-H programs across the country gathered to participate in educational, service and recreational opportunities.

Colleen Cassell represented Alleghany County at the November 26-30, 2021 conference. This year's theme "A Century of Empowering Youth", included workshops designed to develop 4-Hers leadership skills, sessions with outstanding speakers and entertainers, a Service-Learning experience, during which delegates participated in hands-on service projects, as well as tours and recreational opportunities throughout the city.

Colleen was selected to attend due to her success in AIRE (Application, Resume, Interview, and Electronic - Video) which is a workforce development and college prep program application. She has been involved in 4-H since she was 5 years old and continues to expand on her leadership skills each year.



National 4-H Congress, a 4-H tradition for 100 years, was originally designed to recognize state and national winners. As the 4-H program has changed to meet the needs of youth today so has National 4-H Congress. This year's event, like the ones that preceded it, will not only recognize excellence, but also provide an outstanding, educational opportunity for 4-H youth.



Youth Livestock Dairy Shows

Due to the number of dairy farms in the county declining, the number of youth participating in our district dairy show had decreased the over the past few years.

With the assistance of our intern for the summer of 2021, a calf camp was planned for youth, ages of 6 to 18. We had 19 youth to participate in this camp, which was 2.5 days and held in Sparta for individuals from all over the state. The North Carolina Dairy Youth Foundation was a sponsor for the regional show that all the youth participated in. Also, Carolina Farm Credit and the Dairy Alliance provided T-Shirts for all the attendees.

The group that oversees this livestock program is made up of members from the Alleghany Cattlemen's Association, Alleghany High School, NC Cooperative Extension, Alleghany Center. This group came together to provide leadership and educational programs.

The Show Circuit is overseen by one representative from the five participating counties to provide leadership and recognition of this program at an annual banquet.

The 2021 show circuit was able to be expanded with new shows added. Because of this, youth have been able to participate at the local, regional, state and national levels in showmanship.



Med Instead of Meds

The Covid-19 pandemic suddenly and drastically changed the way we traditionally offer education programs to our Extension clientele. One in four Americans has one or more chronic conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. For those over the age of 65, the number increases to three out of four people. Chronic diseases are also responsible for 7 out of 10 deaths each year and treating people with these chronic diseases accounts for around 86% of our nation's health care costs. Many of these illnesses can be eradicated, or at the least, made more manageable by adapting healthier eating patterns, along with including adequate physical activity into daily routines.

The ability to offer virtual programming allowed Carmen Long to work with other agents across county lines and offer the Med Instead of Meds program via the Zoom platform. As a team they were able to teach and present live, as well as some prerecorded recipe demonstrations from their curriculum website. 152 participants registered for the class series, with an average of 64 participants in the sessions each week, over the 6-week time frame. Other participants watched the recordings later when it was more convenient.

According to the pre and post evaluation survey results, we saw a great commitment by participants adapting the practice of eating the Med way by cooking with olive oil more often, adapting a routine of eating the med way and getting more physical activity. Several participants had already begun trying the Med recipes, while others expressed interest in trying them in the future. Participants also expressed that they enjoyed the privilege of being able to participate in the program from the comfort and safety of their homes during a pandemic, the helpfulness of the recipe demonstrations, getting to have multiple instructors present the sessions, access to the recorded sessions for later viewing, the link to recipes on the website, and all the other resource materials provided to them for attending the sessions. A few individuals also reported weight loss throughout the program.

4-H Camp

For more than 80 years, North Carolina 4-H camping has taught youth life skills through centers located from the mountains to the sand hills to the coast. Each year, more than 4,000 campers from across the state participate in 4-H camping programs at North Carolina's 4-H educational centers. Thousands more participate in conferences, school enrichment programs, special events and workshops.

Why camp? Camp has the ability to accomplish wonderful things in the lives of our children without them really realizing that they are changing for the better. By staying in a cabin, they gain a sense of community, shared values, contribution, commitment and compassion. On a nature hike, they have the ability to connect with the natural world. During these times, they are disconnected from computers, television or movie screens. They experience growth by taking healthy risks and stepping beyond their comfort zones. They build character, becoming more competent and more caring. They learn to resolve conflicts, value diversity and to share in the success of the group.

Each year Alleghany 4-H has the opportunity to take a delegation of young people to a 4-H residential camp in NC. The value of camp goes well beyond a week of fun in the outdoors. We have seen dramatic behavioral changes in youth during these 6 days of excitement. There have been numerous parents that write letters or contact us saying "This was one of the best things I could have done for my child. They have come back with a different outlook on life." From behavioral changes with siblings to helping with family meal time or making their bed, the impact of one week can make tremendous changes.

Alleghany 4-H has had several lifetime campers which means from the time they are 8 they return to camp each year. Several of our camps also offer advanced opportunities for 15-17 year olds to be LIT's (Leader's in Training) which then can lead easily into a job opportunity beginning at age 18. In reality, the camping experience can be turned into a career if the love and passion are there.

We truly believe in the experiences of 4-H camp and have seen first-hand the impact it can have on our youth. In the words of our former 4-H North Carolina State Program Leader, L.R. Harrill, "You will leave this place a different person. We hope you will be a better person."



Alleghany Farmers Market

During our second COVID season at the Alleghany Farmers Market, as things opened up a bit more, both vendors and customers were more than ready to venture out in public again and connect with friends and neighbors in person. This market season was a record setting year!

Through active and ongoing recruitment, cooperation with other area markets, and more robust social media presence, the number of total vendors (both full-time and occasional/part-time) selling at market this year tripled in number (approx. 60), compared to previous years. Reaching that critical mass of vendor occupancy significantly boosted the variety of produce, meat, value-added products and handmade goods offered at market this season. CSA (community-supported agriculture) subscription boxes were available and other locally-produced food items, such as goat cheese, fermented/probiotic products and mushrooms, were available for purchase through the Market Store.

With the increase in the number of vendors and variety of products available, the customer base grew massively throughout the season and that direct connection between farmer/producer and consumer helped build solid relationships through consistent purchases, conversations about farming practices, and really getting to know the people who grow your food and create the goods customers look for.

In partnership with the Alleghany Farmers Market, a new nonprofit organization, Alleghany Food Alliance, was created to further address issues of food insecurity, boost local food infrastructure, and support new/established farmers and producers. The Alliance, through a grant from Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), was able to provide \$500 worth of food vouchers for Solid Rock Food Closet to distribute to recipients to exchange for produce and meat directly from market vendors. Additional projects and collaborations are in the works for next year as well.

Workshops are planned for spring of 2022 that will focus on food self-sufficiency, food business startups, and homesteading/gardening.



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. 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 Glade Creek, Piney Creek and Sparta Elementary Schools preschool 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, Color Me Healthy was taught to 71 pre-k children.



One classroom teacher shared that 100% of her students were more willing to taste fruits and vegetables after participating in the program. Based on parent feedback, 95% of the students increased their physical activity. 100% of the parents observed an improvement in their child's willingness to taste fruits at home. 92% of parents observed that their children were more willing to taste vegetables. Parents also 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 the student's long term health.

New Way with ECA



A group of Northwest NC counties have hosted an area Extension Community Association (ECA) leader lesson training twice a year, for almost 20 years. Due to the current pandemic, we have not able to host an in-person training since January 2020. The large majority of ECA members are older adults, making them more at risk for severe illness if diagnosed with COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control). According to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, as older adults' time at home lengthened, loneliness and isolation could increase, leading to a multitude of adverse health outcomes.

Agents teamed together in early 2021 to host a monthly virtual training **New Year, New Way with ECA**. This served as a means to provide programming to current ECA members, include more members of the community in ECA programming and create a social outlet for all. Monthly workshops were planned on a variety of topics, from exercise to simple meals and family resource management. As of December 2021, eleven monthly workshops have been held with a total of 411 attendees. The audience was primarily older adults who spend a majority of their time at home. Participants attended from North Carolina to Vancouver, British Columbia.

As a result, participants were able to learn about a variety of topics virtually and it allowed for interaction among members who are at home more due to Covid-19. Participants reported utilizing resources to save money in new ways such as "using my old blouses to make pillow covers", learning how to exercise at home including, "alternative exercises that can be done seated", learning new ways to prepare foods at home through bread making and air frying. The success of the workshops has led the team to continue the programming for 2022.

Wool Pool

Over the past 3 years, sheep producers have received low prices and haven't able to adequately get a fair or market-driven price for their product with the current wool pool.

Cooperative Extension in NC and VA addressed this problem by looking at new options for their producers to market their wool. During 2019 and 2021, after multiple meetings and discussions, a partnership with KY wool producers was established. This partnership allowed our producers to market any wool, that was of good quality, thru the KY/VA/NC Wool Pool.

Because of this alliance, over 15 companies were able to bid on the producers wool and they received at-least a 100% increase in the amount received per pound of wool. Some producers have seen increases over 200%.

With continued education on bagging, grading and maintaining high wool quality, these producers will be able to garner a high price for their product.

This year we were able to ship 76,340 pounds of wool to Chargers Wool Processors for a premium price for local farmers.



2021 4-H Summer Fun

There are limited opportunities for youth in Allegheny County during the summer months. After not being able to meet in person during 2020, Allegheny 4-H was more excited than ever to get back in the swing of things with Summer Fun 2021. Summer Fun is our series of programs offered during the months of June - August for Allegheny Youth. 4-H is built on the concept of Learn By Doing and teaching a variety of life skills that we hope our youth will carry with them as they grow into successful adults.

During the summer of 2021, Allegheny 4-H offered more than 20 in-person program opportunities to local youth as well as providing scholarships for youth to attend when possible. Some of the community partners that assisted in some of these programs included the NC Forest Service, Allegheny Soil and Water Conservation Service, Allegheny County Beekeepers Association and Extension Agents from the Allegheny Office.

This past summer, Allegheny 4-H was able to provide opportunities to more than 260 youth through a variety of programming. Opportunities spanned from gardening in our "Just Grow It" program to sewing and public speaking. Youth were also able to travel outside of the county and visit some amazing environmental education sites including Grandfather Mountain, where we learned about native species from park naturalists, visited the animal habitats and crossed the mile-high swinging bridge. Other adventures included Linville Caverns, U.S. National Whitewater Center and the NC Zoo. In addition to this, nine Allegheny youth were able to attend a weeklong overnight residential camp at Betsy-Jeff Penn 4-H Center in Reidsville.

Summer programs continue to grow and expand in Allegheny and we are increasingly thankful to our partners, volunteers, parents and youth who make our programs possible.

