

Alleghany County Center

NC COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION



2024

**REPORT
TO THE
PEOPLE**

THE TEAM

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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 Extension Agent, 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.

THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING YOUTH BEEKEEPING THROUGH 4-H: CULTIVATING RESPONSIBILITY, CONSERVATION & COMMUNITY

As environmental concerns continue to grow, one hands-on learning opportunity is gaining buzz across the country - beekeeping. In particular, 4-H, the nation's largest youth development organization, is offering young people the chance to get involved in this rewarding and important activity. Through 4-H's beekeeping programs, youth not only learn the science behind bee colonies, but also develop life skills such as responsibility, leadership, and community engagement.

Bees play an essential role in our ecosystem by pollinating about one-third of the food crops humans rely on. With bee populations declining due to habitat loss, pesticides, and diseases, the need for more beekeepers has never been greater.

By taking part in 4-H beekeeping, youth develop a strong sense of environmental stewardship. They understand that their actions - whether it's protecting bees, planting pollinator-friendly gardens, or supporting sustainable farming practices - can make a positive difference in protecting vital ecosystems.

Youth involved in 4-H beekeeping also develop important critical thinking skills. Whether they are troubleshooting a hive issue, analyzing honey production trends, or predicting the impact of weather changes on their bees, they must constantly evaluate and adjust their approach. This fosters a mindset of problem-solving, resilience, and adaptability - skills that will serve them well in many areas of life. Beekeeping requires time, patience, and consistency - qualities that 4-H's beekeeping program encourages young people to develop. Tending to a hive is not a task that can be rushed. It involves regular check-ins, careful monitoring of the colony's health, and learning how to handle setbacks such as hive die-offs or swarming.

Through 4-H's beekeeping programs, youth gain more than just the technical knowledge of how to care for bees - they gain a sense of purpose, a respect for the environment and the skills to become informed, responsible, and engaged citizens.

By integrating beekeeping into its educational offerings, 4-H provides a unique and enriching opportunity for youth to connect with nature, develop scientific and life skills, and engage in their communities. Beekeeping offers a powerful way to teach young people about environmental conservation, responsibility, patience, and leadership—all while fostering a deep appreciation for the vital role bees play in our world. As more youth participate in 4-H beekeeping programs, they not only help protect pollinators—they also help create a more sustainable future for us all.

During 2024 Allegheny 4-H partnered with the Allegheny County Beekeeping Association to acquire a grant to provide a hands on learning opportunity at a local apiary. The Association was able to purchase bee suits, tools and equipment to provide a one of a kind learning experience. We plan to continue these efforts in 2025 with the hopes of starting a youth 4-H beekeeping club.



ALLEGHANY FARMERS MARKET

The 2024 Alleghany Farmers Market is in its 5th season and continues to grow, evolve and be a successful ongoing venue for market vendors, with most vendors returning year after year. With a current total of over 50 regular weekly and part-time/seasonal vendors (roughly 22-28 vendors each Saturday), the consistent number of vendors gives market shoppers a robust selection of local produce, value-added products and artisan-made goods. Many customers regularly comment on the “good vibes” market Saturdays bring to the community.

Since the 2020 market season (and all that COVID brought to the table logistics-wise) we’ve never had to cancel a market (generally open every Saturday beginning of May through end of October) until Hurricane Helene. We also host a Holiday Market on the Saturday before Thanksgiving each year that is always well attended and offers a very affordable option for craft vendors to sell their wares. Due to unpleasantly cold/windy weather, we moved the location to the Emerson Black Building at the Fairgrounds and it proved to be a perfect location, with better attendance than we’ve had in previous years.



Due to the uptick in new Alleghany residents over the past 2-3 years, there have been many conversations with people asking what NC Cooperative Extension could offer instructionally for those interested in creating small homesteads on their property. We put out a dot survey at the market over a 4-5 week period highlighting a variety of ideas for workshops, such as disaster preparedness, gardening, food preservation and homestead planning. In a collaboration with Wilkes Community College in Alleghany, these workshops are now planned for the winter months in 2025, beginning in February.



2023 DAIRY CALF CAMP

The 2024 state-wide dairy calf camp was held in Sparta, NC at the Alleghany County Fairgrounds on July 29th. At the conclusion of camp there was a showmanship-only show. Youth brought their own calves to work with and use thru the various sessions. This camp is for advanced youth who have shown previously and are looking to improve their skills in showmanship, clipping/fitting, animal management and care. The sessions were lead by Katie Shultz (PA), Jason Zimmerman (NY), Aaron Ray Tompkins (NC) and Heather Schronce (NC).



FALL 2024 CHRISTMAS TREE UPDATE

According to the [NOAA](#), the southeastern US has experienced a decreasing trend in rainfall during the summer months over the last decades. Most climate models forecast that the decrease in summer rainfall will continue into the future. Temperatures have also steadily increased across the Southeast since the 1970s, especially during the summer. The increase in annual temperature is expected to continue, with an average annual temperature increase of 3-5°F by 2041-2070.

This year, North Carolina had an abnormally wet May, followed by the driest June on record - dating back to 1895. Boone specifically had its 3rd driest June since 1980. Temperatures in June throughout North Carolina also ranked as the warmest since 2018. These warm and dry conditions follow 2023, which was North Carolina's 7th warmest year on record since 1895, the first year data was recorded. October of 2023 was particularly dry in many mountain regions. For example, in 2023 Jefferson hosted the driest weather station in the state in October, recording only .35" of rain.

A number of NC counties were affected by the increased heat and drought conditions, with first-year seedling losses observed. A few farms suffered 60-95% mortality of first-year seedlings. In drought-afflicted farms, Turkish fir seedling mortality was generally lower than Fraser seedlings. Canaan fir seemed to withstand water stress better than Fraser, however some fields had very high Canaan mortality. Fields with plenty of weeds seemed to fair better in dry conditions, as the weeds could have kept the soil moist. J-rooted seedlings were hit particularly hard.



A STORY THAT MOVES YOU!

Improving literacy and increasing physical activity are goals for all children, including those in Allegheny County. With high youth obesity rates, moving more will benefit youth of every age. According to the most recent Allegheny County Community Health Report, 72 percent of Allegheny middle school students reported they have exercised to lose weight. More than half of Allegheny high school students reported exercising to lose weight in the past 30 days. If we can reduce obesity at the elementary level, we may have improved health and self-esteem in our older youth. On the 22-23 NC Schools Report Card, more than half of Allegheny students tested below grade level in reading. Moving out of the classroom and encouraging active reading makes StoryWalks® a more fun way to read.

A StoryWalk® is an engaging way to combine literacy and physical activity. It's a unique and interactive outdoor reading experience where pages from a children's story are displayed along a walking path, allowing students to enjoy the story while staying active. They can read the story and explore the outdoors as they move from page to page. This opportunity offers a fun and exciting alternative to traditional classroom reading, perfect for exploring stories in nature. Through Step To Health funding, I received a \$700 StoryWalk® complete with a book printed on weather proof white corrugated plastic and sturdy black wrought iron frames to hold each page. The StoryWalk® will rotate between the elementary schools in Allegheny County.

Superintendent Missey Weaver, helped to install the StoryWalk® at Sparta school and is very supportive of the project. I have received pictures of kids participating and the teachers have reported that the students really enjoyed it. Heather Brannock, principal at Glade Creek School shared, "Thank you so much! This is awesome. The story is up, and the kids love it." We are looking forward to moving the StoryWalk® to Piney Creek School and then repeating schools with a different story in the spring. Social media posts have promoted the story at each school to let the parents and community know about this new opportunity to enjoy a story that moves.



SEW MUCH FUN

The Benefits of Teaching Kids to Sew: Fostering Creativity, Patience, and Practical Skills

In an increasingly digital world, where technology dominates much of our daily lives, one timeless skill is making a quiet but powerful comeback in our 4-H program: sewing. Once considered a basic household skill, sewing is now being recognized for its many benefits in child development. Not only does it foster creativity but also works to teach patience and offers many practical life skills.

This past summer Alleghany 4-H was fortunate to be able to partner with several members of the Alleghany Quilters Guild to help youth explore opportunities in sewing. This year more than 12 youth participated in a two day sewing workshop where they were allowed to learn and strengthen their skills of hand sewing as well as machine sewing. Youth were then encouraged to enter their projects into a district level sewing competition.

Sewing allows children to explore their creativity in ways that many other activities do not. By choosing fabrics, colors, and patterns, children are given the freedom to express themselves artistically. Whether it's making a simple hand-sewn quilt square, or designing a pillow or tote bag, sewing enables kids to think outside the box and see their ideas come to life. This creative process can boost their self-confidence and encourage problem-solving as they figure out how to make their visions a reality. Sewing requires a high level of precision and coordination. From threading a needle to carefully guiding the fabric through the sewing machine, children develop their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. These skills are foundational for other activities, such as writing, drawing, and even playing musical instruments. This past summer we worked with a variety of ages and skill levels helping each to explore the possibilities and gain confidence in their sewing ability.

In addition, sewing helps children improve their ability to focus for extended periods. The repetitive motions involved in stitching or assembling pieces of fabric require attention to detail and patience—traits that are essential for academic success and for managing other responsibilities later in life.

This ability of youth to stay focused and persistent, even when a project doesn't go perfectly, helps them build resilience and perseverance—important life skills that will serve them in many aspects of their future endeavors.



HIGH COUNTRY COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

As a busy shared-use, incubator kitchen, the HCCK 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 2024, several new value-added food businesses and bakers, along with a caterer from Thomasville, two new food trucks were onboarded and the kitchen was upgraded to be able to take on food businesses that require NCDA Meat & Poultry inspection. A Rackmaster bread oven was purchased so bread makers will be able to scale up production and offer new additions to their baked goods lineup. In the winter months of 2025 sourdough baking workshops will be offered, as well as some low-cost “community bake days” for people who are interested in learning more about breadmaking - without having to be a fully-onboarded food business and kitchen member.

A few short days after the devastation from Hurricane Helene, a call was received from an Ashe community member who was helping coordinate a joint partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank and area chefs in Winston-Salem/Greensboro. They needed a large enough kitchen space to produce an enormous amount of hot food that would be distributed to lineman, DOT workers, National Guard members and any Ashe communities without power and/or in need of food assistance.

Within a couple days and after many thousands of pounds of food were delivered, we were able to spring into action at HCCK. Many volunteers and as many as 8 chefs per day worked 12-hour days for a couple of weeks to supply the amount of food needed to keep the community-in-need and hardworking front-line disaster workers fed until most power was restored in Ashe County.



SOUTHEAST DAIRY YOUTH RETREAT



The Southeast Dairy Youth Retreat is a week long retreat for youth interested in learning more about the dairy industry. The SEDYR rotates between SE states, including North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia and Florida. Participants get to attend workshops, hands on demonstrations, and lectures about relevant topics in the industry. Additionally, field trips to visit local dairy farms and other farm businesses are part of the retreat. Some of the highlights this year included visits to North Florida Holsteins, University of Florida, Florida Research Stations, The World Equestrian Center and swimming in manatee bay. This year youth from Alleghany, Surry and Randolph counties attended the event in Florida with Extension Agent Aaron Ray Tompkins and volunteer Victoria Calhoun.



SUMMER INTERNSHIP

In the summer of 2024, Abbie Joines, who is a senior at NC State University, completed an internship with Alleghany Cooperative Extension. During her time working with Alleghany Cooperative Extension, she worked with office staff to assist with 4-H Summer Fun Programming and the Alleghany 4-H River Otters Club. She worked with a total of 400 youth participants ages 5-18 throughout 25 programs with topics such as agriculture, environmental stewardship, forestry, gardening, and pollinators. Also, she worked with 10 youth to prepare and present a presentation at the North Central District Activity Day. 9 youth went on to compete at the NC 4-H Presentation Competition. The Alleghany 4-H River Otters Club is a club where youth participants learn about water quality and conservation and participate in water sampling to learn about water quality monitoring and the NC Stream Watch Program. The most beneficial outcome of her internship was learning that it is important to the success of programming to build a network of community stakeholders and partners. Also, she learned that the principle of learning by doing (the principle that 4-H programs are based upon) is important when engaging youth in learning activities and inspiring youth to be eager to learn more.



ALLEGHANY GARDEN PROJECTS

In 2024, the Kindergarten classroom at Piney Creek School started a garden behind their classroom thanks to funding from NCSU's Steps to Health program. Kindergarten students were able to plant radishes, peas and spinach as well as other fall vegetables. This funding was also used to purchase indoor gardening equipment so students could learn to grow vegetables indoors. Teachers plan to plant spring vegetables indoors next year so students can transplant them into their new garden in March and April.

The Pre-K teacher at Piney Creek School, 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 purchase a shelf and plant lights so students could start growing vegetables indoors. Her students successfully started vegetables inside their classroom and eventually transplanted some of them into their garden space. Students had a successful outdoor garden as well and one memorable event during the growing season was harvesting carrots last fall.

Additionally, blueberry bushes were purchased and planted around the Pre-K playground so that students could check on them daily and learn to care for them. The class plans to plant apple trees near their playground in 2025 so students can learn to grow and enjoy different kinds of fresh fruit.



DRONES & PESTICIDES

During the fall of 2024 Alleghany Cooperative Extension held a pesticide class with Preston Cave from Dobson, NC on using Drones to spray pesticides. There were 43 producers who attended the pesticide class that was held at Curtis Weaver's Farm in the Twin Oaks community.

Participants were able to gain knowledge about how drones could be more efficient to spray small, irregular-shaped fields. Drones significantly reduce the risk of applicators being contaminated by the pesticides, especially those using backpack sprayers. This is a technological advance that several producers in Alleghany County are utilizing.



SPARTA WALK AUDIT

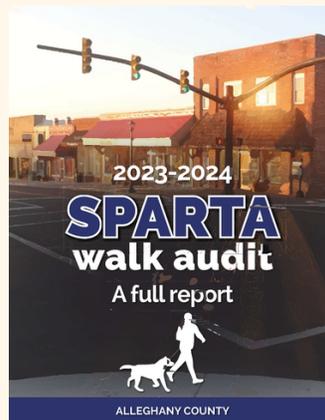
IMPROVING WALKABILITY ONE STEP AT A TIME

Walk audits raise awareness and promote community engagement in identifying areas that need improvement while fostering a sense of ownership. Audits are helpful to improve the safety and accessibility of routes that connect everyday locations as workplaces, schools, grocery stores, parks and other essential services and can result in policy, system and environmental changes that benefit the entire community. Since there hadn't been a walk audit in Sparta since 2012, it was time to assess and evaluate our community for safety and walkability.

In December 2023, over 30 individuals conducted a walk audit of Sparta using the walk audit tool kit from the NCSU Steps to Health program. Participants chose between three different routes to walk. The routes were selected based on their access to important spaces in Sparta, such as the hospital, library, post office, food pantry, parks and schools. Walkers consisted of Extension employees, Alleghany Sparta Trail Association members, representatives from AppHealthCare, Alleghany Health, Alleghany Health Physical Therapy, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce, Alleghany Wellness Center, Town of Sparta Police Dept., the Children's Center of Northwest NC, retired medical doctors and nurses, retired superintendent from Alleghany County Schools and other community members. The goal was to assess general walkability, identify barriers to safe walking and make recommendations to improve the walking conditions within the town of Sparta.

After completing their walk audit route, participants submitted a 5 question Walk Audit Checklist to rate the results of their walk and then added up their ratings to give their route an overall score. Results were compiled and assets and issues/barriers were identified for each route. These results highlighted the strengths and the need for comprehensive enhancements to ensure safer and more enjoyable walking experiences throughout Sparta. All three routes exhibited deficiencies in pedestrian infrastructure and safety measures such as faded crosswalks, inconsistent signage and significant barriers to accessibility. The 32 recommendations were assigned priorities of low, medium and high based on safety, access and ease of implementation. The ease was ranked easy, moderate or difficult based on the difficulty of implementation, costs and resource requirements.

The findings of the walk audit serve as a foundation for informed decision making and collaborative action among local authorities, urban planners, advocacy groups and community members. By working together to address the identified concerns and capitalize on existing strengths, we can create a community where walking is safe, convenient and enjoyable for all residents and visitors.



CHEF & CHILD

Learning cooking skills at a young age is not just about preparing food—it's about gaining confidence, health, creativity, and life skills that extend far beyond the kitchen. The benefits of cooking affect everything from physical health to social connections, financial literacy, and even environmental awareness. By teaching youth how to cook, we equip them with valuable tools to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives, and also foster a sense of independence and responsibility.

This past summer Alleghany 4-H in conjunction with the American Culinary Federation offered our three day cooking program, Chef & Child, to 15 youth ages 8-12. Youth were taught about choosing ingredients, basic knife skills, safe cooking skills as well as making healthy choices. Our program was led by Chef Don McMillan - a nationally recognized chef from Forsyth County.

Encouraging youth to learn to cook not only empowers them to make smarter food choices but also helps them develop critical skills that will serve them well throughout their lives. Whether it's preparing a simple meal or crafting an elaborate dish, the act of cooking can be a gateway to a lifetime of learning, growth and enjoyment. In a world where technology, convenience, and processed foods dominate our daily lives, it's easy to overlook the value of basic culinary skills. However, as the importance of healthy eating, self-sufficiency, and creativity becomes increasingly clear, teaching young people how to cook has emerged as a crucial life skill. Whether in the kitchen with a parent or through formal classes, youth who learn cooking skills are equipped with more than just the ability to prepare meals. They gain a wide array of benefits that can shape their physical health, mental well-being, and life skills for years to come.

Cooking is a fundamental life skill that fosters independence. As youth grow, knowing how to prepare simple meals empowers them to take care of themselves. Whether they're preparing a snack after school or cooking a full meal, these skills give youth a sense of pride and accomplishment. For older teens, the ability to cook extends to greater self-sufficiency as they prepare for adulthood. Being able to cook a balanced meal not only reduces reliance on others but also builds confidence in their ability to manage daily life. It's a step toward becoming self-reliant, as cooking is an essential part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle in the future.

Learning these skills early on can translate into better time management in other areas of life. Teens who know how to balance meal preparation with homework or extracurricular activities are likely to become more efficient at juggling their responsibilities.

Cooking can be a social activity that brings people together. Families who cook together often bond over shared tasks, conversations, and experiences. For youth, preparing meals with parents or caregivers offers a valuable opportunity for mentorship and connection. Whether it's passing down family recipes or simply spending quality time in the kitchen, cooking fosters communication, cooperation, and teamwork. Cooking with others helps develop social skills like sharing tasks, listening to instructions, and respecting different opinions—skills that serve young people well in school, friendships, and life in general.



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