

## HORTICULTURE

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**Status of Industry:** The Mississippi horticulture industry includes vegetable and fruit production as well as the “Green Industry” (turf, floriculture and ornamentals). Collectively the “Green Industries” have a production value in excess of \$51 million and is recognized as the fastest growing segment of the horticulture industry in the state.

There are 582 certified nurseries in Mississippi comprised of 7,250 acres. Approximately 20 percent of those nurseries are located in Northeast Mississippi. The second largest wholesale nursery is located in Tippah County. Horticulture revenues from this county exceed \$1 million.

Northeast Mississippi has an active and growing “Green Industry.” Based on statistics generated by the National Gardening Association, the retail expenditures on “green goods” in Northeast Mississippi are estimated to be approximately \$76 million.

The Extension Service has recognized and addressed this expanding Mississippi industry by assisting in the development of an initiative to promote the growth and economic contribution of these businesses. In the Northeast District this plan of action, the “Mississippi Grow Green” initiative has been very successful with Extension agents devoting thousands of hours to horticulture programming and activities for consumers, youth and industry clientele.

**North Mississippi Extension Horticulture Center:** Through the efforts of a team of Extension personnel funding was secured for the establishment of a Horticulture Center at the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center. The purpose of this Horticulture Center will be to expand and deliver Horticultural information to the public by utilizing trained Master Gardeners as the staff for the center. The first phase of the center, the toll-free Home Horticulture Phone Line (Home HortLine) had its debut in November. The Home HortLine was staffed by Master Gardeners who were able to answer ninety-eight percent of all calls received during the one-month trial run period. The HortLine will reopen in the spring and will operate for 10 months. The volunteer hours involved in the operation of the HortLine will have a value of \$78,400 of donation to the Extension Service. Utilizing Master Gardeners Volunteers will provide a means for Extension to continue to deliver pertinent information to consumers regardless of budget or time constraints.

**4-H Junior Master Gardener Program:** The Northeast District continues to lead the state in youth participation in this new 4-H gardening curriculum. The 4-H JMG program increases youth awareness of horticulture and the environment through “hands-on” gardening activities.

The results of the pilot study that was completed in May of this year indicate academic scores improved for 50% of the participants, 55% of the participants showed more interest in plants and gardens, 46% eat more fruits and vegetables. In addition, parents of youth participating in the program indicated they spent an average of \$257 on “green goods” as a result of their child’s participation in the program. Statewide, there are currently 1800 youth registered in the 4-H JMG program with over sixty percent of those youth located in the Northeast District.

This new program continues to have a significant impact on youth, their parents, and volunteer leaders. An example of how this program can impact a community is the Blackmur Memorial Library landscaping project that the Yalobusha county 4-H agent has coordinated. A 4-H JMG club has implemented and maintained a landscaping project on the grounds of the Library for the past two years. The Chevron Corporation and the Mississippi Legislature have recognized the efforts of these young people. Last year this 4-H JMG received one of the five Congressional awards given for outstanding youth development projects in Mississippi. This year the club will receive the more prestigious Mr. Speaker’s Award for the excellent work of this ongoing community project. The Chevron Corporation in cooperation with the Mississippi Legislature sponsors these awards.

Through increased awareness and attitude changes of these participants the horticulture industry of Mississippi is also positively impacted. If parents of all current participants spend \$257 dollars this would result in potential revenue of \$462,600 for horticulture businesses in Mississippi. As the program expands it has the potential to generate nine million dollars of sales for the “Green Industries” of Mississippi.

**Other Programming and Activities:** Extension Agents in the Northeast District conduct numerous horticulture programs and activities throughout the year targeting consumers, youth and industry. In addition, hundreds of requests for information are received by phone, e-mail, or office visits by the county offices. As an example, Webster County’s Agricultural agent handled over 250 requests for horticulture information in a three-month period.

Some specific examples of how agents continue to meet the horticultural needs of their clientele are outlined below:

Alcorn County Agent assisted local school in grant application for new greenhouses (value \$30,000)

The Montgomery County Agent presented a program on indoor plants to nursing home residents. Also, provided plants and ongoing maintenance of these donated plants for the residents. Quality of life improved for this often overlooked segment of our population. The program is continuing.

The Lafayette County Agent organized a Sports Field Maintenance Workshop for industry clientele. The event included exhibits, educational presentations and featured the field superintendent of the Memphis Redbirds. Attendees had very positive response to workshop.

Horticulture agent for Lee, Monroe and Lowndes counties conducted two very successful advanced trainings for Master Gardeners in those counties. He organized a field trip to Callaway Gardens, which included a workshop on field disease diagnosis conducted by an Alabama Extension Service Plant Pathologist. He also conducted a landscape design workshop, which addressed various commercial and homeowner landscape situations. A city planner, a landscape architect and a landscaper were all involved in the training.

Yalobusha County personnel teamed with the Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center to have a field day and tour of the wildflower test fields for the public. Through their efforts over 200 people learned more about horticulture and wildflowers.

The agents of the Northeast District continue to provide quality, pro-active programming through innovative techniques and timely dissemination of research-based horticulture information to clientele groups.

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