

EXTENSION COUNTY PROGRAMS

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Extension means education, and staff members in each county prepare and deliver educational programs for producers, landowners, homeowners and youth. This past year, over 203,000 youth and adults participated in more than 17,500 agricultural and community development educational activities presented in the 23 counties in Extension's Northeast District. Their estimation of the total economic benefit of these activities was \$15,939,773.

These activities provided information on the production of numerous agricultural commodities, such as horses, goats, beef cattle, swine, poultry, wildlife, timber, cotton, grain crops and horticultural crops. Emphasis was placed on managing risk, crop production and tillage systems, effective marketing, safety, land ownership issues for under-served timber owners, legal issues for women, and the production of quality beef. Special activities were held to promote profitability and identify emerging issues that will shape agriculture in this new century.

Extension agents use an advisory council process that allows producers to grow as leaders through identifying community needs, planning activities to meet those needs, and serving as resource people to help others. Due to skills developed in their county, several of our producers were strong competitors in the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation's state young farmer program.

This advisory process has also been used on the district level. Over 250 producers, representing 13 commodities important to our district met at the 2001 Producer Advisory Committee meeting. This annual event has been held for over 25 years, and is a model for many states for bringing producers, researchers, Extension specialists and university faculty together to focus research and Extension efforts on production problems.

Agronomy – The 2001 crop year was difficult for some producers, with weather and markets severely impacting certain crops. Special programs on conservation tillage were presented to state producers through group meetings and shortcourses. Other activities stressed variety selection, fertility and pest control practices that could reduce input and increase profits. Special efforts were made to identify pest thresholds for sweetpotato production. Producers reported savings of over \$380,000 in production costs by using this information.

Commercial Catfish – As the catfish industry continues to develop in North Mississippi, potential producers ask questions and explore options for production. Because of the high level of inputs, producers face great risks along with great potential. Through trainings this past year, producers estimated Extension programs saved them over \$4.4 million through proper planning and management of ponds and fish.

Community Development – Many counties still have county fairs, which attract large crowds of exhibitors, family members, and public officials, in addition to the fair-goers. These fairs also bring money into the communities, while they promote family, fun and fellowship. As community leaders plan these and other community activities, Extension staff members become involved in the planning and implementation efforts. This past year, an estimated \$461,000 was recycled through counties in the Northeast District through these activities.

Technology – Several activities were developed in 2001 to introduce producers to emerging technology in Ag production. Video auctions, farm-based web-pages, internet information retrieval and computer-generated records were but a few topics offered. These allowed producers to work in a hands-on setting, and in the future, can lead to inter-generational opportunities, as young people can also relate to these technologies.

As technology changes, many of our teaching methods also change. This year saw a growth in distance education programming, which uses interactive video to allow presenters and their audience (though at different locations) to see, hear and talk to each other. Digital technology also allows agents to take pictures of plants, insects and diseases, send them electronically to a specialist at Mississippi State University or at the North Mississippi Horticultural Center, and have the specimen identified almost immediately.

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