

WHAT CAN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION DO FOR YOU?

by Paul J. Pugliese

I would like to propose a reasonable New Year's resolution for everyone: "Learn something new every day." Actually, this should be a life-long pursuit. That is why the new slogan for Cooperative Extension in Georgia is "Learning for Life." This might seem like a trivial thing at first, but for me it is a driving motivation for my job and an aspect of my job that makes me enjoy what I do. Every day, our office gets inundated with calls and questions on everything from ants to xeriscaping. Of course, with such a variety of calls and questions, I will be the first one to admit that I don't know everything and often have to do a little research or make a few calls to extension specialists to answer someone's question. And in the process, it seems that I enjoy the benefits of learning something new every day.

Here is a brief history of how Cooperative Extension came into being. In 1914, Congress established the Cooperative Extension Service to deliver information from land-grant colleges and universities to all Americans, particularly those who lacked access to formal education. Literally, the name means an "extension" of the University system. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension has a long history of helping the citizens of Georgia improve their quality of life through numerous outreach programs and services, fulfilling this mission as a land-grant college. Many people today may not be aware of how they can benefit from these educational programs and services or even what is offered through today's Cooperative Extension.

The University of Georgia has an extensive network of research stations statewide, three main college campuses in Athens, Griffin and Tifton, as well as local Cooperative Extension offices in all 159 counties in Georgia? This means that every citizen in Georgia can easily access the knowledge and expertise of the University of Georgia in their own backyards and local communities. Through local county extension offices, the University of Georgia helps Georgians become healthier, more productive, financially independent and environmentally responsible. Most counties have a combination of Extension agents who specialize in agriculture and natural resources, youth development and family and consumer sciences. Through these pro-

grams, Cooperative Extension can provide information on a wide variety of questions and issues concerning homes, gardens, families, consumers, agriculture and other natural resources.

Today, agriculture is still the number one, largest industry in Georgia and an important component of Cooperative Extension. Thanks to the many advances in science and technology, today's growing populations can be well fed (at least in the United States) with fewer farmers and less acres of land. Sixty years ago, the average farmer produced enough food to feed about 20 people; of course at the time, there were far more farmers and fewer people — the world population in the 1940's was around 2.5 billion. Whereas today's farmer on average produces enough food to feed over 144 people! In Cherokee County, farm operators account for less than 1% of the 184,000 thousand people that currently make up the total county population. Of course the big question that faces future generations will be how many more people can we continue to feed with fewer farmers and fewer acres of farmable land? The world population is over 6.5 billion people and is expected to double *again* in the next 50 years. So, Cooperative Extension will continue to be on the forefront of helping to address this issue; after all, we each have to eat three meals a day.

Today, Extension has evolved into a dynamic organization that addresses needs from farming to leisure activities, such as backyard gardens, equestrian communities, urban forests, landscapes, parks and recreation areas. These growing needs include very important natural resources that must be conserved and properly managed just like farms, to preserve soil, water, and air quality that is critical to the health of our growing population.

- Helping schools through 4-H and youth development programs
- Helping Master Gardeners and urban gardening programs
- Helping farmers with crops, conservation and finances
- Providing information on food, nutrition & child development
- In natural areas by helping residents to protect the environment
- Providing the food service industry safe food information/training
- Providing horticulturist education and professional certifications

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