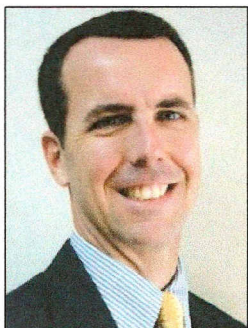


County Officials Agree: Cooperative Extension Generates Return On Investments



By Jeff Christie
ACCG Extension Liaison
The University of Georgia

"I am a firm believer that county government is a service to the citizens of the state. By the same token, public service through Cooperative Extension is also a service to the citizens.

— Melvin Davis, ACCG Second Vice-President and Oconee County Commission Chair

In an uncertain economic climate that is seeing local governments cut "non-essential" items from budgets left and right, it's a good idea to look at the true value of programs like County Extension.

What is the value of a dollar in a county budget? In these uncertain economic times, the answer to this question is critical. To arrive at this answer, county officials analyze the return on investment, or ROI, they get for each taxpayer dollar they are required to spend. Hopefully, a careful analysis proves that they are getting as close as possible to 100 percent ROI for each dollar invested in providing services for their citizens.

What is the value of \$1 invested at the local level in funding the operation of a county UGA Cooperative Extension office? The answer to that question should leave local officials feeling good about that particular line item in their budgets.

Local investment from counties has given UGA the ability to leverage additional inputs from state and federal sources. Since 1998, each \$1 committed by a county in support of Extension operations and programming has translated, on average, to an additional \$3.50 coming from sources beyond the local level. In other words, county officials have realized a 350 percent ROI from the budget totals they commit to Cooperative Extension.

ACCG Third Vice-President and Oconee County Commission Chair Melvin Davis states, "We get a tremendous return on our investment. The greatest strength of Cooperative Extension is its quick response to the needs of our citizens. From horticulture to livestock, gardening, etc., they provide quick, reliable, effective educational information, which is important in today's society. Another strength is

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DeKalb County Extension Agent Gary Peiffer shares his extensive horticultural knowledge with a group of DeKalb County gardeners.

their expertise. With the full support of all the resources of the University of Georgia behind them, Extension delivers solid, factual, unbiased, research-based information.

“I am a firm believer that county government is a service to the citizens of the state. By the same token, public service through Cooperative Extension is also a service to the citizens. Our taxpayers provide our funding source and we need to be responsive in an effective way to the citizens of our community. Cooperative Extension, working with and through various committees and advisory boards and in tandem with county government, helps us to do just that. I completely support the efforts of Cooperative Extension and the relationship that they have with county government.”

Bulloch County Manager Tom Couch agrees. “Generally, the leverage provided by county government investment, which is usually minimal (in the scope of) county operating budgets, provides access to key resources available from The University of Georgia. As Georgia’s counties have grown, the role of Cooperative Extension – which historically focused on agriculture – has expanded to meet the demand for more

community resource services focused on improving the overall quality of life through research-based education.”

Couch continues, “I have found in working for three county governments (urban, suburban and rural) that the success of, and support for, a county Extension office is directly attributable to the quality of the staff. What distinguishes Cooperative Extension from other outside agencies that are supported with county funds, is the confidence that the citizens have in it. I have noticed that when county budgets go through austerity measures or tax increase hearings, there is no circumstance where the Extension budget is challenged by elected officials, or the public. That speaks to the value I think we get here in Georgia.”

Through county Extension offices, the University of Georgia Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Family and Consumer Sciences help Georgians become healthier, more productive, financially independent and environmentally responsible. Through the cooperative funding of federal, state and county governments, Extension agents are in almost every county in Georgia.

Tony Tyson, UGA Cooperative Extension’s Director of County Operations, has a keen appreciation for the support Extension receives from county governments across the state. “We pride ourselves in the fact that we have offices in almost every county in Georgia (157 out of 159). This is only possible because of the local funding partnerships. The funding that we receive from county governments is critical to maintaining the local outreach that extends the resources from the University to serve the people all across the state.”

Regarding Extension’s reputation for assessing and meeting needs locally, Tyson says, “We believe that one of the strengths of Georgia Cooperative Extension lies in the fact that our agents are part of the communities they serve. Because they know their communities so well, they can easily assess the unique needs of their community and design their programs to meet those needs.”

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension’s educational programs have statewide significance:

- In schools through 4-H
- In urban areas with efforts such as Master Gardeners and Urban Gardening
- In rural areas by helping farmers with crop, conservation and financial information
- In homes by providing food, nutrition, child development and financial literacy information
- In the environment by working with residents to protect natural resources
- In the food service industry by providing information and training relating to safe food handling and preparation

Working in three main program areas – Agriculture and Natural Resources (A&NR); 4-H Youth Development; Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) – the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) and College of Family and Consumer Sciences cooperate to support Cooperative Extension’s delivery of unbiased, research-based information to the people of Georgia. County agents and specialists throughout the state share information on issues like

Cooperative Extension Impacts the Three-Fold Mission of UGA

The University of Georgia is the land grant institution for the state. For UGA, this translates to a three-fold mission – teaching, research, and outreach. Cooperative Extension helps to fulfill all of these mandates. Working with students in grades up through high school helps prepare them for learning. Students who arrive at UGA and who have had exposure to Extension programming are more well prepared for academic success during the college years. Through 4-H and a variety of other Extension programs, students are encouraged to be independent and critical thinkers. UGA faculty members are engaged in some of the most imperative research in the country, research whose outcome will have critical impacts for citizens across the state, country and world. Some of the most important research is being done in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) and in the college of Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS).

Research in the absence of outreach does not always reach those who can most significantly benefit from it. Cooperative Extension plays a vital role in delivering research-based solutions for problems to the citizens of Georgia in an effort to improve profitability of businesses and overall quality of life. However, any investment in UGA Cooperative Extension is an investment in a community’s future. It is surely true, also, that in difficult economic times, the economies taught by Extension Services are more relevant than ever – in every Georgia county, whether urban, rural, or in-between.