



Extension Education in Hidalgo County
Making a Difference
2010

*Improving Lives.
Improving Texas.*

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service has been dedicated to serving Texans

for nearly a century. The agency was established in 1915 under the Smith-Lever Act to deliver university knowledge and agricultural research findings directly to the people. Extension programs have continued ever since to address the emerging issues of the day, serving diverse rural and urban populations across the state.

Through a well-organized network of professional educators and more than 100,000 trained volunteers, Extension delivers practical research-based knowledge to Texans in all 254 counties. Our expertise and educational

outreach pertain to the food and fiber industry, natural resources, family and consumer sciences, nutrition and health, and community economic development. Among those served are the hundreds of thousands of young people who benefit annually from Extension's 4-H and youth development programs.

Texans turn to Extension for solutions. Its agents and specialists respond not only with answers, but also with resources and services that result in a significant return on investment to boost the Texas economy. The agency custom-designs its programs to each region of the state, relying on residents for input and for help with program delivery. Here are just a few highlights of Extension's impacts on this county and its people:

Hidalgo County – Summary of Educational Contact

- ★ Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods- 1,818
- ★ Total Contact Hours at Educational Programs Conducted via Group Methods- 294,985
- ★ Total Number of Participants in Group Methods- 133,433
- ★ Total Number of Participant Youth in Group Methods- 79,128
- ★ 4-H Clubs- 24
- ★ 4-H Members- 607
- ★ 4-H Leaders- 120
- ★ Youth Curriculum Enrichment Participants- 10,024
- ★ Youth Special Interest Participants- 58,815
- ★ Master Volunteers- 71
- ★ Extension Education Club Members- 103
- ★ Leadership Advisory Board Members- 24
- ★ Committee/Task Force Members- 196
- ★ Office Contacts- 2,228
- ★ Site Contacts- 7,037
- ★ Phone Calls- 6,328
- ★ Mail/E-Mail Contacts- 19,001

2010 Rio Grande Valley Nutrient Management Program

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture and Agriculture Agents in Cameron and Willacy counties

Relevance: Nutrient management is an important economic and environmental issue that affects water quality, soil quality and crop productivity. Runoff from excess nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizer is one source of pollution in the Arroyo Colorado watershed. At a time when escalating fertilizer prices have become a major concern for agricultural producers, soil testing and nutrient management have become even more important in reducing costs to growers and in improving water quality in the Arroyo Colorado watershed.

Response: The Rio Grande Valley Nutrient Management Education Program is a multi-county soil testing program conducted by specialists and agents with Texas AgriLife Extension Service and Texas AgriLife Research. The primary objective of the program is to educate producers about the economic and environmental benefits of soil testing and proper nutrient management. Over the past nine years, this project has conducted 4,100 soil samples representing a total of more than 165,000 acres of cropland in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties. Crops produced include citrus, corn, cotton, grain sorghum, bermuda grass, melons and sugar cane. Through educational workshops and field days, growers have received training enabling them to implement effective nutrient management strategies.

Results: 4 group methods resulted in a total of 120 contact hours of education. The economic impact of the RGV Nutrient Program was measured in terms of potential fertilizer savings that have resulted from increased adoption of soil testing. Using soil-test recommendations and producer-planned fertilizer rates, the savings in nitrogen and phosphate were estimated at 4.1 million and 4.9 million pounds, respectively. Reduction in fertilizer application rates translated into an average cost savings of \$25.77 per acre, depending on crop and management history. Total economic benefits to producers since the program began in 2001 are estimated at \$4.25 million. This analysis does not include the value of environmental benefits. Important collaborators: Rio Farms, Inc., RGV Sugar Growers, Valley Ag Agents, Dr. Mark McFarland, Dr. Tony Provin, Troy Berthold, Jaime Flores, Arroyo Colorado Ag Issues Work Group, NRCS, TSSWCB, TWRI and many others.

Future Plans: Plan to continue this program contingent upon funding and crops committee approval

2010 Rio Grande Valley Beef Development Program

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture and ag agents in Cameron, Willacy, Zapata and Starr Counties

Relevance: Beef producers can improve their herd or the herds of their customers through more rigid sire selection. Replacement heifers will perform to higher levels when in optimum body condition. Beef producers want to increase the value of bulls by collecting feedlot performance data and carcass characteristics.

Response: Extension conducted an official 112 day bull gain test and a 126 day heifer development program. Numerous data are collected on all animals including: initial and final weights, average daily gain, body

condition score, scrotal circumference, sheath score, reproductive tract score, pelvic area measurement, hip height and ultra-sound measurement of backfat and ribeye area. All data is provided to consignors.

Results: A total of 8 group methods resulted in a total of 505 contact hours of education. A bull gain test and heifer development program has been conducted each year from 1998 through 2010. A total of 1009 bulls and 420 heifers have been in the program. Currently, 55 bulls and 49 heifers are in the program by cattlemen participating from throughout south and central Texas. A new feeder pen of steers has been added this year. 100 percent of respondents surveyed said that the program added value to their operation. Important collaborators: Dr. Joe Paschal, Rio Beef Feed Yard and RGV Beef Improvement Association.

Future Plans: In cooperation with the Rio Grande Valley Beef Improvement Association, plans are to continue the program and perhaps consider marketing alternatives for participants. Another future possibility will be to include an artificial insemination program.

2010 Rio Grande Valley Pesticide Safety Program

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture and Dr. Enrique Perez, County Extension Agent- Agriculture in Cameron County

Relevance: Ag producers have a statutory requirement to obtain and maintain a pesticide license issued by Texas Department of Agriculture in order to use crop protection chemicals. Extension is relied upon to provide education needed in this process. Training is provided for those needing to obtain a license and continuing education is provided to local producers in order to renew their license.

Response: Educational training events were conducted to meet statutory requirements for producers to obtain a license. Continuing education is also be provided.

Results: A total of 22 group methods resulted in a total of 2256 contact hours of education. Five Pesticide Safety Trainings were conducted in 2010. One hundred percent of the 50 students received a passing grade on the exam administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture. The average grade for all students was 87. Numerous continuing education credits were provided to ag producers during the course of the year at every educational meeting conducted. Also provide Certified Crop Consultant continuing education. Important Collaborators: Texas Department of Agriculture and the Texas Certified Crop Advisor Program.

Future Plans: This effort will continue in the future.

2010 Hidalgo County Crop Production Program

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture

Relevance: Sugarcane, cotton, grain sorghum and corn are important agronomic crops for the Rio Grande Valley. An estimated 70 percent of sugarcane producers could improve their yields which could enhance the profitability of this crop for all producers. New/underutilized crops need to continue to be investigated such as soybeans and sesame.

Response: AgriLife Extension provides educational resources for crop producers to gain knowledge which gives them the information necessary to become more efficient, economically sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Results: A total of 14 group methods resulted in 1880 contact hours of education were conducted on a wide variety of topics using a number of different methods. Topics included cotton production, soybean production, farm bill programs, conservation tillage, and many others. Methods included field days, result demonstrations conducted on producer farms, meetings and publications. These included: Cotton Pre-Plant Conference, Grape Field Day, Grain Sorghum and Sesame Field Day, Cotton Field Day, EQIP Meeting, Sugarcane Field Day and Soybean Field Day. Efforts to promote local agriculture included Santana Mills tour of cotton production and groundbreaking, and hosting of Mexican grain buyers visit to area. Important collaborators: Dr. Dan Fromme, Dr. Gaylon Morgan, Dr. James Grichar, Sesaco, Rio Farms, Inc., Lower Rio Grande Valley Cotton and Grain Producers, Texas Farm Bureau Texas Grain Sorghum Association and Texas Boll Weevil Foundation

Future Plans: Establish a sunflower variety trial for this important crop to the McCook area.

2010 Hidalgo County Agriculture Water Conservation Program

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture

Relevance: Water conservation in production agriculture continues to be a priority issue for this area due to the need to continue to use local water resources from the Rio Grande River responsibly.

Response: Educational programs and result demonstrations were used to provide information to end users

Results: A total of 4 group methods resulted in a total of 189 contact hours of education. Master gardeners are taught water conservation in the landscape techniques, such as drip irrigation. Result demonstrations show soil water monitoring technologies. The interaction of nutrient management and water conservation are stressed. Extension partnered with several groups in conducting Texas Ag Irrigation Expo. Important collaborators: RGBI, ADI and Arroyo Colorado planning groups.

Future Plans: Continue teaching people about water conservation methods.

2010 Hidalgo County Emergency Management Plan

Developed by Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture and Ag Agent in Cameron County

Relevance: Production agriculture is susceptible to disasters that require an educational response such as drought, hurricanes, flooding, etc. RGV Animal Issues Committee is developing a plan to cover emergencies regarding animal issues.

Response: Coordinated with Extension volunteers, Texas Farm Bureau officials, local ag leaders and Extension administrators to submit a request that Texas Department of Public Safety allow harvest trucks leaving the field to temporarily carry additional weight. This was requested due to extensive flooding along the river and in the floodway after Hurricane Alex and the need to prevent significant additional crop loss and related economic harm if the harvesting process was not expedited. Extension is taking an active role in the process of the development of a Valley animal issues emergency plan by coordinating with county Emergency

Management personnel, assisting in committee organization, serving on the committee and assisting in writing certain sections of the plan. Conducted an educational program on the effects of Hurricane Alex to production agriculture in Hidalgo County.



Results: A total of 1 group method resulted in a total of 22 contact hours of education. A temporary weight tolerance was granted by Texas Department of Public Safety for the four county area that allowed a 12% over the maximum allowed gross weight for trucks transporting agricultural commodities from the field to the first point of processing. This was an action that local ag producers said provided valuable assistance at a critical time. Work continues on a Valleywide animal issues plan.

Future Plans: Provide local producers more information about the flood protection system.

2010 Farm Financial Management for Limited Resource and Socially Disadvantaged Ag Producers

Developed by Vidal H. Saenz, Extension Agent-CEP (Farm Advisor)
Serving Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy and Starr Counties

Relevance - The Rio Grande Valley, which is composed of Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy and Starr counties have gone through major agricultural disasters in the last few years. The nature of these disasters has been mainly drought and floods that have caused enormous loss of income to the agricultural producers of the area. Many agricultural producers and rural youth face numerous challenges in obtaining financial resources through commercial lending institutions because of the risk involved in farming and ranching and the local banks unwillingness to lend during these times of economic uncertainty. Many of these producers qualify for financing through USDA-Farm Service Agency, but are not aware of their programs or are overwhelmed by the paperwork involved in USDA's loan applications. Knowing that operating loan funds are available through USDA- Farm Service Agency, it is important that Extension offer support in financial planning and management to fill out the necessary paperwork correctly and remove all of the obstacles that impede agricultural producers from applying for these loans.

The purpose of the program is to enhance the business management and marketing skills of agricultural producers who utilize our services. Targeted clientele will learn how to keep and improve production and financial records and generate personal and farm financial statements for use in financial resource acquisition.

Response – The Cooperative Extension Program’s Small Farm Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Program in Hidalgo County developed the following activities to address this relevant issue:

- Outreach of FSA loan programs at many Extension Field days and workshops (Year round)
- Small Acreage Vegetable Production Workshop (April, 2010)
- Education of USDA’s Rural Youth Loan Program (April, 2010)
- Funding for New and Transitioning Horticultural Producers (July, 2010)
- Production and financial record keeping workshop (September, 2010)
- Land Issues for Farmers and Ranchers (November, 2010)
- One-on-one financial planning and management for producers seeking loans (Year round)

Collaborators

The Small Farm Advisory Committee of Hidalgo County provides direction for the program and we have collaborated with the following agencies to make this program successful:

- Several local banks
- Texas Farm Bureau
- USDA-Farm Service Agency, Ag Credit and Commodities
- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Local Livestock Auctions
- Local Feed stores

Evaluation Method/Results

A two-page retrospective post evaluation form was administered to each program participant. The survey was used to determine the level of clientele knowledge gained by the educational programming. Twenty three of the thirty three (70%) of the program participants responded to our survey.

Small Acreage Production - Hidalgo County

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent – Horticulture

Relevance

In Texas, as in much of the country, small scale agricultural production is the fastest growing area of agriculture. Frequently these producers have no formal training in agriculture. Texas AgriLife Extension Service has a mission to provide quality, relevant outreach and continuing education programs and services in the area of agriculture and natural resources.

This program enables small-scale agricultural operators and commercial producers in rural and suburban areas to become more knowledgeable in effectively identifying and evaluating horticultural diversification strategies

for risk mitigation and improved economic sustainability based on total management goals and optimal resource base use.

Response

Five multi-county workshops, including one in Spanish, were provided for growers. Subjects covered vegetable production, budgeting and marketing, available funding, and food safety. Additionally, a **two day conference** was conducted, with tours of successful small acreage production.

Results

Evaluations of the two day conference show that 80% of the 51 producers who completed surveys (of 128 attendees) were primarily interested in small production topics and 96% were satisfied with their learning experience; 78% gained new information and 53% thought they gained financially from the program. Two speakers, both producers, received the highest ratings as speakers, with over 70% of participants choosing one of them as their first choice speaker. This indicates they value the experience of a single producer, rather than programs offering broader information. The list of further topics included requests for step by step information on farming, varieties, etc.; confirming that these producers do follow the national trend of adults entering farming with no formal education in agriculture.

The five multi-county, half-day workshops were attended by between 22 to 31 producers. 35% of producers had no knowledge of the subject, or very little, before attending these workshops. This confirms these producers have a strong learning curve, compared to larger, traditional growers. Overall, 98% of these producers planned to adopt what they had learned in the workshop; acreage owned or leased mostly ranged between ½ acre to 50 acres, with only 18 % of growers having farms based on larger operations.

The program that covered funding availability, had 30% of respondents who were not yet growing crops and were just gathering information on possibilities.

Acknowledgements

A grant from Heifer Foundation supported one of the workshops in Spanish for non-English speaking producers. Specialists, Juan Anciso, Joe Masabini, and Luis Ribera provided programming and organization of three of the workshops.

Future of the Program

This segment of the agricultural community will continue to grow as consumers continue to support direct marketing venues, such as Farmer's Markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's – subscription agriculture). This program will continue in 2011 and will continue to cover basic information for new or non-traditional producers.

2010 Hidalgo County Earth Kind Program – Landscaping for Sustainability

Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Relevance

Issues critical to the sustainability and growth of Texas have been identified as:

Landscape Water Conservation:

Landscape irrigation in Texas accounts for up to 40%-60% of total residential water use during peak summer months. This issue is critically important to millions of urban residents throughout Texas.

Reduction of Fertilizer Use in the Landscape:

Improper landscape management increases the risk for water resource contamination from nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizers. This issue is important in preserving and protecting our valuable natural resources.

Reduction of Chemical Pesticide Use in the Landscape:

The improper use of chemical pesticides in the landscape increases the risk of these materials entering the environment. This issue is critically important to the long term health and safety of the residents in Hidalgo County and the state.

Landscape Waste Management:

Grass clipping and other landscape wastes are a major source of materials entering landfills. This issue is critically important.

Landscaping for Energy Conservation:

Conserving energy through the use of Earth Kind landscaping principles and practices is critically important to the long term economy and environment of the residents in Hidalgo County and the state. Native and well adapted plants can utilize less water and are better adapted to our environmental conditions, which reduces the need for replacing plant materials in landscapes. Trees planted in the landscape can reduce the amount of energy used to cool homes and in some areas of Hidalgo County, residents have no air conditioning and depend solely on trees to reduce the impact of the sun.

Response

51 Programs were delivered in 2010 for 2, 465 people, totaling 5, 187 contact hours. Programs included

- Train-the-trainer classes for Master Gardener Volunteers
- Master Gardener Specialist Training – Advanced training in water conserving methods
- Earth Kind Landscape Design Classes & Tours of Native Plant Landscapes
- Tours of Water Thrifty Gardens and Turf Grass
- Establishment of Native Landscape Grass Trial
- Programs for home gardeners on saving water & utilizing native plants in the landscape
- Programs on utilization of Native plants for local community organizations and a District program for the Texas Garden Clubs

In addition, an article series delivered media coverage in two newspapers, four times per month, covering information on reducing fertilizers and chemicals in landscapes, conserving water in the landscape with efficient irrigation and use of mulch, and utilization of native and well adapted plant materials. This series appears in the Monitor Newspaper, Hidalgo County, and in the Brownsville Herald, Cameron County. Two television programs on Earth Kind principals were provided on the Edinburg cable channel.

Results

Evaluations indicate that 97% of participants were satisfied with the completeness and quality of materials presented, with 99% of participants being likely to recommend Texas AgriLife Extension programs to friends and family. 90% of participants would change behaviors regarding Earth Kind landscape practices and 78% anticipated saving money due to adoption of new practices and information learned.

Collaborators/Partners

The Master Gardener volunteers assisted in teaching and organized two major class series with the City of McAllen, Parks and Recreation Department, and the City of Weslaco, Chamber of Commerce. In addition, The Texas State Garden Clubs, southern region, and the City of Edinburg partnered for programs. The horticulture committee coordinated tours and assisted with program materials for several programs.

Future Plans

Water conservation is a major part of the Earth Kind program. A Rain Water Demonstration will be completed in the N. San Juan Park, along with the completion of a Compost Demonstration. Signs for these demonstrations will be in English and Spanish to maximize outreach. Master Gardeners and horticulture committee members completed seating for 55 people in an outdoor classroom, N. San Juan Park, in 2010 and this facility will be utilized to develop a new educational program for home gardeners in the area.

2010 Rio Grande Basin Initiative (RGBI) – Urban Program

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Relevance

Water quality and quantity have emerged as the preeminent issue across the state including the Rio Grande Basin, as indicated through local input, legislative efforts, and numerous other indicators. Agriculture is the largest water user in the state, and agriculture is under close scrutiny because of the potential for negative environmental (water quality) impacts. Water use in the municipal environment including irrigation of athletic fields, parks, golf courses, and in home landscapes also constitutes a major portion of water used in the Rio Grande Basin. Water use in the home also contributes to water use in the Basin. Programs designed to educate all adult and youth water users on water conservation will help reduce overall water use and increase water use efficiency. Care must also be taken to reduce the risk of water quality contamination from urban/suburban settings.

Consumers, homeowners, agricultural producers, and communities, understand and adopt best management practices to protect water quality and enhance conservation so water supplies will meet future water needs in Texas including the Rio Grande Basin that are essential for expanding agricultural growth, jobs, and the economy in both rural and urban areas.

Response

The following events were conducted in 2010:

- RGBI homeowner education was conducted on Feb. 27, 2010
- RGBI Rainwater Harvesting Demonstration, Weslaco, held for 16 home gardeners in March
- RGBI homeowner education in McAllen for 24 home gardeners
- RGBI Rainwater Harvesting Demonstration was held in San Juan for Master Gardener training
- Turf Trial Water savings – television program
- Native Grass Tour conducted for 41 participants in May
- RGBI media – a series of articles, in two newspapers, totaling 120,000 readership
- RainWater Harvesting Workshop held for 43 high school students in August
- RGBI Ag Producer Training August 2010
- Rain Barrel Workshop held for 25 home gardeners in October

- Native Grass Tour held on Dec. 2, along with a newspaper story about the grasses
- Rainwater Harvesting Demonstration was designed and completed at the Edinburg World Birding Center with the assistance of John W. Smith, College Station, Soil's Department.

A total of 12 programs were conducted with volunteers and specialists with 553 contact hours. In addition to these programs, 4 Master Gardeners took advanced irrigation system training at an AgriLife sponsored workshop in San Antonio and an additional Master Gardener took the Rainwater Harvesting Specialist training.

A Rainwater Demonstration project was begun at the North San Juan Park in corporation with County Commissioner Palacios, Pct 2., and the Texas Water Resources Institute. This project will allow us to conduct outdoor rainbarrel workshops, for larger groups (up to 50 people), in addition to the inside programs we now conduct for small groups.



Evaluations conducted at a workshop on water conservation in the landscape showed that 100% of the participants would change their behavior to utilize native plants, mow grass at the recommended height to reduce moisture loss, mulch around trees and shrubs, irrigate only when needed and will make efforts to reduce fertilizer use on turf.

A mailed retrospective post survey was completed by 12 of 25 participants in a rain barrel workshop, indicating that 100% of the participants were completely or mostly satisfied with the completeness of the program, the relevance of examples, the helpfulness of the information and the quality of the course materials. 100% of the respondents would take actions to conserve water use in the landscape and 45% thought they would benefit economically from the material presented.

A native grass trial was established in the N. San Juan Park and all of the grasses are thriving to the point that Master Gardeners have been able to remove some of the plants and begin another demonstration site at Pct. 4, in N. Edinburg. These sites will be utilized for home gardener tours and tours by Master Gardener classes.

Partners

County Commissioner Palacios of Pct. 2 has been most cooperative in providing classroom and demonstration space. The Deep South Texas Master Gardeners provide weekly care for the demonstration sites and they have shown a great interest in expanding their knowledge base by taking advanced programs. Billy Kniffen, Water Conversation Specialist, has been most helpful and supportive of our county and has generously provided a yearly workshop on making rain barrels. John W. Smith, College Station, has assisted us with the Edinburg World Birding Center project and establishing another demonstration site in a well traveled area.

Future of Program

Water education will continue in 2011 as more demonstration sites are completed. Interest continues from home gardeners who wish to construct their own rainwater collection systems.

Financial Literacy in Hidalgo County

Developed by Nora Garza, County Extension Agent – FCS

Relevance

The recent economic downturn and resulting recession have heightened consumer awareness of the need for financial literacy education. Growing unemployment, foreclosures, and credit delinquencies have contributed to increased interest among consumers in budgeting, saving and cutting back spending. Research studies indicate that people of all ages, incomes, and education levels lack the basic financial knowledge and skills to ensure long-term stability for themselves and their families. In the 2008, **JumpStart** Coalition survey of high school seniors, the average score was 48.3%, a failing grade by most standards.

Response

In Hidalgo County, there are three major programming efforts implemented by CEA Nora N. Garza to impact youth and family finances.

Money Smart consists of five lessons to help adults with low financial knowledge and skills increase financial knowledge, develop financial confidence, and use banking services effectively. **12** sessions reached **167** people.

NEFE (National Endowment for Financial Education) High School Financial Planning Program was offered in the spring. **12** sessions reached **98** teens with information to improve money management knowledge and skills.

Starting Over debtor education program was offered from January to December. **12** sessions reached **24** people, who learned basic money management skills: goal setting, developing a budget, credit and debt management, consumer management, and saving money.

Results

Money Smart impact was determined through formal evaluations and personal interviews to measure knowledge learned and behavior change.

Some notable results:

- * 100% of participants will make a behavior change to reach their financial goals.
- * 92% of participants will implement a behavior they learned to protect their personal assets from scams.
- * 100% of participants will adopt behavior to protect their personal information from identity thieves.

A significant number of clients reported Knowledge Learned:

- * 100% of clients increased their knowledge of credit reports and now have the knowledge to order and read a credit report.
- * 100% of respondents learned something new about how to recognize and avoid financial scams.

NEFE impact was determined through formal evaluations to measure knowledge learned.

A post test on Investments resulted in **63%** correct answers for 17 participants.

In a questionnaire about banking and saving, **71%** of 14 participants said a bank is the safest place for their money. These scores were considerably higher than the average reported by a national study.

Starting Over impact was determined through formal evaluations to measure perceived knowledge gained and intentions to change behavior.

- * 96% will adopt behavior to reach financial goals.
- * 96 % anticipate benefitting economically.
- * 20% increase in understanding of money management was noted.

Future Program Efforts

Texas AgriLife will continue to offer **Money Smart** classes for the Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans, along with seeking new audiences. **NEFE** will be offered at a different high school in the spring and a teacher's workshop is being planned. **Starting Over** classes will continue to be provided by the agent and promoted with the help of Extension specialists and the planning committee. The results of these programs will lead to smarter management of finances by teens and families.

Improving Health and Wellness in Hidalgo County

Developed by Adelita Munoz, County Extension Agent – Family & Consumer Science

Relevance

Research indicates that up to two-thirds of the cancer cases estimated to occur in 2011 could be prevented if behavioral changes are made, showing that prevention plays a key role in the fight against cancer in Texas. Research also indicates that it may be possible to reduce cancer deaths by up to 30-35 percent by improving nutrition and physical activity, and by keeping a normal body weight. Researchers have found 30-60 minutes of physical activity each day may also reduce the risk of developing colon, breast and other kinds of cancer.

Food safety has also been identified as a major issue in Hidalgo County

Response

Cultivando La Salud, a cancer awareness program was conducted for 954 Spanish speaking, un-insured women. An oncologist partnered with Extension to provide a workshop.

Better Living for Texans- Eat Better to Live Better- Obesity is considered a problem among school age children and adults in Hidalgo County. BLT Program provides educational programs to families to help them improve their ability to plan and prepare nutritious meals and shows them how to manage their Food Stamp dollars, so that they have the same purchasing power each week. BLT promotes physical activities and introduces families to our Walk Across Texas program.

Walk Across Texas (WAT), an 8 week program to help people support one another in establishing the habit of regular physical activity. People form teams, involving at least 8 participants, or participate as an individual and keep a log of their miles. In 2010, teams and individuals logged 766 miles. Employees from the County Health Department have started promoting the program and encouraging families to join WAT.

Do Well Be Well with Diabetes – Covers basic nutrition and self-care management. The program helps people with diabetes learn the skills needed to manage their disease successfully. Nine lesson topics are delivered in five classes.

Yo Puedo Controlar Mi Diabetes - is a six week diabetes self management education program for Spanish speakers. Hidalgo County served as a control group for a research project on this new program with 4 groups and 46 participants.

Get The Facts - is a three lessons series on the Nutrition Facts Label. It was developed to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The series focused on label reading, serving size, sodium and fat. Serving size and **fat** were selected as key topic areas because over 60% of adults in Hidalgo County are overweight or obese and at risk for heart disease. **Sodium** was selected because hypertension affects approximately 50 million people in the United States. 64 Pre/post and 54 follow-up surveys were collected and turned in.

Cooking with Diabetes was offered by Hidalgo County staff for people with diabetes. The program was presented to participants of the Do Well with Diabetes and the You Puedo Controlar Me Diabetis programs. This program focused on decreasing the amount of sugar, fat and sodium in their meals.

Results

Cultivando La Salud 100% of the 954 participants learned the importance of early detection. Women were exposed to skills, knowledge, and “hands on” activities to learn how to do the “self breast examination,” build relationships with oncologists and promised to make appointments for mammograms. Participants expressed appreciation to Extension for “opening our eyes” to this important information. Participants expressed gratitude to the oncologist that identified resources for free mammograms. Participants increased knowledge pertaining to cancer and reduced their misconception that cancer was contagious.

Better Living for Texans reached **25, 600 families, impacting 102,400 children in Hidalgo County in 2010.** These families learned to stretch their food dollars, reduce the risk of food borne illnesses, and to serve more nutritious meals. Evaluations showed that 100% of respondents plan to take action or make changes based on the information they received; 88% of participants anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned from this Extension activity; 94%_responded that they would attend another subject offered by Extension; 100% increased knowledge pertaining to nutrition education and 90% of participants shared that they had changed their way of buying groceries and were seeing good results....”they had learned to make their Food Stamps last all month.”

Do Well Be Well was presented to 6 groups, totaling 124 men and women. One group had no insurance whatsoever. Participants were most attentive and doctors provided monitors, strips and other pharmaceutical materials for group members. **Evaluations showed that 90% improved their A1c readings from 9 and 10 to 6.5 to 7.**

Yo Puedo Controlar Mi Diabetes Four groups were held with Spanish speakers in Hidalgo County. All learned to manage their diabetes and improve their meals and A1c readings. 100% of participants gained knowledge in making food selections, learned about carbohydrates and increased their skills in lowering the fat, sugar and sodium contents in their diet. Participants learned about carbohydrates, increased their knowledge of the importance of daily self monitoring their glucose.

Cooking with Diabetes Participants learned to modify recipes to lower fat, sugar and salt. Many reported to be feeling better with foods that were low in fat. Participants increased their skill in food preparation and

learned healthier ways to prepare familiar foods. Participants increased their knowledge of Food Safety, learned how to select higher fiber foods and enjoyed tasting new foods.

Food Handler's Class 187 Participants completed the Food Handlers certification, representing \$104,000 in salary to be received for completion of the program. Questions on foodborne illness improved by 70% as a result of the training. In addition, knowledge concerning cross contamination in foods improved by 26%.

Get the Fact 100 % of class participants improved their knowledge about heart disease and learned that it is the leading cause of death while completing this three lesson series on serving size, sodium and fat and other information on the food label.

Child and Adult Day Care Food Training was presented, in partnership with Texas Department of Agriculture, to 56 participants and 98% reported being completely satisfied with the course materials and 100% increased their knowledge on food policies and nutrition, as well as food safety.

Future Plans These programs will continue in 2011. The Yo Puede Controlar Me Diabetes class was successful across the southern region of the state and will be continued.

Nutrition Education was presented to 25 women who needed this program to be hired at Day Care Centers. 100% of participants were mostly or completely satisfied with the program and thought they gained knowledge.

Improving Family Life in Hidalgo County

Developed by Adelita Munoz, County Extension Agent – Family and Consumer Science

Relevance:

Positive Parenting practices play an essential role in children's development and later in life success. Parents are responsible for several key care giving tasks to help ensure that proper physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development occurs for their children.

Research indicates that children who grow up with actively involved and nurturing parents reap numerous benefits, including better school performance, increased self-esteem, healthier relationships with peers, and greater access to financial resources.

Parents with healthy marriages ensure the emotional developmental of the children. Families that communicate and that encourage the children to express their feelings are going to have high self esteem, good mental health, and be well rounded individuals. This also teaches children to have self control of their emotions. Parents that model good conflict resolution techniques teach their children to discuss vs. using violence. Caregivers also play an important role in the child's life. Research shows that an estimated 13 million children younger than six spend some or all of their day in a day care.

Older, adult populations continue to grow and they too need assistance with issues of interest to them, such as, health care reform, social security and identity theft.

Response:

In Hidalgo County six major program efforts were implemented to support parenting, healthy marriages, anger management, child and adult care giving and elder care.



FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day) Strong relationship exist between children's literacy skills, academic performance, and future income potential. Children who are read to frequently by their parents are more likely to excel on tests of reading proficiency. FRED encourages fathers to make the time to spend with their children reading to them. **Five** schools participated with the FRED Program, involving **150 fathers** participating.

Strengthening Families Programs Families are in crisis with the high number of students dropping out of school, getting suspended, getting in trouble with the law, at twelve years and older. Additionally, parents that are separated or divorced and have dual custody and the involvement of Child Protective Service also experience high stress levels that need to be addressed. The **Strengthening Families Programs** were scheduled as a response to these problems and the request of several judges. The first class was filled immediately and a second class had to be programmed on the same night. The demand for the program has been great and on-going. A waiting list of 50 people is a constant factor for the English and the Spanish classes.

Child Care Trainings and Adult Care - Food Program Training Materials addressing Texas Department of Agriculture regulations was presented to 56 individuals. Customer satisfaction evaluations showed they were completely satisfied with the overall training, the accuracy, completeness, and helpful information they received. The beneficiaries of the training were the 1550 children and adults that attend the care centers where class participants provide the meals.

Healthy Marriages - LOVING FOR LIFE is an eight hour curriculum to help couples prepare for marriage, help others that want to enhance their relationships and those who are seeking to explore new ways to communicate and resolve conflicts. 6 sessions were held in Hidalgo County.

Master Clothing Volunteers meet weekly and receive a variety of trainings so that they can train other women in schools, churches, housing projects, and community centers. Hundreds of women have been able to supplement their income selling the items that they learn to construct. Volunteers contributed 62,000 volunteer hours.

Senior Summit A SENIOR SUMMIT was held to bring seniors together to learn about timely topics, such as social security, health care reform, and identity theft. Invited Congressmen addressed the seniors and conducted “question and answer” sessions.

Results

FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day) is a family literacy program designed to increase parental involvement in children’s literacy development, with a specific focus on fathers.

12 presentations were made at schools and libraries with 150 fathers.

5 schools supported the program.

110 fathers completed the program.

90% indicated that they were not reading at the beginning of the program.

85% indicated that they were reading daily to the children.

85% of fathers said that FRED had brought the family closer together.

20 fathers said that they never thought reading to the children was going to be so enjoyable.

A father said “I thought I knew who my children were, but I really did not. This program has given me the opportunity to really get to know my children. One father was very proud because his children were calling him “MY HERO.”

Strengthening Families is an eight lesson series that helps families learn different parenting methods. 950 participants attended the 8 two hour lessons. 2,850 children were beneficiaries of their child care staff participating.

100% of participants were mostly or completely satisfied with information being accurate.

97% of participants were mostly or completely satisfied with information being easy to understand.

100% of participants were completely satisfied with the completeness of information given on each topic.

100% of participants were completely satisfied with the timeliness, helpfulness of the information presented.

100% of participants were completely satisfied with the quality of course materials and the relevance of the examples used.

97% of participants were mostly or completely satisfied with the instructor’s knowledge, speaking ability, preparedness and organization.

100% of respondents were completely satisfied with the instructor’s responses to student questions.

90% of respondents plan to take actions or make changes based on the information presented.

75% respondents anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned.

97% reported that the information provided by Extension was extremely valuable to them and that they would recommend it to others.

250 fathers were able to reunite with their families when they presented the certificate to a judge and Child Protective Service.

80 Parents that were going through a divorce were able to reconcile and are getting along well. The man said, “this class taught us something that no one is doing. You got to the very important issue...you taught us how to communicate and resolve conflicts. Those two were our problems.”

Healthy Marriages is curriculum to help couples that are going to get married to have a good head start by learning about commitment, communication skills, conflict resolution, and others.

110 Participants attended the ten hour workshop.

35 couples that were going to get married received a 60% discount on the marriage license, a savings of \$1,155.00.

15 couples participated because they had heard “the program was excellent and it would help them.”

15 couples were able to work out their differences and some have volunteered to help the agent because they are so grateful to Extension for saving their marriages.

One couple said, “we had never really communicated....we yelled at each other and always ended up getting mad at each other. This is an excellent class and we are telling everyone about it!”

Master Clothing Volunteers meet weekly to receive training on clothing construction, craft ideas that they can sell to supplement their income. Often times the men are unemployed and the entire family depends on what the homemaker can sell.

24 Volunteers teach sewing at schools, churches, community centers, or colonias.

20 Participants no longer come to class because they are busy sewing and selling items to supplement their family income.

24 volunteers construct items to sell at Craft Shows and have made as much as \$10,800 selling their crafts, jewelry and purses.

5 Master Clothing Volunteers saved the 4-H program \$800.00 by constructing all the judges gifts for the County and District Food Show and the District Fashion Show,

6 Master Clothing Volunteers have stopped attending the weekly classes because of lack of transportation but they report that they are sewing and doing alterations for stores and for friends, contributing \$300.00 to \$525.00 to the household and “it is all because of what Extension did for us.”

Senior Summit is an event that Extension has conducted for the past three years with Congressmen Hinojosa and Cuellar, the Hispanic Chamber, and the City of McAllen, as partners. Seniors from all over the county (Winter Texans) come together, listen to timely topics such as diabetes, social security, identity theft, nutrition, health care reform,

and then have a question and answer time with the congressmen. There are a number of health screenings before the event starts. The participants save money because they get free eye screening, cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure, osteoporosis, and BMI. There are also dental and hearing and they are all free. Thousands of dollars are saved just on the screenings but, more important, is that they gain knowledge on timely issues.

Future Plans

The FCS Committee has recommended that all programs continue in the next year. They all see the need for them.

JMG Youth Program - Improving Horticultural Opportunities in Hidalgo County Schools

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Relevance

Research shows providing children with vegetable gardening opportunities, and the Jr. Master Gardener curriculum, improves their nutritional knowledge and motivation to eat more fruits and vegetables. Vegetable gardening also improves math and science understanding and improves the overall school attendance rate of students. As border counties remain high in the occurrence of childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes and suffer high drop-rates, it is important to the health and welfare of our community to support teachers in developing outdoor activities to improve health and nutrition and horticultural knowledge of youth.

Response

In the Rio Grande Valley, a multi-county, multi-discipline workshop to improve the horticultural skills of educators is provided annually. Additional support is provided to classrooms during the school year, by Extension and Master Gardener volunteers. Teachers register their class groups in the Jr. Master Gardener program and students who complete all of the materials to graduate, become Certified Jr. Master Gardeners at year end.

The **Edible School Garden Workshop** attracted 58 educators from Hidalgo, Cameron and Starr County schools for a day-long workshop with outdoor horticultural demonstrations and classroom activities based on the Jr. Master Gardener curriculum, **Health and Nutrition from the Garden**. This workshop was held May 14, 2010 at the N. San Juan Community Center and Park, where a demonstration vegetable garden is established. In addition to this all day train-the-trainer workshop, a Jr. Master Gardener curriculum workshop was given for 32 parent outreach staff with the Edinburg School District. A summer camp, entitled Nature and Nutrition, was conducted by volunteers for 44 underserved youth at the N. San Juan Park, utilizing the JMG curriculum.

Results

Participant Satisfaction Surveys, completed by 56 of 58 teachers in the Edible School Garden Workshop, showed:

- 100% of respondents were mostly or completely satisfied with the workshop and they viewed the information as accurate and helpful.

- 94% of respondents plan to put in a garden and

- 55% anticipate benefiting economically as a direct result of what they learned from this Extension activity.

- 100% would recommend this workshop to others and

- 100% would attend another subject offered by Extension.

Comments from participants: "This was a great workshop, very appropriate and relevant to our area." "The JMG activities can be used in most any subject – very flexible curriculum materials." "Everything was awesome; the only problem is that the workshop was too short!"

For the school year, 2009-2010, 326 youth graduated from Hidalgo County school based programs and received certification as Jr. Master Gardeners in school ceremonies. Seven new school gardens were

4-H and Youth Development

established at schools in Hidalgo County. Additionally, 451 students in elementary schools participated in an entomology program with a Master Gardener JMG Specialist.

Forty four (44) youth participated in the Nature and Nutrition Summer Camp. This program was conducted by Extension staff, BLT staff, and volunteers. The only complaint from the children was that the camp “just was not long enough!”

An introduction to the Jr. Master Gardener program was also provided by our Master Gardener Specialist with 208 youth at the City of Pharr – Kids Festival.

Several interpretation events were held: 1. Commissioner’s Court; LAB Board; the U.T. Pan American Club; the Texas Garden Clubs – Regional Conference; and the “Food is Medicine” Conference for 252 medical personnel.

In addition, one television event and several newsletters highlighted this program.

Collaborators/Partners

Programs were developed as multi-discipline, multi-county with Extension 4-H, FCS, and Horticulture agents, along with BLT, Master Gardener volunteers and members of the Grow’n Growers. Numerous school districts in 3 counties cooperate on this project. Additionally, Hidalgo County, Pct 2, provides classroom space and outdoor demonstration areas that are utilized in teacher training and children’s camp. The City of San Juan, Parks and Recreation Department provides t-shirts for the children’s camp (\$410.00) and the San Juan/Alamo/Pharr School District provided the breakfast and lunch for the children’s camp.



Future Plans

We will continue to provide the teacher training as a multi-county event. We are discussing an extended summer camp for area children with the County, City of San Juan and with the San Juan/Pharr/Alamo School District. This program will be an introduction to 4-H.

4-H Curriculum Outreach Programs

Al Lopez, 4-H Outreach

Programs and youth reached at area schools by our 4-H Outreach Coordinator, included:

Egg to Chick	1,757 youth reached
Plants/Flowers/Insects	151
Nutrition/Obesity	1096
Drug & Smoking Prevention	507
Underage Drinking	92
Teen Pregnancy	219
Character Education	301
Careers	1614
Emergency Preparedness	407
Food & Fiber	106
Anger Management	<u>72</u>
Total Youth Reached	6322



Entrepreneur Outcome Report, Hidalgo County, 2010

Developed by Nora N. Garza – County Extension Agent – Family Resources

Relevance:

Hidalgo County has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. There is an urgent need to develop and maintain sustainable communities using appropriate economic development tools and programs that are supportive of entrepreneurship in dynamic social and economic environments while considering regional competitive advantages. To achieve and maintain the economic viability of this county, we must educate emerging and existing entrepreneurs based upon the educational needs of the group. The 2004 Texas Community Futures Forum identified Community & Economic Development as the number one issue in Texas. Furthermore, Hidalgo County Leadership Advisory Board indicates this as an educational need.



Response:

In Hidalgo County there is one major program effort implemented to impact the creation and growth of home-based businesses. Collaborators for this project are the University of Texas Pan-American Small Business Development Center, Small Business Administration, Pharr Chamber of Commerce, City of Pharr, and the Extension Economic Development Advisory Committee of Hidalgo County. The Texas AgriLife Extension Service conducted **7** instructional classes and activities for **129** participants interested in exploring home-based business and for micro-business owners who make their own products. A customer satisfaction survey was conducted at the conclusion of a training presented for vendors of the Holiday Crafts & Small Business Expo: 91% of respondents anticipated benefiting economically from the training; and 100% of respondents were completely or mostly satisfied with the training.

The Holiday Crafts & Small Business Expo gave vendors the opportunity to sell their handmade products; take special orders; and make new business contacts. A total of \$2,309 was grossed by vendors. 100% of the vendors rated the craft show as good or excellent to similar fairs. 100% of vendors implemented information they had learned at a previous training session to increase sales and to market the event.

324 people attended the Holiday Crafts & Small Business Expo and had the opportunity to learn how to start a business in sessions conducted in English and Spanish by Extension partners. **189** craft show attendees (non-vendors) completed a written evaluation of the craft show. They reported that the craft show was well organized and worth their time: 92% rated “very good” or “good” for capacity to hold their interest; 91% rated “very good” or “good” for organization of program; 89% rated “very good” or “good” for level of which topic was presented; 89% rated “very good” or “good” for communication skills; 88% rated “agree” or “agree” for the time & money spent to attend the workshop was valuable; 89% of 183 respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” the information was presented effectively; 88% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the material was practical; 88% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” the program provided a good working knowledge of the subject matter.

As the Great Recession continues, individuals and families are looking for ways to generate income. The Extension Economic Development Advisory Committee will seek new avenues for program participants to sell their handcrafts and educational opportunities within the Extension and in the community.

2010 Grow’n Growers – Hidalgo County Community Development

Developed by Barbara Storz, County Extension Agent-Horticulture

Relevance

The TCFE process identified Community & Economic Development as the number one issue in Texas. In Hidalgo County, this issue, along with adult education, were identified as community needs. In addition, residents have identified the need for a farmer's market offering locally grown, organic produce.

Response

Working with a County Commissioner, Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, and members of the horticultural committee, a community development program was designed to meet the needs of low-income Spanish community members interested in developing horticultural and business skills and opening a farmer's market. A pilot program, in 2007-2008, trained 15 Hispanic families to grow organic produce in their back yards and open a Farmer's Market. Instruction, in Spanish, included organic horticultural practices, food safety, nutrition and health, finance, marketing, business establishment and leadership development. All participating families improved their family income and increased their consumption of vegetables. Additional families have been taught in annual programs since September 2007. **In 2010:**

1. Farmer’s Market expanded to 2 Saturdays monthly in Spring and 4 Saturdays in Fall
2. Chef’s provide demonstrations in the Spring Markets
3. 32 Classes, in Spanish, were held for program growers
4. Customer Surveys provide a profile of customer base
5. 3 families provide produce to chefs during year
6. Number of family CSA’s (subscription agriculture) expand from 3 to 4 CSA’s
7. Two of twenty members lose a significant amount of weight (approximately 110 lbs between the two) and improve blood sugar readings by working in their gardens and eating fresh vegetables
8. All families increase their consumption of fresh vegetables and save between \$40.00 – \$125.00 on their monthly groceries

Results

Participants have improved their monthly incomes from \$200.00 –500.00 (in 2008) per month to 500.00 to 900.00 per month in 2010. Four families sell produce and eggs from their homes and are selling to chefs. Program evaluations from classes, show that approximately 82% of participants improve knowledge and 74% change their behavior or intend to adopt new practices introduced in classes, such as drip irrigation.

Customer surveys from the Farmer's Markets were conducted in March, April and May of 2010. Results showed a consistent ranking of customer's reasons for shopping at the market:

1. Most important = How food tastes (95%)
2. Second most important = How food grown (organic) (75%)
3. Third most important = How food looks (65%)
4. Where food grown = local (60%)
5. How much produce costs (50%)

When asked if shopping at the Farmer's Market improved their intake of vegetables, 14.5% responded that they were eating a little more fruits and vegetables and 16.6% said that they were eating a lot more fruits and vegetables as a result of the market. 24% said there was no change and 38% said it was their first visit to the market. 64% of customers are female, 45% are White, and 50 % are Hispanic.

Several interpretation events have delivered information about this program to a broad range of government officials, university staff, and community members, including an October presentation to 252 doctors at a medical conference in Harlingen. Additionally, I received the Superior Service Award in January 2010 for Diversity for the work with the Grow'n Growers program.

Program Collaborators

Hidalgo County Commissioner, Tito Palacios, Pct. 2 has generously provided classroom space, a vegetable garden demonstration area, and a beautiful facility, in a County park, for the Farmer's Market.

Additional partners include City of San Juan, City of McAllen, Texas Department of Agriculture, local farmers who share their knowledge and the specialists and researchers with Texas AgriLife. A grant from Heifer International supported the program from 2007 through June 2010.

Future Plans

Advanced classes are planned in 2011 for those families who have been in the program for more than a year. We will continue to hold 4 markets per month and in September 2011, it will be mandatory to work as an unpaid intern at one of the current farms/gardens so that folks can acquire experience. A Facebook and Twitter account are in the works. We will continue to gather information about sales and income for growers, as well as surveying our customers. We are sharing this information with Dr. Dean McCorkle, College Station, who is studying the economic impact of Farmer's Markets on Texas.

Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Hidalgo County

Staff

Hidalgo County Extension Office

410 North 13th Avenue

Edinburg, TX 78541

956-383-1026

800-638-8239

fax: 956-383-1737

email: hidalgo-tx@tamu.edu

web page: hidalgo-tx.tamu.edu

Agriculture

Brad Cowan, County Extension Agent- Agriculture

Barbara A. Storz, County Extension Agent-Horticulture
(County Coordinator)

Vidal Saenz, Extension Agent-Cooperative Extension

Geraldo Tapia, Ag Research Technician

Family and Consumer Sciences

Adelita Muñoz, County Extension Agent-Family &
Consumer Sciences

Nora N. Garza, County Extension Agent-Family
Resources

Carmen Avila, Family & Consumer Sciences Program
Assistant

Frances Flores, Better Living for Texas Program
Assistant

Yolanda Rios, Better Living for Texas Program Assistant

4-H and Youth

(Vacant) County Extension Agent- 4-H

Alonso Lopez, 4-H Youth Outreach Coordinator

Support Staff

Elena Almendarez

Nora Linda Cruz

Mary L. Patlan

Janie Perales