

EXTENSION *Today*

COUNTY AGENTS ARE HELPING AG TO CHANGE

By Martha Jackson

In Kentucky, communities and researchers are looking for “new uses and new products for agriculture.” That’s what Colien Hefferan, administrator of USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, said about the Bluegrass State when she visited last fall.

Nobody is more involved in that search for “new uses and new products” than county Extension agents.

Working with Extension specialists, local growers, and other agencies, they help farmers make the leap from a tobacco-based agricultural economy to one with greater variety—and possibility.

Kentucky’s diversification efforts are concentrated in:

- Beef-forage systems.
- Horticulture—fruit, vegetable, and nursery plant production.
- Value-added processing.

Beef-Forage Systems

Agents have worked for years to improve beef and forage systems in tandem with producers, Extension specialists, the Kentucky Cattlemen’s Association, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, and the Kentucky Farm Bureau.

They have been a “significant force” in the Certified Preconditioned for Health (CPH) calf sales that have gone on for about 20 years and now have impact on thousands of calves every year, said Jimmy Henning, assistant Extension director for agriculture and natural resources. Agents have also been key in the heifer replacement sales that, along with the CPH sales,

have been essential to raising the quality of cattle sold in Kentucky.

Agents also help organize the cooperative cattle sales that have been a boon to beef producers. “They’re getting people together so the little guy can act like the big guy,” Henning said of county agents.

With agent help, producers are also making use of the model programs in bull genetics, cattle handling, and forage systems that were developed with tobacco settlement funds.



Horticulture

Farmers moving into horticulture are gravitating toward cooperatives, and some agents have given a huge amount of time and invested themselves in making those cooperatives work, said Brent Rowell, Extension specialist in commercial vegetable crops. This past winter, agents also conducted programming on horticultural produc-

tion to assist farmers in developing and improving their operations.

New Extension associate positions (five in vegetables and fruits and one in nursery crops) have been funded by the Kentucky Horticulture Council with tobacco settlement funds made available by the state’s Ag Development Board. Agents are working with these associates to mount on-farm demonstrations and consultations for producers.

Value-Added Processing

Agents and specialists alike are doing more work with people who are interested in taking their products to the next step, said Benjy Mikel, Extension meat scientist. Tobacco settlement money, Mikel said, is “allowing some people to do some things they never thought they could do because financing wouldn’t allow it.”

A lot of agents are excited about helping producers see an innovative food product in their livestock crops, he said.

Some producers are banding together to develop community kitchens in which their value-added products can be processed. These kitchens have to meet health regulations (be certified) if their products are to be sold commercially. Jumping through legal and marketing hoops means lots of players have to be at the table.

“Agents have played a major role in facilitating groups of people getting together to develop these kitchens,” said Betty S. King, Extension specialist in ag economics.

FROM ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service programs are locally defined and administered. Here are a few examples of county Extension programs that are making a real difference in people's lives.

Safety First

The **Hancock County** Cooperative Extension Service, through its 4-H program, provided more than 250 sixth and seventh graders with safety information. The program was carried out with a grant of \$1,000 from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Farm Bureau Women's Committee and the Family Resource Center.

More than 70 percent of the participants learned new facts about railroad safety, 89 percent learned how and why to avoid downed power lines, and 58 percent agreed to practice four or more of the safety tips they learned at Safety Day.

Looking into the Future

The **Meade County** Cooperative Extension Service and the county's judge executive worked with a UK sociologist to talk about the county's future. Volunteers were trained to facilitate discussions in which more than 630 people took part. The participants agreed that the appeal of the small town atmosphere was important to maintain, that downtown regions needed renovation, and that the county needed to address youth-related problems.

Healthy Snacks, Fit Teens

The **Ballard County** Cooperative Extension Service taught middle-school kids to prepare their own nutritious—and healthful—snacks. At the end of the program, 98 percent of the youths indicated they would improve their eating behavior by choosing healthful snacks.

Things that Go BMP

The **Hopkins County** Cooperative Extension Service provided training for 22 individuals in the horticultural industry to help them understand best management practices (BMPs) for irrigation, nutrient monitoring, and fertilization. Seven months after the workshop, participants indicated improved management of their operations and savings in operating costs as a result, largely through use of less water and less waste of fertilizer.

Milking More Dairy Profits

In 1994, Adair County dairy production was low—just over 11,500 pounds per cow. In 1995, the **Adair County** Cooperative Extension Service set a goal of improving production per cow by 2,000 pounds through the use of better management practices. Agents presented educational events for the dairy farmers of the county, including corn silage variety trials, dairy field days, the Dairy Profits program, dairy nutrition workshops, baleage wrapping demonstrations, and a field day about cooling cows. As a result, milk production improved nearly 3,000 pounds per cow, with per-cow profits up by \$445 per year.

Making Healthy Lifestyle Choices

The **Jefferson County** Cooperative Extension Service partnered with the United Clubs Inc. in a summer enrichment program to help young people in West Louisville grow and develop habits conducive to improving their lives. The 12 young people in the pro-

gram learned social skills such as group cooperation, respect for others, a sense of commitment, and self-esteem. At the end of the summer-long program, it was evident that the youth were showing a general concern for group success, increased self-esteem and confidence, and a greater adherence to rules.

Living with Diabetes

The **Carroll County** Cooperative Extension Service worked with local health departments in three other rural Northern Kentucky counties in planning and coordinating a four-session workshop about dealing with diabetes. Seventy people attended the session, which focused on healthful lifestyles. Nearly 90 percent of the participants indicated that they learned how they can modify their diets to help them live longer and better.





Improving Nutritional Choices

The **Harlan County** Cooperative Extension Service collaborated with other county groups and organizations to present the Kentucky Gets Foodwise program. Of those who attended, 60 percent said they gained knowledge about nutrition, food preparation, food safety, and saving food dollars.

Phase I Money Used Wisely

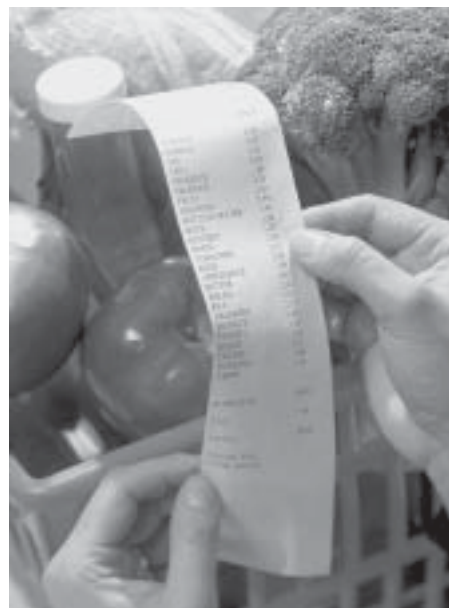
The Ag Development Board, working with the **Harrison County** Cooperative Extension Service, has allocated nearly \$1 million in Phase I tobacco settlement funds during the last two years to 150 farmers who are seeking to diversify their operations. Among the funded projects are livestock handling facilities, forage improvement, and improved livestock genetics. Plans also have been formalized to allocate funds for low-interest loans to assist farmers in the changeover process.

Tourism in Licking River

The Buffalo Trace Tourism Conference is made up of representatives of five counties in the Licking River Area. Sixty people attended the conference this past year to make plans to enhance their communities' economic well-being through agritourism. The conference is now in its second year, with Cooperative Extension agents in the **Licking River Area** bringing together local leaders to work for a common good.

Stretching Food Dollars

The **Wolfe County** Cooperative Extension Service presented a series of seven lessons on getting the most nutrition for your food money. Through innovative, hands-on budgeting activities and tracking of spending habits, more than 80 percent of the participants completed a workable spending plan using personal resources. One young mother said that she was proud of her accomplishments in taking control of her family finances and that as a result, her family had experienced less stress.



Gardening Makes Lives Bloom

The **Boyd County** Cooperative Extension Service's Master Gardener curriculum at the Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, now 3 years old, is a huge success. Food being grown at the prison is used at the institution, and the program is helping inmates learn skills they can use when they have completed their sentences. Two inmates who have completed the program have secured jobs in the horticulture field.

Assuring Quality Beef

The **Barren County** Cooperative Extension Service provided 10 training sessions to help local beef producers enhance the quality of their beef. Some 350 beef producers were certified for the Kentucky Beef Quality Assurance Program. Certification allows the farmers to command a higher price for their feeder calves because buyers will know that the animals are of higher quality.

Food Production, Preparation, Health, and Safety

Anderson County Cooperative Extension agents working with Extension agents in surrounding counties presented a special program on food, including how to grow it, prepare it, and keep it wholesome. Nearly 100 persons attended. When participants were surveyed afterwards, 95 percent said they had a better understanding of cooking wild game, 94 percent were able to identify some exotic fruits and vegetables, and nearly all reported they planned to use a new fruit or vegetable in a family meal.

KENTUCKY'S AGRICULTURE IS ON THE MOVE!

Kentucky's agricultural system is on the move, and Kentucky Cooperative Extension is in the middle of these exciting changes. For those of us involved in agriculture, there is something special about spring and the promise offered by a new crop and a new opportunity. You can almost feel it in the air. That same sort of feeling is in the air in Kentucky agricultural production. Even with significant changes in our tobacco program and concerns with crop and livestock prices, Kentucky producers remain optimistic about the opportunities.

The good news is that changes are taking place in Kentucky, and opportunities are emerging. Developing these new enterprises takes teamwork from producers, producer organizations, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Ag Development Board, Cooperative Extension, and many other agencies and groups. We have rarely seen the level of cooperation within Kentucky's agricultural community that is evident today. Sparked by Phase I funds administered by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board, new enterprises are blooming.

The front-page article for this issue of *Extension Today* highlights some of the new opportunities taking shape for Kentucky producers. Evident in those successes is the importance in the process of our county agents, who have been instrumental in helping develop leadership in local communities and identifying opportunities for new operations.

Three areas of emphasis in particular are paying dividends for those producers seeking alternatives to tobacco:

- Beef/forage systems are a key area of opportunity in Kentucky, and Cooperative Extension programs, as part of a team effort of several agencies and groups, are making a real difference. Kentucky cattle are now developing a reputation of quality.
- Horticultural crops offer new markets and income potential for producers. Agents and specialists are developing programs that help producers take advantage of those opportunities, such as providing educational support to co-op members and teaching production techniques.

- Value-added processing is another opportunity that will allow producers to obtain a greater share of profit from their products.

We are gaining momentum for important changes in Kentucky agriculture. The research-based educational programs conducted by Cooperative Extension are helping to lead the way. County agents, supported by specialists, associates, and faculty at the state level, are making a difference in Kentucky agriculture and helping secure our agricultural future.

—Larry W. Turner, *Associate Director, Cooperative Extension Service*

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