

# COVID-19 Response

## Southern Region Community Development Extension Impacts

As we welcomed the new 2020 year, few if any of us, were anticipating the drastic life-changing events that would unfold quickly. By mid-March, most of the Land-Grant Universities in the South had halted face-to-face programming and were scrambling to retool to online community support efforts. Key issues surfaced quickly including:

- How to navigate online working environments, both personally as we each adapted to our own new worlds, but also professionally as we sought to find ways to serve communities.
- Exploring ways to serve communities and individuals that lack broadband access.
- Shoring up businesses dealing with mandatory closures, disrupted supply chains, workforce issues, and the resulting reduction in profit.

At the same time, deep equity issues around diverse issues widened even further including:



Racial Trauma



Food Insecurity



Educational Gaps



Income Gaps

Any portion of these issues noted above reflect deep community challenges that must be addressed in order for resilience to occur. To that end, Community Resource Development (CRD) efforts within the Cooperative Extension Service are urgently working to identify innovations that help guide communities, businesses, and families toward a positive future. What follows is a series of brief vignettes designed to provide snapshots of some of the work that has occurred. While not capturing all the intense effort underway, these address some of the ways CRD has sought to:

- Reach out to people without reliable and affordable broadband access
- Help people make connections to new resources
- Pivot or reframe programming or information that would have been delivered face-to-face
- Supported resilience by those impacted by COVID– individuals, families, farms, businesses
- Develop new partnership

Lessons learned from these experiences can help guide CRD efforts to promote recovery and resilience in both the near future as well as in the more long-term trajectory. Turn over to read COVID-19 response stories from around the region.

Alabama

### Alabama A&M University

Alabama A&M Extension has delivered four virtual training sessions of the Career Countdown Program. A Virtual Business Café was also developed to connect limited resource, minority, and women-owned small businesses with COVID-19 related programs, funding opportunities and other resources. Extension has utilized Zoom and Facebook live to reach 39 organizations including schools and libraries.

Arkansas

### University of Arkansas

Extension actively monitored policies and disseminated information through videos, infographics, social media, blogs and other web-based content. Education was targeted to the general public with ways people could support small businesses. A week-long Supporting Small Business Bingo contest on Facebook highlighting ways the public can support small businesses resulted in actions to support 57 small businesses.

Florida

### University of Florida

UF/IFAS worked with UF Health Sciences to provide several webinars for county elected officials most recently discussing COVID-19 concerns regarding farmworkers with Ag industry leaders. In both instances this helped bring the latest understanding and science to the local decision makers regarding the pandemic.

Georgia

### Fort Valley State University

Many people served by Extension are unable to receive the one-time economic impact payment because they are deemed "unbankable". This same population is also experiencing extreme poverty conditions resulting from COVID-19 including joblessness and homelessness. Extension county agents are working with their clientele to educate them on how to secure their impact payment alternatively and assist 'unbanked' clientele with finding and opening a bank account.

Kentucky

### Kentucky State University

The ReOpen Frankfort Grant Program is intended to serve as gap funding for small, consumer-focused businesses located in the Frankfort community that have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant awards may be used for operating expenses including rent, utilities, payroll, inventory costs, etc. Presently, 20 Frankfort area small businesses have received up to \$90,000.

Mississippi

### University of Kentucky

The Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky awarded roughly \$600,000 to local businesses and farms in response to COVID-19. The Small Business Stimulus and Innovation Funds were distributed across 29 counties to 242 largely front facing businesses. Also, in partnership with the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and the Community Farm Alliance, over \$100,000 was awarded to small farms and black farmers.

### Mississippi State University

Extension responded to COVID-19 by creating a new bulletin series to report changes in tax revenue by county/municipality. We are also working with the Mississippi Development Authority to survey business owners regarding economic losses. We have ramped up online delivery of family financial management and small business training on moving to online sales, and are providing resources on PPP loans and the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program.

### North Carolina Cooperative Extension

NC Farmworkers are crucial for the state economy, yet a highly vulnerable group; risks which are exacerbated by COVID-19. The NC State Extension's Farmworker Health and Safety Program has focused distribution of relevant and reliable information to the farm working community through social media, newspapers, radios, and podcasts. The program has also produced a COVID-19 prevention training for farmers and distributed personal protective equipment.

North Carolina

South Carolina

### Clemson University

In meeting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Clemson Cooperative Extension rose to the occasion with a large focus on resilience and innovation. Resources made available to their audiences included 49 available COVID-19 article links to 4-H, agribusiness, agricultural education, food systems and safety, rural health and nutrition, and species/disease identification topics. Additionally, 23 articles focused on homeowners and industry concerns during the crisis.

Tennessee

### University of Tennessee

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Tennessee Extension developed a website to coordinate and streamline decision-making resources to help Tennessee citizens. The Extension team also developed 30 Extension publications and presented 25 webinars to support farmers, families, students, producers, agribusinesses, value-added agriculture, small businesses and workforce.

Texas

### Prairie View A&M University

The CED Unit within Extension at PVAMU was and continues to respond to the needs of small businesses affected by COVID-19. Since the pandemic the unit has been very active in helping small businesses and agri-businesses with Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and Paycheck Protection Program applications. As of May 2020, 78 businesses were assisted, 16 webinars conducted, 2,773 participants reached, 43 EIDL, and 19 PPP applications were submitted and packaged.

### Texas A&M University

Specialty crop producers have struggled to understand and implement opportunities as COVID-19 has disrupted market channels. In response, AgriLife Extension is working with the Sustainable Food Center, National Center for Appropriate Technology, and Foodshed Investors to help farmers expanding into new market channels. Extension faculty are presenting a series of virtual workshops replacing in-person workshops cancelled due to COVID-19. Also, an online course and business plan templates for market and financial analysis were created to support business planning efforts.

Virginia

### Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Cooperative Extension launched Balancing Life, a weekly webinar series providing "rapid-response" to COVID-19 issues. Topics have included Working and Schooling from Home, Teen and Adult Mental Health, Financial Management, Suicide Prevention, Older Adults, and Racial Understanding. At least 2,500 people have attended the sessions. Participants have rated the series as "very useful" in post-webinar surveys with 476 responses.