

COVID-19 Response

Southern Region Community Development Extension Impacts

Continuing to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic's tremendous challenges as 2022 unfolds. As the Land-Grant System in the South responds, these issues are some of the central concerns that Community Development Extension professionals are seeking to address:

- 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 partnerships

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.



Through the national EXCITE initiative, AAMU Extension launched AL Voices for Vaccines to connect limited-resource Alabamians with education and information on COVID-19 and vaccines. A particular innovation in this project was the creation of our free hotline, 866-897-0266, that provides information on vaccination and test sites via SMS, meaning those without broadband access can access traditionally web-based content. Working with partners, such as the Alabama NAACP and local medical professionals, this project has engaged approximately 18,000 Alabamians with research-based education, and free health kits including valuable items such as masks, thermometers, and sanitizers.



Alabama Extension partnered with the AU School of Pharmacy and the Alabama Department of Public Health to bring medical information and vaccination clinics to Alabama communities with high COVID-19 infection rates, limited healthcare access, and low vaccination rates. Over 141 social media posts reached 217,000 user accounts. Twenty focus groups connected over 150 Alabamians from 34 counties to identify questions and concerns Alabamians have regarding COVID-19. Over 10 information sessions reached 1,200 Alabamians providing evidence-based information. Additionally, five vaccination clinics immunized over 65 Alabamians. The project will continue through spring 2023 with Excite grant funding provided by the Extension Foundation.



Current withdrawals are exceeding the sustainable yield of the aquifer beneath Arkansas and Mississippi. Virtual field trips documenting benefits of conservation and educating farmers and others about technologies and practices that reduce water usage while maintaining or enhancing yields are helping reverse this trend to ensure sufficient water for all users. In addition to water-related benefits, this project increased awareness of how to effectively use virtual educational technology by other groups. Consequently, team members were asked to assist with the 23rd and 24th Arkansas Soil and Water Education conferences and provide consultation to other groups interested in virtual education delivery methods.



The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Cooperative Extension Program received a grant as part of the national Extension Collaboration on Immunization Teaching and Engagement (EXCITE) project. This new partnership with Cooperative extension and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention provides unbiased information to address vaccination hesitancy and strengthen immunization education. This allows us to address the health disparities issues in the underserved communities. The main focus is to identify barriers for minority populations in the counties and communities we serve.



When the University of Florida IFAS Extension entered the pandemic lockdown, agents struggled to identify ways to engage their audiences in virtual programs while also navigating the work-from-home situation. In response, the Community Resource Development team developed a weekly webinar to teach strategies for increasing virtual engagement and provide tips for working from home. During the last 30 minutes of the webinar, participants were encouraged to share and connect with each other to address social isolation issues. In post surveys, agents reported that the webinars eased some of their worry and stress and taught them how to be effective in a virtual environment.



The FAMU LOVE project collaborates with faith-based organizations who already have community trust as well as established communication mechanisms to reach our target audiences of racial minorities, rural residents, and low-income households/below poverty residents across North Florida. The social media campaign is ongoing, while the team meets regularly to plan for a presence at in-person events. The social media campaign is serving as an effective tool with our target audience. It guides individuals to participate in scheduled and virtual face-to-face activities. As we continue with our social media campaign, we have also initiated plans and designs for adding new media including billboards.



The City of Frankfort's economic recovery grants were made available to businesses that fit certain criteria to help mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on small businesses. A total of 40 grants were awarded for a total amount of \$966,600. KYSU's CRD team, consisting of Gill Finley Jr. and Chris Cribbs, got involved by knocking on doors to ensure businesses were assisted and applied for the grant funds to surmount the pandemic effects.



In response to COVID-19, MSU-Extension is partnering with Mississippi Main Street, Mississippi Development Authority, and the Kellogg Foundation to create and implement action plans to address downtown revitalizations efforts in 50 Mississippi communities. The first 23 of these were completed in 2021 in partnership with the Northeast MS Hills Heritage Area. Early results of completed plans have included small business creation, improved farmers markets, enhanced tourism and recreation events, façade improvements, building renovations, and legislative appropriations to implement revitalization projects across the state.

Alabama

Arkansas

Florida

Kentucky

Mississippi

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

With education and accessibility to vaccines becoming a priority for public health in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic a team from NC State Extension, supported by funding from the Extension Foundation EXCITE program, developed Farm to Families: Protecting Our Health - De la Finca a la Familia: Protegiendo Nuestra Salud. Project objectives include measuring the trust, knowledge, and perceptions that farmworkers in Eastern NC have about vaccines and testing potential interventions using both social marketing and Promotoras to create culturally responsive messaging, educational materials, and methodologies to increase adult vaccination rates in the farmworker community.



The Langston University horticulture program has been extending knowledge and expertise to Oklahomans on how to grow food on their farms, backyards, and community spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Extension team stayed engaged by assisting communities and individuals to set up gardens for their own food. The gardening program was also beneficial in helping people cope with the stresses related to the crisis by staying physically and mentally active.



During the pandemic, staff at the Freshwater Coast Center for Rural Development converted farm management resources taught in classes for the Agribusiness undergraduate degree and made them available digitally to workshop participants via Zoom. Also, staff reframed all entrepreneurship workshops to fit a 1 - 1.5-hour class. Such modifications enabled staff to successfully implement the Center's rural entrepreneurship education plan, which included delivering 13 programs and assisting small business owners and growers to research market as well as strategic and land use planning trends. The staff reached over 200 participants via 26 hours of direct instruction and 55 individual consultations.



The library mobile hotspot lending program initiated by University of Tennessee Extension improved access to broadband for 109 families and connected 395 adults across six rural counties (Hancock, Morgan, Polk, Grundy, Cannon and Wayne) in collaboration with public libraries. To improve broadband access for students during COVID-19 in the school systems, students in 11 elementary schools in Bradley County were provided mobile hotspots to participate in online instruction activities. A downtown wireless network was installed in downtown Pikeville (Bledsoe County) funded by Appalachian Regional Commission to provide free internet to residents and visitors over a period of one year.



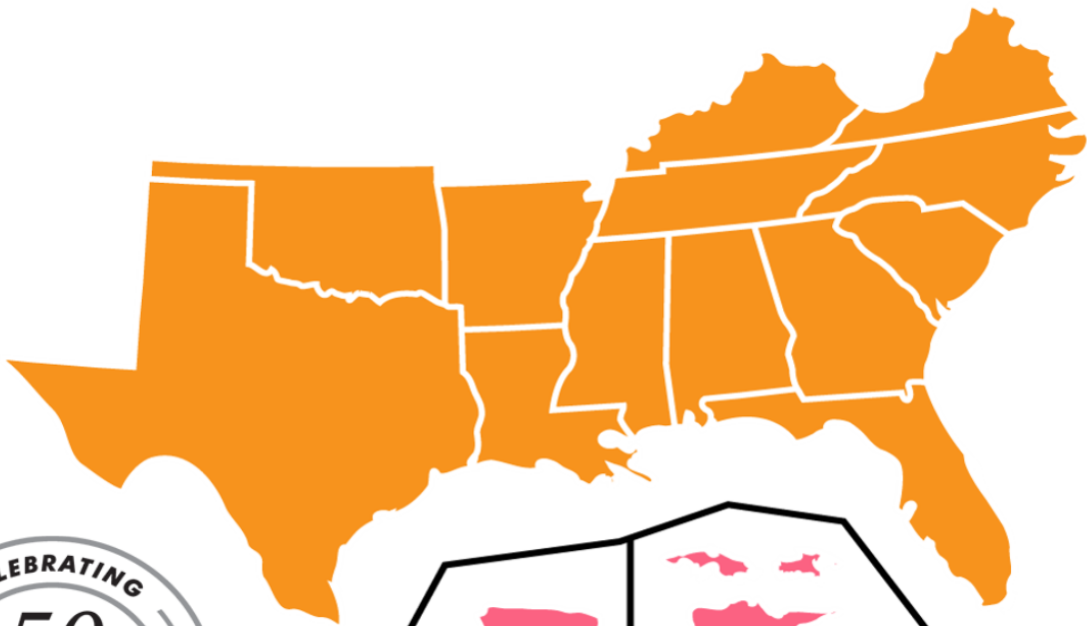
Texas Rural Leadership Program developed a workshop focused on shifts in people's attitudes about work life due to the pandemic. This workshop has been utilized in two larger audiences, a regional human resource management professional organization and a 17-county geographic region organization. Participants reported changes in perspectives and practices, with an increased focus on meeting elevated community affiliation needs of employees/members.



Madison County Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension partnered with local government to develop and implement a county-wide COVID-19 hotline and registration system to operate a local vaccination clinic for Madison County residents in cooperation with emergency services, and the local hospital and health district. As a result of Extension's COVID-19 engagement efforts, the hotline managed over 12,000 phone calls, scheduled 4,466 appointments, hosted 16 vaccination clinics that vaccinated 5,351 residents, and conducted an agri-business focused regional clinic for 1000 farm workers. Of those vaccinated, 74% were 65 and older and 28% had no access to the COVID-19 internet registration systems.



Extension educators at WVSU assisted over 150 small businesses with marketing planning, and connected them to vital resources during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed them to make necessary changes or to insulate themselves from the negative impacts that occurred to businesses across the nation. As a result, the locally owned business community was more resilient and able to survive until the greatest impacts of the pandemic subsided.



Southern Region
**Program
Leadership**
Network
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