



TEXAS A&M  
**AGRILIFE**  
EXTENSION

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## Extension in the City

July 2022  
Quarterly Newsletter



PRAIRIE VIEW  
A&M UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Cooperative Extension Program

Practicing collaboration and innovation to advance the unique interests of urban counties in Texas

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**AGRILIFEEXTENSION.TAMU.EDU**



# OUR WORK MAKES A DIFFERENCE. IN THE LIVES OF TEXANS AND ON THE ECONOMY.

## **MISSION STATEMENT:**

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service works daily to make Texas better by providing innovative solutions at the intersection of agriculture, natural resources, youth, and health, thereby improving the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, and communities through education and service.”

## **VISION STATEMENT:**

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will be the leader in providing science-based information and solutions in agriculture and health to every Texan.”

## **SHARED VALUES:**

“We value People, Programs, and Partnerships.”



## Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Urban Counties



### Extension in the City

It is my pleasure to share the second edition of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Extension in the City newsletter. We are very grateful for your support of our Extension programs across our agency. Several of our county extension agents have conducted a variety of quality programs/services for thousands of participants both in-person and in a virtual format. The Urban Extension Program has prided ourselves on a commitment to excellence in providing quality education, and you will read about many different programs that will help you better understand how we navigate the delivery in an urban environment.

We are also excited to add a new member to our team. Xiomara Diaz-Vargas will begin her new role as the County Extension Director – Dallas County effective August 1, 2022. Xiomara served as the Indiana 4-H State Specialist for New Audience Initiatives and has over 18 years as a cross-cultural competent Extension Professional for the Agriculture and Natural Resources and 4-H Youth Development program areas. She has extensive experience in urban and rural programming, peer mentorship, volunteer empowerment, and strategic partnerships. Xiomara is a second-generation 4-H'er and Extension Educator.

Respectfully,

David D. Wright  
Urban Program Director  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

## 2022 NACo ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER



The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America's counties, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- Advocate county priorities in federal policymaking
- Promote exemplary county policies and practices
- Nurture leadership skills and expand knowledge networks
- Optimize county and taxpayer resources and cost savings, and
- Enrich the public's understanding of county government



Each year NACo hosts its annual Achievement Awards program, a non-competitive awards program that seeks to recognize innovative county government programs. One of its many award winners this year in its Human Services Category was Bexar County and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Bexar County and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service have traditionally strived to help Texans better their lives: more specifically Texas' families through the application of evidence-based knowledge. In 2019, Bexar County developed the Greenies Urban Farm project, 10-acres of undeveloped land in San Antonio's inner city known as the Eastside and part of the Eastside Promise Zone. In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a need that rose to the top of everyone's priority list was food insecurity. Food distribution centers were pushed to the brink with high demand for food and low food donation and supply shortages. Bexar County and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service sprang into action to utilize 1-acre of land dedicated for the future 10-acre Greenies Urban Farm for high density vegetable production to feed its most vulnerable families.

As a result of our work this 1-acre will continue to be dedicated for fruit and vegetables production to serve communities in need and indirectly impact the obesity and food insecurity challenges that impact the health and well-being of Bexar County families by shaping their attitudes toward urban agriculture, food, and health.



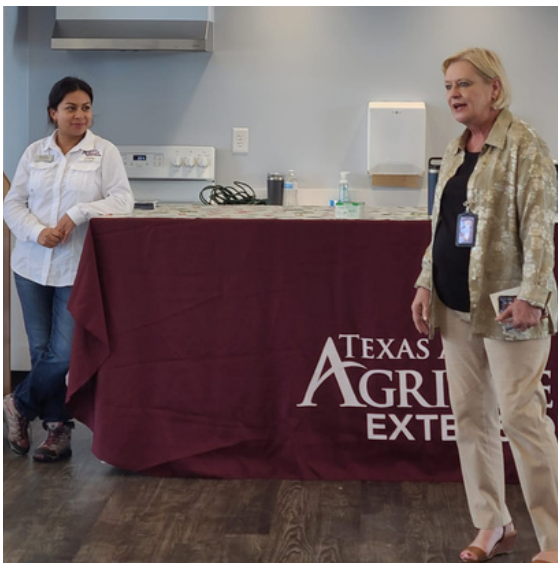


## GREAT THINGS HAPPENING WITH DALLAS COUNTY YOUTH

Youth camps and projects have dominated Dallas County summer programming with a focus on the connections between agriculture and health!

The Dallas County Extension team including agents, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and Master Wellness volunteers partnered in presenting “Path to the Plate” at the Dallas District 1 Road & Bridge complex. This unique immersive experience was designed to connect area urban youth with nature. It’s well documented that time in nature results in several positive outcomes and may be a key component to mitigate childhood ADD, obesity and depression. Participants from Garland Parks and Recreation rotated through 5 outdoor stations/topics including native gardens, orchard, honeybees, vegetable gardens/composting, & domestic animals. They were able to pick and sample fruit right from the plant, view live honeybees at work, see and touch vegetables growing in our gardens, pet and feed animals, and locate/identify insects commonly found in compost. They also got to create a healthy treat using a kid-powered bicycle blender. Special thanks to all the participants!

Youth at Texas Rangers MLB Youth Academy participated in the 4-week program series “Choose Healthy”, which was delivered by the Better Living for Texans and Family & Community Health Extension agents. Topics discussed included Choose MyPlate, Healthy Hydration, Living a Balanced Life, and others. The youth also participated in “Dance Fit” which encouraged campers to maintain fitness and improve their health by following various choreographed dances. A fun time was had by all!



Dallas County Commissioner Dr. Theresa M. Daniel speaking to youth participants.



## GREAT THINGS HAPPENING WITH DALLAS COUNTY YOUTH



A new connection was recently made with Jonathan's Place, a safe haven for abused and neglected children, teens, and young adults as the center understands the importance of youth enrichment programs. Through the Better Living for Texans initiative, youth participated in a program series which encouraged them to make healthy meals, adopt healthy food safety habits, increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and understand the connection between the garden, agriculture, and getting food on your plate.

In late spring, Family & Community Health partnered with Big Thought to provide "Adulting 101", an educational opportunity based on skills youth will need as they transition into adulthood. Youth received instruction on 5 subject areas; Meal Planning, Teamwork, Practical Skills, Budgeting, and Debt. Big Thought is in the process of chartering three 4-H clubs which will engage recently trained AmeriCorps adult club leaders who will enroll and work with approximately 90-150 youth as 4-H members.

Finally, Dallas Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has engaged a summer intern to assist in program delivery at eleven Dallas Parks and Recreation summer camp sites. These program series have graduated approximately 500 youth through engaging and interactive sessions focused on healthy eating and the importance of physical activity.

"Teamwork makes the dream work", leading to great things happening with Dallas County youth!

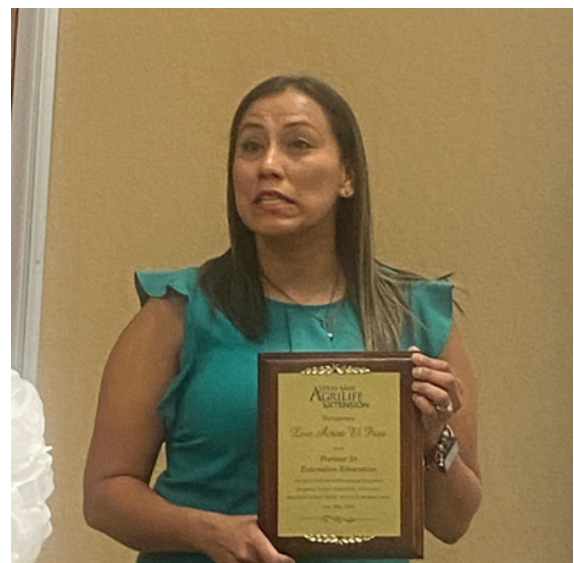


## RECOGNIZING OUR VOLUNTEERS

On May 13, 2022, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office in El Paso County hosted its annual volunteer recognition event in person after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. In 2021, due to the dedication and resilience of our volunteers, a total of 1,110 Extension volunteers provided 29,791 hours of service valued at \$810,315.20 in El Paso County. Extension volunteers include certified Master Volunteers, 4-H & youth development, livestock project mentors, leadership advisory board, and program area committee members.

We are pleased to announce Dr. Raymond Bader as this year's recipient of the Friend of Extension awarded to individuals who have provided exceptional service or support of Extension. As an Extension retiree, Ray has served in numerous capacities within AgriLife as both an agent and administrator. Well into retirement, Ray continues to use his extensive knowledge in cotton breeding to support agriculture in El Paso. His tireless work and efforts have moved Fusarium Wilt (FOV-4) research into the forefront of the cotton industry.

The El Paso office is pleased to announce Live Active EP as the 2021 Partner of Extension education, which recognizes organizations to bring educational opportunities to the people of El Paso. Live Active EP is a online platform developed by the City of El Paso in response to the COVID pandemic to promote better health and wellness by encouraging physical activity, improved nutrition, and strong mental health to youth and their families. Through the marketing and promotion efforts of Live Active EP, our Extension programs were able to reach new audiences, clients, and networks within in the community.



## ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Mental Health programming needs have been exacerbated due to the ongoing pandemic. Under the lead of our Family & Community Health agent, Dr. Gigi Shamaley, the AgriLife Extension office in El Paso has implemented Mental Health programs to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and educate the public about mental illness. As a certified mental health first aid instructor, Dr. Shamaley has educated first responders to identify and administer mental health first aid to adults and youth in the county since 2019. This year alone, she has trained 41 new responders in collaboration with Emergence Health Network, the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) in El Paso County.

In addition, mental health educational presentations have been conducted at two local senior community centers where over 50 participants received educational presentations on strategies to increase happiness and the importance of laughter for good health with the “Laugh a Latte” and “Would you Like to be Happier?” programs. The Mindful Wellness curriculum, a 4-class series, was implemented at Polly Harris senior center which introduces the practice of mindfulness to reduce stress.

Other local programming includes disseminating mental health and suicide prevention information at the County of El Paso Employee health fairs to help individuals recognize mental health issues signs and symptoms. Virtual programming efforts with our local school districts include the presentation of “Stress: Friend or Foe?” to Socorro ISD staff and parent volunteers in Spring 2022. Through these outreach efforts, over 128 individuals received information to identify mental health illness and strategies to maintain strong mental health.





## VEGETABLE GARDEN ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Fort Bend County, with all your bounty, how does your garden grow? With demonstrations and presentations from Master Gardeners all in a row!

And, oh boy, the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners have been building the bounty! The Fort Bend County Master Gardener Association held a ribbon cutting to unveil the Vegetable Garden Enhancement Project on June 3. The project was funded by a grant from USDA and a Fort Bend Master Gardeners Association investment. Located on the grounds of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office of Fort Bend County in Rosenberg, the teaching garden and outdoor classroom includes a raised bed, garden planters, compost area, herb garden, and pavilion with rainwater harvesting.

Fort Bend County Master Gardener Association members extended special invitations to people in their circles of influence who were unfamiliar with the association but interested in community connections, education, gardening, giving back, and spreading good news. Personal invitations were sent to elected and appointed officials who represent Fort Bend County. County Judge K.P. George attended as well as representatives from Precinct 4 Commissioner Ken DeMerchant's office; the Richmond mayor's office; and US Congressman Troy Nehls' office.



## VEGETABLE GARDEN ENHANCEMENT PROJECT



Produce from the vegetable gardens is shared with local nonprofits. Representatives from the Fort Bend County Senior Center and the Mamie George Community Center were in attendance representing the beneficiaries of the bounty. Representatives from USDA, NRCS, and FSA were also on site to see and celebrate.

Fort Bend County Extension Agent for Horticulture, Boone Holladay, gave special recognition to the people who made the project happen, then turned the program over to Fort Bend County Master Gardener Richard Weir, who shared a project narrative presentation and PowerPoint for the crowd of about 60 participants. Immediately following the ribbon was cut and FBCMG members provided informal tours of not only the vegetable garden, but other demonstrations on the grounds.





## ¡SALUD A TI!

On Saturday May 14th Better Living for Texans Agents Lora Jorgenson and Jasmine Carey along with Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program Agents Khadija Ghaffar and Erika Ovando and Family & Community Health Agent Amanda Krippel participated in a community wide health and wellness fair, ¡Salud a Ti!, to promote health and wellness among the Hispanic population in Harris County. This event not only provided cooking demos from AgriLife Extension BLT and EFNEP Agents but also provided the community with onsite Covid testing, liver testing, diabetes, and eye vision testing along with activities for children and the opportunity to shop at the Azteca Farmer's Market. BLT Agents Lora and Jasmine demonstrated a healthy cooking demo called Cowboy Salad for all participants to taste and the opportunity to take home a sample and the recipe card. EFNEP Agents Khadija and Erika demonstrated a sweet and savory food called Energy Nuggets, and all participants walked away with a sample and a healthy recipe to take home and make with their family. Over one hundred people attended the health fair and benefitted from educational resources and healthy recipes for the entire family.



## FARMER HOWDY'S AG-VENTURE

We can say a lot of things about the challenges the last few years have brought about due to a worldwide pandemic; online learning for schools, zoom meetings, along with many other changes. For those of us in Tarrant County, this time was used as a time to begin thinking outside the box in terms of education for youth and adults alike as well as using this time to strengthen many of our current partnerships.

One of our most influential partnerships happens to be with the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo (FWSSR). For the last 20 years, FWSSR has had an outreach program where they scheduled time to be in schools around the county to talk about the "Cowboy Way of Life", speaking mainly about rodeo and bullying. Like AgriLife, they also used the 2021 year as a time to restructure and recreate a few programs. They understand Fort Worth has a rich history in the Agricultural Industry, from many facets not just the cattle industry. But when you begin to look at the county, we are becoming more Urban, with less understanding about where your food comes from.





## FARMER HOWDY'S AG-VENTURE

Knowing and understanding the importance of this topic FWSSR approached our local office to begin the conversation on how we could partner to better educate youth on the importance of agriculture in our everyday lives.

With the help of a talented group of TCU Interns, a day in the life of Farmer Howdy, Cornelius Corncob, Hoss, and Elwood (the FWSS mascots) came to life in their "AgVenture". Utilizing the Path to the Plate curriculum, we were able to demonstrate where your food comes from as well as the many by-products we use in our every day lives that no one thinks about.

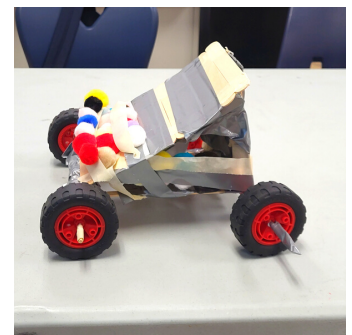
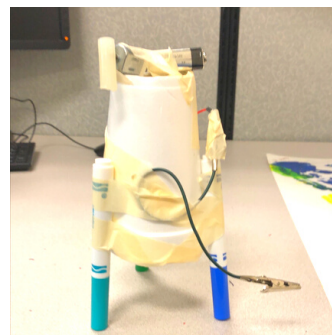
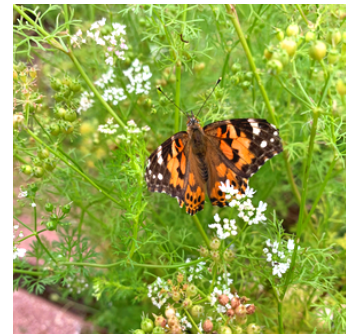
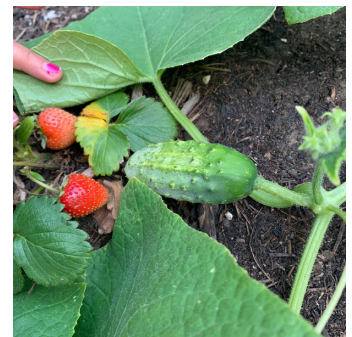
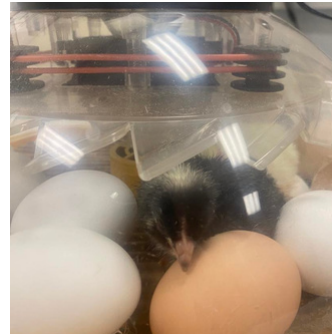
For the first 3 weeks in January the group traveled to various schools around the county performing the skit to grades 2-4. During this time the group was able to reach approximately 7,000 students on their AgVenture.

We are happy to announce this partnership was a success and we will be continuing with it next year as well as expanding our AgriLife presence for many years to come. So "bee" on the lookout for more "AgVentures" from Farmer Howdy and the crew in 2023.



## 4-H CAPITAL AFTERSCHOOL SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAM

Our 4-H CAPITAL team was excited to continue in-person afterschool programming after our busy TCYS Fall program. Spring programming kicked off after a week of training for our instructors. We were honored to serve 14 schools and over 200 students. The Animal Science team focused on the Egg to Chick program, incubating over 60 eggs in three classrooms. Our students grew so attached to their baby chicks that several families took their hatched chicken home. Animal Science instructors constructed two chicken coops for our schools and restored one coop where we currently house 4 hens. Our Garden Science team ensured their 4 schools had fresh soil and repaired garden beds. The students really enjoyed seeing the process of their gardens growing, this year had a high success yield. Our Garden Science students spent the Spring not just growing plants, they also had the Small Bites program. This program helps our students create healthy eating habits with easy, fun cooking lessons. The Natural Resources team bonded over river and park clean ups, fishing trips and even got to visit a hatchery. Natural Resources focused on Del Valle, serving 5 schools in that district. Lessons focused on the importance of pollinators and renewable energy. The game warden guest speaker was a highlight. The Natural Resources and Garden Science programs had butterflies in the classroom, releasing them into gardens after witnessing each stage of their life cycle. Our Engineering and Technology team focused on coding and programming. This team partnered frequently with other curriculum areas to show how engineering is involved in Gardening, Renewable Energy, etc. This really impacted how the students view Engineering and Technology.





## 4-H CAPITAL SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAM

During June 4-H CAPITAL was eager to bring Summer Enrichment to our students primarily in Del Valle. Many of our school sites pooled students from various sites allowing our programming to have an even higher outreach than usual. During the Meet the Teachers events at schools the hens were a hit. It's lovely seeing parents and families as excited as our students about 4-H programming. Our garden science team focused on ensuring the garden was fully harvested and ensuring our students had plenty of healthy snack ideas for summer with Small Bites. The young gardeners worked on improving and expanding their garden's composting program. The garden students learned all about vermicomposting with our newly restocked worm bin. Over sixty students were able to witness the life cycle of lady bugs in the classroom. We were all surprised at how different the larva looks! Our Gilbert students loved having the chickens at their school for a week. We were happy to have donated hundreds of fresh laid eggs to various school support staff. Our hardworking hens laid an average of twenty-eight eggs a week. These Animal Science instructors worked hard to bring many animal guests to these students. Our Natural resources team focused on bringing awareness of our local parks and resources and our students loved practice casting. These students can't wait to utilize their knot tying and bird identification this summer. Our instructors even assisted at Water Day and other school events. Summer programming was short but fun! 4-H CAPITAL is grateful for the continued support and partnership in this community.



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Commissioner Justin Rodriguez  
Commissioner Marialyn Barnard  
Commissioner Tommy Calvert



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Commissioner John Wiley Price  
Commissioner J.J. Koch  
Commissioner Dr. Theresa Daniel



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Commissioner Ann Howard  
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With the support of the County Judge and County Commissioners, each Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County Office offers the knowledge resources of the Texas A&M University System to local citizens for self-improvement, individual action, and community problem-solving.

**Thank You.**

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating