

JANUARY 2024

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN HARRIS COUNTY





Extension Education in Harris County

Howdy and Welcome to Harris County!

Making a Difference in Harris County



NEW AGENT SPOTLIGHT

Photo above: Stephanie Gray - Harris County
Extension Agent - Horticulture

Stephanie Gray started as a Master Gardener Coordinator in June 2023 and has transitioned into the County Extension Agent - Horticulture, Commercial/Green Industry position as of November 2023.

Stephanie graduated with a degree in Environmental Science and Planning from State University of New York - Plattsburgh. She worked on a mid-scale organic farm as a harvest manager and market lead. Following this, she moved to Montana for a few years and worked as a community organizer. Stephanie started calling Houston home two years ago. She has a passion for community involvement, innovation, and plant science. As a Horticulture Agent Stephanie will focus on professional development outreach in underserved communities and partnering with local businesses to expand our programming.

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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.”

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

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.”

Front Page- Catch a glimpse of our vibrant community in action! Shannon Sullivan, Harris County Assistant Extension Agent, and Gabrielle Washington, Harris County Extension Agent – Volunteer Management, lead impactful initiatives. Students and parents engage in the 4-H Livestock Program retagging, guided by Shannon's expertise. Meanwhile, Gabrielle orchestrates an annual program for seniors, captured by an image of a senior with a plant. Read more on page 7.

harris.agrilife.org



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PHOTO ABOVE: TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE - HARRIS COUNTY OFFICE STAFF

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HIGHLIGHT

ABC13 Interviews Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Agriculture and Natural Resource Agent



“ENSURE YOUR TREES STAY STRONG AND VIBRANT THIS WINTER WITH THESE EXPERT TIPS FROM HARRIS COUNTY'S TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE AND THE HOUSTON ARBORETUM.”

WINTER TREE CARE TIPS FROM TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE

By Karrie Calloway - Community Engagement
 Coordinator & Steven Frederick - Harris County
 Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resource

»»» **CLICK HERE**

Dive into the live interview now at abc13.com

Title: Why are leaves changing color in southeast Texas?
 Here's why the fall weather may be the cause.

By Elyse Smith

»»» READ MORE

As winter settles in, our trees need a little TLC to weather the cold. ABC13 teamed up with the Harris County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, featuring insights from Steven Frederick, the Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent. Additionally, we've partnered with Christine Mansfield, the senior manager of marketing at the Houston Arboretum, to bring you a holistic guide:

- **Fall Colors Check:** Steven Frederick assures us that Houston's trees are doing well, celebrating with vibrant fall colors. However, if those hues show up too early – think September – it might be a sign of trouble. Stay vigilant!
- **Yearly Tree Diary:** Keeping a simple log of your tree's appearance throughout the year is recommended. Any unusual changes, like color shifts, limb losses, or bark issues, are red flags. If you spot them, consult the pros.
- **Winter Care Routine:** For trees that shed leaves, we advise a pre-winter mulching and watering session. Pines, though, don't hit snooze for winter, so consistent care is key. Come spring, the buds will tell you if your trees are happy and healthy.

EFNEP Top News of the Quarter



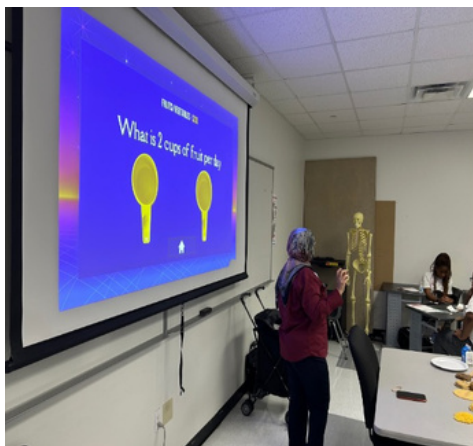
➤➤➤ Girls, Inc. Bold Leaders Summit 2023

The Bold Leaders Summit 2023: Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) was invited for the second consecutive year by Girls Inc. to be a part of this empowering event that brought together over 100 amazing girls aged 12-18. Our close ties with Girls Inc. through the Imagine Science Partnership made it happen, and EFNEP has been in the mix for the past two years.

Picture this: STEM activities, presentations, and loads of inspiration categorized under three tracks – Strong, Smart, and Bold. The girls got hands-on with STEM activities, dabbled in product development, and even delved into discussions on mental health and wellness practices. But that's not all; they also got the lowdown on growing and saving money – talk about life skills in action!

We, the Harris County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension crew, are excited to be a part of this journey with Girls Inc. Our collaboration keeps getting stronger, and the Imagine Science Partnership is making waves in creating a positive space for learning and personal development.

As we look back on the Bold Leaders Summit 2023, we can't help but feel a sense of pride. Here's to more opportunities to inspire and uplift these incredible young leaders. The last two years have been a blast, and we're eager to see what the future holds.



EFNEP rocked the Bold Leaders' Summit on October 7th, 2023! We represented the Strong Track with a unique twist – a lively Jeopardy game from our "Teen Cuisine" curriculum.

In small groups, attendees tackled questions with tricky answers. Using food models, Khadija Ghaffar, Extension Agent – EFNEP, explained the right choices, turning learning into a game. Competitive and educational, the girls loved it! Plus, everyone snagged prizes for participating.

"LOOKING FORWARD TO MORE FUN NEXT YEAR!"



By Khadija Ghaffar - Extension Agent – EFNEP

By Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Harris County
Better Living for Texans Agents Lora Jorgensen and Jasmine
Carey and Family & Community Health Agent Dr. Sonja Davis

➤➤➤ CANNING IT

**“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Harris County
Collaborates with Fred Aguilar Promise Center in Baytown”**

FOOD PRESERVATION WORKSHOP

The Fred Aguilar Promise Center is an organization in Baytown that strives to improve the lives of the local community by connecting people to health, education, and financial resources. The center also has a community garden to grow fresh, healthy produce and to teach gardening skills. This workshop was planned to teach the local community how to properly and safely preserve fresh produce. The Harris County Extension Agents started the workshop with a 1-hour presentation on safe canning methods.

Then the participants were split into groups, and each group was given enough fresh produce to make one recipe (4 pints) of tomato salsa. The participants washed the produce and chopped the peppers, onions, and garlic. They boiled the tomatoes to remove the skins and then prepared the recipe. They filled pint jars with the salsa, which were then water-bath canned following proper procedures. Each participant was able to take home a jar of salsa.



"AGING MY WAY" SENIOR WELLNESS EVENT LIGHTS UP PVAMU NORTHWEST HOUSTON CENTER



➤➤➤ AGING MY WAY

HERE'S A FANTASTIC HIGHLIGHT FROM THE TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE - HARRIS COUNTY FAMILY & COMMUNITY HEALTH UNIT AND PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE, FEATURING BETTER LIVING FOR TEXANS:

Dr. Sonja Davis, along with the Harris County Family & Community Health Unit, interns, and volunteers, transformed the event into a star-studded affair. The day featured theater-themed décor, a red-carpet photo booth, and a lineup of speakers covering a range of topics, from artificial intelligence to mindfulness. Notable speakers included comedian Karen Williams, John Starne, Angel Hanzik, Anthony Holmes, Lee Merriweather, and others who added flair to the occasion.

BLT Agents Lora Jorgensen and Jasmine Carey led engaging sessions on Chair Yoga and Container Gardening. Seniors left the event not just with memories but also with photos, crafts, and even a container garden with fresh vegetable plants. The demographic diversity was represented by Asian, White, African American, and Hispanic participants, all engaging in activities aimed at promoting a healthy and safe lifestyle.

This collaborative effort was a testament to our commitment to community wellness, leaving a lasting impact on the seniors who participated. "Aging My Way" was more than an event; it was a celebration of vibrant living and shared knowledge.



By Sonja L. Davis, County Extension Agent – FCH & Jasmine Carey, Lora Jorgensen, and Sarah Ellis, Extension Agents – Better Living for Texans

November 16, 2023



Location: Prairie View A&M University Northwest Houston Center, 2449 Grant Rd., Houston

Family & Community Health Agent Dr. Sonja Davis and the FCH Program Advisory Committee orchestrated a remarkable annual event for seniors, titled "Aging My Way." The day-long gathering at Prairie View A&M University Northwest Houston Center brought together 91 enthusiastic female participants aged 60 and above.

COOKING WELL FOR HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE

3-WEEK SERIES

By Dr. Sonja Davis, Harris County Extension Agent – Family & Community Health

➤➤➤ DASH EATING PLAN

In partnership with WellCare Insurance, Urban Harvest, and Harris County Precinct 1, Agent Davis implemented two Cooking Well for Healthy Blood Pressure series at Duessen Senior Center and Cavalcade Community Center. Each 3-week series provided participants with an overview of the DASH Eating Plan, a virtual grocery store tour to assist with navigating the grocery store, and using spices and herbs to season food. During each class, students broke into groups and cooked healthy recipes, demonstrating that foods could taste good and remain healthy without the heavy use of sodium. Some of the dishes prepared were zucchini chocolate chip cookies, stir-fry, and zucchini nachos.

The DASH Eating Plan is a heart healthy approach that has been scientifically proven to lower blood pressure and have other health benefits. To learn more, go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH.





DECEMBER 2023

BY TE'ANNA DONALDSON, EXTENSION AGENT – FCH – PVAMU EXTENSION

➤➤➤ SAFE RIDERS

“Securing Our Future!”

***THAT’S WHAT WE’RE COMMITTED
TO DOING IN HARRIS COUNTY.***

The Safe Riders Car Seat Program is a crucial initiative dedicated to ensuring the safety of young passengers during vehicular travel. Launched with the primary goal of reducing the incidence of child injuries and fatalities in car accidents, this program provides valuable education and resources to parents and caregivers. The program offers comprehensive guidance on installation techniques, encouraging caregivers to secure car seats correctly to optimize protection.

Prairie View A&M University CEP Agent Te’Anna Donaldson regularly offers this program twice monthly, for more information please call the Harris County Extension Office at 713-274-0950.

A TASTE OF LATIN AMERICAN HERITAGE

Harris County is enjoying the flavors of Latin American Heritage! Participants throughout this series displayed an eagerness and excitement to learn about the healthy and vibrant food traditions in Latin American cultures while introducing their tastebuds to an array of delicious recipes. This program offers participants an immersive experience, featuring cooking classes and cultural insights while bridging communities and fostering appreciation for Latin heritage.





Texas 4-H & FFA Swine Validation

In the month of November, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Harris County conducted the validation process for the Texas 4-H/FFA Swine validation program. This essential step ensures that youth in Harris County, intending to participate in major shows in 2024, are eligible to compete with their swine projects at prestigious events such as the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo, San Angelo Stock Show & Rodeo, San Antonio Livestock Show & Rodeo, Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, and Rodeo Austin.

During the validation process, participants receive a state validation tag and complete the necessary paperwork to exhibit their swine projects at these renowned shows. This opportunity not only allows them to showcase their hard work but also provides a chance to travel across the diverse landscapes of Texas, competing for scholarship funds. These funds can be utilized for their college education or invested in acquiring a new animal for the upcoming year.

We are thrilled to share that in 2023, Harris County successfully validated 259 swine projects. As we eagerly anticipate the 2024 show season, we extend our best wishes to all Harris County 4-H and FFA members. May your dedication and efforts lead to a successful and rewarding experience in the upcoming competitions. Here's to a fantastic show season ahead!



We've got an exciting tale from Codwell Elementary's recent expedition down Hwy. 290 with our partners at Prairie View A&M University Extension. Brace yourself for a hands-on experience like no other at the Poultry Science Plant in College Station!

"POULTRY SCIENCE DAY"

"Hands-on" is an understatement for our adventure at the poultry farm. Our future farmers from Codwell Elementary delved into the fascinating realm of chicken processing. From chick candling to witnessing the 21-day life cycle of a chick, it was an immersive learning experience.

Highlights:

- Connecting in-class embryology lessons to real-world scenarios.
- Gaining insights into the preparation of chickens for sale and distribution.

The journey was not just educational but also a sensory rollercoaster. Our partnership with Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program continues to open doors for unique and impactful learning experiences.

Stay tuned for more adventures and discoveries from Codwell Elementary!





Empowering Harris County Youth: Norman Borlaug Youth in Agriculture Program

By Katherine Hamilton, County Extension Agent – 4-H & Youth Development



In November, Harris County Extension Agents Katherine Hamilton and Steven Frederick accompanied 19 Harris County students to Texas A&M University. They attended the first session of an incredibly unique academic enrichment program offered to outstanding high school students from around Texas, the Norman Borlaug Youth in Agriculture Program.

This experience immerses 34 urban and rural youth in solving complex challenges in our state from water and food insecurity, land fragmentation and more, requiring leaders from both backgrounds to deliver solutions. The Growing a Vision experience is an opportunity offered to youth who want to make a difference in their community and hone their leadership skills.

Texas A&M University professors are supporting students through a multi-faceted educational strategy, paired with instilling proven professional habits, positively impacting the trajectory of this next generation of leaders. By participating in the program youth not only get an enriching leadership experience but they are given a scholarship for their 4-H enrollment fee along with an educational grant following completion of the program.

Texas A&M University professors are guiding students through a multi-faceted educational strategy, instilling professional habits that will positively shape the future of the next generation of leaders.

Program Highlights:

- Three in-person weekend-long sessions
- Weekly virtual classes over six months
- Enriching leadership experience
- Scholarship for 4-H enrollment fee
- Educational grant upon program completion

A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP BLOSSOMS

By Zachary Giblin County Extension Agent – Urban Youth Development

>>> READ MORE “HARRIS COUNTY 4-H, BETTER LIVING FOR TEXANS, AND BAKER RIPLEY HEAD START”,

We're thrilled to share the success story of our collaborative efforts this past Fall semester! The Harris County 4-H and Better Living for Texans units joined forces with Baker Ripley Head Start of Greater Houston for an enriching initiative.

What Happened: Throughout the Fall semester of 2023, we teamed up to train over 30 Baker Ripley educators on the early childhood Learn Grow Eat Go! curriculum.

Impactful Outreach: The trained educators, stationed at nine Baker Ripley Head Start locations, reached over 550 youth with lessons centered around gardening, tasting new fruits and vegetables, learning the different parts of plants and their functions, and participating in fun physical activities.

Spring 2024 Plans: The partnership doesn't stop there! This Spring semester, Baker Ripley Head Starts and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Harris County, are gearing up for another round. Together, we aim to continue the Learn Grow Eat Go! program, bringing more educational experiences to additional classes.

Future Growth: This collaboration is not just about education; it's about fostering a love for learning, healthy eating habits, and active lifestyles. We're excited about the positive impact we've made and the potential for even more growth in the future.

Houston Public Library Gardening Lecture Series

BY BRANDI KELLER, HARRIS COUNTY HORTICULTURE AGENT

Harris County Master Gardeners and Horticulture Agents presented a total of 16 lectures at libraries to residents of Harris County in 2023 throughout each of the four Harris County commissioner precincts. The opportunity to collaborate with the Houston Public Library System increased local community engagement, audience diversity, and accessibility.

Harris County Master Gardener volunteers and Harris County Horticulture Agents presented 10 one-hour lectures to a total of 545 participants from October - December. Each program was offered in-person and streamed live, online to the library Facebook page.

Volunteers presented on herbs, container gardening, rainwater harvesting, composting, native plants, and fall vegetable gardening. Horticulture Agent Brandi Keller spoke on pre/post freeze landscape care and living alternative holiday trees, while Horticulture Agent Stephanie Gray discussed container gardening.

2 AGENTS
5 VOLUNTEERS
16 LECTURES
13 LIBRARIES

Houston Public Library System

819

In-Person/Online Attendees

in 2023



Donnie Byrd, HPL Administration Manager - Adult, Senior, and Multicultural Programs, poses with Harris County Master Gardener Volunteers (Teresa See and Robin Kendrick-Yates), and attendees of the lecture series. Robin offered a selection of native plants to take home. Photos are courtesy of Houston Public Library System.

Hydroponic Gardening: Growing Beyond Soil

BY BRANDI KELLER, HARRIS COUNTY HORTICULTURE AGENT AND
SHANNON SULLIVAN, ANR/HORT ASSISTANT AGENT

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Harris County and AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Dallas hosted a 3-hour, virtual hydroponic gardening program on November 11, 2023. The program was aimed at existing hydroponic producers and beginners interested in learning more about hydroponics or starting a new business.

Dr. Joe Masabni, Extension Vegetable Specialist out of the Dallas Center, presented and shared his research with 111 online attendees on the benefits of hydroponics, system types, suitable crops, system maintenance, and cost/production estimates.

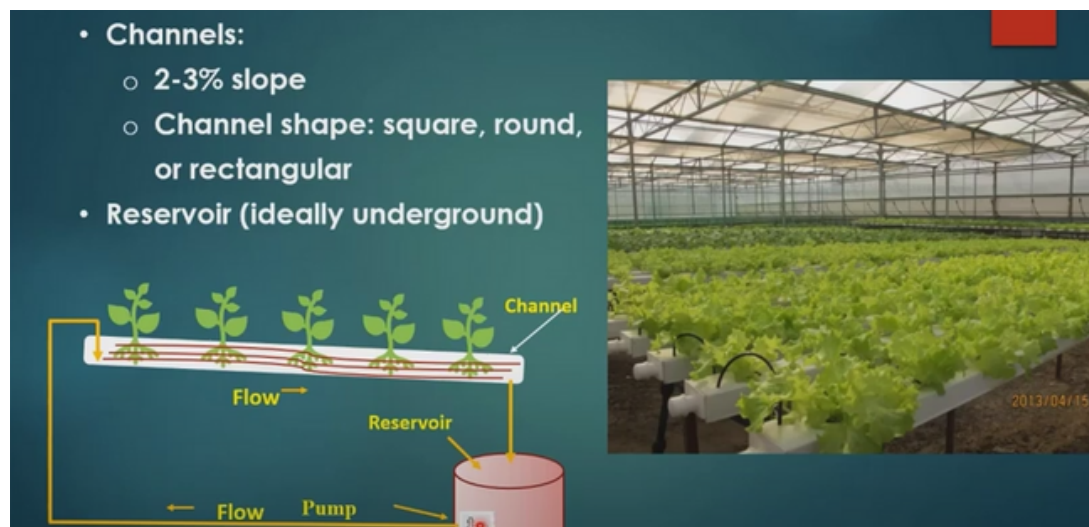
The program's idea originated when a local school sought more information on hydroponics. Two hydroponic towers, purchased by a predecessor, had been dormant for an extended period. Following consultations with Extension and an invitation to join the virtual training, educators could better plan for indoor gardening initiatives.

Completed participant surveys indicated:

- 85% intend to apply what they learned.
- 71% anticipate saving money from the information provided.
- Attendees consisted primarily of beginners (73%), illustrating an increasing interest in the practice.

What is hydroponics?

Hydroponics is a popular, alternative gardening method that grows plants without soil, offering higher yields, year-round growth, and use of indoor space. Despite requiring specialized equipment with varying costs, it saves on water and pesticide use. The learning process includes becoming familiar with hydroponic systems, soilless mediums, nutrient solutions, and necessary equipment to maintain optimal conditions.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE
IN HARRIS COUNTY

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IN COOPERATION WITH

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Harris County Judge

Rodney Ellis

Commissioner, Precinct 1

Adrian Garcia

Commissioner, Precinct 2

Tom S. Ramsey

Commissioner, Precinct 3

Lesley Briones

Commissioner, Precinct 4

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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD,
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