



# **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.”

# NUEL SOUTHERN & 1890'S REGIONAL CONFERENCE



The 2023 NUEL Southern and 1890's Regional Conference was hosted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Harris County. This year's conference was a celebration of innovation, community engagement, and sustainable agriculture. There were 156 attendees representing 13 States: Texas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Alabama.

Keynote Speaker William S. McArthur, Retired U.S. Army Colonel and NASA Astronaut, delivered an inspiring presentation at the 2023 NUEL Southern Region Conference. He shared his remarkable journey of exploration, offering valuable insights on teamwork, innovation, and perseverance from his illustrious career as an astronaut. Mr. McArthur's speech was a highlight of the conference, leaving attendees motivated and inspired.

From Master Wellness and Strengthening Communities to Urban Youth Development and Charting a Path for Youth Success, this conference encapsulated a spectrum of topics that hold the potential to transform lives by harnessing the power of partnerships and the urban programming approach in action.



## HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH STRESS

According to the American Psychological Association for young children, tension at home is a common source of stress. Children may be troubled by family discord, divorce, or loss. Even happy changes, such as a new home, the arrival of a new sibling, or beloved new step-parent can be hard on a child.

School is another frequent source of concern for kids. Young children might be stressed about making friends, dealing with bullies, or getting along with their teachers. They might also be anxious about tests and grades.

GEM: Get Experience with Mindfulness is an awareness and acceptance stress management program for ages 10 and up. GEM places an emphasis on stress management taught through practical and interactive mindfulness-based activities to facilitate experiential learning. GEM is a research based and theory driven program that meets National Healthy Education Standards.

Samantha Villanueva, our very own Health & Wellness Educator facilitated 16 series this year while developing partnerships that support student well-being and success with Community in Schools, Harlandale Independent School District, the KIN Afterschool Program, San Antonio Independent School District, San Antonio Youth, YMCA and YWCA.

Students learned what mindfulness is and how to integrate it into daily life, how important physical alignment and form is and were able to practice over 25 strength and flexibility poses adapted from yoga poses, and relaxation techniques.

If you are interested in participating, contact Samantha Villanueva, Health and Wellness Educator ([samantha.villanueva@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:samantha.villanueva@ag.tamu.edu)) at 210-631-0400 or visit: [bexar-tx.tamu.edu](http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu)



## HATCHING IN THE CLASSROOM: EGG TO CHICK

According to the Texas Education Agency, Texas is expected to have the second-highest percentage of the nation's future STEM job opportunities. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education is a method of hands-on teaching and learning where students learn to apply academic content by creatively solving real-world problems with innovative design-based thinking to prepare students for future career opportunities.

Hatching in the Classroom: Egg to Chick is a hands-on learning experience teachers can use with students from kindergarten to 12th grade. Each TEKS aligned lesson helps students learn biological concepts and develop a deeper understanding of the life sciences. Examining embryos at different stages of growth, and observing a beating heart are just a couple of fun and exciting activities students can participate in.

Dorothy Herbst, our very own Urban Agriculture Educator facilitated 14 series this year while enhancing classroom curriculum delivery that supports student science-based success with Baptist Temple Early Learning Center, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Judson Independent School District, Northeast Independent School District, Northside Independent School District, South San Independent School District, and World School Sprouts.

While having fun, students learned the parts of an egg, incubator, and chicken, the diet of chicks and adult chickens, and products of poultry.

If you are interested in participating, contact Dorothy Herbst, Urban Agriculture Educator ([dorothy.herbst@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:dorothy.herbst@ag.tamu.edu)) at 210-631-0400 or visit: [bexar-tx.tamu.edu](http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu)



## "ADDRESSING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH CULTURAL FOOD PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY (OLDWAYS NUTRITION EDUCATION)

Family & Community Health Agent Marvin Young, accompanied by Mrs. Te'Anna Donaldson (Harris County FCH) and Mrs. Terri Wesley (Dallas County Snap-Ed), shared information from their one-hour breakout session with more than 40 conference-goers throughout the National Urban Extension's Southern Region. Mr. Young discussed barriers to achieving better health and nutrition outcomes in people of African heritage and classified healthful foods from across the African diaspora that make up African Heritage Diets. He reframed nutrition education programming to program participants in a culturally relevant way. Young also showed several pictures and a video displaying students from the southern sector of Dallas County (often labeled a food desert or food swamp) engaging in the program. The presentation's finale was the food demonstration of "Spicy Chickpeas" from the "A Taste of African Heritage nutrition program conducted by Mrs. Te'Anna Donaldson and Mrs. Terri Wesley. The session focuses on strategies for overcoming cultural and structural barriers to children's nutrition in communities of color, utilizing existing resources and best practices for African-American and immigrant populations. Key Points 1. Although a "Southern Diet" heavy in fried foods, processed meats, and sweetened beverages is often seen as the "traditional" diet for many African Americans, a healthier, more traditional model can be found in the foods brought to the New World by Africans, along with those they adopted. 2. People are likelier to eat (and enjoy) foods that honor their culture, traditions, and preferences.

There were more than 40 Extension professionals from southern region states who attended the breakout session and food demonstration. The audience consisted of Extension agents, program leaders, and other administrators.



### NEW AGRILIFE SATELLITE OFFICE IN SOUTH DALLAS

Commissioner John Wiley Price has provided new office space to house part of the Dallas Family Community Health Unit. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) team, composed of County Agent Cheryl Miller, educators Maribel Vidal and Joyce Washington, and Family Community Health CEP Agent Marvin Young, will be able to focus on programs in health and well-being, parenting, life skills, and nutrition for underserved clientele, but, not excluding other audiences, that will catalyze to improve their quality of living. This new office is a win-win for Extension because it gives us the visibility for a larger audience and the opportunity to expand collaborations with county agencies. The South Dallas Government Building is situated on a 12-acre campus at the corner of West Wheatland Road and Polk Street, sharing spaces with the County's Tax Office; Veteran's Affairs; County Constable, Sheriff's Traffic Division, Dispatch, and K-9 Unit; and two Justice of the Peace courts.

## INCREASING HUMAN CAPACITY TO TRAIN MORE YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID IN DALLAS CO.



According to Mental Health America, Texas ranks 28th in the nation for youth mental health and ranks 51st for access to mental health care. Additionally, 1 in 5 children in Texas experience a mental disorder in any given year. Texas has the highest percentage of youth who had a major depressive episode in the past year and did not receive treatment (73.1%). Specifically in Dallas County, 2 in 5 children/youth face mental health and substance use disorders yearly.

Through support from North Texas Behavioral Health Authority, Texas A&M AgriLife, and the Dallas County Extension office, funding was provided for Liz Espie, Family Community Health Agent, to receive training and become a Youth Mental Health First Aid instructor.

As of now, two Youth Mental Health First Aid courses are scheduled with Dallas ISD to provide training to DISD Police Officers. The FCH agent will support and lead youth mental health programs through Teens and Teachers (ARP grant). Hopefully, with this additional training and upcoming programs, awareness about youth mental health will increase in the communities that Extension serves.

## Dallas Co. @ 4-H True Leaders in Equity Institute, Washington, D.C.

Bias-based bullying of youth is occurring every day and is associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Victims suffer through repeated and prolonged attacks over unchangeable cultural traits. With 1 in 3 Texas youth living with at least one immigrant parent, and according to the last census, Texans of color accounted for more than 95% of the state's population growth over ten years, Texas and Dallas County is the perfect place to implement a program based on cultural understanding and acceptance. The True Leaders in Equity Institute sponsored a Dallas County 4-H team for a 4-day Washington, DC conference this fall. This institute equipped teams to be change agents within the Cooperative Extension System as we seek to create more welcoming and inclusive environments. This training and leadership opportunity challenged participants to work together to ideate and champion an equity-related project that will grow 4-H in their communities. The Dallas team, composed of two teens and two adults, decided to work on a Community Action Plan to address the issue of Cultural acceptance; **"Embracing Culture Diversity: Many Cultures, One Community."** The team attended sessions focused on gaining a deeper understanding of key principles and concepts related to equity and inclusion, developing their skills and competencies in equity leadership, and making connections to people, organizations, and tools that can be helpful to them for their projects—and creating an overall framework for their project for the next year and a specific 90-day action plan to implement when they return home. In September, the CHS Foundation awarded the Dallas Team \$1,500 to help implement their action plan.

## MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND RESOURCE FAIR

Minority Mental Health Month is an annual observance in July that aims to raise awareness and address the mental health needs of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States. According to the Office of Minority Health (OMH), these groups often face barriers to accessing quality mental health care, such as stigma, discrimination, lack of cultural competence, and language barriers. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Family & Community Health Agent and Emergence Health Network collaboration held a health education and resource fair on July 26, 2023. The event was held at Wellington Chew senior center. The event opened with an education presentation by the agent on Depression and Older Adults. Followed were brief mental health topics presented by Emergence Health Network and Molina Healthcare. The presentation session was wrapped up with a prayer from the local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter representative. A total of 43 adults attended the presentations. Subsequently they were able to meet with organizations and learn about various mental health resources available in their community. Local organizations hosting resource information tables included 6 partners (Emergence Health Network, LIVE Active, Molina Healthcare, NAMI, Aliviane, & Be Well). A chair yoga session wrapped up the event hosted by Selflove Wellness Yoga.



new



new

## GROWING WITH G.R.O.W.S.

The GROWS program (Gardening, Resources, Outreach, Workshops, and Seminars) has had a great second year with its water conservation seminars. We conducted 9 educational programs reaching over 400 homeowners in 2023.

Through this partnership with El Paso Water, several water conservation topics were presented during these workshops including raised bed gardening/preparations, passive water harvesting, composting, native plant, etc. The goal is to create sustainable landscapes with sustainable practices while conserving water resources. During such presentations we provide the public with tips on how to save water inside their houses and how to save water in their gardens. We promote the usage of drip irrigation, better time to water, and how to water plants appropriately.

To achieve better distribution of the above-mentioned information, we hosted these programs at different venues throughout El Paso. We have had programs on different zip codes to achieve an ample distribution of information.

Our goal for the upcoming years is to increase our attendance and hopefully reach 100 to 200 more homeowners.



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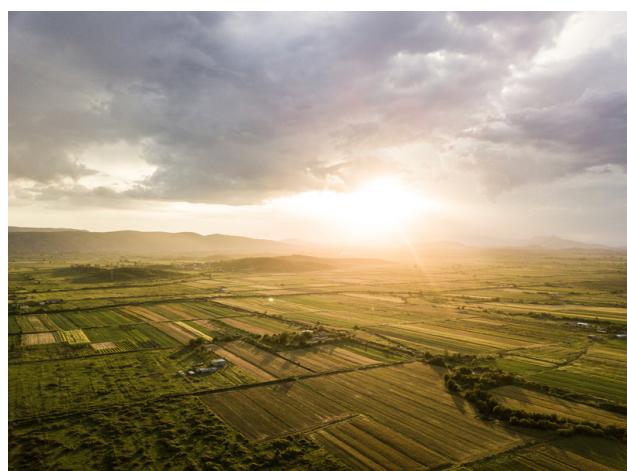
## 4-H MEMBERS HIGHLIGHTED

Fort Bend County 4-H ended the program year with a special celebration of member achievement throughout the year. Youth were recognized at the 2023 Awards Program on August 28, for participation in county, district, and state events. Prestigious awards for members who complete a 4-H Record Book and interview with a panel of judges are given for Rising Star, Bronze Star, Silver Star, Danforth "I Dare You," and the highest honor of Gold Star. Other special awards are also given for scholarship recipients and outstanding leaders. The 2023 event included a number of special guests: Sugar Land Mayor Joe Zimmerman, County Commissioner Andy Meyers, County Judge KP George, and State Representative Stan Kitzman who brought flags flown over the state capitol to dedicate to the Gold Star winners. Pictured below are the 2023 Gold Star recipients Ethan Bryan and Tiffany Sellers with Representative Kitzman.



## OWNING YOUR PIECE OF TEXAS

A full-day workshop presented by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Agriculture Law specialist Tiffany Lashmet was hosted in Fort Bend County by Ag Agent John Few on September 25 at the Rosenberg Civic Center. Attendees learned about various aspects of land ownership including liability awareness and exemption standards. Real estate agents earned 7 CEUs for their participation. This workshop is a fitting complement to the New Landowner Series hosted by Agent Few in shorter sessions throughout the year. Land ownership and urbanization of farmland are hot topics in Fort Bend County.



## AG'TIVITY BARN AT THE FORT BEND COUNTY FAIR



The "AGtivity Barn" is part of the Fort Bend County Fair hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Prairie View A&M Cooperative Extension Program, and Fort Bend 4-H with support from Texas Farm Bureau. AGtivity Barn is an agriculture awareness event for fairgoers. The area is open in the evenings and on weekends for the public. Local 4th grade students from the less-rural parts of Fort Bend County (like the class from Sugar Land pictured above) participate in school tours on weekday mornings. Students rotate through a variety of stations to learn more about agriculture and health, the connection between the two, and the role agriculture plays in the everyday lives of Texans. Stations include corn, cotton, rice, poultry, beef, rabbits, wildlife, pollinators (bees), pecans, fruits and veggies (nutrition) and physical activity. Special guests and elected officials (including Constable Daryl Smith pictured above) attended a special tour on Wednesday to observe the school tours and interact with the students. This year school tours included around 500 students Tuesday - Thursday. On Friday, about 150 participants from the Exceptional (special needs) Rodeo (pictured above with staff member Karen Santos) stopped by for an informal visit to the AGtivity Barn. In the evenings and on weekends, an estimated 55,405 fairgoers came through the Barn. Attendees are able to see chicks hatch from eggs in the incubator, baby chicks playing in a pen (or being held by adorable 4-H "helpers" as pictured above), and full-grown poultry in the "yard." A variety of information posters outline the perimeter and large animal figures are positioned about, perfect for taking pictures. The event includes every member of the Fort Bend County Extension Staff in one way or another.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Fort Bend County Staff has several new members. The group is committed to working hard and playing hard. Staff "pep rallies" are led by staff members approximately once a month to provide time for informal discussion and fun. Rally themes have included a Travel Bucket List, a Summer Luau, a New (program) Year's Eve Party, and a Fair Days Shindig (as pictured to the left)!



## STEM and Robotics Camp

By 2024 the U.S. will be short 1.1 million needed STEM professionals. Too few young people, especially girls and youth of color are pursuing STEM careers. This is both a loss for industry and the economy. 4-H is a youth development organization designed to empower young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. Youth build life skills by leading hands-on projects in areas such as science, health, agriculture, and civic engagement. Independent research has shown that youth that participate in 4-H are four times more likely to give back to their communities, two times more likely to make healthy choices and two times more likely to participate in STEM activities.

The Harris County 4-H unit provided a STEM and Robotics lesson every Friday for the month of July at the Richard and Meg Weekley Community Center. Partners at the weekly community center advertised the lessons to the public and provided a space for the lessons to take place. Lesson topics included The Engineer Design Process, Coding, and Physics as it related to Astronomy. 20 youth participated each Friday, ranging in age from 8-12 years old. Surveys completed by youth indicated that 90% of participants learned new information and 80% showed an increase in STEM career interest after participating in the camp.

20 youth between the ages of 8-12 years-old attended the camp each Friday during the month of July.

According to surveys completed by the participating youth:

- 90% of participants learned new information during the camp.
- 80% of participants showed an increased interest in pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers after participating in the camp.



## Six-Week Cylinder Gardening Program

The Cylinder Gardening Program is designed to educate students on plant growth from seed planting to harvesting. This program contributes to leadership development in children by teaching individual responsibility, direction and planning, data gathering, accountability, teamwork, and experimentation over the course of 6 weeks. Cylinder Gardening is a method of gardening that uses bottomless cylinders as small individual gardens, requires little pre-gardening preparation or experience, and is practical for urban environments.

73 educators across all 4 county precincts enrolled 4,528 students in the September 2023 program semester. This is a 69% increase in student enrollment and a 192% increase in educator enrollment from September 2022.

Educators are provided a Teacher's Guide written by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents including information on how to plant their seeds, how plants grow, insect and disease control, harvesting and tasting tips, and further instructor references.

25 Certified Master Gardener Volunteers contributed over 200 volunteer hours towards the Cylinder Gardening Program. In-kind donations to the Harris County Master Gardener Association in support of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Cylinder Gardening Program include \$19,550 of seeds, food grade buckets, and fertilizers. Volunteers cut 1,500 buckets and packaged 1,666 seeds and fertilizer bags to donate to schools around Harris County.



## GREAT THINGS ARE GROWING IN TARRANT COUNTY!

Great things are growing across Tarrant County with our Tarrant County ARPA-funded project, "Eat Well, Feel Well!" This project encompasses several of our banner AgriLife programs into one overall project and is being implemented at six schools across Tarrant County this first year, reaching 1,600+ youth!

Our hope through the full implementation of this project, is to see stronger nutrition impacts and the adoption of healthy behaviors by combining both adult and youth programming opportunities on each campus, impacting the family unit. Additionally, we hope to see a more engaged community and more parent involvement on each school campus. This project will fund 15 campuses over 3 years.

During the 2023-2024 school year, six schools in Tarrant County were selected and are implementing both adult and youth programs focusing on gardening and nutrition. Teachers and one appointed site-coordinator for each campus were trained on the "Learn, Grow, Eat & GO!" youth gardening program and are implementing this in classrooms this Fall. Additionally, our Better Living for Texans Agent, Sanci Hall, is teaching the "Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities" gardening program with adults on each campus. During the Spring semester, our Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) educators will be implementing both "Healthy Heroes Adventures" and "Healthy Bites, Healthy Moves", teaching key nutrition messages to both youth and adults on each campus.



## TARRANT COUNTY 4-H HOSTS INTERNATIONAL VISITORS



The Tarrant County AgriLife Extension office was contacted by the U.S. Department of State and asked to present to their International Visitor Leadership Program exchange for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development. They were particularly interested in the 4-H program and any hands-on science-based learning, specifically emphasizing our work with youth in agriculture and entrepreneurship.

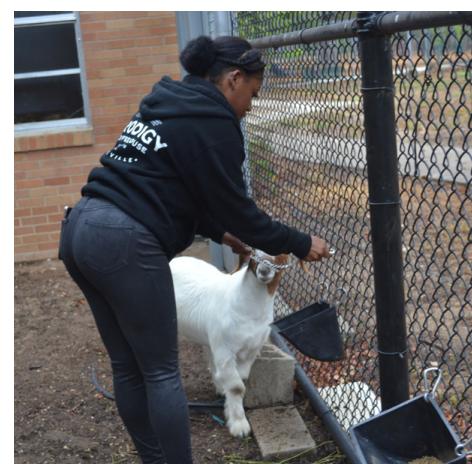
On September 12, 2023, we hosted 21 international visitors from Haiti and 15 different countries in Africa, along with 4 interpreters. Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Charles Brooks provided a welcome and an overview of the history and economics of Tarrant County. The Tarrant County Extension Director, Courtney Davis, provided an overview of the Extension model and the overall work done by AgriLife Extension in Tarrant County. The Tarrant County 4-H Agent, Kate Marshall, provided information on the 4-H program and how we educate youth with specific emphasis on our major curriculum enrichment projects (i.e. Hatching in the Classroom and 4-H Robotics). Additionally, two Tarrant County 4-H youth who presented on how they have turned their 4-H rabbit project into their own small business...they were a huge hit! Kate did an amazing job coordinating all of this and we were excited to have such a unique opportunity!



## 4-H CAPITAL

4-H Capital's 2023-2024 service year started on August 16th and it has been great getting to know our new AmeriCorps members over the past couple of months. They've been learning about goats and youth, developing and practicing their own fun lesson demonstrations, teambuilding, and more! We spent several mornings out in the goat pens: sanitizing the feeders, water containers, and hutches, as well as clearing out vegetation that grew up in the spring. We really appreciate the hard work our new members put in to revive the pens during this hot, dry August.

After weeks of training our members were able to put their new learned skills to the test in afterschool! We are excited to see our member and students grow over the next few months!



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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.**