

## Virginia Cooperative Extension

*Unit Extension Leadership Council  
2012 Development Awards*

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## *First Place - Advocacy*

### **Arlington & Alexandria Extension Leadership Council**

**Relevance:** Arlington and Alexandria Extension programs and classes have always been well-attended and involved many volunteers, but Extension staff were often unaware, or not invited to collaborate with local organizations. While many in Arlington's population of 208,000, and Alexandria's 140,000 were touched by or familiar with Extension programs, very few were aware of the larger picture and comprehensive offerings of our VCE offices. Throughout 2011, the ELC focused on advocacy with the goal of all stakeholders valuing Extension's programs and understanding resource needs, while merging the Arlington and Alexandria ELC's and adopting revised bylaws.

**Results:** With extensive collaboration with our Extension staff, our ELC planned to connect our legislative, local government, academic, nonprofit leadership, and business community audiences and stakeholders together through the context of Cooperative Extension programs, volunteers, agents, and ELC members. Led by our current ELC chair, Mary Van Dyke, our ELC reached out individually to our Delegates and Senators, County Board, City Council, School Board officials and school administrators.

One-on-one meetings were followed by collaborative efforts in pursuit of state-level support for the ELC. The ELC hosted a Grow Eat Learn seminar and fundraiser, held an annual ELC Retreat, cooperated on promotional materials, and hosted a Legislative Breakfast featuring Brian Calhoun from Virginia Cooperative Extension and leaders from both Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. Participants worked through collaborative problem-solving strategies with nearly 80 elected officials, school STEM educators and local community leaders.

**Response:** We saw many participants from our Legislative Breakfast a few hours later at the Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting. VCE was a popular topic of conversation. Our audience had become our advocates. The ELC has been invited to bring expertise to current conversations on invasive species regulation in Richmond. The Arlington & Alexandria ELC now has the partnerships to develop local, regional and nationally-linked urban agriculture and food system initiatives with ANR, FCS, 4-H, and Community Viability.

## *First Place - Marketing*

### **Louisa County Extension Leadership Council**

**Relevance:** The Louisa County Extension Leadership Council decided on a dynamic project in 2011 that would focus attention on many of the key issues our community faces and that encompassed the three pronged mission of Extension including Agriculture, Youth Development and Family and Consumer Science. The project consisted of a community teaching garden that was located on the grounds of the Louisa Community Cupboard which is our local food bank. The purpose of the project was to encourage healthy eating patterns to battle the obesity epidemic, to promote food self sufficiency and to support the local food bank by providing fresh vegetables and herbs to recipients. The concept was not only to provide fresh locally grown vegetables to those who might not be able to afford them but to teach the clients of the food bank the skills to have a garden at home as well.

**Response:** ELC members and the local extension agents collaborated with the Department of Social Services and the food bank as well as many community volunteers to complete this large task. Many local businesses donated materials for the project including, vegetable seeds, tomato plants, fertilizer, compost, building materials and much more. Soil Samples were taken, above ground garden boxes were built, the half acre plot was plowed, and the garden was planted. Demonstrations and workshops were held throughout the project on soil sampling, soil amendments, layout and garden design, planting, proper fertilization, weeding and care, harvesting and finally food preservation. The local 4-H youth assisted in weeding the garden as well as volunteering to bag groceries for the food bank. The ELC and the extension agents lead these events and provided oversight as the project unfolded.

**Results:** As a result of the project 20 participants from the VIEW (Virginia Incentive for Employment not Welfare) program learned many valuable gardening skills and received fresh vegetables and training. Over 300 pounds of food were grown and made available to clients at the local food bank as well. Central Virginia Master Gardeners have decided to make the Community

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Teaching Garden an official project and are taking over the reins from the ELC to continue this worthwhile project. The Plant-A-Row program has also been instituted in the community now as a direct result of the project's success. Plant-A-Row encourages residents to plant an extra row in their home garden and to donate the vegetables grown to the food bank for those in need. More community volunteers have continued to step forward to help with this coming year's project because of the vision and forward thinking of the Louisa ELC and Extension Staff.

## *Runner-Up*

### **Amelia Extension Leadership Council**

**Relevance:** As a result of needs assessment, the Extension Leadership Council found that agricultural and economic issues are top priorities. The revitalized Amelia ELC has been working with the Amelia office to assist in making program decisions that promote the wisest use of available resources due to program limitations caused by prolonged Agriculture and Natural Resource and 4-H Youth Development Extension agent vacancies.

**Response:** The Amelia Extension Leadership Council helped to identify current and desired future program partners to increase the awareness of Virginia Cooperative Extension. In addition, these partnerships would serve as potential resources for local involvement in volunteer recruitment and advocacy activities. The Amelia ELC gave specific consideration to identifying underserved audiences that benefit from Extension programs. The main focus areas identified as strong supporters and having the capacity for increased involvement included Agricultural producers and small business owners.

**Results:** Extension Leadership Council volunteers held regular meetings and were active in local community activities to promote VCE that included an entry in the 2011 Amelia County Christmas parade, and a booth at the Amelia County Fair. They have been invaluable in the recruitment of new volunteers. The Family and Consumer Sciences agent assisted in creating an electronic Farmer's Market survey to gauge the support of a community garden and a local Farmers Market initiative. The Extension office posted information on the Amelia Cooperative Extension face book page and ELC members hand delivered print surveys to local businesses without Internet capabilities. Over 120 businesses and residents responded positively to the survey. As a result of this effort, volunteers were recruited to support the areas of ANR, 4-H, and FCS in varying capacities.

Members developed strategies to increase the visibility of VCE by inviting the Development Specialist, from the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) to provide support and review the progress of the committee. The committee felt Extension could benefit by showcasing entrepreneurship opportunities available through FCS. In addition, they have submitted letters to the editor of the Amelia Bulletin monitor, provided a presence at the County Board of Supervisors meetings to garner support for local VCE Extension agent positions, advocate to subsidize fees for Amelia residents that use the Prince Edward cannery, and for the approval of financial support towards beautification projects by Amelia Master Gardener volunteers. Extension Leadership Council members were involved in all aspects of the decisions about current and future programming efforts of the Amelia Extension Office. The Board of Supervisors is expected to adopt a resolution of support at the February meeting in 2012.

Collaborators: Amelia County Board of Supervisors; Thomas Harris, Amelia County Administrator; Amelia County Extension Leadership Council, Amelia County Fair Association, Amelia Parks and Recreation, Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism Council; Jane Henderson, FCS; Ashley Butler, ANR; J.L. Hamner Public Library; New Horizons Insurance Agency

## *Runner-Up*

### **Buckingham Extension Leadership Council**

**Relevance:** In the fall of 2007, the Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent in Buckingham County left to pursue other opportunities. This created an enormous need in Buckingham for ANR information and educational opportunities. Buckingham is a rural county with 22% of the county in agricultural production. The sale of agricultural products is very important to Buckingham because it provides a large inflow of money into the local economy. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the market value of agricultural products sold by Buckingham County farmers in 2002 was \$20,254,000. After the position had been vacant for more than a year with no projected hiring date in site, the ELC members knew that they had to take action

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**Response:** Members of the Buckingham ELC recognized that not having an ANR Agent in the county was having negative impacts on the agricultural community. Realizing that the lack of state funding prevented immediate filling of the position, the ELC members brainstormed options and developed a plan of action involving county support until such time as state dollars again became available. The ELC members worked with the Unit Coordinator to initiate discussions with the VCE Central District Director about approaching Buckingham County for a county-funded ANR Project Associate. With that approval, the Unit Coordinator approached the County Administrator while ELC members lobbied with members of the Board of Supervisors.

**Results:** In the FY2010 budget, Buckingham County allocated funds for an ANR Project Associate to work 22 hours per week. Even though this did not fully address the need, it did help considerably. Showing the positive impact this person was making, the ELC again lobbied the county for additional funding to bring the ANR Project Associate up to 30 hours per week for FY2011. This move received favorable response from the County officials and was approved. In Spring of 2011, when state funding became available to hire an ANR Extension Agent, the County agreed to a 50% share of the costs to hire an Agent, in large part because of the foundation work done by the ELC and the fact that the money was already in the budget for the county-funded position. The process to get a full-time ANR Agent back in Buckingham County was a slow one, but one that met with success because of the foresight of the Buckingham ELC and the work they did to keep the need for an ANR position prominent in the minds of County officials.

**Collaborators:** All members of the Buckingham Extension Leadership Council including VCE faculty and staff in Buckingham County, 4-H and Agriculture volunteers (not part of the ELC)

**Contact:** Ruth Wallace  
[ruwallac@vt.edu](mailto:ruwallac@vt.edu)  
PO Box 227, Buckingham VA 23921  
434-969-4261

## *Runner-Up*

### **Greenville/Emporia Extension Leadership Council**

**Relevance:** According to the Southern Rural Development Center Greenville/Emporia have over 20% of its residents living in poverty. High levels of poverty have important consequences on the vitality of Greenville/Emporia – including the quality of jobs, education, and local services, to name a few. With the fiscal challenges facing our federal, state, and local agencies, it is pretty clear that tackling poverty will not be possible if we depend exclusively on government for the solutions and the necessary resources. More and more, the innovative approaches to reducing poverty in our counties and communities will rest on the ingenuity and active engagement of local people and organizations. The "Turning the Tide on Poverty" has represented an innovative and exciting program that has intended to mobilize the talents of local people working together to reduce poverty and build vibrant communities.

**Response:** The Greenville/Emporia ELC are very active in the Turning the Tide on Poverty project. They have served as volunteers in the Turning the Tide on Poverty, poverty simulation that was used as a kick start activity for the project for local community stakeholders. The ELC also had members to train as facilitators to lead community discussion circles on the topic of poverty.

In 2011 Lowe's one the largest employers in Emporia left the community. The Greenville/Emporia ELC answered the call with ELC member Warden Wright offering a Greenville Correctional Center Job Fair due to the loss of Lowe's in our community. The ELC volunteered their assistance with this noteworthy cause. Turning the tide on poverty has spread into community action groups as Greenville/Emporia sets out to conquer poverty.

**Results:** Turning the tide on poverty is community affair led by the efforts of VCE in Greenville/Emporia. The ELC joined forces with the Greenville/Emporia VCE, local officials, 4-H, Greenville County High School, and various community agencies to provide over 4,000 pounds of food (150 clients) to the community on a monthly basis through the Central Virginia Food Bank through the use of a mobile food pantry. The mobile food pantry is provided to local residents the fourth Friday of each month. This date was selected because most clients who receive SNAP benefits usually run out of resources towards the end of the month. The Greenville/Emporia ELC has successful being a momentum of force in helping to the Turning the Tides on Poverty through their volunteer hours and leadership in the local community.