

Virginia Cooperative Extension

*Unit Extension Leadership Council
2013 Development Awards*

First Place - Advocacy

Powhatan Extension Leadership Council

Relevance

Powhatan County extension programs have been well-attended in recent years. However, the Unit ELC voiced concern in early 2012 that newly elected officials were not familiar with the services provided by the local Extension office. ELC members also noted a misconception heard by members of the Board of Supervisors that Powhatan is no longer a rural, agriculture community. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, Powhatan has 29,792 acres of land in farms. Although this marks a 45 percent decrease from the previous census, the market value of products sold from Powhatan farms increased by 8 percent during this same period. The major focus of the Powhatan ELC throughout 2012 aimed to increase involvement of local citizens and elected officials in the support and advocacy of Extension programs.

Response

ELC members Johns Bailey and Ernest Barham initiated contact with two board members to discuss options to increase their awareness of Extension programs. As a result, an agriculture sub-committee was appointed through the ELC to collaborate with Extension staff to host an ag awareness dinner. This effort brought representatives from Farm Bureau, the local Soil and Water Conservation District and VCE together as one to educate state and local officials of the rich agriculture community in Powhatan. The dinner took place at a Powhatan farm and featured locally-grown foods and products. The ANR agent also produced a video, "Powhatan County Home Grown," which featured Powhatan farmers. In other efforts, ELC members and VCE staff collaborated to conduct a pork loin fundraiser to finance a volunteer recognition dinner in October. The goal was to highlight the many local Extension programs, while ensuring that stakeholders, including state and local officials, were made aware of the efforts made by our more than 200 volunteers. ELC members prepared and served the meal along with VCE staff.

Results

Senator John Watkins was among the 53 in attendance at the agriculture dinner, along with seven members of the local planning commission and board of supervisors. The invitation-only dinner was provided and prepared free of charge through funds and in-kind donations by area producers, the Powhatan ELC, Powhatan Farm Bureau and Monacan Soil and Water Conservation District. Additionally, the agriculture video has been viewed by hundreds of stakeholders throughout the year, including the Powhatan Farm Bureau's annual meeting, as well as featured on the Extension office's social media site, Facebook. The ELC's volunteer recognition dinner was attended by approximately 80 guests, including Delegate Lee Ware and several local officials. Volunteers were treated to dinner and acknowledged for their efforts, while local officials increased their awareness of Powhatan's Extension programs.

Collaborators

Faculty and staff of Powhatan County VCE Office, Powhatan Extension Leadership Council members; Monacan Soil and Water Conservation District, and Powhatan Farm Bureau.

Contact

Cathy Howland, Powhatan Unit Coordinator and 4-H Extension Agent, (804) 598-5640

First Place - Marketing

Arlington/Alexandria Extension Leadership Council

As members of the Arlington & Alexandria Extension Leadership Council (ELC) we are pleased to nominate our ELC for recognition in marketing. In 2012, we focused on expanding our marketing efforts to promote programs that were uniquely tailored to the needs and issues in Arlington and Alexandria. After our efforts, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) is now recognized by a much broader range of stakeholders as being an important community resource to provide education and solve the many challenges that both communities face.

Relevance

Historically, VCE classes in Arlington and Alexandria have always been well attended and involve many volunteers. However, as the demographics of the two communities' change, an increasing number of people ask, "What is Cooperative Extension?" "Where can I find information on such and such a program?" and "I tried to find it on the website, but I couldn't?" ELC members came to the conclusion that within Arlington's 211,000 and Alexandria's 140,000 communities there was room for much more outreach and marketing.

Response

As a first step, we reflected on the role we wanted Extension to play over the next five to ten years. This involved a process of Appreciative Inquiry. Through this process we identified three focus areas for our marketing efforts: 1) reaching out to new and different target populations, 2) demonstrating the uniqueness of Extension programs and differentiating Extension's role from other service organizations, and 3) documenting the value that Extension programs bring to the table in addressing local development challenges.

Results

- Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) program built and strengthened connections with the local credit union, the public schools and VCE, and improved flyers to better market the Reality Store and Kids Marketplace youth financial literacy programs.
- Master Gardener and Master Food volunteers and agents work in a multi-stakeholder collaboration with health coalitions, tenant organizations, and landlords in both Arlington and Alexandria to support community gardening in residential complexes. This outreach facilitated by the ELC grows community spirit and brings VCE's knowledge to a wider market and audience.
- ELC took a leadership role in urban agriculture/food system discussions in our locality.
- The ELC held a forum on Energy in the Community that fostered connections with energy policy makers and built personal links between VT and energy managers in Arlington and Alexandria. Fifty people attended this event that had a local and a national focus.
- Formulated public value statements to strengthen outreach to legislators and others, and initiated a blog for our office with VCE.
- Joined the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and collaborated with for-profits and nonprofits on the proactive Workforce and Education and Community Action committees.
- Outreached to other ELCs through our Unit Coordinator's and our ELC Chairs presentations on ELC challenges and successes.

As a result of actions initiated in 2012, Arlington & Alexandria ELC now takes a leadership role in marketing VCE in the local community, and as a result Cooperative Extension programs and personnel are increasingly widely known and our research-based information is more accessible.

Second Place - Marketing

Chesapeake Extension Leadership Council

Relevance

As a result of conducting the 2008 Situation Analysis, the Chesapeake Extension Leadership Council (ELC) determined five priority issues in Chesapeake. These priority issues were: (1) Profitable Agricultural Production, (2) Urban and Suburban Water Quality Concerns, (3) Life Skills and Decision Making, (4) Positive Youth Activities, and (5) Diet Health Nutrition Across the Lifespan. All of these priority issues were being addressed by relevant programs offered by the local Extension; however, there was no single event or activity in existence that encompassed all priority issues.

Response

The ELC decided to support an annual Farm Days event in the city. This event, which partners with the Virginia Dare Soil and Water Conservation District, focuses on youth and teaching them the relevance of agriculture, water quality, and conservation in their lives. First grade classrooms from public and private schools are selected from a drawing to attend this field day where youth are given the opportunity to visit approximately eight outdoor exhibits such as crops, poultry, livestock, beekeeping, dairy, forestry, Master Gardener/horticultural crafts and nutrition. Exhibits are interactive and aligned with the Virginia Standards of

Learning for Schools. Farm Days collaborates with many local departments and state and federal agencies, such as the Soil and Water Conservation District, Parks & Recreation, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Virginia Department of Forestry, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Also participating in this event are Extension volunteers consisting of Master Gardeners, 4-H Livestock Clubs, Beekeeper Associations, equine organizations, ELC members, and other adult volunteers. There are approximately 50 to 60 adult volunteers involved with setting up exhibits, educational instruction, logistics, and tour group leaders. All Extension Agents, Program Assistants and staff are involved in working together to ensure a successful Farm Days event.

Results

Since its conception, Farm Days has become so popular among schools that it has compelled the creation of an application process and drawing for schools to determine which classrooms will fill the 800 slots offered during the two day event. There are twice as many applicants as our current resources will allow. The students learn about the source of their food supply and the importance of being good stewards of the environment. For many students, this is their only intensive exposure to crops, horticulture and livestock. Parents are also welcome to attend with their children's classrooms. There are typically 120 parents who attend.

Contact

Watson Lawrence, Unit Coordinator, ANR Extension Agent, watsonl@vt.edu

Third Place - Marketing

Greensville/Emporia Extension Leadership Council

Relevance

Greensville/Emporia has been faced with statistics that force the area to be ranked lower than most surrounding counties/cities in Virginia's community data. Health care, poverty levels, and unemployment rates have been some of the major stressors affecting the area. In 2012 Greensville was ranked 96 and Emporia 131 out of 132 counties and cities in Virginia's Health Rankings. The unemployment rate also remains high, with a rate of 8.8 percent in Greensville County and 11.2 percent in Emporia making Emporia the third highest in Virginia. Greensville and Emporia has one of the lowest median incomes in Virginia with Greensville at \$47,394 and Emporia at \$32,799 compared to \$61,406 statewide (U.S. Census 2010).

Response

Project REACH UP! 2012 (Resource Experience Activating our Community Health through Understanding and Participation) was a community resource activity-focused week (September 24-30, 2012) held in the City of Emporia and Greensville County with special events/programs scheduled. Dr. Ken Jordan the ELC Chair served as the Chairman of Project REACH UP 2012! The project was developed in response to data showing the needs of the community. This family-centered community resource awareness/community viability initiative featured programs that addressed the needs of the community and programs offered by VCE. The Greensville – Emporia Unit and its Extension Leadership Council (ELC) in Program Year 2012 successfully completed planning and program activity execution in all four (4) areas of consideration for award recognition: (1). situational analysis was conducted, with audience and key stakeholder participation, to respond to local community needs during the "Turning the Tide on Poverty" Initiative and the Strategic Leadership Strategies in the Community; (2). a seminar-based current issues focus was included as a key event day during the innovative, thematic week-long project initiative, identified as Project REACH UP! 2012, with its intent to promote community viability and issue/resource awareness for the City of Emporia and Greensville County; (3). multiple opportunities were provided during 2012 for citizen outreach and involvement/advocacy by elected officials (including proclamations and project support); and (4). collaborations and consultations were formulated with six (6) additional groups/agencies in 2012 to extend the reach of program services for Virginia Cooperative Extension in Southside Virginia.

Results

As a result of Project REACH UP! 2012 800 students at GCHS participate in a life and health style change initiative. This initiative has created a Zumba class offered after school for students. 82 community members participated in Health Screenings. Four professional development seminars were offered at the Emporia campus of Southside VA Community College. The Let's Move Initiative is now a major programming initiative for the local Head Start and Boys and Girls Club programs. Eleven community members were recognized for their contribution to the community. Honorees of the luncheon have become more involved in the community and VCE programming efforts since receiving their awards. One honoree has joined the 2013 ELC.

Dr. Martha Walker's speech made a true motivational impact in the community with local officials inquiring how to apply community viability principles to the local area. Project REACH UP! 2012 was also documented as a VCE success video story.

First Place - Membership

Prince Edward Extension Leadership Council

Relevance

The Prince Edward County Extension Office has seen a significant amount of agent and staff turnover in the last five years. As a result, the unit's Extension Leadership Council held very few meetings. Many on the membership list were no longer active in extension programming. During the years of the ELC's inactivity, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors and the Prince Edward County Administration invested significant resources in the local foods movement with a focus on the renovation and expansion of the Prince Edward Community Cannery. County officials worked with extension administrators to develop an agent position focusing on the promotion of local foods. When this agent was hired, the need for a renewed Extension Leadership Council that could assist agents and staff in strategizing and building relationships in the community became increasingly apparent.

Response

The staff of the Prince Edward Extension Office developed a list of partnering agencies and organizations and key volunteers in each program area. Representatives of these groups along with those volunteers were invited to an organizational meeting of the new Extension Leadership Council. Each potential member was provided with a position description and a tentative outline of the focus of future quarterly meetings -- community needs assessment, program review and planning, program promotion and marketing, and recognition.

Results

Active members currently include volunteers from each program area, a youth representative, the director of the Piedmont SWCD, the school district's food service director, the director of the Piedmont Health District, a Master Gardener, a county supervisor who is also a dairy farmer, and a representative of the Farmer's Market Association. ELC members have worked with agents to assess community needs and determine how extension programs can meet those needs. Members brainstormed ideas for increasing community awareness of local foods and helped agents prioritize related activities. This led to the use of the mobile demonstration kitchen for a local foods tasting at the Farmer's Market and the involvement of agents and ELC members in a Food Day program. ELC members have volunteered to serve as judges in local 4-H contests and accompanied a group of teens on a leadership retreat. One ELC member is working with agents to develop a plan for a summer day camp for youth focusing on farm-to-table activities. This member has also facilitated a partnership with the local Girl Scouts. Youth from both programs will be working together with Habitat for Humanity to install gardens at new Habitat homes. Participating on the ELC has facilitated a stronger partnership between Extension and the local Health District as evidenced by the development of the Piedmont Out Walking program, a grant-funded program with over 500 participants. VCE and the PSWCD are currently collaborating on the development of a Watershed Awareness Day program to be offered to area elementary school children.