

Cameron County Extension Newsletter

JULY 2023 - SEPTEMBER 2023

WHAT WE DO:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is a unique education agency that provides programs, tools, and resources on a local and statewide level that teach people how to improve agriculture and food production, advance health practices, protect the environment, strengthen the economy, and enrich youth.

In all 254 counties, County Extension Agents serve families, youth, communities and businesses throughout the state.

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CONTACT US: VISIT US AT:



Cameron County Extension Office
 1390 W. Expressway 83
 San Benito, TX 78586
 956-361-8236



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Facebook

www.cameron.agrilife.org
www.facebook.com/agrilife.cameron

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EXTENSION STAFF:

Marco Ponce

County Extension Agent
 Agriculture & Natural Resources

Tony Reisinger

County Extension Agent
 Coastal & Marine Resources

Lilian Mezquida

County Extension Agent
 Family & Community Health

Jennifer Herrera

County Extension Agent
 Horticulture

Analisa Sanchez

County Extension Agent
 4-H & Youth Development

Gloria Carter

Cooperative Extension Agent
 Family & Community Health

Stephanie Bowman

Cooperative Extension Agent
 4-H & Youth Development

Beatriz Loya

Extension Agent- EFNEP

Nidia Garcia

Extension Agent- BLT

Kristina Loreda

Extension Agent- BLT

Miriam Rodriguez

Office Manager

Nina Loya

Office Aide

Horticulture

By: Jennifer Herrera, CEA - Horticulture



RGV Small Acreage- During the summer, I conducted an educational program focused on the production of microgreens and mushroom cultivation. The specialty crops program was well-attended, with over **56 participants**. The topics included insights on business start-ups and marketing.



Master Gardener Training- This August, a new cohort of **13 Master Gardener Interns** commenced their hybrid training. The curriculum covered a range of topics, including soils, plant pathology, earth-kind landscaping, composting, and grape cultivation.



Earth-Kind- The **Master Gardeners and I** hosted various workshops on topics like herb gardening, Texas Superstars, Rainwater Harvesting, and the history of Rio Grande River. With over **160 participants**, our presentations were a great success.



Rainwater Harvesting



Herb Workshop



Texas Superstar Presentation

Expanded Food And Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)

By: Beatriz Loya, Extension Agent- EFNEP



SUPPORTING TEXAS FAMILIES WITH GREATEST NEED SINCE 1969

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) helps young families and youth with limited resources—those most at risk to suffer from hunger, food insecurity, and the inability to connect with available support systems. EFNEP offers practical lessons in basic nutrition, food preparation, food budget management, and food safety in settings convenient for the participants. Program graduates reflect significant, lasting improvement in eating behaviors and healthy food habits. Texas has a need for EFNEP—2023 data show that percent of Texas families with children under the age of 18 were living below poverty level, compared to 14 percent of U.S. families.

EFNEP MAKES A REAL DIFFERENCE

Adult Program

Using hands-on experiences, EFNEP adult participants complete a **eight lesson series** on stretching food dollars, improving eating habits, and practicing food safety principles. As a result of participation in EFNEP, participants will learn to prepare more meals and snacks at home, be more active, control portion size, and have more energy.

Youth Program

The EFNEP Youth program is directed toward low-income school-age youth. These students participate in a **six week series** of fun and educational lessons on good nutrition and food safety as part of summer programs and classroom and after-school activities. Through fun and engaging activities, youth learn to build a healthy plate, set limits on sugar, fats, and sodium, be active, food safety, and to practice healthy behaviors.

EFNEP REACHES DIVERSE AUDIENCES

In Texas, ethnically diverse EFNEP nutrition assistants reach youth and adult groups whose principal language may be English or Spanish.

During the 3rd Quarter of 2023:

- **268** families enrolled in EFNEP;
- **88** participants graduated with **127** continuing in the program.
- **173** youth contacts were made through the EFNEP Youth program;
- **128** youth contacts graduated from the EFNEP Youth program;
- **100%** of EFNEP participants have children under the age of **19**;
- **96%** of the Adult participants showed improvement in one or more diet quality indicators; and
- **86%** of the Youth participants showed improvement in diet quality indicators



VOLUNTEERS STRENGTHEN EFNEP

During the 3rd Quarter of 2023, **47 volunteers** donated **240 hours** of work to EFNEP in Texas. At the Texas volunteer rate of **\$29.95/hr.**, this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of **\$7,188**. Volunteers make a difference in their own communities and contribute to EFNEP's continued success.

COST -BENEFIT OF EFNEP

Studies have shown that for every **\$1** spent on EFNEP, **\$10** were estimated to be saved in **health care costs** and **\$2** saved in **food costs** by participants. For Texas, this is **\$43 million** in estimated health care cost savings and almost **\$8.6 million** in food costs.

Cooperative Extension Program Family & Community Health

By: Gloria Carter, EA- Family & Community Health



PRAIRIE VIEW
A&M UNIVERSITY
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AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Cooperative Extension Program



FAMILY &
CONSUMER
SCIENCES

Balanced
Living



Balanced Living- The Balanced Living program at **La Feria ISD** began in September. Participants learn the importance of managing their time, stress, nutrition, physical activity, and sleep for optimal health. The participants will complete the program in October.

Health Aging- I partnered with **Cano Health, a senior-focused primary care group**, to provide lessons to educate their health center participants regarding the following topics:

***Fall Prevention, *How to Cope with a Serious Illness Diagnosis, *Healthy Vision, *Arthritis, *Dementia and Alzheimer's disease, *Heat stroke & heat exhaustion prevention, *Elder Abuse, *Crohn's and Colitis disease, *Medication Management, *Isolation & Depression, *Shingles, *Nutrition, *Physical Activity, *Diabetes, *Blood pressure**

The sessions were held weekly in **July, August, and September**. Program participants reported that they are eating healthier, moving more, and are more aware of and practicing disease prevention & management due to attending the CEP/FCH Healthy Aging programming at Cano Health centers in Cameron County.

Snap-ed: Youth Nutrition- Agent Carter trained **nine staff members** from the Harlingen Consolidated School District's Afterschool Centers for Education program on implementing the **Choose Health: Food, Fun, & Fitness youth nutrition program**. The staff members will teach the lessons over ten weeks at their respective campuses, wherein the students learn vital concepts about nutrition, food preparation, food safety, and physical activity.



Family & Community Health

By: Lilian Mezquida, CEA - Family & Community Health

Cooking "Well with Diabetes"- In **August 2023**, cooking well with diabetes was implemented at First Baptist Church of Los Fresnos. Participants learned about 1. Carbohydrate Foods, 2. Making Recipes with Fat Better for you, 3. Double Pleasure Side Dishes, and 4. Celebrating Sensibly with Diabetes. **18 participants completed the program.**



*Cooking Well with Diabetes
English group*



*Los Fresnos First
Baptist Church*



*Cooking Well with
Diabetes Spanish group*

Future Programs

- **September:** Strong People Strong Program (12 weeks) at Los Fresnos
- **October:** Cooking Well with High Blood Pressure at Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana Mexicana, Brownville



Extension Office San Benito

Cooking Well Exploring Cultures- In **July 2023**, the cooking well exploring cultures was implemented at the Extension Office in San Benito. The program provides the tools you need to expand cultural palate by diving into recipes from the Philippines, Poland, India and Interior Mexico while creating health food



WellMed Senior Community Center in Harlingen

Be Well, Live Well is a **5-session program** that promotes nutrition and physical activity for older adults. Sessions were held monthly at the WellMed Senior Community Center in Harlingen and Cunningham Manor Apartments in Brownsville with over **20 older adults enrolled**.

A Fresh Start to a Healthier You! 4-session nutrition program focuses on increasing fruit & vegetable intake and teaches to cook nutritious meals & spend less on groceries. Sessions were held at Perez Elementary School in Brownsville with about **15 adults enrolled**.

Walk N Talk: Fruit & Vegetable edition focuses on increasing physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption. Participants keep track of miles walked during the 8-week program. Walking groups and sessions were held at **La Feria ISD**.

Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities

By: Kristina Loreda, Extension Agent - Better Living for Texans

Better Living for Texans Extension Agents also attended **Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Fall Faculty Conference September 13th and 14th**. **Better Living for Texan Agent Kristina Loreda** helped to host with **Heidi Lopez** BLT Agent in Starr, and **Andrea T. Barragan** BLT Agent in Hidalgo, an Advanced Garden Training Program in Spanish for participants who have already completed the Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities Program. Specialists and research scientists joined us from the District 12 office and Citrus Centers in Weslaco.

July, August, September 2023 started off with planning and filling up schedules. **Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities** began programming in September at Brownsville Wellness Center, La Feria New Hope Community Garden, Perez Elementary in Brownsville and Rodriguez Elementary in Harlingen. New garden beds will be added at Brownsville Wellness Center.



Specialist Dr. J. Anciso, Dr. Laughling from the Citrus Center, Heidi Lopez BLT EA Starr County, Andrea T. Barragan BLT EA Hidalgo County and Ricardo Carranza stand for photos from the Advanced Gardening Training.



Participants at Perez Elementary along with students help to plant and restore garden beds.





Agriculture & Natural Resources

By: Marco Ponce, CEA - Agriculture & Natural Resources

Harvesting of Grain Sorghum Variety Trial- County Agent harvested a late season **9 variety grain sorghum variety trial** that was planted back in early May at **James Bauer Farms in La Feria**. Each variety that was harvested consisted of **9 rows**, and they were replicated three times in this trial. Each variety was harvested separately and weighed utilizing a grain weigh buggy. Samples of each variety were taken in order to measure bushel weight and moisture content. Final results of this trial which will include yield and quality data will be shared with local producers so they can make informed decisions related to which grain sorghum variety will perform the best in our local area.



Pesticide Applicator Training- Cameron County Agriculture Agent conducted a pesticide applicator training for **private and non-commercial applicators**. There were over **20 people** who attended this program that was held at the Cameron County Extension office in San Benito. Participants viewed a series of videos and presentations that totaled over **4 hours of education**. Participants were able to follow along with a question-and-answer sheet that helped educate them in the areas of personal protective equipment, pesticide safety, calibration, and reading pesticide labels. This training served to effectively prepare the participants to take their certification exam.

Women in Agriculture Program- Cameron County Landowners attended a Women in Agriculture Workshop that was held at the **South Texas Ecotourism Center in Laguna Vista**.

- There were over **30 participants** who attended this educational program.
- Promotional Booths Included: The Valley Land Fund, Cameron County 4-H, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and the Cameron County Master Naturalist – Pollinator Project.
- The following topics were discussed: Wildlife as an Ecotourism Business, Overview of the South Texas Ecotourism Center, USDA-FSA and NRCS Programs, and Agricultural Use Tax Exemptions.

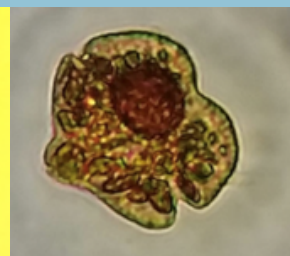


Coastal & Marine Resources

By: Tony Reisinger, CEA -Coastal & Marine Resources



South Padre Island was grazed by a **weak red tide bloom in September**. Red Tide Rangers conducted cell counts at the **UTRGV Coastal Studies Lab** and found light to moderate mix of two species of red tide, one that produces very little of toxin. This bloom did not cause fish kills and irritating aerosols as in the past and lasted three days.



At the **83rd Texas International Fishing Tournament in August**, we trained weighmasters and assisted at the weigh station. **1007 anglers** participated in the tournament.



We trained and certified **70 shrimpers** to be drill instructors in marine safety and survival at Brownsville in July. Monthly safety drills are required aboard shrimp vessels and are proven to save lives.



The **Texas shrimp season** opened July 15th and the Cameron County fleet faced low shrimp prices and high fuel costs. Production picked up after a tropical depression dropped some rain in south Texas. Even with better production, fuel remains high and prices low.

Heroes 4-Health- The goals of the **Heroes 4-Health** initiative are to teach youth the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices, including healthy eating and regular physical activity. **The Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness curriculum** was implemented at the Brownsville Parks and Recreation youth summer camp in June 2023 and completed in July. **28 youth** participated in the interactive program, where they tasted healthy recipes, played fun games, and learned about various nutrition topics.



Juntos 4-H- On July 23-26th, **15 Juntos 4-H youth and 7 parents participated in 2023 Juntos Summer Academy**, a 4-day event in San Antonio, TX, where students were exposed to many learning opportunities in the areas of leadership, college and career readiness, 4-H projects, and teambuilding. Students toured two college campuses, Texas State University and University of Texas San Antonio.

On September 11, the Cameron County Juntos 4-H Program kicked off the new school year with a fun event for families at **Berta Cabaza Middle School**, where a new group of **8th grade students and their families** had a chance to meet families already in the program. Volunteers presented to **45 participants** about the components of the program and led interactive activities. A week later, the group began a series of **5 family workshops**, designed for students and their parents to learn and connect with each other as they prepare for the journey of post-secondary education. Approximately **42 participants and 7 volunteers** attended the first two workshops.



4-H & Youth Development

By: Analisa Sanchez, CEA - 4-H & Youth Development



4-H Awards- Cameron County 4-H members from **4th – 11th grade** underwent interviews to discuss their **4-H Record Book, experiences with 4-H, and what they have gained from it.** The 4-Hers highlighted their leadership and servitude roles on a county, district, and state level. They then spoke about how they plan to use their knowledge in the real world and become leaders in the community. During the interview, some 4-H Members were able to meet **Commissioner David Garza and State Representative Janie Lopez.** **Twelve 4-H members** were then selected based off their experience and interview and were celebrated at our **Cameron County 4-H Banquet** on August 25th, 2023. The AgriLife Extension Office was packed with 4-H members and families to celebrate the youth who were selected!



Cameron County 4-H Council Meeting- The first 2023 – 2024 Cameron County 4-H Council Meeting was held September 18th, 2023, by our County Council members. We had **30 4-H members and Volunteers** to past events from last year and the new year that has just begun. The 4-Hers decided to make their One Day 4-H Community Service to **unload pumpkins at the First Methodist Church's Pumpkin Patch and donate Treats for Troops for the month of October.** They then discussed upcoming county events such as Livestock Validation for different species, workshops, and contests. In conjunction with this meeting, we hosted the first of the **Livestock Judging series** we will be hosting for the students!



Kitchen Safety Workshop- On September 23rd, 2023, the Extension Conference room was packed with **4-H members and adult leaders** who were preparing for their **Food and Nutrition projects** we host on a county, district, and state level. This was hosted in **collaboration with AgriLife Extension and the Prairie View Cooperative Extension.** During this Kitchen Safety Workshop, the 4-Hers got a hands-on experience of how to fight bacteria, fire safety, proper knife handling skills, kitchen tools, and more information about our **Food Show/Food Challenge contest** that we will be hosting on October 14th, 2023.

