

Cameron County Extension Newsletter

JANUARY 2023 - MARCH 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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Color Me Healthy for SNAP-Ed is a **9-session** curriculum for kindergarteners. About **25 five- to six-year-olds** from IDEA-Harlingen ACE (After-school Centers on Education) enrolled in the nutrition and physical activity program. They learned through music, colors, and exploration of the senses that being healthy and physically active is enjoyable.



A Fresh Start to a Healthier You! 4-session nutrition program for adults had **29 graduates**. They learned about food safety, increasing fruit and vegetable intake, saving more at the grocery store, and increasing physical activity.



Choose Healthy nutrition program for middle-schoolers enrolled **128 sixth graders** from **Oliveira Middle School**. Students learned about making healthy food and beverage choices, increasing physical activity, and increasing intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.



Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities

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

This year started off busy with planning and filling up schedules. **Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities** began programming in late January and February at **La Feria Recreational Center, Gonzalez Elementary in Brownsville** and continued the partnership with **La Feria ISD and Prairie View Cooperative Extension** for **Wellness Wednesday classes**. Continued **Garden Maintenance** and up keep has been going on at **New Hope Church in La Feria** where a Community Garden was established Fall of **2022**. Volunteers and Master Gardeners work to keep the garden growing and successful every Friday morning. **Better Living for Texans** Extension Agents attended the Health Summit Conference in February where new ideas and more training was learned for 2023!



Participants at **La Feria Community Center** learn how to plant container Salsa Gardens with tomatoes, jalapenos and container variety onions. This group had so much fun learning and planting.

La Feria Community Garden
harvest
Potatoes
and Broccoli!



Parents at **C. Vail Elementary in La Feria** plant a salsa garden with tomatoes, container variety onion, and jalapeno.



Agriculture

By: Marco Ponce, CEA - Agriculture

Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference: County Agents from Cameron and Hidalgo Counties conducted the Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference that was held at Rio Farms in Monte Alto. This program was conducted for local Cotton and Grain producers where they were able to acquire **5 CEU's**. Some of the topics included: **Boll Weevil Update, Sorghum Production Supply and Demand, Corn Trade with Mexico, RGV Cotton and Grain IPM Update, and a Cotton Management Update.** Participants were also treated to many door prizes and a ribeye steak dinner.



Bull Gain Test – Performance Measurements: County Agents from Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Starr Counties conducted a series of Performance Measurements on the Bulls that were entered into the **Bull Gain Test and Heifer Development program at Rio Beef Feedyard.** Agents first recorded a final weight on the bulls and heifers so that the Average Daily Gain could be determined. Agents then measured Hip Height, Scrotal Circumference, and Pelvic Measurements. All bulls were also given a sonogram in order to measure their Ribeye Area and some more mature bulls were given a Breeding Soundness Exam. All of these Performance Measurements give the Breeder the data they need to effectively market their Bulls for potential sale.

Planting Cotton Demonstration Plot: County Agents from the Rio Grande Valley planted a **10 Variety Cotton Result Demonstration Plot.** Each Variety was planted on **6 rows with 40 inch spacing** between the rows. These Cotton Varieties were replicated three times in order to ensure data accuracy and also to make this an official test. Each variety will be harvested separately, and the cotton will be weighed and documented. Cotton samples will be taken and bagged separately so that quality factors for the lint such as length, staple, and strength can be measured.



Coastal & Marine

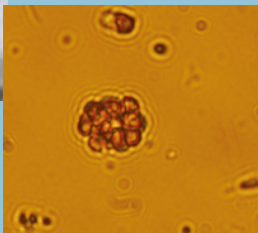
By: Tony Reisinger, CEA -Coastal & Marine Resources



Bahia Grande's restoration is now complete. In 1980, the Brownsville Port Isabel Shrimp Producers Association, Cameron County, AgriLife Extension and Texas Sea Grant received a grant to re-establish the **Bahia Grande lagoon complex as an interconnected wetland to reduce dust, increase shrimp production, and provide recreational use of this 10,000-acre complex.** We have now determined the Ecosystem Services for Bahia Grande are valued at **\$219 million annually for the 3000 acres** of reestablished seagrass meadows shown in the figure above!



In March we experienced a mysterious short duration **harmful algal bloom** in the **Arroyo Colorado** which we suspect resulted in the loss of **40 pounds of blue crabs** at a commercial crabber's facility. TPWD Kills & Spills biologist Liana Lerma identified the potential source of the mortalities as a bloom of the harmful algae *Heterosigma akashawi*, a neurotoxin producing fish killer that occurs worldwide. If confirmed as the cause, this will be the first incidence ever of this harmful alga causing invertebrate mortalities. Crab samples are now being analyzed for the toxin. No dead fish were found in the Arroyo.



Our Cameron County **shrimp fleet is in dire straits.** Fuel prices have begun to drop but the price of shrimp is now at historic lows due to imports. The few vessels that fished this quarter had good production, but crew shares were extremely low and boat owners lost money. We are expecting good numbers of **H2B workers in April** to help fill the labor shortage. The fleet contributes an average of **\$70 million** to our economy annually and provides **over 1200 jobs.**





The **Heroes 4-Health** youth nutrition series was implemented at **IDEA Academy-San Benito (25 youth)** and **Dr. Cash Elementary School (10 youth)** in San Benito. Participants learned new healthy recipes and were challenged to adopt healthy habits at home and school. **The Hearty Cowboys 4-H Club** at **Porter Early College High School** in Brownsville also served as **Heroes 4-Health ambassadors (11 youth)** and met twice a month to learn about nutrition and healthy food preparation.

The Juntos program at **Berta Cabaza Middle School** with the implementation of their first family night on **January 6th**. Juntos families gathered for dinner, educational presentations, and fun team-building activities. Guest speaker, Yahaira Marroquin, spoke about her experience as an engineer with TxDot and how her life and educational journey led her to her career. Juntos success coaches, Scarlett Hernandez and Rebecca Torres, also presented on the success coach student monitoring program that was launched with the students.



- **January- 2 senior** 4-H members from **Harmony School of Innovation 4-H Club** entered a total of **11 photos** in various categories.

- **February, 3-member** team participated in a **Duds to Dazzle** competition.

In this event, the team is given a textile and has **60 minutes** to create a new product using items from a supply closet. Another contest, Cameron County 4-H Roundup, had **31 CEP 4-H members** compete from **Harmony School of Innovation 4-H Club** and **Sullivan Elementary 4-H Club**. This event includes educational presentations and a talent showcase. Many of these youth placed in their categories and advanced to district-level contests.



4-H & Youth Development

By: Marco Ponce, CEA - Agriculture

Cameron County Fair & Livestock Judging Contest: Over **20 4-H members** competed in the Cameron County Fair and Livestock Show livestock Judging Contest. **2** of our teams placed in the **top three** and several members received high point awards. Congratulations to **Mia Ponce, on winning Grand Champion Lamb**.



Willacy County Livestock Judging Contest: Cameron County 4-H members competed in the Willacy County Fair Livestock Judging Contest. **Senior team members placed 1st** at this highly competitive competition.



Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show: Cameron County 4-H had over **450 entries** at this year's livestock show. Over **20 4-H members** made the Sale of Champions Auction for placing high with their projects.

Congratulations to **Avery Fohn of Highland Hustlers 4-H** for exhibiting the **Grand Champion Hog**.

Congratulations to **Thomas Cruz of Briggs-Coleman 4-H** for exhibiting the **Grand Champion Poultry**.



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—2019 data show that 16 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

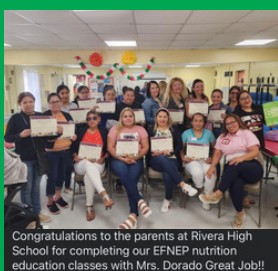
The EFNEP Youth program is directed toward low-income school-age youth. These students participate in a **six lesson series** of fun and educational lessons on good nutrition and food safety as part of summer programs and classroom and after-school activities. Through fun and engaging activities, youth 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 1st Quarter of 2023:

- **200 Families enrolled.**
- **54 Participants graduated.**
- **1,261 youth contacts**
- **1,261 youth graduates**
- **100 Participants have children under the age of 19.**
- **46% Families were at or below 100% of federal poverty level.**
- **71% Families enrolled in one or more food assistance programs.**
- **0% pregnant**
- **1% nursing**
- **18% not pregnant, not nursing, no children at home.**



VOLUNTEERS STRENGTHEN EFNEP

During the 4th Quarter of 2022, **90 volunteers** donated **1,140.3 hours** of work to EFNEP in Texas. At the Texas volunteer rate of **\$29.95/hr.**, this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of **\$34,151.985** this volunteerism has a minimum dollar value of **\$317,293.87**. 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.

Family & Community Health

By: Lilian Mezquida, CEA - Family & Community Health



This year started 4 **Strong People Strong Bodies** groups. The classes are designed for mid-life and older adults and include progressive resistance, balance training, and flexibility exercises. Classes are **twice weekly** for **24 weeks**.



Brownsville Perez Elementary



Brownville Bob Clark Social Services Center



Extension Office San Benito

On **March 25, 2023**, we hosted the **Multicounty Spanish childcare training for Directors and Childcare providers**. The childcare providers receive **four** clock hours towards their licensing. The topics were: Help Children to Cope with Trauma and Stress, Food Safety in the Classroom, Minimum Standards and Obesity prevention in early childhood. There were **thirty-nine** registered participants.



Spanish Childcare Conference



Minimum Standards



Food Safety in the Classroom



**PRAIRIE VIEW
A&M UNIVERSITY**
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Cooperative Extension Program



Cooperative Extension Program Family & Community Health By: Gloria Carter, EA- Family & Community Health

Agent Gloria Carter facilitated **six sessions** from the **A Taste of Latin American Heritage** curriculum at **Brownsville ISD Pullam and Castaneda Elementary, San Benito ISD's Veterans Memorial Academy, and La Feria ISD's Sam Houston Elementary**. A "**Taste of Latin American Heritage**" is a plant-based nutrition & cooking program created by Oldways: Health Through Heritage. Participants were introduced to Latin American heritage foods' vibrant history, culture, and nutrition. They also participated in cooking demonstrations where they learned how to cook and/or incorporate the foods they learned about into their meal planning. Over **50 participants** completed the program.



Health & Parent Engagement Fairs

- On March 31st Mrs. Carter participated in the **HCISD Lee Means Career Fair** wherein she shared information regarding her education and job experience for over **400 students**.
- On April 1st, the agent participated in the **Brownsville ISD Spring Fiesta fair**. Mrs. Carter shared nutrition information beneficial for families. More than **100 contacts** were made during the fair.

15 youth participants from **Harlingen CISD's Bonham Elementary School ACE program** and an additional **10 youth** from **San Benito ISD's Afterschool program** at **Frank Roberts Elementary** participated in the Choose Health: Food, Fun & Fitness program. The **8 sessions** emphasized the importance of drinking fewer sweetened beverages, eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, eating whole grains, making healthier fast-food choices, and staying physically active.



RGV SMALL ACREAGE



EARTH KIND

Healthy Lawns, Healthy Waters Program
57 Participants

Master Gardeners assisted with Children's Activities at the Harlingen Farmers Market



Grape and Wine Session 1: Starting A Vineyard
73 Participants



Grape and Wine Session 2: Growing Grapes
65 Participants



MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER TRAINING



14 Interns

Topics included

- **Plant Pathology and Entomology**
- **Butterfly Gardening**
- **Drip Irrigation**
- **Texas Superstar Landscaping**
- **Soils**
- **Plant Growth and Development**