



Fairfield County

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2008 County Highlights

Strengthening Families and Communities

Adult Volunteers Improve Their Skills

- Through volunteer education programs in 2008, adult volunteers improved their skills in the areas of club management, positive youth development, and specific project areas. 32 adults completed the new volunteer process. A mandatory club meeting was held where 229 individuals participated and were given updates for the year. The 4-H Advisory Committee conducted the second 4-H Day to recruit new members; 31 youth and adult volunteers assisted the 62 families that attended.

Financial Stability

- **Take Charge of Your Money**—The growing debt in Fairfield County seen through home foreclosures and bankruptcies has given OSU Extension an opportunity to provide a series of educational classes in personal finance. Ninety percent of participants in the series stated they planned to set aside money for at least a three-month emergency fund. Eighty-five percent of participants stated they plan to adjust their spending to match their income with in the next three months to establish the emergency fund and put a higher percentage of wages into savings for future needs they have identified. One participant stated, “I plan to set aside money each month for savings first then any leftover for my impulse buying.”
- **Money Choices**—A greater demand has been identified for one-on-one coaching sessions with low-income individuals in budgeting household money, credit, and debt repair. Most of these individuals are receiving assistance from Job and Family Services, Metropolitan Housing, and other local agencies. Approximately five individuals are seen each month. Only ten percent of participants already had a plan to reduce their spending and debt. Fifty-five percent stated they plan to reduce their debt within the next three months and increase their savings because they had adequate income to repay debt and reallocate monies within the household budget. The three-month follow-up indicated twenty-three percent of these individuals had reduced their debt by ten percent, as one participant stated, “I now know how to develop a budget for the month, and break it down by week.”

Food Security

- **Family Nutrition Program**—Each day individuals struggle to feed themselves and their families in this economy of cutbacks and jobs lost. The Family Nutrition Program provides education on making good food choices at the store, buying in quantity, and stretching foods for more than one meal with limited dollars. Approximately 33 programs are held monthly with over 2,000 participants each year. Through evaluation 90% of the participants have indicated they learned new information about nutrition and 70% planned to make changes in their food purchasing and meal plans.

Food Safety

- **Food Preservation and Safety**—Cost of food has doubled over the last year. Summer vegetable gardens increased and preserving these foods to stretch food dollars was a priority this year. Eighty individuals participated in the “It’s Easy to Preserve” class on the different methods of food preservation. Ninety-five percent of participants planned to use the water bath or pressure can method for preserving food after attending the class. One individual stated, “I was scared the pressure canner would explode; I now have confidence in using my canner correctly and will be using it for green beans, corn, and making applesauce.”

Preparing Youth for Success

Community Club Program

- The 4-H Community Club program strives to provide youth with positive relationships with caring adults. This year 259 volunteers assisted 1,321 youth in developing life skills in communication, interpersonal relations, decision-making, and responsibility.
- Youth today have access to technology, science, and world travel through books and electronic media to help guide them into a career path. Another career path to explore through intergenerational teaching would be in the creative arts by learning from past generation in the creative home arts of cooking, baking, and sewing. New county project books were introduced in cake decorating, pie and pastry making and candy for county fair with an increase of 30 percent participation. Each project book included leadership, developing a budget for the project, and intergenerational contact. One 4-H member stated, “I got to know my grandma

better because she helped me with my project and have memories of us doing the project together.”

Teens Offer Service and Take Leadership

- Service learning experiences such as the Junior Leadership Club, Camp Counseling, 4-H State Ambassadors, Ohio Teen Council, Project Workshop Instruction, 4-H Fashion and Culinary Council, and community service projects highlight the focus of Fairfield County 4-H teen involvement at the county, state, and national levels. These opportunities have allowed members to give back to their community and to recognize the difference they make for others and the world around them. This year, 12 of these teens attended the overnight retreat at the Fairfield County Extension office before heading to the Teen Conference, where they were joined by 11 additional Fairfield County teens in order to gain leadership and organizational skills and even led a statewide workshop!

Youth Develop Life Skills at Camp

- Youth need opportunities to engage in learning. 249 county youth had the opportunity to engage in learning in at least one of four camping programs offered this past year. Members participating in the program(s) indicated they met new people, learned and practiced new skills, citizenship, outdoor living, responsibility, and improved self-esteem. 29 counselors went through camp counselor training and utilized these life skills both at camp and upon camps completion. These individuals developed leadership, social, preparedness, and organizational skills to better provide younger 4-H members with learning experiences.

Enhancing Agriculture and the Environment

- With over one-fourth of the U.S. corn crop being used for ethanol in order to work towards energy self-sufficiency, the input costs for agricultural production have all increased to new levels. However, sale prices of livestock prices have not increased proportionately. As a result, producers can no longer increase net income by producing more with purchased feed. In an effort to maintain farm income, Extension and the local SWCD have conducted farm-based and practical research, demonstration plots, field days, and meetings resulting in the adoption of planting oats for forage following wheat. As a result of the above programs, each year over 1,000 acres of oats are planted following wheat in Fairfield County alone that cover the soil as a soil conservation practice and provide 3 tons per acre of dry matter. The resulting forage produced is worth in excess of \$100 per ton, or \$300 per acre, minus the input costs of pro-

ducing of \$50 per acre, to net \$250 per acre or \$250,000 net value added to Fairfield County producers.

- The Fairfield County OSU Extension office strives to make research-based information available and promotes the adoption of approved practices through mailed and electronic newsletters, electronic alerts of current research and production updates targeted to commodity groups, newspaper articles, radio programs, television programs, fair, meetings, field days, farm tours, and on-farm visits. The most time-consuming is providing information and promoting approved practices one-on-one through office visits, e-mails, and telephone. The approximate number of face-to-face contact has been over 2,000 people, telephone consultation with over 5,000 people, and e-mail messages including electronic newsletter with and to over 60,000 people.
- The Fairfield County Master Gardeners continue to maintain the gardens at the Fairfield County Courthouse and Hall of Justice. Master Gardeners dedicate two full work days each year to spring and fall clean-up and plantings as well as bi-weekly weeding and maintenance to the project. This Community Service began over 10 years ago, in cooperation with the Fairfield County Commissioners. The Fairfield County Master Gardeners donate in excess of 150 hours annually to the maintenance and upkeep of the Courthouse Gardens. In June of 2008, the Fairfield County Courthouse Gardens were featured during the Fairfield Heritage Association's "Behind the Garden Gate" Garden Tour, which drew over 400 Central Ohio visitors to Fairfield County area gardens.
- The Fairfield County Master Gardeners hosted their first one-day educational gardening event. The event drew over 150 participants from seven surrounding Central Ohio counties that focused on soil amendments, rain gardens, and many more basic gardening practices. In addition, the Master Gardeners concentrated on putting together a basic user-friendly gardening journal complete with gardening tips.

Advancing Employment and Income Opportunities

- The local SWCD, Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce, and OSU Extension are working with the local Amish community to establish a produce auction. Intentions are to add value to local produce by marketing a significant portion at the US 33 corridor. Local income enhancement through the field to vehicle local produce marketing effort is projected to net Fairfield County residents \$50,000 during the initial auction year through producer and retail marketing returns.

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