Local Food and Farm Focus for 2011

We recently got together as a staff and discussed what we – as the Watauga County Extension Office – were known for in the county and what we SHOULD be known for. Overwhelmingly, we agreed that our office and our agents are best known for supporting local farms and gardening. This includes everything from providing advice on how to get rid of slugs in hostas, analyzing nutritional content of forage for cattle, teaching kids how to pull weeds in their school gardens, to supporting the marketing efforts of the county’s choose-and-cut and agritourism industry. Many of our programming efforts are integrated across the area’s local food and agricultural economy.

Cooperative Extension’s Local Foods Coordinators pledge to purchase 10 percent of your food from local sources. The 10% Campaign is an effort by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems and N.C. Cooperative Extension to build a local food economy in North Carolina. North Carolinians spend about $35 billion a year on food. If each person spent just 10 percent on food locally – roughly $1.05 per day – then approximately $3.5 billion annually would be available in the state’s economy.

Through the campaign website, consumers and businesses can pledge to spend 10 percent of their food dollars locally, purchasing products from area farmers and food producers. Participants receive weekly email reminders to report how much money they spent on local food. The website lets consumers see how their dollars were spent on local foods grown across the state. In addition, the 10% Campaign website provides a “Find Local Foods” page with links to help consumers find local food and farm products in their own communities. A “Learn More” page includes links to information on a variety of partner organizations, such as Slow Food USA and Eat Smart, Move More NC. There are also links to educational information on topics ranging from how to set up a workplace community-supported agriculture program to how to cook seasonal, local products.

Cooperative Extension’s Local Foods Coordinators will help connect consumers and food producers and support local businesses and organizations that want to spend 10 percent of their food dollars locally. Margie can even work with businesses and organizations that register through the website to help them develop a plan for purchasing local products. By joining the campaign, you will be supporting food producers in your community and helping to keep dollars invested in local businesses.

Watauga County Advisory Leadership Council Members

Marcia Alayon  Jim Bryan  Joan Hear\nBetsy Anderson  Kristan Cockerill  Winston Kinsey
Bryan Belcher  Carol Hancock  Trish Lanier
Cheryl Brown  Dick Hear\nBill Moretz  Linda Slade

Visit Us Online at: wataugaces.blogspot.com
FARM CITY - Getting Back to Its Roots

As you may know, in 2009 and 2010, the Farm City Banquet was held as an outdoor event at the Blair Farm in downtown Boone during the month of August.

This different venue and format allowed an outdoor celebration of our community’s agricultural heritage—honoring the urban and rural supporters of agriculture and community development. Live music, farm animals, educational displays, and a catered dinner with local foods (thanks, Bananas!!) made the event fun for kids and was a popular late summer festival. However, during the peak of the harvest season, many of our farmers and families weren’t able to join us!

After several months of discussion and feedback from individuals and community groups, the Farm City Banquet is going back to its roots. The Farm City Committee will meet in early 2011 to plan for a return to the late fall, banquet-style celebration. However, WE NEED YOUR HELP!! Fellow Farmers, Ruritans, Farm Bureau, and Grange members . . . please help us make the 2011 Farm City Banquet the biggest gathering of the Watauga County community of the year!! If you’d like to be on the planning committee, please call or email Jim Hamilton at 264-3061 or jim_hamilton@ncsu.edu.

Local Farm and Food Festival Summer of 2011

For those of you who enjoyed the outdoor format of the last couple of Farm City Banquets, don’t despair!

Due to the popularity of the outdoor event and focus on local food and farms, we will continue this celebration by having a late summer “Local Food and Farm Festival” that will cap off a week of High Country farm tours and summer local foods events.

With our 2011 Local Foods initiative, this event will provide an opportunity for our community, local vendors, and area farmers to connect and spread the word about the High Country’s local foods, farms, and fun.

Our planning committee is looking for community volunteers to help with this event too! Please contact our office, 264-3061, to let us know if you’d like to help out!!

NCDA GRANT for Local Foods Promotion

Watauga Extension and its partners were recently awarded a $55,000 grant for a project entitled “Maturing the High Country’s Local Food System.” This project is a partnership between the Watauga & Ashe Cooperative Extension offices and the major players in local foods production in our region: Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, High Country CSA, and New River Organic Growers (who will serve as the fiscal agent for this grant).

The High Country has a strong agriculture base. Farmers are transitioning from tobacco to other crops including fruit and vegetables. Creating more demand by educating consumers about High Country-grown produce will increase the economic stability and sustainability of these farming operations. We have several farmers’ markets in the area, and interest is high for expanding opportunities for community-supported agriculture programs through area worksites and targeted local marketing strategies.

This project will hopefully attract new growers and allow existing growers to expand their technical proficiency in production. Prior educational efforts on Specialty Crops production have emphasized the introductory level of a range of different crops. Typically, a grower’s school or field day compress four or more sessions and topics into a day’s event, which means that each crop receives only cursory coverage. This project will support in-depth education about a small number of highly-promising crops and production techniques (day-neutral strawberries, broccoli/other brassicas, winter squash/other cucurbits, season-extension & Integrated Pest Management) for area growers, both new and experienced, to step-up their production to a quantity and quality that will keep these crops in demand by area buyers.

This project also will enhance the marketing capacity for local food production in the region and increase the number of consumers who can expect to see some heavy advertising of local foods in the next year. By reaching consumers through marketing and “cooking local” classes and demonstrations, this project will educate the public on the availability of High Country produce and the economic and nutritional benefits of supporting local growers.

EXTENSION NEWS CORNER

AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

LOCAL FLAVOR

NCDA GRANT

Promoting the benefits of supporting local growers.

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 огромное содержание информации в тексте, но в контексте какие-то конкретные темы или вопросы из него...
**CRYPTOMERIA SCALE** Found in Christmas Trees

By Jill R. Sibleybottom, NCSU Mountain Conifer Integrated Pest Management Specialist

An invader and devastating pest has been found this summer in Western North Carolina. Cryptomeria scale (Aspidiotus cryptomeriae) is an introduced pest from Japan. It has been a serious pest of Fraser firs and other Christmas trees in Pennsylvania and other northern states for many years. There it causes much more damage than the elongate hemlock scale (EHS). It spreads faster than EHS and causes more serious damage on the foliage. The needles have yellow blotches and will fall off the tree making them unsalable.

This pest was first found in North Carolina earlier this year in Macon County near Franklin. This Fraser fir Christmas tree field was isolated from other fields, so concerns about spread to other farms were not as great. It was in a residential area, and it was believed that the scale came in on some nursery stock in a neighboring house. The field in Ashe County was just identified a couple of weeks ago. The grower noticed a tree that looked like it was dying from a distance. When he looked closer, it was obvious that many trees were affected. Not only was Cryptomeria scale found in the trees but also a predator which feeds on the scale — the two-stabbed lady beetles. This black beetle has a large red spot on either side, looking as if it has been stabbed. Both the adults and larvae feed on scales and both were present. But there were so many scales that the predators cannot control them all.

This site is in the city limits and is surrounded by houses. Again it is believed that the scale came in on shrubbery planted nearby. Unfortunately, unlike the Macon County site, this field is in view of many Christmas tree fields. It is possible that other farms are infested with the scale. Growers might confuse it with EHS, but the scale is round instead of elongated and there are not both brown (female) and white (male) forms as with EHS. In doubt, bring a sample to the Extension office where photographers can be sent to me for positive identification. Another telltale clue is the two-stabbed lady beetles which are normally very rare in Christmas trees. If you do find this pest, please contact the County Extension Office so we can keep track of where it is found.

The growers at both sites have attempted to control this pest. I haven’t gone back yet to see how well they worked. However, materials and timing is similar for Cryptomeria scale as it is for EHS.

View my blog at fraseripm.blogspot.com for updates about this pest and other pests in Christmas trees. Again, this pest is very serious and if it spreads, it has the potential to be the most serious pest on Fraser fir Christmas trees.

Crypomeria Scale (Aspidiotus cryptomeriae Kuvana). By J.Davidson - USDA Agricultural Research Service
**LINGERING CHORES FOR LANDSCAPES**

For die-hard gardeners, it can be a bittersweet experience to have the dormant and cold of winter rapidly approaching. To ensure that your Gardens and landscapes weather through the upcoming season, there are a few helpful reminders to act upon while ground is still visible!

**Mulch, Mulch and More Mulch**

Mulch helps insulate plant roots from the cold and also helps to reduce soil moisture loss. A properly-applied mulch layer can also help reduce the likelihood that plants will be uplifted from the soil during freezing and thawing over the course of the winter. But don’t go overboard . . . huge piles of mulch around tree trunks and branches can actually lead to rot and other problems. Usually a 2-3” layer of mulch is ample for winter protection.

Mulch also is a great cover for chipmunks, mice and voles that can easily girdle young trees and shrubs. Pull mulch away from tree trunks and branches, leaving several inches between the plant and the mulch layer. This open space makes critters more visible to predators and can help you visibly detect if you do have rodent pests sneaking around your plants.

**Water Well**

Water is essential for plant growth and survival. With evergreen plants that hold onto their leaves and needles throughout the winter, water is a necessity for making it through to spring. Desiccation, or the drying out of foliage, is a common culprit for plant death in the winter. Drying winter winds coupled with intense winter sun causes plants to transpire and that lost moisture cannot be adequately replaced if the ground is frozen below the plant’s root system. It is important to water plantings well during a dry fall to ensure that plants can access suitable moisture reserves. A long deep soaking of the soil can help to ease the stress of winter conditions.

It is also not uncommon to water landscape plants during warm spells throughout the winter to help replace some of the lost moisture.

**Wind Barriers**

For small evergreens that are in exposed locations, you can create a seasonal windbreak to protect them from harsh, drying winds. For most plants, it’s best to use material that is open and airy, like burlap or canvas around the frame. Avoid using black plastic as a wrapping material as this can alter the ambient temperature around the plant and lead to problems. While it may not look fabulous, this method can save young evergreens and help them to weather through the winter.

Anti-desiccants are also used as a foliar spray on evergreen foliage, however, frequent application is required and UV light can degrade them so quickly that they often are not successful.

So enjoy these last few opportunities to be outside in your gardens, and spend the winter dreaming of the new plants you’ll add next year!
IDENTIFY
Continued From Page 4

chemicals, traps, and, most importantly, mothballs. Mothballs are commonly used as snake deterrents, but they are made from the chemical Naphthalene and are toxic to the kidneys if swallowed by children, cats, dogs, and small mammals. Being highly volatile during breakdown, airborne Naphthalene particles could be inhaled during exposure. Thus, alternative methods are best. Here are some things you can address to reduce the presence of snakes:

1. If you have a bird feeder in your yard, make sure to periodically clean up the fallen bird seed. When seed falls from the feeder, birds will forage on the ground, thus attracting ground predators like snakes.

2. Any sort of exposed trash will attract rodents, and they leave a scent trail that snakes will follow. Even compost can attract rodents if left exposed. Cleaning up your garbage disposal and compost area and keeping it covered will decrease the likelihood of rodents and thus snakes.

Each of these tactics will greatly reduce snakes and other unwanted pests. However, you should keep in mind that with snakes present, you are naturally establishing a habitat for rodents and other wildlife that would otherwise over populate and become a bigger issue posed to your yard and garden.

Article written by Jamie McGirt, ASU Sustainable Development student intern with the Watauga County Cooperative Extension this year.

EVALUATING
New Crop Possibilities For Your Southern Appalachian Mountain Farm

S
o you want to add a new crop to your farm, and you’d like some help from Cooperative Extension in evaluating whether this new crop will fit your enterprise and enhance your farm’s profitability. Great! This is one of NC Cooperative Extension’s primary roles, and the Agriculture Agents in the Watauga County Extension Center have a broad range of experience with ornamentals, livestock, vegetables, fruits, medicinal herbs, forest products, value-added enterprises, and other farm goods that can be raised or crafted here in the mountains.

We have seen crops and projects that have helped local farms to become more profitable and others that failed to improve (or even harmed) cash flow. We can help you to research production requirements and marketing options, and we will ask some tough questions about the realism of your projections and assumptions.

What we, as Agriculture Agents, cannot do is to choose a crop for you. “Can you tell me what I should grow?” is not a useful question to ask your Extension Agent, because the final decision and all the required follow-through are your’s and your farm’s. To be successful with any crop, you have got to love it, to produce it at top-quality, and to market it relentlessly. No Agriculture Agent (or crop consultant, or anyone else) can say whether you have the passion within you to shepherd a new farm enterprise all the way to success. A good agent or consultant can help you to plan a strategy – from the land, labor, and capital you will need to the market into which your crop can be sold. An Agriculture Agent’s job is to help you avoid pitfalls and mistakes while helping you to identify and seize opportunities to sell your best crops at the highest prices possible. To get the very best advice and assistance from an Agriculture Agent, it helps to spend some time evaluating possible alternate crops and enterprises on your own first, and there are a number of worthwhile resources available.

There are some excellent alternative crop guides out there to help with choice and planning. Among the best that are both free and available over the Internet are guides published by ATTRA and by the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. (Links to each of these guides, plus two other alternative crop resource lists, can be found at the bottom of this article.) ATTRA’s guide (“Evaluating a Rural Enterprise”), at only eleven pages, is an excellent introduction to a framework for initial crop assessment and informed choice. It guides the reader through a process of evaluating your farm resources (Marketing, Land, Buildings, Machinery, Labor, etc.) and the basics of financial planning; plus its Resources section includes more excellent crop and farming guides that can be purchased. The longer University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension guide uses a series of questions and worksheets to guide a grower through an assessment of Profitability, Resources, Information, Marketing, Enthusiasm, and Risk (hence PRIMER). The worksheets in the PRIMER guide allow for a greater depth of investigation and planning output on how a crop will affect (and be impacted) by each of these factors.

Each of these guides is worth reading and using. The additional crop lists and links below can offer more ideas and inspiration, but what about the particulars of the Southern Appalachian mountain region and Watauga County in particular? Clearly we will never be a region known for olives (we are too wet and too cold) or commodity feeds...
While the motivated grower might grow enough heritage-open-pollinated grain corn to custom-mill into profitable specialty grits and cornmeal, the trick is to find a crop that fits not only our climate but your own land and the particulars of the market you hope to tap. For any crop being considered, our region has a few important strengths and trends that are worth noting. Working within these areas may make certain crops more marketable and even profitable.

- We are in the midst of a local food renaissance: Enthusiasm for locally-grown foods continues to grow. While much of the passion is for local vegetables and fruits that are also organic, there is plenty of room for farmers using conventional fertilizers and sprays to sell their quality goods at a lower price than organic commands. Plus, local-food farm products such as pasture-raised meats and grain-grown shiitake mushrooms can command some measure of price premium even without organic certification.

- We are in a region that people want to visit: Even during this latest economic downturn, people have continued to visit the High Country. While grower baskets, selling foods to area restaurants and/or inviting the public to your farm for an “agritourism” experience can add to your bottom line if done well.

- We have an educated and enthusiastic populace: Significant portions of our county and region are educated about healthy living and natural foods. Plus, many of our elders grew gardens in their younger days. For those who can’t garden for themselves any longer, your farm birds will work with both of us to keep our healthy foods. Similarly, our local farmers’ markets are filled with young parents seeking to buy healthy foods for their children. Whether young or old, these are smart customers ready and willing to pay for good product.

- We have some seasonal advantages: While the late frosts and short growing season of the High Country can be a disadvantage for some crops, our cool summers can also be an asset. Our summers stay cool enough to raise day-neutral strawberries, ever-bearing raspberries, and cool-season greens such as lettuce and kale. These crops cannot be raised in regions hotter than ours. When one compares the area to high-elevation mountains to the surrounding area of the southeastern US, it makes sense for local growers to market these crops when the lower regions cannot produce competitive crops – in July, August, and September particularly. Plus, late winters in the mountains make tapping and boiling maple syrup possible – a novelty this far south!

Of course, not every crop that can be grown locally is sure to be a winner. Some of the major pitfalls of the region and market we have observed of late include:

- We are a magnet for insects and disease: Those funguses and insects that over-winter in Florida take a long time every Spring and early Summer traveling northwards before they bother New England growers. Fortunately, here we have all the cool and damp of New England, but those insects and diseases reach us weeks or even months before they affect northern growers. This is one reason why we can suffer badly some years from Late Blight on tomatoes, Downy Mildew on squash, plus corn earworms and other insects. Our extended rainy periods during many growing seasons help to incubate anthracnose and black rot on grapes, rhizoctonia on lettuce, phythththora on peppers, etc. Cooperative Extension growers should never put all their “eggs” in the tourism basket, selling foods to area restaurants and/or inviting the public to your farm for an “agritourism” experience can add to your bottom line if done well.

- We are prime habitat for “wildlife”: Any crop that deer can eat, they will. If you want to grow almost any vegetable or fruit on a commercial scale here, then fencing needs to be in your plans and budgets well before planting. Some crops need additional protection from turkeys, crows, and even bear if you live further into the back-country. Additionally, livestock producers need to plan for fences, guardian animals, and other risk-mitigation strategies to lessen the impact of coyotes, dog-packs, and hawks.

- Some crops have small pools of buyers: A lot of interest has swirled around hops and wine grapes as of late, but these specialty crops to grass-fed beef, strawberries, broccoli, and other daily foods purchased by most everyone, how do they really stack up? Unless you plan on building a winery or brewery of your own (at a cost of $3-$1 million, generally), then you will need to sell those hops and/or grapes to a vintner or brewer. There are well over a million potential customers within a four-hour drive of all our farms, and every one of them will eat something every day. There are only a few dozen breweries and wineries within the same area, and most of them buy their supply of grapes and hops once or a few times per year. With the smaller customer pool, prices and marketing options will be more limited for hops growers and vineyard managers. Similar constraints exist for truffles, medicinal herbs, alpacas, and other crops and livestock that target extremely tiny niches. To succeed with any of these crops, you need to be among the very best. I can say with some confidence that the 50th-best strawberry grower in NC can probably sell some or all of his crop at a satisfactory price. If you know your market, the demand is there for most crops that grow, package, and sell better hops than you, I am not nearly so optimistic.

These are just a few of the local factors that might influence your crop choice. If you are considering adding a new crop to your farm, please read and use the resources below, and then contact your Extension Agent to discuss the matter further. The time you invest in planning before spending the first dime or planting the first seed will surely pay off later.

Links & Resources:
University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension’s PRIM-ER for Selecting New Enterprises for Your Farm
www.uky.edu/Ag/AgEcon/pubs/ext_ace/ext2000-13.pdf
ATTRA’s Evaluating a Rural Enterprise
http://www.attra.org/atta-pub/PDF/evaleurp.pdf
The Growing Small Farms website
www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/altcropslinks.html
The National Agricultural Library’s List of Alternative Enterprises for Small Farm Diversification

EVALUATING Continued From Page 5

Cold Weather Tips For Poultry

The spring and summer are usually easy seasons to manage your chickens, however, winter may offer a few challenges. Here are a few tips to keep your chickens productive and happy.

- Chickens actually can do very well in cold weather. When protected from wind, cold weather won’t slow down growth as much as colder weather. The first instinct people have is to lock their chickens in the hen house or outbuilding, but this can cause more trouble than the cold. Chickens should be provided shelter in the winter, but be sure to provide plenty of ventilation. Ventilation should allow air exchange but not allow wind through the house. If you allow your hens outside in the summer, offer them protection in the winter. Exercise is important for the health of the birds. To help keep hens warm, keep adequate feed for the birds. The idea of adding heat to the chicken house to increase winter production has been tried and usually doesn’t pay off. To help keep the birds warm, add a layer of straw or hay to the floor of the house. Feeding scratch in the evening helps keep chickens busy and keeps their crop full before going to roost.

- One of the most important things in the winter is a constant supply of water. It is challenging in the winter to keep non-frozen water supplied to your birds. Many of the traditional waterers are hard to open when frozen, and plastic waterers will freeze and crack. Galvanized waterers work better but still can be damaged if the water is allowed to freeze solid. The best practice is to fill waterers half full in early morning and again in the afternoon. Egg producers on the lookout for predators, raccoons, skunks and often neighborhood pets will get into chickens this time of year. The best way to avoid predator losses is to prevent them from occurring. Make your hen house and run predator “proof.” Some predators can fit into small openings, while others prefer to dig their way in. Examine your pen to eliminate holes and weak places in the fence, and remove brush and weeds from around the chicken house.

- A few simple steps now can help maintain your chicken flock, keeping it productive.

Fall BEEF CATTLE MANAGEMENT TIPS

Spring Calving Herds
• Pregnancy check cows and replacement heifers. Call open cows and cows that are poor producers, old, or have chronic health problems.
• Give booster vaccinations to replacement heifers when weaned calf-calibrated, and vaccinated for predators.
• Analyze weaning weights and start an index for your herd to help make culling decisions.

Fall Calving
• Watch cows daily for calving problems, record birth dates, calving weights, and calving ease to include on cow records.
• Test bulls for breeding soundness.
• Purchase new bulls and match EPD’s to your herd’s needs.

General Recommendations
• Take soil tests on pasture and hay fields. Apply lime as needed; fall-applied lime will lower pH by spring and time to reseed.
• Conduct a pasture walk to determine the quality of the grass and the amount and type of weeds present.
• Keep minerals available to cattle.
• Clean water tanks.
• Check winter feed equipment and make repairs.
• Keep an eye on cattle for signs of fall poisoning; avoid grazing in wooded areas with acorns and/ or buxeyes.
• Inventory feed supplies and develop a feeding plan.
The Five P’s For Winter Feeding The Beef Herd:
Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance

The wind is blowing and the rain has stopped for now, the fall-colored leaves are now dropping faster, winter will be just right around the corner.

Last winter was a trying time for everyone, but it was especially hard on livestock and their caretakers. I think the severity of winter found many people not prepared; I hope this year will be different! Here are some tips to help you prepare for winter:

The first step to take is to inventory your animals and identify groups that have similar nutritional needs. Typically at this time of year, the majority of cows are in middle gestation (bred 5-7 months) for spring calving herds. Brangus and replacement heifers, weak yearlings, bulls and lactating cows all have slightly different nutritional needs. Typically, 1,100 lb. gestating cows will need 26.5 lbs. of dry matter daily (this translates to 31 lbs. of hay daily).

Grazing and lactating animals need increased nutrition to be productive. The classes of animals with higher nutritional requirements should be supplemented. There are many byproducts of grain processing that meet the nutritional needs of the beef herd. Some of these products are soybean hulls, corn gluten feed, cottonseed, and many combinations fed by feed companies. The Extension Service can help you develop a feeding plan including a balanced ration.

The fourth step is to examine your feeding system. Do you simply place round bales out in pastures? Are they fed in rings or bale feeders, or are they rolled out on the ground? Research has shown that by simply placing round hay bales out in the pasture, losses can exceed 30%. If you are storing hay outside and uncovered, your total losses could easily be 50%. It will not take very long to recoup the cost of a hay ring to reduce these losses. There should be enough feeder space to prevent lower status cows from not receiving enough hay. The common practice here in the mountains of unrolling hay can be very effective. If this system is only used when the weather is favorable, then losses can be reduced. Unrolling hay also offers the advantage of allowing all cows to eat at the same time, avoiding boss cows becoming overfed and more timid cows not getting enough to eat.

Take the time to do a little planning to insure you have enough to feed your cows this winter. A little time spent now can help avoid problems this winter, especially if it turns similar to last year.

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FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

EAT SMART, MOVE MORE . . .
MAINTAIN, DON’T GAIN! HOLIDAY CHALLENGE

This holiday season, stuff the turkey — not yourself! The statewide Eat Smart, Move More movement is gearing up for the fifth annual “Maintain, Don’t Gain! Holiday Challenge.”

Rather than focusing on trying to lose weight — a difficult task at this time of year — this free six-week challenge provides participants with tips, tricks and ideas to help them maintain their weight throughout the holiday season. Free on-line sign-ups are now open at www.myeatsmartmovemore.com.

The challenge begins on November 22 and runs through December 31. People who sign up early and complete the pre-survey will receive bonus healthy holiday recipes and a shopping list.

In 2009, more than 8,200 people from all 100 North Carolina counties and 47 other states took part in the challenge. At the end of the program, 82 percent reported maintaining their weight.

This holiday season, add to the success — join and promote the Holiday Challenge!

The Eat Smart, Move More . . . Maintain, Don’t Gain! Holiday Challenge is a part of the Eat Smart, Move More NC movement to increase healthy eating and physical activity opportunities wherever North Carolinians live, learn, earn, play and pray. Find out more at www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com.

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YOUTH AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are the ability to interact with others in a constructive manner. Young people have an opportunity to develop social skills in their interactions with parents, grandparents, teachers, other adults, siblings and peers.

Top social skills listed as important for youth to develop include: conflict resolution skills; communication and listening skills; teamwork; decision-making; self-management; including handling emotions and stress management; and empathy and accepting differences.

Role modeling and the importance of parents are consistently mentioned as needs in helping youth develop their social skills. Of course, joining in group activities like 4-H is a great place to practice and interact with positive role models and peers.

For a great on-line interactive guide for 2nd-4th graders to explore resolving conflicts, check out www.urbanext.illinois.edu/conflict/

The 4-H blog has some links for articles on things parents can do to help youth develop their social skills. See us at www.watauga4h.blogspot.com/

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HOME LEARNING IDEAS

Want some ideas for those times when you’re bored and looking for something to do?

Science experiments are fun and can be done with common household items. Or, explore science through the internet. 4-H and other educational organizations have some great links online. We have some listed on our 4-H blog. Check us out at www.watauga4h.blogspot.com/ and look for the “Science” link on the right.

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GIVE THE GIFT OF AN EXPERIENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
4-H CAMP REGISTRATION OPENS

Try to come up with a meaningful gift for a child or grandchild? Why not give the gift of an experience? Consider giving a youth a week at camp -- something that will create memories for a lifetime. Now is the time to begin enrolling for 4-H Camp for Summer 2011.

Watauga County 4-H will escort a group of 8-14 year-old campers to Bet-sy-Jeff Penn 4-H Center. The center is located above Greensboro in Rockingham County, near Reidsville.

The camping week is June 26-July 1.

To guarantee a spot, register by January 28. The good news is you can reserve your spot with a $100.00 deposit and have until June to save up for the rest of the fee, which is $280.00 more (total of $380.00). The fee covers meals, lodging, t-shirt, transportation to camp and more. Registration will continue beyond January 28, but spaces may not be guaranteed. Contact the 4-H office at 264-3061 for more information or to register. Check the website out at http://www.nc4h.org/camps.
Promoting Educational Achievement

What would you say is the best way to help kids do well in school? Scholars scanned research studies to find out what the research says. The scan shows that qualities outside the school are important contributors to success in school. Based on all the research results, the researchers created a list of top things families and communities can do to help improve academic achievement:

1) Reduce unintended pregnancies
2) Improve prenatal and postnatal maternal health
3) Support positive parenting practices among parents of infants and young children
4) Improve young children's nutrition and encourage mothers to breastfeed
5) Enhance the quality and availability of educational child care, preschool, pre-kindergarten, and full-day kindergarten
6) Connect children and adolescents with long-term mentors
7) Support positive parenting practices among parents of school-age children and teens
8) Provide family and couple's counseling to improve family functioning
9) Provide high-quality educational after-school and summer programs
10) Develop positive social skills, and reduce delinquency among adolescents

Parenting practices suggested include parents involving their children in home learning activities, being active in the daily lives of our children, and keeping the lines of communication open.

As far as social skills, “Research has found strong links between social skills and success in school and in other areas of life... programs that focus on developing social skills... have generally been found to produce at least one statistically-significant, positive impact... the most effective programs designed to help children and youth build their social skills tend to be those that combine some level of teaching, modeling, and coaching.”

The researchers conclude, “Many factors beyond the classroom can affect whether children and youth succeed in schools. Whereas within-school standards, practices, staffing, and curricula clearly are vital to raising the academic achievement of the nation’s children and youth, addressing non-school factors could augment efforts being made in schools.”

We are lucky in our community to have many groups helping to provide resources on the many assets young people need to succeed. Research reviews like this can help provide suggestions on priorities for youth and family programming efforts, help us re-commit to best practices, and remind of us of the importance of all that we do with our children.


CALENDAR

NOVEMBER
November 3
4-H Food Fun/Food Connections, 3:30 p.m., Ag Conference Center

November 6
4-H Horse Show Planning Meeting, 6:15 p.m., location TBA

November 18
4-H CloverBuds (5-8 year olds), 6:00 p.m., Ag Conference Center

November 23
4-H Explorers (9-11 year olds), 6:00 p.m., Ag Conference Center

OUR MISSION:

“North Carolina Cooperative Extension partners with communities to deliver education and technology that enrich the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians.”