How Cooperative Extension programs create jobs, spark investment

Overview

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is a good investment for the state of Nevada. Every state dollar going to Cooperative Extension leverages funding from federal and county governments. The three-way (county, federal and state) funding partnership established by Nevada Revised Statutes helps fund 20 Cooperative Extension offices statewide and nearly 100 education and research programs, including the 4-H youth development program. This collaborative funding pays for faculty and staff, who design and implement community programs. These UNCE employees also find the grants that pay for these programs, and these investments contribute to economic output and activity across the state. Cooperative Extension brings in nearly $5 million a year in grants, which are spent in local communities helping all citizens – from seniors to preschoolers. Here are some of the ways these programs are helping Nevada citizens and communities:

- **Diversified Agriculture**: We have created a small-farm program that connects Nevada growers with lucrative markets. We’ve helped communities establish vibrant farmers markets. We’ve helped alfalfa growers find new crops that are more profitable and use less water.

- **Economic Development**: The UNCE-supported University Center for Economic Development provides economic development research, technical assistance and educational services. UCED fosters economic development throughout Nevada by making the extensive resources of University of Nevada, Reno available to organizations and areas that can benefit from job and income creation and job retention efforts.

- **Volunteers**: We train and employ thousands of volunteers each year to bring University knowledge to small groups and communities. This army of volunteers is worth more than $1.5 million annually to the state. In Las Vegas alone, 300 Master Gardeners contributed a total of 38,104 hours valued at $794,472 providing landscape training, guiding community gardens, assisting at schools and operating the Master Gardener orchard. In Carson City, Master Gardener volunteers donated 250 pounds of fresh produce to seniors and various community food agencies.

- **Protecting Public Land**: Our natural resource programs attacking invasive weeds have saved thousands of acres from damage while ensuring the value of public lands and private farmlands. Weeds could be costing the state $12 million in lost recreation value, so eliminating them is not only good for public land but good for Nevada’s bottomline.

- **Workforce Training**: Our programs have helped hundreds of youngsters stay in school, giving them critical science and entrepreneurial skills that make them better prepared for the
workforce. We also have programs to keep troubled youth out of the courts and the juvenile justice system.

- **CONTROLLING MEDICAL COSTS:** We teach Nevada’s growing senior population how to be more independent, healthy, happy and engaged, saving the state in medical care and related expenses. We teach at-risk populations the value of good nutrition, helping them avoid developing chronic illnesses.

- **BETTER PRESCHOOLS:** We train child care providers to be more effective caregivers and teachers and to develop a sense of pride and professionalism in their work. Thousands of young children in Nevada are in the care of someone other than their parents or other family member every day. The quality of care and education that young children receive has an impact on the children, their families and our communities. Caregivers need training and education to provide quality child care. UNCE has offered training to improve the quality of child care in Nevada for over 20 years.

- **FIRE PREVENTION:** Our Living with Fire program brings critical education to thousands of Nevadans, helping them fortify their property against catastrophic wildfire. This program helped launch the Nevada Fire Safe Council, which has raised millions of dollars on fuels reduction programs. Overall, the result has been tremendous savings for local, state and federal firefighting agencies.

- **HEALTH AND SAFETY:** Cooperative Extension provides training to public water treatment plant operators throughout Nevada, saving these water districts – including Las Vegas Valley Water District and the Truckee Meadows Water Authority – hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in training they need to maintain their certification and stay abreast of ever-changing Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.

**Helping Nevada communities prosper**

**Housing development**

Cooperative Extension faculty have worked with local communities to analyze their housing development strategy with an eye toward making these small communities more attractive to industry.

**Engaged Leadership**

This program works with new municipal elected officials to develop their effectiveness, vision and leadership abilities.

**Project FIND**

Cooperative Extension is leading the effort in small mining communities to find industries who might utilize the infrastructure of former mining developments, bring new jobs, residents and industry to struggling communities.
Helping agriculture producers become more profitable

Diversified agriculture

We have created a blossoming small-farm program that connects Nevada growers with a ready and lucrative market with urban restaurants and resorts. Thanks to Cooperative Extension, small farm owners in Nevada now sell their products to high-end restaurants in Las Vegas, San Francisco and Los Angeles. A UNCE survey of these farmers indicates that 80 percent are expanding, hiring more people and increasing the size of their farms to meet the growing need. Producers are diversifying their crops, adding processing facilities and considering a farming cooperative to better market their products.

Teff crop production

Cooperative Extension has helped alfalfa farmers in central Nevada become more profitable by helping them establish a teff crop and a market for the small grain and forage produced by teff. The number of acres committed to growing teff has tripled in Churchill, Lyon and Pershing counties. Cooperative Extension has helped establish a market for the crop, facilitating meetings between teff growers and groups from Ethiopian communities in California and Nevada who want to supply teff to ethnic markets across the country. Teff grain returns an average of $89.34 more per acre than alfalfa in northwestern Nevada and uses only two-thirds the water. The grain harvested by local farmers in 2010 was purchased at $.40 per pound with a total value of $260,000 and teff flour made from the grain more than doubles the original value. Teff forage from Nevada is marketed as high quality horse hay for an average price of $150 per ton -- 50 percent more than highest quality alfalfa from Nevada in 2010.

Collaborative Resource Stewardship

Cooperative Extension has helped ranchers develop new methods for improving both rangeland conditions and the number of cows that graze on public land through science-based grazing strategies, handling procedures and vegetation monitoring. Riparian areas have recovered at the same time the livestock numbers supported by the range have increased.

Cattlemen’s Update

Livestock producers have seen up to 10 percent increases in profits from attending these series of seminars on production techniques, low stress livestock handling techniques, corral system evaluation and technique education for ranch employees.

Eagles & Agriculture

This program brings visitors to Douglas County to witness the arrival and activities of dozens of American bald eagles during the early spring calving season. What began as incidental bird-watching has grown into three days of tours, exhibits, photography workshops, lessons on local history and wildlife,
and guides to the birth of calves and the eagles. Over the past eight years, Eagles & Agriculture has generated an estimated $1.4 million in local economic impact, drawing interest from as far as Florida.

**Weed prevention**

In states like Nevada, noxious weeds cost the state through lost tourism, reduced habitat for livestock and wildlife, and encroachment on farmlands. Invasions of Eurasian water milfoil ruin swimming holes and beaches; perennial pepperweed infestations foul stream banks, damage water clarity and ruin fish habitat. One study by UNCE found that weeds are costing the state up to $12 million a year in reduced recreation, with weeds discouraging anglers, hunters, horseback riders, campers and hikers. Noxious weeds also diminish the market value of land. Cooperative Extension battles the problem and prevents these types of losses many ways:

- By conducting dozens of workshops for hundreds of land managers on how to best control and eradicate weeds
- Running programs that help unemployed youth learn job skills while spraying for weeds or eliminating encroaching woodlands
- Developing a statewide Early Detection Rapid Response team program and using science to explore how to prevent noxious weed invasions on Western farms

**Helping children stay in school and learn job skills**

Cooperative Extension has many programs designed to help youth develop better study skills so they can stay in school longer or be better prepared when they enter the job market.

**4-H**

There are more than 49,000 young people engaged in 4-H programs across the state of Nevada. The 4-H program promotes life skills development through an expanding number of delivery modes: 4-H community and project clubs, military and 4-H Afterschool programs; special interest groups; school enrichment; camping and more.

**4-H Afterschool programs**

These programs increase children’s reading grades and social skills, making them better prepared to stay in school and become a valuable member of the Nevada workforce.

**Youth Worker Training**

Youth Worker Training is a program designed to increase the knowledge and skills of youth workers, paid and volunteer, who work with school age youth (K-12) primarily in out-of-school-time settings. Last year, our Youth Worker Training program provided professional development to nearly 300 youth workers who supervise some 8,740 Nevada youth participating in out-of-school-time programs. Cooperative Extension’s Tools of the Trade curriculum is used across the country, and is mandatory for
any after-school program that receives grants from the National 4-H Council or MetLife. This year the module will be taught in 11 states and is expected to reach more than 5,500 after-school workers.

**Bootstraps**

This program in three counties helps youth who are out of school and not working develop job skills and work experience to keep them employed long after they leave the program.

**Career Edge**

This workforce readiness program for high school students gives hundreds of students each year a chance to develop leadership and organizational skills. They become better job candidates by learning how to properly dress, interview and fill out job applications and resumes.

**Family Storyteller**

This program helps parents and students both learn the value of reading, improving their language skills and study habits. Parents increase their ability to use English, helping them in the job market. Nearly 12,000 Nevada families, 80 percent of them Hispanic, have participated in the program.

**Mini-Society**

This program teaches children entrepreneurship concepts. They design and develop their own society, creating a name, flag and currency. Children identify opportunities and establish their own businesses to provide goods and services to their fellow citizens.

**Project MAGIC**

Since the mid 1990s, national award-winning Project MAGIC has graduated more than 3,000 juvenile offenders who have not reentered the justice system, saving taxpayers an estimated $5.4 million in incarceration costs. Probation staff estimate only 10 percent of graduates are further involved in the juvenile justice system compared to 30 percent for other youth in Nevada.

**Protecting homes**

**Living with Fire**

This is a comprehensive, multi-agency program aimed at teaching homeowners how to live more safely in high wildfire-hazard environments. The program, encompassing research and education, was developed in 1997 as a result of a collaboration between University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE), Nevada’s Agricultural Experiment Station and the Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators, a group of 12 Nevada and California firefighting agencies. Fuels reduction projects in 18 Nevada communities have resulted in 7,962 tons of wildfire fuels being removed and 1,089 acres treated.
Nevada Radon Education Program

This partnership with the Nevada State Health Division educates Nevadans about the possible health risk posed by elevated levels of radon in the home. Cooperative Extension has distributed more than 10,000 kits and has developed a deep database that helps pinpoint where radon levels are highest. For instance, results indicate that nearly 20 percent of the homes in Washoe County have had radon levels above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Action Level. In Douglas County, nearly 1,300 tests have been conducted and more than 40 percent of the homes have elevated radon levels. Extension’s efforts to detect the problem and educate the public on ways to safely eradicate the danger could save lives, as more than 20,000 Americans die of radon-related lung cancer each year.

Protecting Lake Tahoe

Best Management Practices training is helping reduce the fine sediment that is reaching the lake and damaging its legendary clarity. Each year our educators teach contractors in both English and Spanish the best ways to reduce erosion in urban areas, helping them improve the value, strength and versatility of their businesses.

Battling obesity and other health problems

Helping Nevadans eat better

Each year, UNCE brings hundreds of thousands of dollars to Nevada from the federal government for programs aimed at improving Nevadans’ health. We teach nutrition and exercise to school children, gardening to senior citizens and healthier eating habits to targeted audiences at high risk of developing obesity-related illnesses, including heart problems, diabetes and cancer. All of these efforts help improve the quality of life for citizens and the state’s bottom line by keeping people out of hospitals.

Helping seniors stay healthy and independent

Cooperative Extension is saving Nevada money with programs that help Nevada’s seniors live healthier more independent lives, keeping them in the workforce, and off of disability and out of expensive nursing homes.