University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Helping to grow Nevada’s economy

2011 Program Highlights
MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) is proud to share a sampling of our 2011 programs with you. This report highlights how UNCE helps individuals, groups and counties apply research and knowledge to improve financial conditions and help bolster the economy of the state. UNCE has made it a priority to identify local issues and implement programs that address specific needs. As individuals and government grapple with declining resources, UNCE helps provide programs to affect economic conditions. At no time in Nevada’s history has a need for university outreach education been more important.

I invite you to visit your local UNCE office and learn more about the broad range of programs that we’re conducting in your community. Our faculty and staff are eager to share their knowledge and provide educational resources and programs that produce measureable impact and make a difference for Nevadans.

Karen Hinton
Dean and Director
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2010 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Here are just a few examples of how we fulfilled our mission last year:
- Faculty and staff made 814,464 face-to-face contacts with children, youth and adults throughout Nevada;
- Faculty and staff received outside grants totaling $4,900,696;
- Faculty published more than 110 educational fact sheets, curricula and special publications;
- More than 2,100 individuals visited our website each day; and
- Nearly 1,300 volunteers helped faculty and staff deliver educational and research programs.

2011 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

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2010 UNCE FUNDING

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION MISSION

To discover, develop, disseminate, preserve and use knowledge to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of people.

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New Heights

Eagles and Agriculture is just one program Cooperative Extension has helped develop in recent years in an effort to help communities discover new forms of tourism and economic stability.
It’s no surprise that University of Nevada Cooperative Extension works with Nevada’s farmers and ranchers – that’s a hallmark of Extension’s land-grant mission. But many people might be surprised that Cooperative Extension’s role these days goes well beyond identifying weeds or testing soils.

Just as agriculture in Nevada has changed over the years, so have UNCE programs that help agricultural producers. As consumers have grown more interested in produce grown closer to their homes, Cooperative Extension has worked extensively with small Nevada farmers to develop ways to improve their productivity and their selection of vegetables and fruits. It has helped develop farmers markets, taught farmers to build hoop houses and introduced famous chefs to local farmers.

“Farming is changing and we’ve been there with farmers to help them adjust and learn about those changes,” said Loretta Singleary, the area director of the Central/Northeast counties of Nevada.

Promoting agriculture from the ground up

Many UNCE programs help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Nevada agricultural operations. One such project involved introducing hoop houses to Nevada farmers, helping them profit from a longer growing season.

A hoop house is designed to collect the sun’s energy for heat, allowing vegetables to be planted sooner and to endure early- and late-season temperature extremes. Cooperative Extension has helped growers from Lincoln County to various Nevada Indian reservations install hoop houses.

Crops such as carrots or other root vegetables can be grown year round using hoop houses.

In 2007, Nevada had only a handful of hoop houses. But with the help of UNCE, that number has expanded dramatically. With Cooperative Extension’s help, producers have been able to construct hoop houses for roughly $1,200. In Lincoln County alone, 10 producers have built more than 20 hoop houses.
Continued from previous page

“Lincoln County producers can’t afford to grow these types of crops without the hoop houses,” Extension Educator Holly Gatzeke said. “The low-cost design of the hoop house allows producers who would have never considered growing crops to enter the market.”

Other advantages of hoop houses

Hoop houses in Lincoln County are primarily utilized to cultivate specialty crops, but Randy Emm, the coordinator of Indian programs for Cooperative Extension, said hoop houses on Indian reservations in Nevada have the potential to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables available to local communities.

“Traditionally, we are talking about populations that have had limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, which can contribute to health problems,” Emm said. “Hoop houses can provide a constant source of fresh produce and healthy diet options for the community.”

UNCE has helped build hoop houses on four Nevada reservations, including communities in Yerington, Walker River, Duckwater, Ely and Mineral County. Two more houses are going in this year in Duck Valley and Pyramid Lake.

Emm also oversees various UNCE programs helping local producers. In Duck Valley, laser land leveling, pipeline and fencing strategies and practices are introduced to producers with the assistance of USDA cost sharing and loan programs in order to improve efficiencies in production. Weed identification and treatment programs help individuals improve the well-being of the community by eliminating noxious weeds.

From farm to market: nurturing local sustainability

UNCE has also helped the bottom line for Nevada farmers by creating linkages between farmers and commercial buyers for restaurants and other venues.

Large-scale agricultural operations, which can grow and transport produce at less cost, once deterred smaller producers from entering the market. But demand for high-quality produce has increased, and with consumers showing a willingness to pay more for higher-quality products, boutique growers have gained a toehold in the Nevada market.

“Consumers are more willing to buy from a local producer they know and trust with better-tasting produce than they are to buy cheap produce from a grocery chain,” UNCE horticulturist Robert Morris said. “I’ve seen consumers pay nearly two-fold for local, quality produce.”

UNCE also helps educate producers on growing and marketing strategies. In Lincoln County, producers have banded together to form a cooperative to help bring products to Las Vegas markets. Research at the UNCE orchard in Las Vegas has helped farmers increase productivity and optimize planting schedules.

“Ultimately, money spent on Nevada produce goes to benefit Nevadans,” Morris said. “We want to continue to foster the relationship between local growers and consumers, as it helps Nevada business as a whole.”

State and regional oversight

UNCE staff are also involved with the Nevada Small Farm Conference Planning Committee, which serves as an oversight board for issues facing small farmers in Nevada. The committee represents a number of entities such as Western Nevada College, Nevada Grown and UNCE; which all have a vested interest in developing agriculture.

“The goal of the committee is to address the needs of agricultural producers through educational outreach and the dissemination of UNCE research,” said area director Loretta Singletary, who has served on the committee. “In doing so, UNCE hopes to develop local food systems on the community level.”

The committee concentrates on projects that demonstrate the benefits of alternative crops as well as those that promote water conservation. The committee has helped develop marketing options and alternatives for farmers.

UNCE faculty also work to establish institutions that provide technical and analytical services for farmers and producers. One such project in development is the Great Basin Co-op Testing Laboratory in Pershing County. The Co-op will offer nutritional reports for hay, grain silage and other feeds as well as analyses for water and soil samples. Once established, the Co-op will begin to explore other services, such as biofuels research.

Pershing County Extension Educator Steve Foster said an important focus of the Co-op is its management and operation by members of the community. The Co-op will be staffed by student interns, and 50 percent of the revenue generated by the Co-op will go towards student scholarships and internships. The Co-op hopes to promote agricultural development among young adults in the community, Foster said.
University of Nevada Cooperation Extension is strengthening Nevada’s economic backbone by working with Nevada communities to identify problems and develop the leaders capable of solving them.

In White Pine County, that means looking for ways to exploit the area’s rich recreational opportunities.

In Topaz Ranch, it means finding lower-priced propane.

In Laughlin, it might be a solar powered generation project.

From the contributions of economic research projects in rural areas to the expansion of leadership programs statewide, Cooperative Extension is playing an integral role in helping the Silver State recover from the current economic downswing.

Providing community leadership

One stepping stone on the pathway to a healthy community is developing a group of effective community organizers.

“A big part of leadership training is understanding the community in which you live,” said Douglas County Extension Educator Steve Lewis. “This is called community awareness.”

Lewis works in Douglas County to help facilitate such awareness. After identifying some of the region’s specific challenges and goals, Lewis introduces members of his Community Leadership class – comprised of individuals such as members of the Douglas County Chamber of Commerce, local government, the private sector and the retirement community – to more than 100 community leaders in the area.

“We get on a bus and go to different sites, and a presenter will talk to the class,” Lewis said. “We ask presenters to talk about their mission and vision, their organization, their challenges and their leadership approaches to overcoming these challenges.”

Lewis and his class meet one day per month for 11 months. Each month they tackle a different issue, ranging from education, social service, health, public safety, state government and the judiciary.

Lewis said that by building an understanding and connection within the community, his students become better leaders themselves.

“All of a sudden, they become a wealth of knowledge for their
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communities,” Lewis said.

Developing leaders and solutions

For Community Development Specialist Marlene Rebori, building a healthy community starts with developing effective community leaders.

“Sometimes we think leadership is this elusive quality,” Rebori said. “But it’s about engagement — being involved in the community, doing things in the community. It’s all about building positive relationships within these communities. When that happens, the sky’s the limit.”

Rebori’s work with UNCE’s Engaged Leadership program expanded to White Pine County, where she helped facilitate a community visioning process. From there, budding community leaders identified potential projects to tackle within their community.

The Engaged Leadership process allows members of a community to voice concerns, develop programs and boost community involvement. With some guidance from Rebori, White Pine County citizens developed a community forum in order to create more discussion among members of the community. Another leadership group is working to “explode” outdoor recreation opportunities in the region. A third group developed a welcoming committee to boost tourism and show civic pride for the area. All three of these programs kicked off in the summer of 2011.

Community leaders statewide have caught wind of the program’s success in rural White Pine County, and Rebori is set to work with community leaders in Washoe and Mineral counties next.

Rebori said every county’s needs and goals are unique. “Different communities also have different opportunities,” Rebori said. “There’s no one-shot approach to leadership. It’s about identifying the specific needs of each community and building from there.”

Community assessments help communities set goals

Working in conjunction with Nevada Rural Development Council, UNCE Leadership Specialist Carl Dahlen helps community members facilitate conversations and identify their community’s needs and goals.

His first step in developing these community assessments is to attract community members to listening sessions, where attendees can voice their concerns and gain a better understanding of the community climate.

“It’s the beginning of a strategic plan,” Dahlen said. “It’s really designed to bring people together around common goals.”

Dahlen said such assessments tackle not only a community’s economy but also the aspects of a community that might otherwise be overlooked.

“It’s about, what are the priorities in the community? What are the concerns? How do we address these concerns? “Down at Topaz Ranch, they had a problem with the cost of propane,” Dahlen said. “It was very high. There was no kind of competition. One person was able to take that information to competing propane providers and say, ‘Hey, come down and bring a competitive price,’ and because of that, the price of propane went down.”

Research to back it

UNCE Community Development Specialist Tom Harris works on “the economic side of community development.” Harris and the UNCE-supported University Center for Economic Development (UCED) provide economic development research, technical assistance and educational services to members of rural and urban areas interested in community development.

UNCE and the Center also provide state researchers with data for grant-writing projects and state legislative leaders with information about Nevada’s rural areas.
Helping communities by advancing a new brand of tourism

By Robert Mills

Nevada has always relied on tourism, but with the spread of legalized gambling to all corners of the country, the focus of tourism promotion in Nevada has been forced to change.

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is aware of that, and has been working with citizens and local leaders to help Nevada’s communities build a stronger tourism identity.

The examples range from such “agritourism” programs like Eagles and Agriculture, which celebrates Douglas County’s farming and ranching heritage, to farmers markets, such as those Extension helped establish in Tonopah, Virginia City, Caliente, Summerlin, Henderson and Las Vegas.

What’s more, many of UNCE’s leadership training programs help communities focus on their future in tourism. In Douglas County, UNCE’s community assessment process led to working groups for tourism and arts and culture, and one result was the Genoa Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival, which boosted the local economy by $210,000 in 2010.

“These communities have so much to offer, and no one knows that better than Cooperative Extension,” said Dean and Director Karen Hinton. “Our faculty and staff live in these various communities, and that is key in helping get some of these programs off the ground.”

How Eagles and Agriculture took off

The 7-year-old Eagles and Agriculture program celebrates Douglas County’s rural character by luring birdwatchers, photographers and other outdoor enthusiasts to the region for three days to witness the annual visit of dozens of eagles and other raptors who come during the February calving season.

Cooperative Extension teamed up with the Western Nevada Resource Conservation and Development District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Carson Valley Conservation District and local ranchers to launch Eagles and Agriculture in 2003. The program includes bus tours of the Carson Valley, photo workshops, guest speakers and rafting trips on the Carson River. But the center of attention are the golden and bald eagles and the five area ranches that host them each year. In addition to eagles, participants learn about local history, ranching operations and wildlife. Participants gain a better understanding of Carson Valley agriculture and cow-calf production, but also a greater appreciation for the role agriculture plays in providing wildlife habitat.

The event has brought in an estimated $1.4 million in revenue to the local economy over the last seven years.

“Our agricultural and pastoral setting is really what brings people here,” said Steve Lewis, the Extension educator for Douglas County. “They feel like they’re in a rural community.”

The weekend-long agritour plays host to regional falconers as well as photography instructors and UNCE educators who teach weed maintenance and watershed management.

“This is an opportunity for the visitors to meet the ranching community,” Lewis said. “They get to understand...
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their daily lives and the challenges they face.”

**Lincoln County branches out**

Extension Educator Holly Gatzke has been active with the Lincoln Communities Action Team in developing a long-term plan for tourism for the county, focusing on how to create tourist activities, working with tourists and tour operators, and effectively marketing tourism.

“What we’ve done is provided training opportunities for locals to understand more about tourism and customer service,” Gatzke said. “From that, they’ve created some really unique events for the area.”

From country-style hayrides and Christmas caroling in the winter to pub crawls in the warmer months, Lincoln County leaders look to provide something for everyone, while maintaining a classic, rural touch.

One event, Cuisine in the Country, provides locals and out-of-towners with a unique ranching experience coupled with the fine dining of locally grown produce and meats prepared by chefs from Las Vegas restaurants.

Last year’s Cuisine in the Country event sold out.

“People from Vegas came out and were thrilled. They were like, ‘Wow! This is right here in our back yard?’ ” Gatzke said.

Trail Days is another warm-month event starting in June. Visitors can ride horses or take ATV or Jeep tours on some of Lincoln County’s beautiful, scenic trails.

“People come out here, see how beautiful it is and then want to come back,” Gatzke said. “The population is very small, so providing a few extra events has been really positive.”

**The lure of farmers markets**

Lincoln County has also cashed in on farmers market trend, with weekly markets in Caliente and Pioche. Those markets join a growing number statewide, providing locals and tourists alike a chance to sample locally grown produce and products. With markets in Tonopah, Reno, Virginia City and throughout southern Nevada, visitors are now more than ever likely to sink their teeth into fresh Nevada fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products.

Drive-by tourists are no strangers to the Tonopah farmers market, and they’re more than welcome among the local crowd that gathers for good food and fun, said Extension Educator Amy Meier.

“Our market is right on our main street,” Meier said. “Anyone driving through Tonopah will pass by our market. We’ll get people driving through town to stop, but it’s also a huge community event in town.”

**Changing the Las Vegas profile**

Meanwhile in Las Vegas, the popular Molto Vegas farmers market, launched through Extension’s Produce to Chef program, has spawned plans for three other farmers markets in downtown Las Vegas, Summerlin and Henderson,” horticulture specialist Robert Morris said.

“It’s evolving according to demand,” Morris said. “What Cooperative Extension is doing is trying to facilitate and let the market drive it. What we’ve done is formed a bridge so producers can get together to discuss markets, what’s working and what’s not. They can discuss prices – what prices people are getting – all sorts of things they couldn’t do before.”

And these thriving farmers markets are changing the way visitors see the Las Vegas area, Morris said.

“We’re changing the image for tourists,” Morris said “It’s not just a gaming community. It’s not just ‘Sin City.’ The way we’re impacting southern Nevada is by enhancing the view. People go to restaurants and see that food on the menu is produced locally, and restaurateurs are proud to let them know that.”
In tough economic times, Nevadans are looking for ways to save money. Whether you are a homeowner or an industry employee, Cooperative Extension offers several programs to help conserve water, thus saving money.

Homeowners can retrofit their yards to desert landscaping and save water, conserve energy, reduce the time and money needed for maintenance and still look beautiful if it is designed correctly. Cooperative Extension offers a twice-a-week series of classes in Las Vegas called Landscape Design with the Desert in Mind. Since its inception, more than 600 residents have completed the series of eight classes with a finished design ready to be installed.

The series was developed by Robert Morris, horticulture specialist for Cooperative Extension, to transfer landscape water and energy conservation research to the general public in the form of innovative landscape designs.

“Class attendees leave the class with a finished home landscape design that is beautiful, functional and saves water and energy,” Morris said.

In 2010, Morris combined his research with the efforts of two local landscape architects in retooling the class curriculum and offering it in Spanish as well.

Participants in Las Vegas and Pahrump last year were taught how to conserve water and energy through designing residential landscapes. All told the designs will save 1.8 million gallons of water a year, according to a model employed by the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

Industry employees can attend Desert Green, the yearly premier turf and landscape event for professionals in the Southwest. Now in its 15th year, the event covers such topics as landscape architecture, arboriculture, irrigation and water conservation, and golf and sports turf management.

The two-day training includes sessions on pest management, UNCE horticulture specialist M.L. Robinson said. The Nevada Certified Applicators Exam is also held during the event. Over 250 individuals are trained each year in various horticultural disciplines.

Another program, Basic Principles of Landscape Management, is a desert environment program targeted to the Green Industry in southern Nevada. Robinson and other faculty members worked with the City of Las Vegas to develop an ongoing, in-house teaching and training program for city personnel.

“Every parks and recreation employee from the City of Las Vegas—all 140—have been trained,” Robinson said.

This program is now available in Spanish, and 85 Spanish-speaking green industry workers were trained with a grant from the Division of Forestry. Two

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Cooperative Extension publications are being translated into Spanish for future classes.

In addition, 200 students have been trained from the commercial community in Las Vegas at the Lifelong Learning Center. More than 300 students (100 Spanish-speaking) were taught correct pruning and other arboricultural techniques at the annual pruning seminar.

All of this adds up to big savings for Nevada businesses who employ landscape professionals. The training also better prepares workers for additional jobs, improving their professional prospects.

In northern Nevada, Western Area horticulture specialist Heidi Kratsch, along with colleagues in Utah, conducted research on native plants used in home and commercial landscapes to help conserve water and provide habitat for native pollinators such as bees, birds and butterflies.

“The plants studied are native to Nevada and are fully hardy to our high-desert climate,” Kratsch said.

The first objective of the study was to identify, evaluate and select native plant species and varieties that show promise for water and resource conservation in ornamental landscape systems. The second was to collect and disseminate information about heat- and drought-tolerance, ease of production and limits of environmental adaptation of evaluated plants to the scientific community, growers, retailers and the public.

“Plots were irrigated only as often as needed to prevent wilting,” Kratsch said. “Irrigation was by a drip system arranged in a grid,” she added. No irrigation was provided in the second year of the trials. Pre-emergence herbicide was applied early in spring to control weeds.

“In all, 11 species were tested and recommendations for water and resource conservation and heat-and-drought-tolerance were suggested,” explained Kratsch. Some of the species included in the study were Cercocarpus ledifolius (Curlleaf mountain mahogany), Purshia mexicana (Mexican cliffrose), Agastache urticifolia (Nettleleaf giant hyssop), Monardella odoratissima (Mountain beebalm) and Geranium viscosissimum (Sticky geranium).

This study was supported by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service through a sub-award from the Great Basin Native Plant Selection and Increase Project.

Recently, Kratsch worked with a team of researchers from Utah State University in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management and the Central Utah Water Conservancy District to develop a model that identifies the water, fertilizer, pesticide and fuel requirements, the carbon and particulate emissions and the dollar costs of a designed residential or commercial landscape over its economic life. The model was translated into an interactive web format so that property owners can input their own landscape parameters and tweak them to realize the greatest water savings without losing aesthetic value. Model results were published in the Journal of the American Water Resources Association. The free web resource is available at http://vle.cuwcd.com/default.aspx.
Teaching the ‘soft skills’ that prepare youth for workforce

By Jim Sloan

Each year, Cooperative Extension works with thousands of Nevada youth in programs designed to help them succeed in the workforce.

In some cases, such as the Bootstraps program, young adults learn actual job skills that help them land work. But in other programs, participants learn the important “soft skills” that not only help them find work but to succeed in those jobs right from the start.

“Employers are saying that the workers they interview lack the intangibles – things like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking and decision-making,” says Eric Killian, a UNCE youth development specialist in Clark County. “That’s what we try to foster with some of our programs.”

Killian’s Career Edge helps high school students develop effective interview skills and resumes while they gain an understanding of what type of careers best fit their personal interests. Students come away from the program with a better understanding of how their school subjects have a direct effect on their future career choices and success.

Since 2008, more than 2,100 students in five different schools participated in the Career Edge program, Killian says. Their teachers felt the program had a big impact on their students’ attitude toward school as well as their decision-making skills and ability to work in teams.

“All the students were clearly engaged in the learning process, said Robert W. Murphy, a teacher at Spring Valley High School in Las Vegas. “The students gain insight and they come away better prepared to get a job.”

Career Edge is just one of several UNCE programs throughout Nevada that either help Nevada high school students earn their diploma or give them the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. Here is a round-up of some of those programs:

Bootstraps: Hard work, lasting lessons

Bootstraps gives unemployed young adults in rural northern Nevada jobs and job training while they work on vital natural resource projects on public land. The program is located in Battle Mountain, Tonopah and Hawthorne, and teaches lasting life skills to idle youth while protecting Nevada’s rangelands from invasive vegetation.

Rural Nevada counties have some of the highest rates in the nation of young adults from 18 to 25 years old who are not working and not in school. These young people who drop out of school and then find themselves unemployed often wind up in jail or abusing drugs or alcohol, costing the state money, says UNCE youth development specialist Marilyn Smith.

“The economic impacts on the family and community of idle youth not capable of supporting themselves are obvious,” Smith says. “But if you want to reverse the problem and get these young people back in school or in a job, programming has to be intensive and provide long-term support. That’s what Bootstraps does.”

UNCE Lander County Extension Educator Rod Davis and Smith, working with the Bureau of Land Management, were able to launch Bootstraps on a small scale in 2005. A similar program was launched in Tonopah under the direction of Extension Educator Amy Meier, and recently a program was started in Mineral County under the direction of Extension Educator Staci Emm. Each program targets specific needs in
their community. In Lander County, Bootstraps crews work on controlling the damaging spread of pinyon-juniper woodlands. In Tonopah, the issue is weed control on public lands. In Mineral County, the youth work with local agencies to gain job skills and provide additional support for community projects.

Each Bootstraps session lasts three months. The teams start out with a two-week session in the classroom, where they learn about job safety, work on their resumes, meet job recruiters and work on interview skills. They study health, conflict resolution and teamwork. They spend much of the rest of the session in the field working, often camping in remote areas, cooking and cleaning up for themselves and studying during breaks to get a high school GED diploma.

“They find out they can succeed,” says Davis, who often visits the camps and teaches classes. “All of a sudden they are being treated with respect in the world of work.”

Tonopah Bootstraps participants surveyed 545,000 acres for invasive weeds, treated 100 acres with herbicides, and completed post-treatment monitoring of 1,650 acres. The Lander County Bootstraps crews have rehabilitated more than 5,000 acres of sensitive habitat the threatened sage grouse needs for nesting and raising its broods. Follow-up studies show that with few exceptions, program graduates are in school or working.

**Project THUNDER**

This program reaching more than 1,000 middle and high school youth in Clark County provides training in leadership, decision-making, problem-solving, workforce readiness and civic responsibility. Youth attend residential leadership conferences and take part in ongoing seminars, committing to work together on community projects.

Participants come away from their Project THUNDER experience with greater confidence and decision-making skills. They consider a broader array of potential results from their decisions, and they set loftier goals and find they are more likely to reach those goals after completing the program. They are more comfortable talking before groups, and they find people are more likely to seek out their opinions and advice. They also are more likely to volunteer to help others.

**Mini-Society**

This Clark County program takes to heart recent studies showing that an increasing percentage of middle and high school students—nearly three out of four—plan to be self-employed at some point. It also addresses the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation’s findings that students not only need math, science, reading and technology skills but also “creative and entrepreneurial skills.” Research indicates that youth ages 10-12 are at the ideal age for learning to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities, assess the risk involved and bring the goods to market.

Mini-Society uses experiential learning to help youth ages 10 to 12 years old recognize business opportunities and to develop their own entrepreneurial enterprises. More than 4,000 students have completed the program. They design and develop their own society—creating a name, flag and currency—and they establish their own businesses to provide goods and services to their fellow citizens. “Ever since Mini-Society started, I look forward to having a good career,” one participant wrote.

**Together for a Better Education/Junos Para Una Mejor Educacion**

Nevada and Clark County have the lowest graduation rate (45 percent) in the country, with 109 students a day dropping out of school. But studies from the Alliance for Excellent Education show that if Nevada raises the graduation rates of Hispanic, black and Native American students to the same level as whites, the resulting increase in personal income would bring more than $2.2 billion to the state economy. At the same time, decreasing the high school dropout rate would save the state $78.4 million a year in crime-related costs.

Together for a Better Education is a new Cooperative Extension program that provides students and their families the knowledge and resources they need to stay in school and gain access to college. It’s an experiential program that is taught in both English and Spanish, meeting weekly for six weeks. It also enlists success coaches and college-age mentors who continue to help students after the program is over.
Reducing health care costs with senior programs

Mary Wilson discusses nutrition and menu ideas with a group of seniors as part of the Eat Smart Live Strong program.

By Jim Sloan

Mary Wilson, a nutrition specialist in Clark County, got a call one day from the chief of Nevada’s state food distribution program. The state official wanted help providing nutrition information to Nevada’s senior citizens who qualified for commodity foods. Wilson found that a large portion of those who qualified for commodity foods were at risk of malnutrition. The people Wilson talked to didn’t understand how food label expiration dates worked, and many were growing tired of the same flavors night after night. They weren’t eating well. Wilson quickly teamed up with Cooperative Extension horticulture specialist Angela O’Callaghan on a new program that began teaching seniors how to grow herbs and small vegetables in window pots and then how to combine those products with their commodity foods to produce a tasty, healthy new menu. O’Callaghan teaches them how to grow, Wilson teaches them how to cook, and the results include such delights as glazed carrots with fresh mint.

Early evaluations of the program show that the participants of the five-session Eat Smart Live Strong programs are eating more fruits and vegetables and that the potential risk for malnutrition among people who have completed the program declines dramatically.

“Seniors love to come to this class,” Wilson said. “People generally aren’t that receptive to nutrition classes because no one wants to make the kind of changes I’m usually asking them to make. But this class is different. After the first session, they’re hooked.”

Eat Smart Live Strong is just one example of dozens of Cooperative Extension programs aimed at helping all Nevadans, from preschoolers to senior citizens, improve their health by eating better and staying active. These programs include school gardens, nutrition classes, cookbooks and fitness publications. All told Cooperative Extension’s eight health and nutrition faculty conduct more than 20 health and nutrition programs, including educational initiatives that address pregnancy, breastfeeding, childhood obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, senior health and independent living, and food safety and security.

These programs have attracted more than $2.5 million in active grants, and are making a big dent in the economic losses Nevada absorbs as a result of obesity, malnutrition and the chronic diseases that are attributed to those problems.

According to a study by the Milkin Institute, the cost of treating these conditions totaled nearly $1.9 billion in Nevada in 2003. What’s more, these illnesses reduced the productivity of workers, including those who were sick and those who missed work to care for a sick relative, by about $7.5 billion.

And it doesn’t appear that those costs – and the need for programs that help Nevadans change the behaviors that lead to chronic diseases – are abating. A recent study by Cooperative Extension and the Cannon Survey Center at UNLV found that more than half of Nevada’s 50-and-over population has been diagnosed with a chronic disease. Using 2010 projections from the Nevada State Demographer, this represents more than 450,000 Nevadans who need solid, reliable
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information and training that can help them avoid costly hospital visits, reduced income or even more severe losses.

Knowing how to deliver the message

Health experts used to think that people would change a poor diet once they knew the consequences, but Cooperative Extension faculty understand that it takes more than that. “Not only do we design programs to educate people about health and nutrition, but we also determine the best ways to deliver that message,” said Cooperative Extension nutrition specialist Kerry Seymour, who recently wrote and edited a study on Nevadans’ preferred methods for receiving health information.

Here are some ways Cooperative Extension is improving the health and nutrition of Nevadans and some of the economic impacts of those efforts:

- UNCE faculty collaborated with the Washoe County School District to utilize UNCE nutrition programs to meet USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program nutrition education requirements. In 2009, $466,234 in federal funding provided fresh fruits and vegetables to approximately 6,530 students at 14 Washoe County schools (a 270 percent increase in funding and an approximate doubling of students reached over 2008). In 2010, more than $500,000 in funding provided fresh fruits and vegetables to 10,000 Washoe County students. In the three years of the program, more than $1 million in funding has benefited 21 schools and 20,000 students.

- UNCE faculty secured $1,225,000 in USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Education grants to fund 16 nutrition education programs to reach Nevadans who receive SNAP dollars. These programs accomplish a variety of things, including encouraging low-income middle school students to eat low-fat, calcium-rich foods; teaching elementary school students to grow and eat their own food; showing families at risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes how to modify recipes to reduce sugar, fat and salt; and encouraging breastfeeding to hundreds of new, low-income, predominantly minority mothers each year.

Nutrition education programs tackle obesity, senior wellness

By Marilyn Ming

Nevadans of all ages, from pre-school to seniors, benefit from Cooperative Extension’s health and nutrition programs. Keeping citizens healthy, active and contributing members of the community saves Nevada the cost of unemployment, disability and absenteeism.

Several nutrition education programs have the common goal of addressing the public health epidemic of adult and childhood obesity. It’s been scientifically proven that cost of preventing a health problem is a small fraction of treating a problem once it becomes manifest, so Cooperative Extension focuses on heading off obesity-related chronic illnesses – including diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other conditions – before they start. The overweight and obesity rate in Nevada is 38 percent, higher than the national rate of 32 percent – another indicator that health programs that reduce obesity are crucial to Nevada’s overall health and economic well-being.

Here are other examples of Cooperative Extension’s vital health and nutrition programs:

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) assists families with limited financial resources. Through educational support and experiential learning, families acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve their health and nutrition.

EFNEP focuses on three key areas: food resource management practices (planning meals, comparing prices, etc.); nutrition practices (making healthy food choices, reading nutrition labels, etc.); and food safety practices (thawing and storing foods properly).

This year, Cooperative Extension’s seven EFNEP instructors conducted programming with 1,051 participants with 4,584 family members affected indirectly by the programming efforts.

The Grow Yourself Healthy program in northern Nevada and the Food For Thoughts in southern Nevada teach nutrition by creating and using a school garden. Both program foster healthful eating habits and increase

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Nutrition programs reach Nevadans of all ages

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physical activity, instilling lifelong behaviors for obesity and chronic disease prevention. “Individuals learn differently,” Angela O’Callaghan, a Cooperative Extension horticulturist specialist, said. “By bringing students into the garden, they can learn math, science and spelling in a different environment.”

Last year, the Food For Thoughts program was taught to 77 classes at a dozen schools. During the nine years since the program’s inception, 65 of the 80 are still using their school gardens. Grow Yourself Healthy provided a total of 103 nutrition lessons taught to 178 students.

Smart Choices addresses the costly public health issue of childhood obesity by promoting nutritious foods. In its 10th year, Smart Choices increases both teachers’ and students’ awareness of the components of a healthful diet. This program provides an annually updated nutrition curriculum to participating elementary schools, in-service teacher training, in-class nutrition instruction, fruit and vegetable sampling, and newsletters to teachers and parents.

Last year the program at the five participating schools trained 129 teachers and school staff and 1,456 students, Cooperative Extension nutrition specialist Kerry Seymour said.

Veggies for Kids reaches second- and third-grade students at northern Nevada schools having high percentages of American Indian students. It is currently being conducted in Washoe, Elko and Mineral counties. Seymour said that of all ethnic groups, Native American children are at greatest risk for obesity and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, that accompany obesity.

Studies show that Native Americans eat significantly fewer vegetables and fruits than other groups, and variety is limited. The use of traditional foods – derived largely from plant sources, fish and lean wild game – is waning. Veggies for Kids raises awareness of the health benefits of traditional foods and promotes vegetable gardening as a means to promote and increase vegetables and fruits in Native Americans’ diet.

In 2010, the VFK curriculum was taught at the two schools and 68 students attended classes. The VFK schoolwide fruit-tasting event provided additional educational opportunities for the schools’ students and staff.

Seniors CAN promotes successful aging by improving older adults’ quality of life and helping them maintain high-quality independent living. In Clark County alone, more than a quarter of Clark County’s 75,000 new residents each year are seniors. The Seniors CAN program enhances participants’ sense of control over the lives, decreases their loneliness and improves their self-esteem – all of which, studies have shown, can help put off a person’s admission into a hospital or nursing home. A cost-analysis of Seniors CAN showed that it may have saved the state of Nevada up to $137 million in state Medicaid payments over the years by helping hundreds of Nevada seniors remain independent and healthy.

Health Education for Assisted Living (HEAL) provides wellness and quality of life education for residents of assisted-living facilities. Assisted living gives the elderly a way to maintain their independence and functionality. These life-transition facilities require major adjustments for most elders, creating a unique teaching opportunity for health education.

The Senior Healthy Lifestyles is now in its fifth year, bringing healthy lifestyle information to senior citizens in rural Nevada. The course educates rural Nevadans on nutrition, exercise, and such special interest topics as protecting yourself from identity theft and scams and safe driving in the aging process. In-person classes are presented at many of the locations, and those sessions are often delivered to more Cooperative Extension sites in rural counties via interactive video.