

### Extension Coalition Makes Positive Changes to Community Health

The negative health effects of nicotine are well-documented, especially for children and pregnant women. Exposure to nicotine can be toxic to fetal cells, affects lung development and capacity, and is linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Riley County Extension has been working in partnership with the Riley County Health Department to reduce exposure to tobacco or any device that delivers nicotine, such as e-cigarettes or vape pens. In April 2016, a tobacco use resolution amendment was presented and approved by the Riley County Board of Commissioners to prohibit the use of electronic smoking devices in all county buildings and on the property of the Riley County Health Department.



### Extension Programs Aimed at Keeping Farmers on the Farm

A significant drop in agriculture commodity prices over the last two years has dramatically impacted farm profitability. Trying to be proactive, Extension locally and at the state level has focused on farm financial management and has offered programs to prepare producers for challenging economic times. Riley County Extension was host or co-host to events focusing on the use of futures, options, crop insurance, and other risk management tools. Producers have learned about land leasing principles, rental rates, and land values, and have been given a review of historic land prices to help project land values in the near future.



Looking to the future, Extension Agents across Kansas have participated in Finpack training to become familiar with computer software that can assist in analyzing difficult farm financial management choices. We have also focused on promoting the Kansas Agriculture Mediation Service Office and the services they can provide to financially distressed producers. Our goal is to help producers to effectively manage the production, policy, and market risk involved in agriculture, allowing their operations to sustain long-term profitability and to successfully transition to future generations.

### Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program Impacts Community Vitality

Riley County Extension, in cooperation with the IRS and the Manhattan Public Library, coordinates the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Twelve volunteers were recruited and trained to complete basic tax returns. Volunteers logged more than 500 hours of service and prepared 528 federal tax returns and 539 state returns. Volunteers have the opportunity to connect one-on-one with tax payers and help them understand their tax return, and credits such as the Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Credit and Retirement Saver's Credit. What was the impact? During the 2016 tax filing season:



- \$721,970 in tax refunds were returned to the local community. This helps to stimulate the local economy, and reduces the demand for public assistance by assisting taxpayers to first access money they are legally entitled to through a tax refund.
- \$ 58,681 in tax liabilities were paid.
- The IRS sets the value of tax preparation at \$206.50 per return, bringing a total in estimated value of tax fee savings performed by volunteers to be more than \$109,000.

## Extension Master Gardeners Improve Environment with Foster Pollinator Program



An estimated 1,700 visitors learned about the importance of habitat for our pollinators which includes butterflies during the annual Sunset Zoo's Earth Day event. Families were given seeds and plants that are utilized by these insects to improve their habitat. Each of us depends on an abundant number of pollinators for reproduction of 90% of flowering plants and 1/3 of human food crops we eat. Habitat loss, disease, and the inappropriate use of pesticides lead to a decline in pollinators populations.

## Developing Tomorrow's Leaders with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education

The Riley County 4-H STEM Club is a group of young people and adults who gather for monthly meetings to learn more about science, technology, engineering and math. The purpose of all STEM programming is to provide young people with the space and guidance needed to explore engineering, science, and technologies at their own pace. At the foundation of youth engineering is the idea that everyone, regardless of age or previous experience has something valuable to offer in terms of ideas or insight. Before every session youth hear about the importance of listening and incorporating the ideas of others into the creation process. Each STEM session follows the Engineering Design Process. First they discuss as a group what they know about a particular topic and ask questions like; "where have you seen it?", "how did it behave?", "what could you do to better a particular design?". A brief history of the chosen topic—bridges, flight, wind power—is provided. Participants are then given a challenge that will guide their work for the remainder of the session. Groups are given a limited set of supplies they will need to manipulate in order to succeed at the given challenge. Teams have a chance to brainstorm before working together to construct their design. During the building phase, construction is stopped several times to discuss as a group what is working/ not working, allowing groups to share their successes and failure with the audience. This allows other groups to learn from the mistakes of others, saving time and energy. Throughout the entire building phase, groups are testing and retesting their designs, looking for flaws/ weakness in the system. By the end of the process, or "final test", teams have planned, designed, and tested many times over, improving their design each time. Science, Engineering, Technology and Math pervade every aspect of our lives. STEM education provides youth with opportunities to develop critical thinking, decision making and problem solving skills, and prepares them to be contributing members of our future workforce and society.



For more information visit [www.JoinKansas4-H.org](http://www.JoinKansas4-H.org)

## E.A.R.T.H. Provides Environmental Education for Tomorrow's Leaders

The EARTH (Earth Awareness Researchers for Tomorrow's Habitat) program provides environmental educational programming to elementary students in Riley County. Students perform a variety of hands-on experiments related to water, land, air and living resources. In the spring, students and teachers have the opportunity to attend an EARTH educational workshop. Environmental educators from various local organizations give hands-on presentations allowing youth to connect what they learned in the classroom with the real world. Programs like EARTH allow Riley County Extension to integrate hands-on learning into classrooms throughout our communities, and reach more than 2000 youth each year.



Grand Challenges

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