2011 has been an interesting year for our country. Mitchell County has not been spared the economic troubles that have faced other counties in our state and nation. Many county citizens are out of work, lots are looking at ways to save money and much of our agriculture community is looking at ways to remain profitable and sustainable. Mitchell County Cooperative Extension has worked to look at people’s needs and present programs to help meet those needs. We have continued to work from our 2009 needs assessment. This needs assessment was conducted by surveying citizens, gathering input from various focus groups, advisory leadership council input, census information and direct observation. From this needs assessment, key issues were identified that our staff should focus on in 2011. These issues included:

1. North Carolina’s plant, animal and food systems will become more profitable and sustainable.

2. Producers will increase sales of food locally to more agriculturally aware consumers through market development, producer and consumer education, and new farmer and infrastructure support.

3. Parents and caregivers will effectively use recommended parenting, self care practices and community resources.

4. Adults and youth will apply financial management practices to cover basic necessities, increase savings, reduce debt and build long-term assets.

5. Futures that Work: School to Career Pathways

6. Youth and adult program participants will make healthy food choices, achieve the recommended amount of physical activity and reduce risk factors for chronic diseases.

Through these programming efforts Mitchell County Extension staff were able to make 11,031 contacts with county citizens through meetings, on-farm visits, workshops, telephone, email, newsletters and various other outlets. We presented information through 73 meetings, workshops, demonstrations, lectures and conferences. Staff also worked to obtain over $89,140 in funding to present programs such as farmers market marketing, Medicare Part D election, 4-H life skill development, 4-H shooting sports program and agriculture demonstrations and meetings.
Mitchell County Cooperative Extension looks forward to carrying out the mission of the N. C. Cooperative Extension for the citizens of Mitchell County by helping them put research-based knowledge to work for economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and improved quality of life.

Below are some highlights of 2011 programming that addressed the identified needs mentioned earlier.

**Profitable and Sustainable Agriculture Systems:**
- Two hundred program participants increased their knowledge of best management production practices that increase net farm incomes by increasing production in a cost effective manner and/or by reducing cost of production.
- Eighteen program participants aspired to begin a new alternative, bio energy or value-added enterprise.
- One hundred ten program participants increased their skills in farm production and marketing practices, farm business management and human resource management.
- $30,000 in income gains as a result of starting new or alternative crops/enterprises.
- Mitchell County fruit and vegetable producers saw income gains of $10,800 by implementing Extension-recommended production and marketing practices.
- Mitchell County Christmas tree and ornamental growers had income gains of $40,800 due to implementing improved production practices.

**Local Food Systems:**
- Eighty-nine producers gained knowledge needed to increase production for local markets.
- Through media articles and presentations by Extension personnel, over 2,714 consumers increased awareness of the value of local agricultural systems.
- Sixty-eight individuals gained knowledge or acquired skills related to vegetable gardening.
- Thirty-three producers improved their marketing skills.
- Mitchell County farmers increased their income by $67,000, from sales of locally produced agricultural products.
- Farmers, who diversified their marketing strategies (retail, wholesale, institutional), increased their income by $17,000 from sales of locally produced products.
- Over 1,200 county residents buy from local farmers.

**School to Career (Youth and Adults):**
- Five Hundred Sixty-nine youth increased their knowledge in science through activities such as conservation field day, ag awareness field day and 4-H robotics club.
- Fourteen youth have participated in the 4-H Dropout Prevention "ALIVE" Program.
- Nineteen high school age youth are participating as members of Mitchell County 4-H clubs.
- Thirty-three youth are gaining employability skills through activities like 4-H presentations, livestock showing and sewing projects.
- Sixty-seven percent of the participants in our 3rd grade nutrition program showed an increase in their knowledge of overall nutrition, and regular physical activity. Thirty-three percent showed an increase in their knowledge of choosing a healthy breakfast and drinks.

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