2021 Statewide Impact

West Virginia University Extension is committed to improving lives and livelihoods of all West Virginians by improving health outcomes, enhancing prosperity and providing trusted research and education. The pandemic has been challenging, but reaching more of our citizens, through virtual and in-person events, has provided a silver lining for us. In fiscal year 2020-21, we engaged with more than 219,300 adults and 71,070 youths. We also capitalized on opportunities to extend our reach by increasing our efforts on digital platforms, including social media and video. As we move forward, we will continue to let WVU’s pillars – health care, education and prosperity – guide us, while also helping to create purpose for those we serve.

Improving lives and livelihoods for all West Virginians

Education

The “Grow This Challenge” is one way we combat food insecurity for West Virginians. We supply seeds and education so they can grow their own food. Of the 444 individuals who responded to a 2021 post-survey, 46% improved diet quality, 29% were more food secure and 17% reduced their grocery bills.

According to the West Virginia Board of Education, only 28% of West Virginia youths are proficient in science. Unique and creative programming during the pandemic allowed us to offer summer 4-H camps, including camps that were virtual, camps in a box, day camps and 3-day residential camping experiences. As a result, 87% of attendees expanded science knowledge and 69% learned ways to help their communities, while also seeing how science can be used to solve everyday problems.

Studies show that only 44% of West Virginia third graders are proficient in reading, and children from low-income homes often have a lower reading proficiency, particularly during the summer. Our six-week Energy Express reading and nutrition program, in partnership with AmeriCorps, uses hands-on activities to help children improve reading comprehension. Of the total survey respondents, 92% felt the program increased their child’s literacy and developed prosocial skills, such as making new friends, increased confidence, teamwork and a positive relationship with mentors.

“My child doesn’t like to read but has shown interest in the books that were provided by Energy Express...Per the teachers, he has learned valuable social skills which are very difficult for him. Thank you so much.”
Health Care

West Virginia has the highest diabetes and mortality rates in the country. To address COVID concerns, our Dining with Diabetes experts provided virtual classes to 109 people in the state. The courses provided information on how to successfully manage diabetes, eat healthier and engage in physical activity. As a result of the program 76% participants reported feeling confident in keeping their diabetes under control, and 42% said they now eat smaller portions.

The WVU Extension Family Nutrition Program reached more than 1,610 youth participants through online and in-person educational programs. As a result, 87% of participants made healthier food choices, 58% improved physical activity and 48% improved their ability to prepare simple, nutritious and affordable food.

Social isolation is common among aging populations. This isolation, further exacerbated by the pandemic, often leads to additional health issues. Our WVU Extension Calling Community provided meaningful connections for seniors and college students via regular telephone conversations. Sixty-eight senior participants reported increased social connections. Additionally 54 college-aged mentors improved communication skills and 44 noted a change in perceptions of seniors.

Prosperity

The average market value of farm products and overall farm profitability in West Virginia is significantly lower than the national average. When unable to identify pests/diseases and take quick action to address those issues, growers can lose landscape trees, ornamentals and other plant resources worth millions of dollars. Our plant and pest diagnostic clinic is not only able to diagnose these issues, but also provide disease forecasting for fire blight and downy mildew incidences to apple and cucurbit growers.

Last year, the prediction system helped save farmers an estimated $900,000 while reducing surface runoff into the Chesapeake Bay.

Providing a skilled and ready workforce is critical to enhancing prosperity in West Virginia, where the median household income is $16,000 lower than the national average. When James Hartman lost his business during the pandemic, he turned to our West Virginia University Safety & Health Extension experts to learn new skills, which later resulted in two, high-paying jobs. Hartman noted that the courses and knowledge gained helped him stand out from other candidates.

To combat seasonal growing barriers, WVU Extension launched the high tunnel “lunch ‘n’ learn series” to educate farmers on production practices and how to use high tunnels for optimized planting. Farmers who took the class planted cool- and warm-season crops with a value of more than $20,000.

“We have been having issues of there not being much food on the shelves in the store, so we want to grow some vegetables of our own to eat and possibly can for later,” a Grow This program participant noted.