

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

What to do when the doctor is miles and miles away

Land-Grant universities help develop solutions.

Health and safety in rural areas present unique challenges. Many rural occupations are hazardous. Health care professionals may be miles away. Many citizens have low or fixed incomes. The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Land-Grant universities are helping to address these issues. With their intimate knowledge of rural communities and issues, these experts are ideally suited to help rural residents identify challenges to health and safety and formulate solutions.

Payoff

- **The doctor is in.** The Rural Medical Scholars Program, sponsored by the Mississippi Rural Health Corps, will train physicians who come from and choose to remain in rural Mississippi. Each year, up to 30 high school juniors and seniors participate in a rigorous six-week summer academic program offered by **Mississippi** Extension. In 1998—the program’s first year—74 students said they would choose to pursue a pre-med curriculum in the fall of 1999. Of those completing the program in 1999, 89 percent said they are considering going to medical school. In Alabama, a cooperative study by **Auburn University** and the University of Alabama’s School of Medicine will increase the understanding of rural health care needs. The results will help develop educational programs to better prepare medical personnel for work in rural areas, keeping medical practitioners in rural areas and providing more consistent health care for rural residents.
- **Health care fair.** **Arkansas** Extension’s Family Nutrition Education program staged a health fair for low-income senior citizens who couldn’t afford mammogram screenings or other health tests. Blood sugar tests, cholesterol checks, body fat analyses, hearing and eye exams, nutritional counseling and blood pressure checks were provided at no charge. Normally the cost to the 200 participants would have been more than \$8,000. During the fair, more than 30 pints of blood were donated to the Red Cross. One abnormal screening resulted in an early detection of cancer. **Georgia** Extension offered a similar program. One participant jotted a note saying, “Prostate test for my husband sent us to a urologist. Prostate cancer discovered early — treated — doing well. Thank you.”

**RESEARCH,
EXTENSION AND
EDUCATION
AT WORK**

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- **Extension to the rescue.** After a four-year-old Georgia boy consumed berries from a bush in the family's yard, local extension staff used a digital camera and e-mail to send images of the plant to the **University of Georgia** Herbarium. Within 10 minutes, scientists there identified the plant's berries as very toxic. The child was treated locally and was spared further trauma, or possible death, by the quick response from Georgia experts.
- **Safety net.** To promote safety in the home, **Kentucky** Extension worked with a county health department and a local civic group to provide child safety packets to parents of all newborns in the county. More than 400 safety packets with a smoke detector, batteries, cabinet safety latches, poison control information and emergency telephone numbers and electrical outlet covers have been distributed. One free smoke detector saved the lives of a family whose home was destroyed by fire.
- **Have a belt.** And give the kids one, too. Historically, Mississippi has the nation's worst traffic death rate. **Mississippi** Extension's Homemaker Volunteers successfully lobbied for passage of a state law increasing the age of children required to wear seat belts or be buckled in child safety seats from 4 to 8 years. After the law passed, the volunteers launched an education campaign on buckling up. Recent Mississippi public safety data confirmed the success of the law and campaign. In 1998, 9.4 percent more children were in safety restraints, and safety belt use increased 13.8 percent since 1994. **Delaware** and **Georgia** also have programs to boost the use of child safety seats.
- **Increasing visibility.** In the past five years, more than 2,500 accidents in **Ohio** involving farm machinery resulted in more than 800 injuries and 33 deaths. **Ohio State** researchers found materials to make Slow Moving Vehicle signs that are twice as visible and last at least twice as long. The research resulted in new national standards for Slow Moving Vehicle signs that will be put into place this year. The researchers also developed a lighting and marking system that will show drivers exactly how wide farm machinery is. This system has become a national standard.
- **Putting a lid on skin cancer.** Farmers exposed to excessive amounts of sun are at a high risk of developing skin cancer. **South Dakota State** Extension offered free skin cancer screening to farm families and offered to exchange traditional farmers' caps for wide-brimmed hats with better sun protection for the face and neck. After three months, 89 percent of the participants said they were wearing the wide-brimmed hats.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
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Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service in cooperation with the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, the Academic Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, the International Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, and the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

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