

# SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

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## Drive to Thrive

Nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit and economic leadership.

*Sometimes a major manufacturer brings thousands of new jobs to an area. Most of the time, though, it's not that easy. The USDA and land-grant universities use timely information and creative approaches to bring out the inner drive that starts and expands businesses, generates jobs, and builds local economies.*

### Payoff

- **Bigger and better.** It's often easier to create new jobs in an existing company than start a new business. A **West Virginia** program helps companies focus on things that threaten them and hinder their growth. For example, the effort has helped businesses retain or add five jobs and increase local payrolls by \$250,000, secure a \$2.8 million grant, and develop a commercial kitchen to help small food-industry businesses. **Montana State** Extension helped rural areas develop a new industrial park, start a new onion growers group with \$108,000 in annual sales, expand two businesses, and create 40 new jobs. **Michigan State's** New Ventures FastTrac class helped 14 businesses with plans to create 24 new jobs and increase annual sales by \$360,000. A **Purdue** program trained 85 participants to help their businesses secure public and private support, raising more than \$675,000 in grants.
- **Everybody eats.** The market is always open to new food products. Land-grant universities help people turn great ideas into successful new food businesses. **Georgia** food scientists and economists provided four one-day training sessions to help people begin food businesses. Of the 113 people who went through the program in 2002 and 2003, 54 now produce and sell food products. Many others are still in the planning stage. A **Virginia State** fish-processing facility has helped small-scale catfish growers improve their profits by 20 percent. **North Carolina State** food scientists have come up with a marination process that enables a large fish processor to develop a new line of prepackaged marinated fish. **Montana State** Extension trained 815 people on starting a specialty food business — 19 have started new food businesses, and 28 are planning ventures. **Purdue** Extension's New Ventures Team has led to a new six-farm partnership selling produce to a Chicago organic food distributor. Another grower's group formed a produce auction

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with gross sales of \$800,000 in 2003. A **Si Tanka University** Extension program is training potential South Dakota entrepreneurs and has developed local-market food products like Lakota soup packages, fry bread mixes, and buffalo retail cuts.

- **Starting young.** Before you can help people fly with new business ventures, sometimes you have to help them crawl. In Oregon, for instance, only 43 percent of Latino students finish high school. An **Oregon State** Extension program, 4-H Tech Wizards, partners with the Intel Latino Network to teach young Latinos to excel in computer technology. Of the 200 youths enrolled in the program, 90 percent improved their grades. All 200 graduated from high school, and many plan to go on to college. A **Georgia** youth program targeted work-force preparation and led middle-school kids through the steps to start a business. In one county, 14 teens actually started new businesses. After several months, nine businesses were profitable. An **Alabama** Extension urban youth program got students to start businesses in beekeeping, Web page design, lawn care, babysitting, and computer repair. Most have kept their businesses running and earning profits. At the **University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff**, a similar program's percentage of low-income minority students on their schools' honor rolls improved from 20 percent to 85 percent. Their parents' employment improved from 20 percent to 89 percent. Nine parents earned GEDs, and three have enrolled in community college. South Carolina's **Clemson**, Montana's **Chief Dull Knife College**, and Oklahoma's **Langston University** have similar extension programs.
- **Under your nose.** Sometimes a new opportunity is right there in front of you. For instance, when Nebraskans harvest their largest crop, they blow countless tons of corn husks out the back of their harvesters. But a **Nebraska** researcher has found a way to turn those husks into a high-quality textile that's easy to dye and more comfortable than many synthetic fabrics. **Kentucky** foresters helped an eastern red cedar sawmill turn virtually worthless, leftover wood into secondary wood products. The first order for these products was worth more than \$250,000. A **Louisiana State** program trained more than 2,000 homeowners in landscaping principles, and more than 20 of them started lawn care

or landscaping businesses. Two have annual incomes over \$200,000, and most clear \$40,000 to \$50,000.

**Alaska** researchers are studying the gourmet morel mushrooms that naturally spring up after forest wildfires. With wildfires burning thousands of acres of Alaskan forests every year, the potential is great for a new market crop. Researchers are also looking at peonies, which can be grown in Alaska when they aren't thriving elsewhere.

- **From the farm.** In rural America, farms may be the most likely source of economic expansion and needed job growth. **Utah State** Extension, for instance, helped relocate a 1,500- to 3,000-cow dairy to one rural area. The dairy brought the area \$9.4 million in economic activity for first-year construction and operation. It offers new local jobs and markets for hay, silage, and replacement heifers. **Virginia State** Extension helped more than 100 beginning farmers develop business plans and earn \$800,000 in 2003 from sales of vegetables, fresh flowers, pastured poultry, and organic eggs and beef. **Arkansas** Extension helped one of the state's largest rice growers change to a more lucrative wholesale nursery operation with a value of \$2.5 million. In a similar program, **Mississippi State** Extension helped several farmers with traditional crops start new businesses growing sod, greenhouse plants, and ornamental trees.



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