SCIENCE & EDUCATION
Impact
Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Lending a Hand

Volunteers improve our quality of life.

Volunteering is an American tradition that has made a vast contribution to communities, organizations and individuals nationwide. A recent poll found that more than one-third of Americans have been or are now volunteers. Today's adult and youth volunteers are active, dynamic, creative individuals who possess the skills, desire, and patience to accomplish a wide variety of tasks. USDA and the Land-Grant University System create volunteer opportunities nationwide, and provide leadership training, expertise development, and program opportunities for those who train and lead volunteers. The economic value of volunteer service is probably in the millions of dollars. But, the societal value is immeasurable.

Payoff

- **Cleaner communities. Louisiana** Extension collaborated with community agencies, adult volunteers, and 4-H youth to recycle 60 tons of newsprint in the past three years, eliminating the need to expand a local landfill. Extension also organized more than 300 volunteers who joined commercial and recreational fishermen to pick up 7,000 abandoned crab traps that could snag outboard motors and fowl shrimp trawls, as part of the governor's Louisiana Crab Task Force. **Arizona** Extension's Master Naturalist volunteers removed 15 acres of noxious weeds along trails, donating more than 2,019 hours to area agencies and organizations. Their efforts were valued at more than $35,500. **Maryland** Extension volunteers invested 4,000 hours in 13 counties and Baltimore in 2004, educating the public about backyard composting to reduce the amount of fertilizers used on lawns and gardens and keep yard waste out of landfills.

- **Rags to riches.** Volunteers in a **California** 4-H program made new gift items from cast-off thrift-store clothes that would otherwise have gone into a landfill, sold them for $14,000, and donated the money to a local hospice. Participants in **Kentucky's** Master Volunteer in Clothing program devoted nearly 13,000 hours to teaching others sewing techniques so they could start home businesses or sew for themselves.

RESEARCH, EXTENSION AND EDUCATION AT WORK

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- **Helping youth. Oregon State's** 4-H Outreach programs, designed to serve a growing Hispanic population, reached more than 4,000 Latino youth and 650 adults. Approximately 13,900 hours were contributed by Latino adult and youth volunteers, and $2.2 million has been raised through grants and gifts to support outreach efforts. **Mississippi State** Extension volunteers teamed with a local housing authority on a five-week summer reading project for 29 children. This program provided an equivalent of $250 of services per child, compared with summer reading day camps that normally charge each child $50 a week. Volunteers in **Delaware's** Junior Gardener program taught hands-on gardening lessons to 14,590 students in private and public schools, child care centers, and day camps.

- **Cracking the books.** Nearly 500 college students mentored children in a 44-county **West Virginia** Extension summer literacy program that included more than 4,000 volunteers. More than 3,000 children benefited from about 90,000 hours of assistance: 64 percent increased or maintained their reading scores, and 20,000 books were distributed for students to keep. Seventy-five teen volunteers in an **Oklahoma State** Extension literacy program tutored 44 children in reading for a year. These youth have donated about $13,500 worth of in-kind service, based on a $10 hourly tutoring fee. More than 450 high school and college volunteers in the **California** 4-H Animal Ambassador program taught animal science lessons to nearly 8,000 students.

- **Home improvement**. **Colorado State's** 124 Native Plant Masters logged more than 43,400 educational contacts with homeowners. As a result, at least 90 percent intend to include native plants in a sustainable landscape on their own properties. To reduce home electric bills, **Arizona** Master Gardeners taught 200 homeowners the proper planting and placement of shade trees around the home. They distributed 1,493 donated shade trees to 504 electric cooperative customers, with a projected savings of 732,312 kWh or $69,788 for the peak three-month summer period. Similar Extension Master Gardener programs nationwide train volunteers who educate their communities about sound gardening practices. For example, **Kansas State** Master Gardeners volunteered almost 68,000 hours in 2004, valued at $1.1 million, and **Georgia** Master Gardeners provided nearly 150,000 volunteer hours annually, worth more than $2.5 million.

- **Community cornucopia.** Volunteers and inmates at a **Colorado State** Master Gardener program for a jail garden harvested 19,136 pounds of produce, saving taxpayers more than $22,700 in food costs. Inmates reduced their sentences and gave back to their community by providing fresh produce to the jail kitchen. **Maine Extension** gardening volunteers in the Plant A Row for the Hungry program, created by the Garden Writers of America, coordinated the donation of nearly 300,000 pounds of fresh produce, valued at $500,000 since 2000. **Georgia** Master Gardeners also provided 3,000 volunteer hours to operate a Plant A Row Garden for the needy, distributing more than 10,000 pounds of fresh vegetables worth about $15,000 to community organizations. Similar programs are under way in **Kentucky State**, **Missouri,** and **North Carolina State**.

- **Charity begins at home.** As part of **Iowa State's** Life in Iowa program, designed to encourage Iowa students to live and work in the state after graduation, 44 undergraduates spread out across the state for paid summer internships. Each student volunteered 100 hours to a local community project in 2004. The Life in Iowa project gives university students experience economically, politically, spiritually, and personally while they volunteer and gain real-world experience. And that's the true spirit of volunteerism.

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
United States Department of Agriculture

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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