

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

TARRANT COUNTY



Volunteer Awards

Each year the Tarrant County AgriLife Extension team hosts an interpretation luncheon and volunteer awards reception to close out the year and celebrate AgriLife's big wins. The 2024 event was held on Thursday, December 12, 2024, at the Tarrant County Plaza Building.

The following awards recipients were recognized by the Tarrant County team.

The Friend of Extension Award recognizes an individual or organization for outstanding service to the people of Tarrant County by their exceptional support and personal involvement in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.



FWISD After-School Program

From left: Carlos Walker, Telecia Toston, Courtney Davis, County Extension Director, Maru Castaneda, Fredrick White, Felecia Myers, Tamara Gulley, Nakia Cole, and Jordan Peldyak, CEP-4-H & YD Extension Agent



Craig Holland

From left: Courtney Davis, County Extension Director, Craig Holland, award recipient, and Jacklyn Jones-Doyle, ANR County Extension Agent

The John South Spirit of Extension Award recognizes a program area committee member for exemplary service in the design and delivery of educational programs which enhance the quality of life for the people of Tarrant County.



We would also like to congratulate two additional John South Spirit of Extension Award recipients not pictured:

Theresa Posani and Karen Scott



Pierre Gant

From left: Courtney Davis, County Extension Director, Pierre Gant, award recipient, and Sanci Hall, Better Living for Texans (BLT) Extension Agent



The Darlene Myatt Friend of Children Award recognizes an individual or organization for dedicating time, talents and treasure to teaching children with dynamic enthusiasm and loving leadership.

Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD

From left: Courtney Davis, County Extension Director, Monica Padilla, with Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD, award recipient, and Kate Marshall, 4-H & YD County Extension Agent

The Director's Award recognizes an individual or organization for providing exemplary support for Extension educational programs and volunteers.



Tarrant County Support Services

From left: Courtney Davis, County Extension Director, Robert Carter, Assistant Director, Support Services, accepting award on behalf of Eric Raven and County Support Services, Ruth Zavala, Receptionist, and Mary Oviedo, Office Manager



Casey Oliver

From left: Casey Oliver, Texas A&M University, award recipient, and Courtney Davis, County Extension Director



Volunteer Awards

Congratulations to all of our Recipients!

EXPLORE ROBOTICS TRAINING EMPOWERS TARRANT COUNTY EDUCATORS



Kate Marshall, County Extension Agent, 4-H & Youth Development



On November 14, 2024, nine dedicated educators from across Tarrant County gathered to participate in an engaging hands-on training session focused on utilizing LEGO® Spike Prime robotics kits. This innovative training aimed to equip teachers with the skills needed to integrate robotics and STEM learning into their classrooms effectively.

The session provided participants with a comprehensive introduction to the LEGO® Spike Prime robotics kits, which are specifically designed to captivate and educate students in grades 5 through 8. Throughout the training, teachers explored practical applications, coding techniques, and collaborative learning strategies that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

Upon completing the training, the educators became eligible to check out the robotics kits for use in their classrooms at no cost. This initiative not only enhances accessibility to cutting-edge educational tools but also underscores a commitment to advancing STEM education within the county.

The Explore Robotics Training serves as a vital step in empowering teachers to inspire the next generation of innovators and engineers. By integrating robotics into the curriculum, educators can spark curiosity, creativity, and a passion for learning in their students, preparing them for a technology-driven future.



2024 FLASH BACK

Jacklyn Jones-Doyle, County Extension Agent,
Agriculture and Natural Resources

In Tarrant County, there is a noticeable lack of consumer knowledge and appreciation for the vital role agriculture plays in everyday life. Many residents do not fully grasp the importance of agriculture or the fundamental processes behind agricultural production. The timeless saying, "If you eat, you're involved in agriculture," remains as relevant today as ever. While it's evident that the food we consume comes directly from agricultural production, many people overlook the value of agricultural by-products, the processing industry, and the significant economic impact of every aspect of the food chain.

Small-acreage producers (farming operations under 100 acres) often face challenges achieving positive net cash farm income. Currently, educational programs addressing small-scale farming and ranching in Texas are fragmented, focusing on isolated aspects such as labor limitations, quality of life, environmental objectives, wildlife management, and community development. To enhance economic sustainability and mitigate risks, rural and suburban small-acreage operators and commercial producers need comprehensive knowledge and tools to effectively evaluate diversification strategies. This approach will help align total management goals with optimal resource utilization and long-term sustainability.

The Agriculture and Natural Resources department remains committed to providing programs that support small-acreage producers and new landowners. These programs can range from agricultural valuation to beef cattle production, with a particular focus on individuals new to the industry or those managing limited acreage.

Information for the Agricultural and Natural Resources programs can be found on the Tarrant Co – Ag & Natural Resources Facebook page as well as at [Urban Programs Tarrant County | Teaching, Research, Extension and Service.](#)

Be on the lookout for more information on the following "Agricultural Management" program series in March 2025 – Flock Talk – Backyard Chickens

1. Intro to backyard chickens – Partnership with Russell Feed and Supply
2. Breed & Nutrition – virtual program
3. Selling eggs, poultry and food safety – virtual program
4. Health and disease – virtual program
5. Composting and the environment – virtual program

In 2024, we were thrilled to host the 2nd Annual Women in Agriculture Conference, a dynamic day-and-a-half event inspired by Annie's Project. This conference brought together women from across Texas, offering them valuable opportunities to connect, learn, and share experiences within the agriculture industry. The program featured a range of topics tailored to empower women in agriculture, fostering their growth and success.

The response from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees expressing appreciation for the knowledge gained and the supportive community created during the event. Due to its resounding success, we are excited to continue this initiative as part of our 2025 programming.

Plans for the 2025 Women in Agriculture Conference are already underway, and we are committed to building on the success of this year's event. Stay tuned for more details as we finalize the agenda's shaping up to be an inspiring and enriching event you won't want to miss.



CHEF TIM LOVE HOLIDAY BOOT DRIVE BENEFITS TARRANT COUNTY 4-H

Jordan Peldyak, Extension Agent,
Cooperative Extension Program, 4-H & Youth Development



4-H Club Members



Jordan Peldyak,
Extension Agent,
Cooperative
Extension
Program,
4-H & Youth
Development

The Tim Love Holiday Boot Drive began last year with a partnership with Chef Tim Love, Ariat boots and Tarrant County CEP – 4-H & YD Extension Agent, Jordan Peldyak. Chef Love is a well-known chef in the Fort Worth area and proud supporter of local initiatives. Chef Love participated in 4-H as a child and loves the mission of the 4-H program and wanted to give back to the organization.

The youth in the 4-H program support many community service efforts throughout the year, but this project is about giving back to those students that have worked so hard in the program. Chef Love was gracious to start a boot donation partnership that would benefit Tarrant County 4-H members in need, with a new pair of boots during the holidays. During a recent interview with the Fort Worth Magazine, Chef Love stated, "I believe in the power of community and the joy of giving, especially during the holiday season."

The community came together to make 2024's Cowboy Christmas like no other, supporting these young people and celebrating the giving spirit that defines our North Texas community. The "ALL IN" Holiday

Boot Drive was a community-wide effort where local organizations and individuals can donate a pair of boots or monetary donation to Tannahill's Tavern and Music Hall in the Fort Worth Stock Yards. In 2023, we had 40 pairs of boots donated and in 2024 we had 78 donated.

Tarrant County 4-H members participate in many livestock, environmental, community service and camp programs throughout the year that require good safe footwear. Having a good pair of boots will not only help students that are already participating in 4-H programs but to grow the program as well. This really is a community-wide effort that will benefit the youth of Tarrant County. Please see the article below from the Fort Worth Magazine and NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth news story below.

Fort Worth Magazine: [Chef Tim Love Brings Back 'ALL IN' Holiday Boot Drive for Second Year - Fort Worth Magazine](#)

NBC 5 News Texas Today: [Donate boots to deserving kids – NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth](#)

GROWTH RINGS: EXPANDING INTO 2025

Laura Miller, County Extension Agent, Commercial Horticulture

Water Efficient Recognized Green Professionals

We welcomed a new cohort of **25** pros who joined the 149 landscape service providers that have completed the five-week course since its inception in 2016. Designing and maintaining multiple commercial and residential landscapes, they have a big impact on the adoption of water conserving practices.

2025 classes start January 15th in four counties.

Pros in Parks

Providing ongoing continuing education to employees who care for our public park spaces has been a priority for this program area since 2008. In 2023, we were happy to complete four in person classes in Fort Worth and three in Arlington. In 2024, **172** participants came from Fort Worth, Arlington, Mansfield, and Burleson to attend one or more of the eight sessions with topics that ranged from working safely to integrated pest management. This partnership with the cities of Fort Worth and Arlington benefits the entire area by ensuring continued access to nature, opportunities for exercise and better health for the environment and all citizens.

2025 classes begin January 7th in Fort Worth & 9th in Arlington.



Arborist Short Course

Our Certified Arborist Short Course has helped arborists prepare for the challenging International Society for Arboriculture examination since 2018. **19** aspiring credential holders completed the three-day course last year, and two of them have already earned their certifications.

The 2025 Short Course will be November 11th - 13th in Fort Worth



Result Demonstrations

The search for resistance to Rose Rosette Disease was joined by the quest for drought tolerant turfgrass species. Many thanks to the City of Grapevine and Tarrant Regional Water District for hosting these demonstration plots.

North Texas Urban Forestry Conference



175 arborists attended the 2024 conference to learn about new technologies for managing trees in urban areas.

2025 Conference: February 27th in Hurst

Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council invites you to the Hurst Convention Center February 27th.

Listen to Dr. Stephanie Adams, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Dr. Andrew Loyd, Barlett Tree Experts, Demian Gomez, Texas A&M Forest Service, and others for a conference all about how to manage the stressors effecting our tree canopy.

TARRANT COUNTY EFNEP CELEBRATING GROWTH AND LOOKING AHEAD



Robin Hall, Extension Agent, Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program

As we step into the new year, we are filled with gratitude for the continued support of our community. This past year has been one of growth, learning, and meaningful impact.

We were thrilled to welcome two new staff members to our team who have already made remarkable contributions to our program. Their energy and enthusiasm have been invaluable as we expanded our reach. At the same time, we said goodbye to two educators whose contributions have left a lasting impact. Additionally, we hosted three outstanding student interns, two from TCC's Nutrition and Dietetic Program, and one from TCU's Dietetic Program. Their fresh perspectives and hard work helped us both initiate and complete some projects that were merely thoughts and ideas before they came. Their dedication was inspiring, and we are excited to see their bright futures unfold.

One of the highlights of the year was the expansion of our program through partnerships with new campuses, including those participating in the Eat Well, Feel Well Grant Program. Thanks to these new partnerships, we were able to reach both adults and youth in Arlington, Crowley, Everman, Fort Worth, and Keller Independent School Districts. We also returned to facilitate classes at three local homeless shelters, two community centers, REACH Fort Worth, and ACH Child and Family Services. These partnerships have been instrumental in delivering impactful education and resources to promote healthier lifestyles.

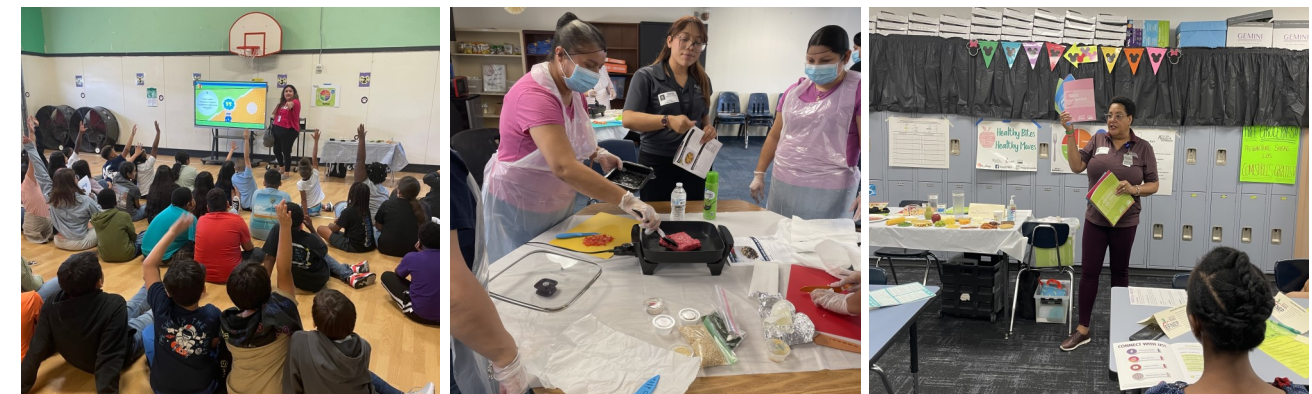
While we celebrate these successes, 2024 highlighted the significant impacts we have made in the community.

From increasing our total adult and youth participant outreach to helping participants lower their consumption of solid fats, added sugars, and sodium, we achieved many great outcomes. Along the way, we also identified opportunities for growth, which we are eager to address with refined strategies and innovative approaches. With continued collaboration amongst our team and with program partners, we look forward to building on this foundation and creating an even greater impact in the coming year.

Below are some of the specific outcomes we are proud to share:

- 100%** of our adult participants showed improvement in one or more diet quality practices, such as eating more fruits and vegetables and drinking soda and sweetened beverages less often.
- 100%** of our adult participants showed improvement in one or more food resource management practices, such as comparing prices and using grocery lists.
- 90%** of our youth participants gained nutrition knowledge to choose foods wisely.
- 60%** of our youth participants improved in their physical activity practices.

As we look to the year ahead, we remain committed to fostering strong partnerships, improving program delivery, and amplifying our collective impact. Together, let us continue building healthier, more vibrant communities and creating meaningful change.



Wishing you all a joyful and prosperous new year!

COOKING WELL WITH DIABETES

A recipe for success!

Alaina Woolsey, County Extension Agent, Family & Community Health



Imagine a kitchen filled with laughter, the aroma of fresh herbs, and the excitement of discovering new culinary adventures. That's the spirit of our "Cooking Well with Diabetes" program!

This 4-week program, led by our talented AgriLife Extension team, offers a unique approach to diabetes management. Unlike generic cooking classes, "Cooking Well with Diabetes" specifically focuses on:

Practical, Real-World Solutions:

Learn to navigate grocery stores, decipher food labels, and create delicious meals that fit seamlessly into your daily life.

Building Confidence:

Gain the knowledge and skills to make informed food choices and enjoy cooking without fear or frustration.

This program is ideal for anyone living with diabetes, as well as caregivers, family members, and friends who prepare meals for them. Each week participants will:

Connect With Their Inner Chef:

Learn valuable cooking techniques and uncover delicious and healthier alternatives to sugary ingredients.

Taste the Difference:

Enjoy hands-on demonstrations of diabetes-friendly recipes.

Engage With Their Community:

Share tips, recipes, and encouragement with fellow participants.

Get ready to explore exciting class titles like "Celebrating Sensibly," "Carbohydrate Foods," "Making Recipes with Fat Better for You," and "Double Pleasure Side Dishes."

"Cooking Well with Diabetes" isn't just about restrictions; it's about embracing a healthier lifestyle filled with flavorful meals and newfound confidence in the kitchen.

BISHOP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Christa DeStefano, County Extension Agent, Family & Community Health



Bishop Elementary School in Everman ISD Named the First "Healthy School Recognized Campus" in Tarrant County

We are proud to announce that Bishop Elementary School in Everman ISD is the first campus in Tarrant County to achieve the highest honor awarded to a program partner school by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. On November 21, 2024, I hosted the "1st Annual Bishop Elementary School Turkey Trot," celebrating the culmination of a campus-wide "Walk Across Texas" challenge as well as three youth health programs and one adult nutrition education series. Bishop Elementary satisfied all of the criteria (and then some!) to be named the first ever "Healthy School Recognized Campus" in Tarrant County!

Congratulations, Bishop Bulldogs! Whoop!

It seems like not that long ago I was writing my New Year's article for 2024, and here we are ushering in 2025! If you have been around for a bit, you know that this newsletter is one of my favorites. It is that time when we pause for a moment and reflect on what was, is now and what lies ahead in the coming year.

Each January, I purposefully choose a word that defines my outlook for the upcoming twelve months, and this year is no different. In 2024, I focused on new ways to FIT health into my life. As I stand (well...stand and move on my walking pad!) at my desk drafting this article, I am proud of the ways I explored to FIT health into my day. Transitioning to a standing desk then adding a walking pad did not take long, and my fitness tracker kept me in check daily!

Did you find any creative ways to FIT health into your schedule this past year? As I proudly close 2024's chapter, my goals for this year are to STRIVE and THRIVE in 2025. Yes! You can have more than one "Word of the Year!" With a multitude of endeavors and projects already penned on 2025's calendar, I will STRIVE daily to give my best so that I may THRIVE as will others whom I am serving as their County Extension Agent for Family & Community Health. If you are ready to STRIVE for your health to THRIVE in 2025, reach out and let's chat...it's going to be an amazing year!

" in 2025!



CLEAN, SEPARATE, COOK, CHILL: A RECIPE FOR FOOD SAFETY

Sanci Hall, Extension Agent, Better Living for Texans



Food safety is one of the most important aspects of healthy living, and it starts right in our very own kitchen. Understanding how to properly store, prepare, and cook food can prevent foodborne illnesses and protect your family's health. By following some essential guidelines, you can ensure that the meals you serve are both delicious and safe to eat.

Clean: The First Step in Food Safety

Keeping everything clean is the foundation of food safety. This includes your hands, utensils, cutting boards, sinks, and countertops. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), you should always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, especially raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Also, sanitize kitchen surfaces regularly to eliminate harmful bacteria.

Separate: Prevent Cross-Contamination

Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria from raw foods spread to ready-to-eat foods. To avoid this, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends using separate cutting boards for raw meats and other foods like vegetables and fruits. Also, store raw meat in sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to prevent juices from dripping onto other items.

Cook: Proper Temperatures Are Key

Cooking food to the correct internal temperature is crucial for killing harmful bacteria. For example, poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F, while ground meats like beef and pork should reach 160°F. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) emphasizes the importance of using a food thermometer to ensure accuracy.

Chill: Keep Cold Foods Cold

Proper refrigeration slows the growth of harmful bacteria. The FDA recommends setting your refrigerator temperature at or below 40°F and your freezer at 0°F. Perishable foods should be refrigerated within two hours (or one hour if the temperature is above 90°F). Leftovers should be stored in shallow containers to cool quickly and eaten within 3-4 days.

Know the Danger Zone

The "danger zone" for food is between 40°F and 140°F, where bacteria can grow rapidly. Foods left in this range for more than two hours should be discarded. According to the Partnership for Food Safety Education, understanding and avoiding the danger zone is essential for food safety.

Food safety is an everyday practice that protects you and your loved ones from foodborne illnesses. By adopting habits like cleaning, separating, cooking, and chilling, you can reduce risks and enjoy your meals with peace of mind. Want to dive deeper? Visit the links in the resources below for expert tips and more comprehensive guidelines.

Resources:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/keep-food-safe.html>
- USDA: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education>
- FDA: <https://www.fda.gov/food/people-risk-foodborne-illness/safe-food-handling>
- FoodSafety.gov: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety>
- Fight BAC: <https://www.fightbac.org/>

GREAT THINGS ARE GROWING HERE - WINTER UPDATE

Melanie Earley, Eat Well Feel Well Program Assistant

This Fall our campuses finished up their 10-week course of Learn, Grow, Eat & GO. Students learned about what plants need to grow, they used multiplication and division to appropriately space their seeds with paper towel gardening, they set rules for garden maintenance, and they sampled nutrient dense veggies such as Swiss Chard and Bok Choy.

Everyone earned their Junior Master Gardener certification. In addition to Learn, Grow, Eat & GO, the parents at these campuses also learned about:

- Cooking more meals at home
- Ways to be more active with their family
- Weight management
- Saving money on groceries
- Controlling portion size, and
- How to keep food safe

Through our Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Programs, Healthy Bites Healthy Moves or Cooking with EFNEP.

Our fall gardens are beginning to produce food, and we will be back in the garden again in the Spring. We also had one campus participate in Walk Across Texas (8 week walking program) which landed them the distinction of the very first Texas A&M AgriLife Extension "Healthy School Recognized Campus" of Tarrant County.



Top Left: J.W. Bishop Elementary is designated as "Healthy School Recognized Campus."

Top Right: Heritage Elementary harvest

Bottom Left: Parents at Goodman Elementary prepare a dish.

Bottom Right: Students at Heritage Elementary harvesting some vegetables.

Great things are growing here!