

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

TARRANT COUNTY

SPRING 2025

Meet OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBERS!



Horticulture
Dept.

JAY CADDEL

Howdy! My name is Jay Caddel. I am thrilled to join the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of Tarrant County as the Home Horticulture Agent. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture from Texas A&M University, and I most recently served as the Nursery Manager at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. It is there I maintained the greenhouses and nursery; propagated native plants; and supported events in the garden.

I am delighted to share my knowledge in horticulture with the vast community, specifically my love for native Texas plants. I am also delighted to be working with our committed and knowledgeable Master Gardeners, whose work extends the reach of our office. In my leisure time, I enjoy gardening, traveling, and spending time with my family. I value family in the highest regard, and I am proud to call AgriLife Extension Service my new home.

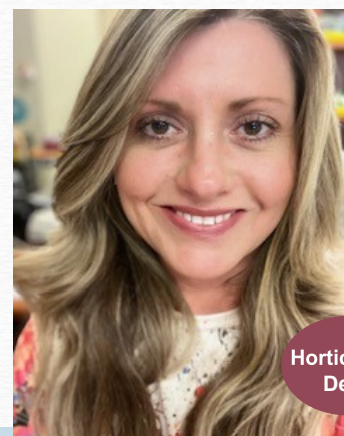


EFNEP

JORDAN CALLAHAN

As a Credentialed Dietetic Technician, AAS NDTR from Tarrant County College, and Nutrition Science student at Tarleton State University pursuing a career in dietetics, I have a passion for nutrition education, cooking, and physical activity. I previously worked as a restaurant manager and in acute care nutrition services. Helping the community learn about the power of preventative healthcare is my overarching professional goal, and I am so proud to be a part of AgriLife Extension serving Tarrant County.

Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, I am a married mother of school-age children, and moved to Texas nearly 10 years ago. My family enjoys hiking all over this beautiful state, as well as in Oklahoma. My husband and I made Tarrant County our home and are so thankful for all of the wonderful people we have met. There is a reason the state motto of Texas is "Friendship!"



Horticulture
Dept.

KAYLEA PONTIER

Greetings and Happy Spring to everyone. My name is Kaylea Ponthier, and I am honored to be your new Administrative Assistant for the Horticulture Department of the Texas A&M AgriLife Service in Tarrant County. I assist department agents, Laura Miller and Jay Caddel, with their jobs and work closely with our team of great Master Gardener volunteers.

My background is in health, nutrition, and healing with natural alternatives, which ultimately starts in the garden. I look forward to coming to work every day and being at the forefront of keeping Tarrant County beautiful and healthier. In my free time I enjoy spending time with my son and doing DIY projects around the house.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve and allowing me to be a part of this wonderful and diverse team.

Texas 4-H Day at the State Capitol Brings Youth Leaders to Austin

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



AUSTIN, TX – Hundreds of Texas 4-H members, volunteers, and supporters gathered in Austin for Texas 4-H Day at the State Capitol on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. It's an annual event that provides youth leaders the opportunity to engage with state legislators, learn about the legislative process, and advocate for the impact of 4-H programs across Texas.

The event, held at the Texas State Capitol, featured a full schedule of activities, including meetings with state representatives and senators, a guided tour of the Capitol, and a recognition ceremony in both the House and Senate chambers. 4-H members from across the state had the chance to witness government in action, gaining insight into the roles and responsibilities of elected officials.

Texas 4-H members proudly wore special event shirts as they met with lawmakers to discuss how 4-H programs have shaped their lives and communities. Many shared personal experiences about leadership development, STEM education, agriculture, and civic engagement through 4-H, emphasizing the program's role in preparing the next generation of leaders.

Texas 4-H Day at the Capitol allows our members to see firsthand how decisions are made at the state level and how they can be active participants in shaping the future. The event underscored the strong partnership between Texas 4-H and state government, reinforcing the importance of youth

involvement in public service. As the day concluded, 4-H members left inspired and motivated, ready to apply their newfound knowledge and experiences in their local communities.



Pictured above are Tarrant County 4-H member, Kaden Gordillo, and Senator Kelly Hancock.

For more information about Texas 4-H and its leadership programs, visit <https://agrilife.org/urbantarrant4h/>.

6TH ANNUAL STEER ULTRASOUND CARCASS CONTEST

Jacklyn Jones-Doyle
County Extension Agent
Agriculture and Natural Resources



Donnie Robertson, Ultrasound Technician

A total of 40 out of 42 market show steers participated in the jackpot class at the Tarrant County Junior Livestock Show on February 25, 2025. The participating steers represented various breeds, including but not limited to American Crosses, British Crosses, and European Crosses, though breed was not considered a factor in the evaluation.

Two images were used for the contest. The first image, taken over the 9th, 10th, and 11th ribs, was used to measure the percentage of intramuscular fat, which in turn determined the Quality Grade. The second image, captured between the 12th and 13th ribs, provided a view of the ribeye, allowing for measurements of rib fat thickness and ribeye size in square inches.

The primary objective of this contest is to expand participants' understanding of cattle feeding. The program provided exhibitors with valuable insights into how their steers would be evaluated on the carcass rail, focusing on key factors such as back fat, intramuscular fat, ribeye area, carcass grade, and yield grade.

Additionally, the contest aims to highlight the differences in grading and feeding performance among various cattle breeds. These variations are influenced by both individual traits and genetics, both of which play a crucial role in determining overall animal quality. By gaining this knowledge, exhibitors can accurately assess and understand the true market value of the calves they are raising.

Of the 40 steers that participated in the contest, 1 graded Choice, 24 graded Low Choice, 13 graded High Select, and 2 graded Low Select. Over

the past six years, interest in this program has surged. Participants, along with their parents and advisors, are increasingly recognizing the value of this information and its impact on their understanding of cattle grading and market value.

The floor price for the show was set at \$1.50 per pound. However, after reviewing the previous week's fat markets, it became clear that this rate was well below the market average of \$2.15 per pound. When presenting the contest results, I encouraged all participants to use their data to sell their steers as freezer meat, targeting a minimum price of \$2.20 per pound based on live weight.

Out of the 40 steers in the contest, 19 exhibitors followed this advice and successfully sold their steers at an average rate of \$2.24 per pound live weight. Financially, these exhibitors earned an average of approximately \$2,526.36 per head (calculated using the average weight of 1,218 pounds per steer at \$2.24 per pound), **securing a premium of almost \$871.86 per head above the show's initial floor price.**



Image of Ribeye during contest

CONGRATULATIONS and MANY THANKS!

Congratulations to all the participants in this unique contest! Shout out to our program sponsors:

The Meat Board, Rendon Meats, and Hillwood Land and Cattle.

Your support is invaluable in making this event possible and we extend our deepest gratitude!

A special THANK YOU to the

Tarrant County Junior Livestock Association

for its continued dedication and support of this contest. Your efforts help provide valuable learning opportunities for exhibitors and contribute to the success of the program.



Tarrant County 4-H: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE

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

The National Geographic Slingshot Challenge is a worldwide environmental competition for high school age youth to help solve environmental issues in their communities. Teams of students are tasked with identifying a large environmental issue and create a sustainable solution through action. Once students identify their issue, they record a one-minute video about the plan to address this issue and a plan to solve it. The contest is judged at the national level and the top team wins \$10,000 to help fund their project.



Last year the I.M. Terrell 4-H Club in Tarrant County submitted a video about planting more native plants around neighborhoods and school campuses to reduce the amount of water needed to grow landscapes. Water usage and the growing population of the county has caused large concerns about the future of our water supply statewide. The I.M. Terrell 4-H Club received \$2000 in funding for the project this year allowing us to build a greenhouse and start potting native plants year-round.

The contest video for this year was submitted February 8th showing the progress we have made throughout this past year. We will soon see if we are awarded additional funding and look forward to the feedback we receive from the video we submitted.

RIPARIAN ZONES

Jay Caddel, County Extension Agent, Home Horticulture



Riparian zones are ecosystems that occur along streams, rivers, and lakeshores and are essential in storing moisture and protecting water quality, as well as providing nutrients and habitats for fish and wildlife. Texas is home to 15 major rivers and several thousands of streams, totaling 191,000 miles. Riparian zones are vital in providing flood and erosion control, and filtering stormwater runoff of pollutants. These green spaces preserve wildlife habitats and protect tree canopies and help to reduce urban heat islands.

The fastest-growing large city in the United States is Fort Worth. The city is bisected by the Trinity River and encompasses 348 square miles, including over 60,000 acres of undeveloped land and averages 59 new residents a day. Tarrant County's estimated 2025 population is 2.2 million people, making it the third largest county in Texas. With this growth comes the need for more housing, leading to the loss of green space and the increase in water usage.

At this point all of Tarrant County should be aware of their water usage and how that affects the environment, which leads to the question of how do we protect these areas? Generally, the best solution is to leave them alone. Development can compact the soils along these waterways, and recovery can be difficult. The City of Fort Worth has an initiative to update the City's Subdivision Ordinance to include riparian buffers, development incentives, and help developers realize the monetary value associated with riparian areas - homeowners will pay more to live next to a preserved green space. Not everyone lives next to a riparian zone, but the native plants that inhabit these areas can be beneficial to the landscape. If you have a low-lying area in your landscape where water collects, an area where runoff occurs, or a rain garden, planting native plants which can handle the moisture is a good option for you. These plants stop the water from running off and allow the water to percolate through the soil removing contamination. There are several grasses that fit this criterion, such as Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and Eastern Gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*). For the

pollinators, some varieties to plant are Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Plains Coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), Pink Evening Primrose (*Oenothera speciosa*), Lemon Mint (*Monarda citriodora*), Maximilian Sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*), Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and Halberdleaf Rosemallow (*Hibiscus laevis*). These are just a few of the native varieties that can handle the moisture but can also take the North Texas heat.



To learn more about Riparian zones visit:

- [Texas Riparian and Stream Ecosystem Training - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#)
- [Riparian Restoration on Farms and Ranches in Texas - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#)
- [Creating a Buffer for Texas Ponds - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#)



Welcome to our class of
2025 Master Gardener Interns

“Bee” a Keeper

Laura Miller, County Extension Agent
Commercial Horticulture



Beekeeping or apiculture has a long history. Humans originally hunted honey like bears, but the ancient Egyptians developed many of the beekeeping methods we still use today such as using smoke to calm bees and storing honey in jars. Colonists brought the European honeybee to the Americas and *Apis mellifera* has been popular here for the past few centuries because of its high levels of honey production and importance as a pollinator, as well as its relatively docile behavior.

What’s your why?

Bee population decline has been in the news for the past few decades. This has prompted an increase in honey bee research. Dr. Garrett Slater, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Apiculture Entomologist, was working as a commercial beekeeper in 2006 when his employer lost 80% of his colonies. That inspired him to embark on an academic journey to try to improve bee health.

Many people were motivated to try keeping bees during the early days of Covid 19. With more time at home and concerns about food security, all kinds of small-scale food production enterprises were launched.

The Texas Legislature set out to encourage beekeeping during the 2011 session, when they approved agricultural use valuation for parcels of land between 5 and 20 acres. Land used primarily for beekeeping should be managed to support the plants bees need and in Tarrant County, at least 6 bee colonies/hives are required. Access to a useable water source within ¼ mile of the apiary is also required.

Where should I start?

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension has supported the Texas Master Beekeeper Program since 2015 with the goal of helping beekeepers grow their skills and become mentors for Texas beekeeping. You can learn more about the program and connect with beekeeping resources at <https://masterbeekeeper.tamu.edu/>.

Bees are fascinating little animals with complex lifecycles. Some people are afraid of bees, while others choose to provide them with a home. Those herders of our littlest livestock are called beekeepers.

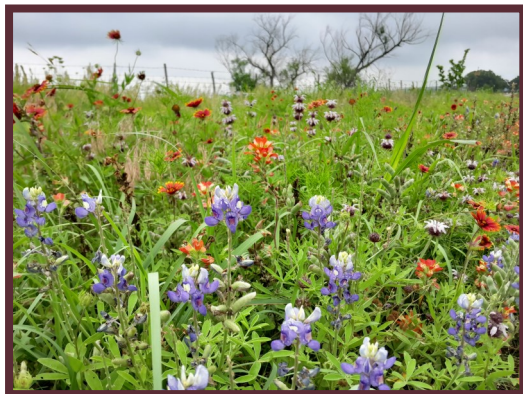
The 4-hour Beekeeping 101 online course is always available on <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/>. If you prefer an in-person course, Metro Beekeepers Association, offers a 10-week course from January to October right before their monthly meetings. Those monthly meetings, held on the 2nd Monday of each month, are free and open to the public and are a great way to learn and meet mentor beekeepers. <https://metrobeekeepers.net/>.

Bee a Friend

If beekeeping is not for you, you can still provide for bees in a meaningful way simply by growing flowering plants and exercising care when using pesticides.

Landscape plants can provide pollen and nectar at times when crops and wildflowers are not blooming. Winter blooming plants such as rosemary and trees that bloom in the early spring like redbuds produce nectar and pollen when there are few food sources available. Similarly, abelias and crape myrtles keep flowering when other plants have given up for the summer. It is hard to provide habitat for polar bears in the average backyard, but anyone can offer resources of pollen, nectar and water to bees and other beneficial insects.

If you use pesticides to control undesirable insects, remember that bees are insects too. Foraging bees typically head home from work in the evening, making that one of the best times to apply an insecticide. Always read and follow label instructions when using pesticides and pay special attention to those bee cautions.



Meet Tarrant County EFNEP’s Newest Nutrition Educators

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

We’re excited to introduce the two newest members of our team, Extension Assistant, Alexia Davila, and Jordan Callahan, our newest Nutrition Education Associate. Both ladies have already made a remarkable impact on our youth nutrition programs since joining us less than nine months ago! Their passion for teaching, creative approach to nutrition education, and dedication to helping young people build healthier habits are already making a difference! In this edition, we asked them some fun and insightful questions to learn more about their backgrounds, favorite nutrition tips, and what inspires them in their work. Read on to get to know them and the fresh energy they bring to our programs!



Alexia Davila,
Extension
Assistant



Jordan Callahan,
Nutrition Education
Associate

Can you tell us a little about yourself and your background?

Hi, I’m Alexia Davila. I graduated from West Texas A&M University with a degree in Animal Science. I enjoy reaching out to different communities in our county to educate kids about healthy lifestyles. With over five years of experience working with children, I find teaching them both rewarding and fun!

What do you hope to accomplish as a youth nutrition educator?

My goal is for every participant to walk away with at least one valuable takeaway they can apply in their daily life. I also make it a priority to learn each student’s name and create an enjoyable, engaging environment for the class.

What’s one healthy eating tip you love sharing with kids?

The importance of moderation and making sure physical activities are enjoyable. Moderation is a vital skill that helps people incorporate the not-so-healthy foods kids love into their diet while still maintaining a healthy lifestyle. When it comes to physical activity, the goals are much easier to achieve if you’re having fun. My main goal is to help kids build a positive relationship with food and exercise early on, as this is an essential part of living a healthy life.

If you had to describe yourself as a fruit or vegetable, which one would you be and why?

I would choose an orange to describe myself because they represent brightness and positivity. I strive to maintain a sunny outlook and love to brighten people’s days. I take pride in creating a positive environment and focus on spreading good vibes rather than negativity.

What inspired you to pursue a career in nutrition education?

I have always loved food! After COVID hit, my husband and I (both in the food and beverage industry at the time) lost our jobs and I had the time to think about what I wanted to do as a career. I looked for something more lasting, more impactful, and something that would make my kids proud! I enrolled in college shortly after and started focusing on building my new career.

What excites you most about working with youth in this role?

Kids can make such a big change in the community. Learning about nutrition when you’re young affects your health for the rest of your life, and your kids, their kids, etc. It creates a ripple effect that can affect generations. Teaching kids impacts the decisions they make for the rest of their lives and can prevent disease before it ever occurs.

If you had to describe yourself as a fruit or vegetable, which one would you be and why?

Sweet potato. Always sweet potato. For everything. It is me, it is my favorite, it is the best. It’s so versatile!! You can do anything with a sweet potato from breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, snacks, even drinks! I like to try to be adaptable to new situations but always bring a bit of myself to everything. And I’m hearty!

If you could cook a meal for anyone, past or present, who would it be and what would you make?

Oh man. One time I made calamari for President George W. Bush and that was cool. Trying to top that... Maybe my grandfather? He worked in Japan for Yokohama Tires and before he retired would spend the majority of his time there. He taught me to love food and be adventurous. He gave me eel, natto, duck, and countless fruits and vegetables that my parents (despite their dedication to health) never opted for during family dinners, all before I reached my teenage years. He passed a few years ago and the number of people from all over the world who came to his funeral was insane, and everyone had a story about how adventurous he was! Grandpa Jimmy loved yellowtail collar and now that I’ve learned a bit more about fish mongering, I can make a mean one with some homemade ponzu. It would be nice!

THRILLIN' & GRILLIN'

Alaina Woolsey, County Extension Agent, Family & Community Health

As the weather begins to warm up, we can focus again on one of our favorite summer pastimes: grilling.

Grilling is a fantastic way to reduce fat and maintain a beneficial nutrient profile in our foods. It also generally keeps the house cooler and the 'bought air' inside. Grilling provides an opportunity to grill a variety of foods, including meats, seafood, vegetables, and fruits.

One way to add even more flavor to your grilled foods is to utilize a marinade. It's an easy way to flavor via herbs and spices without adding salt, so you can still have a quality product without sacrificing flavor. Additionally, making your own marinades allows you greater flavor control in the kitchen or at the grill, and they can also help tenderize tough cuts of meat. Make sure you include an acid like vinegar, lemon, or lime juice to help break down tough meat or vegetable fibers.

Marinated Grilled Vegetables



Recipe adapted from the New York Times' Marinated Grilled Vegetables

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar or sherry vinegar
- 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons whole-grain mustard
- 2 pounds grilling vegetables, such as peppers (bell, shishito, mini), broccoli rabe, broccolini, asparagus, radicchio, fennel, corn, zucchini, eggplant, green beans, mushrooms or snap peas

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, combine the oil, vinegar, and mustard. Cut the vegetables into pieces that are large enough so as to not slip through the grates.
2. When you're ready, grill the vegetables over the flame, flipping occasionally, until well browned and tender, 2 to 15 minutes, depending on the density and size of the vegetables.
3. As the vegetables finish, transfer them to the marinade. Let the vegetables sit in the marinade for 15 minutes and then serve.

2GETHER WE ARE 2TIMES AS STRONG!

Christa DeStefano, County Extension Agent, Family & Community Health

We are celebrating lots of 2nds in 2025 at Texas AgriLife Extension Service! Heritage Elementary in Keller ISD became the second school in Tarrant County history to earn the prestigious Healthy School Recognized Campus designation! Working alongside Heritage Elementary to bring this esteemed honor to my alma mater school district has truly been one of the highlights of my Extension career thus far! Way to go, Panthers! The culture of improving health outcomes on your campus is one to be Panther Proud about!

Heritage Elementary School - Keller ISD 2024 - 2025 Healthy School Recognized Campus



Left to right: Melanie Earley, Eat Well Feel Well (EWWF) Program Assistant, Kimberley Paul, Heritage ES Principal, Sarah Shue, Heritage ES Campus Instruction Teacher/Program Specialist, and EWWF Campus Coordinator, and Christa DeStefano, County Extension Agent, Family & Community Health



What an honor to be invited again to present at the 2nd Annual Kidney Wellness and Health Expo hosted by Commissioner Alisa Simmons. It is no secret in Tarrant County that your FCH Agent is passionate about the relevance of water consumption to our health. Just ask Commissioner Simmons herself! She will gladly tell you who is keeping an eye out to make sure Tarrant County is drinking more water and fewer sugar-sweetened beverages. Contact our office for info on water programs for health!



Elizabeth Hall - HTYA

Elizabeth and Kaden are completing their 2nd year as Healthy Texas Youth Ambassadors (HTYAs) in Tarrant County! What better way to say "Thanks!" for their continued contributions than during National Volunteer Week! Y'all make me proud!



Kaden Gordillo - HTYA

FRUIT OR VEGGIE CHALLENGE!

Sanci Hall, Extension Agent, Better Living for Texans



Fruit or Veggie Challenge!

Are you looking for a fun way to encourage healthy eating habits in your family? Challenge your household to try a new fruit or vegetable each week! This simple activity can help introduce new flavors, boost nutrition, and make mealtime more exciting. I love a good challenge and cannot wait to start this with my family.

How to Get Started:

1. **Choose a new fruit or vegetable each week.** Let each family member take turns picking one. Maybe you need a way to encourage your family to try a new food; you could give a prize for the family member who tried the most “new” fruit or vegetable each month. Making a chart of locally grown fruits or vegetables might also encourage you and your family to get more involved.
2. **Learn about it.** Research its origin, nutritional benefits, and different ways to prepare it. I love learning and find it fascinating to learn how a food got from its original location to my location. For example, I love peaching and had no idea that peaches were first cultivated in China back in 10,000 BC and first arrive in North America in the 1500 AD with Spanish Conquistadors. However, Indigenous communities played a key role in moving those peaches all over the continent.
3. **Taste test!** Try it raw, cooked, or in a recipe and rate the flavor as a family. Trying to find different ways to enjoy that new fruit or vegetables is a great culinary journey. There are some vegetables I love raw and some I prefer cooked! I love raw Jicama and would have never known what it was had I not been willing to try something new!
4. **Keep a log.** Create a chart or journal to track which ones you like best. This will help you when you need more motivation when planning your weekly meals. This could also help save some money if you already know you’ve tried something. If you have younger family members, using pictures of the foods could keep them engaged and chart who enjoyed it and who prefers something else.

Resources to Explore:

- USDA MyPlate – Explore fruit and veggie tips: <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/fruits>
- CDC Healthy Eating – The benefits of fruits and vegetables: <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/>
- Fruits & Veggies – More Matters from Produce for Better Health: <https://fruitsandveggies.org/>

Get ready to discover new flavors and create healthy habits together. Start your challenge this month and enjoy the adventure of trying something new!

Why It's Important:

- Expands food choices and reduces picky eating.
- Increases intake of essential vitamins and minerals.
- Encourages curiosity about food and nutrition.
- Makes grocery shopping and meal planning more interactive.
- Supports digestive health with fiber-rich choices, helping to maintain a healthy gut.
- Strengthens the immune system with antioxidants and vitamins such as C and A, reducing the risk of illness.
- Lowers the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.
- Helps maintain a healthy weight by incorporating nutrient-dense, low-calorie options into meals.

Great Things Are Growing Here!

Melanie Earley, Eat Well Feel Well Program Assistant

This Spring our campuses continue to learn about vegetable gardening and how it ties into nutrition. Students have been diving into lessons about MyPlate with the help of some “Healthy Heroes.” MyPlate is the USDA’s official symbol of the 5 food groups, and “Healthy Hero Adventures” is an innovative and fun approach to youth health and wellness education using personal instruction in addition to cartoon characters that represent different aspects of nutrition and exercise.



All campuses are plotting their raised beds for an upcoming Spring vegetable garden, while Sanci Hall our Better Living for Texans Extension Agent has been teaching parents how to grow vegetables at home using container gardening. Parents have also been learning about composting, how to feed their plants and tips for harvesting and collecting seeds. Stay tuned, great things are growing here!

SPRING UPDATE



Photos:
Top left: BLT Agent Sanci Hall planting vegetables with parents at Rankin Elementary.
Top right: EFNEP Youth Instructor Alexia Davila teaching Healthy Heroes program at Kirkpatrick Elementary.
Bottom left: Students at Sagamore Hill Elementary learning about MyPlate with EFNEP Youth Instructor Jordan Callahan.
Bottom right: Parents at Sagamore Hill learning about the stages of composting.