Laurens Junior Master Gardeners

In 2016 Laurens County 4-H and the Laurens County Master Gardeners' Association partnered to offer the first ever Laurens County Junior Master Gardener Program Series. Youth in grades 3 through 5 were invited to join an eight workshop series held once a week. Meetings were held at the Laurens County Extension Office and the Joe R. Adair Outdoor Education Center. Classes were taught by local Master Gardeners' Association members. Seven youth graduated from the first year of the Junior Master Gardener Program Series. Youth gained knowledge and hands-on experience with the assistance of local caring adults. Volunteers and the local 4-H program are looking forward to offering this program annually.

Graduates of the first annual Junior Master Gardener Program pose with Gary Pierre, MG Association President, and Katie Shaw, Laurens Extension 4-H Agent.

Fire Ant Control is a “Hot Topic”

Many Laurens County associations requested programs on effective Red Imported Fire Ant control this year. Fire ants are a constant nuisance in our State, and many “common folklore” remedies that are presented as fact just do not work. Extension Agent Bryan Smith presented proper fire ant control techniques for the Laurens Master Gardener Association, the Lifelong Learning Network, and the Clinton Young Farmers Association this year. The groups learned that the most effective way to combat these pests is with fresh fire ant bait, and that timing is critical when broadcasting baits. Fire ants only forage when the soil temperature is between 70 and 95 degrees, so applications must be scheduled in this window. They also learned that fire ants do not eat solid food, so the “grits will make their stomachs explode” idea cannot work. Participants working in a subdivision later reported a great increase in control effectiveness using the methods provided.
The 34th annual Woodland Clinic forestry competition and career day for high school students was held April 26th. The Woodland Clinic Inc. board members with the assistance of other public and private organizations with interests in forestry and natural resources worked together again on the event this year. Students from eight schools in the upstate of South Carolina comprised the nineteen teams competing in the Clinic this year which is held at the Oasis Farm at Connie Maxwell Children’s Home in Greenwood. Over forty volunteers came out to participate with this popular event. The competition includes elements on tree measurement, tree identification, tree insects and diseases, a compass and pace event and a fun team lumberjack race. Extension is represented on the Woodland Clinic Board and organized and assisted with pre-event training for teams and in setting up the event the day before and coordinating activities the day of the event. All the students had an enjoyable day of competition and camaraderie.

**National Grazing Lands Tour**

The National Grazing Lands Coalition recently visited three farms in upstate South Carolina as part of their annual fall tour, including one in Laurens County. Farmers, ranchers and grazing land stewards from across the United States visited the Upstate on September 9th and 10th. The tour stops included the Pecan Dale Farmstead and the Happy Cow Creamery in Pelzer and Pompey's Rest (Jackson Family Farm) in Ware Shoals. The Jackson Family farm was selected for the tour after recently being featured on an episode of RFDTV’s “Out on the Land,” where Don Jackson, his son, Patrick, and Extension Agent Cassie Wycoff discussed the huge improvements made in forage stands and soil health over the past three years by implementing several grazing management strategies. Tour participants were provided a home cooked lunch at Martin’s General Store and Bee Hive Cafe in Ware Shoals. South Carolina Senator Danny Verdin joined at lunch to speak to the group about agriculture in the county and state.

A local utility company approached Laurens Extension this fall requesting a wildlife, plant, and insect safety training. The company wanted to provide field workers with the ability to spot dangerous animals and insects as well as problem plants. Extension Agent Bryan Smith developed a 40 minute training with the help of wildlife specialist Dr. Corey Heaton and entomologist Vicky Bertagnolli, providing images and identification of venomous snakes, venomous insects, and plants such as poison ivy. Images of innocuous animals and plants commonly mistaken for harmful look-alikes were also provided, as well as escape strategies when dangerous animals are encountered. Treatment options for bites or contact were also presented. Twenty-Four utility workers attended the presentation and provided a lively question and answer session after the presentation.

Poison ivy and Copperhead snakes were just two of the potentially harmful animals and plants discussed during the program.
ServSafe Food Safety Certification Courses

Food service establishments inspected annually by SC DHEC are required to abide by mandate SC 61-25. This state law requires that each kitchen must (1) identify a person in charge, (2) the person in charge must hold a recognized food safety certification, and (3) the food safety certification must be obtained by June 26, 2016. The Servsafe Manager Certification fulfills these requirements. Rhonda Matthews taught the exam preparation class this year and administered the exam to 274 commercial food service managers in the Upstate.

The exam is stringent. It is designed to test knowledge of food transport and handling, storage, pathogen growth and foodborne illness, employee health and hygiene, food preparation and cross contamination, plus food regulation. A score of 75% or better is required to become certified. Approximately 60% of those enrolled in the classes passed the certification exam. The average passing score was 76%.

Students enrolled in these classes were diverse regarding age, gender, race and educational background. After each class, a follow-up was conducted with numerous students to ensure they received their grades and were able to access their certificate.

Laurens Ag and Industry Tour

The Laurens County Extension office, Laurens County Chamber of Commerce, AgSouth, and Laurens Farm Bureau co-coordinated the Laurens County Ag and Industry Tour in 2016. Approximately 60 people met at the Laurens Farm Bureau office on September 28th to tour ZF Transmissions, Piedmont Technical College’s Center for Advanced Manufacturing, and Hidden Springs Farm. This year’s only farm stop is a horse boarding facility in Gray Court, SC, which cares for approximately 25 horses. Tour participants learned about the different horse breeds present at Hidden Springs and the daily management of the animals. Owner Gail Bolt also spoke to the group about her small breeding program, which is beginning to gain national recognition among American Paint Horse competitors. Educational booths were also organized by Clemson Extension agents and set up at the farm for participants to visit. Clemson’s dystocia simulator was used to demonstrate various calving positions which may be problematic for the cow during birth. The Natural Resource Conservation Service and Department of Natural Resources also demonstrated the Rainfall Simulator, which visualizes the amount of precipitation that penetrates into the soil under different management conditions. The group then enjoyed lunch at the Owings Community Center and viewed Better Service Milling, an agricultural and fertilizer supply company.

Laurens County 4-H Bucket Calf Project

The Laurens County 4-H Bucket Calf Project is designed to introduce youth 5 to 18 years old to beef and dairy 4-H projects. A “bucket calf” is an orphaned or newborn calf purchased at 2 to 14 days of age. The calves are started on a bottle (or bucket) and nipple. By allowing youth the experience of working with a smaller, less intimidating size of animal, they become comfortable with beef and dairy cattle as they grow. Twenty-two youth participated in the project in 2016.
Forest Landowners Programs

The Laurens County Forest Landowners Association’s quarterly meetings provide programming of interest for forest landowners each year. This group covers a wide range of forestry and natural resource topics during their meetings.

During the August meeting John Stillwell, Director of Land Division with Jenks Reality, spoke about timberland sales, timberland investment, and comparing rate of returns for timberland versus other investments. This topic was of great interest to those managing property or looking to acquire more forestland.

At the November meeting an “Ask a Forester” panel discussion was held. A selection of Foresters from the private sector, government, and industry fielded forestry and natural resources questions from those attending.

In February Patricia Carson, Land Protection Specialist with Upstate Forever, discussed Conservation Agreements and how they can protect an owner’s land. She also covered how to establish an agreement and the benefits to the landowner. Upstate Forever works with landowners who are interested in protecting their properties with conservation agreements and with facilitates outreach activities to educate landowners about conservation options.

In May Ken Leach, the Manager of Wood Procurement for Colombo Energy, presented information about their new pellet mill plant. Colombo Energy has constructed a new wood pellet fuel mill in Greenwood County near the Solutia and Fuji Film plants. Ken spoke about their plans for beginning mill operations in Greenwood as well as the company’s overall goals and objectives for their business in South Carolina and the US.