This fall when Hurricane Matthew began to roar up the Atlantic coast bringing rain and wind again to Lexington County, many of us immediately thought of the historic flood of October 3rd and 4th of 2015. Thankfully we were spared another event of the magnitude of the flood. Although, once again, we did suffer some agricultural damage, we were spared the widespread damage to our road, homes, and infrastructure that we saw in the October 2015 flood.

The flood of 2015 was disastrous to Lexington County in many ways with a number of roads and some pond dams still under repair. Although our agriculture did not suffer as much as some of the areas of the Low Country, we did suffer losses of crop estimated to be around $10 million. Associated damage to farm structures, ponds, and erosion damage in our fields were not calculated but added to the damage figure. Soil productivity was also affected and will take a few more seasons to recover.
The SC Department of Agriculture devised a plan to help farmers recover some of their losses. This plan was sent to the legislature for approval and $40 million were allocated to help with farm relief in the form of grants. The amount of the grant covered only 10% of the total loss up to a maximum of $100,000. The SCDA asked for help from Clemson Extension Service to ‘roll out’ the plan, provide crop budgets, and pricing information to begin to develop a way of assessing crop losses and to provide a fair means to help the growers recover some lost income. Several group meetings were held around the county to show the growers how the program would work, what documentation was needed, and how to fill out the necessary forms. SCDA programmers were able to make the form available on-line in a ‘fillable’ format.

The final program allowed the growers to provide receipts for inputs or federal Farm Service Agency documentation to verify acreage and losses. Clemson Extension agents and specialists on the Agribusiness, Agronomy, Livestock, and Horticulture Teams worked with our local lending community and the SCDA to provide person-to-person help in assessing damage, filling out forms, and estimating crop losses using production and pricing information from Clemson University and USDA-AMS published prices for the period in October.

In small groups, by on-farm visits or visits to the lenders’ offices or the county extension office growers were assisted in filing their paperwork by the deadline. Most of the growers who suffered significant damage applied for a grant and no grants were rejected for any reasons. The payments were made to the recipients beginning in early October 2016, and we recently received a final accounting of the program. The total disbursed to SC farmers to help recover from damage from the October 2015 flood was $35,512,560; of this total, $666,693 was distributed to Lexington County farmers.

Since my arrival in December, 4-H in Lexington County 4-H has been growing exponentially. We are very excited to announce several new 4-H Clubs in communities near you! The Twin-City 4-H Club, Lexington Livestock Club, Lexington Horse Club, and Live Oaks Shooting Sports Club will all be meeting for the first times this fall (2016). These clubs are focusing on teaching 4-H Youth about a broad range of project areas.

Thanks to our new 4-H Clubs, paired with those already well developed in the county, Lexington County 4-H now offers program area focuses ranging from Horse, Livestock, Rabbit, or Agriculture to Healthy Living, Shooting Sports, and Leadership. Lexington County 4-H’ers have competed and represented the county in various State-Wide programs and events like the South Carolina State Fair, the South Carolina State 4-H Horse Judging Competition, and the State 4-H Teen Council.

In addition to our new community based clubs, we’ve been as busy as bees in schools across the county providing and delivering supplemental learning curriculum for teachers. Curriculum subject matter available range from Embryology, Agriculture and Healthy Lifestyles to STEM, Environmental Awareness and Wildlife. Schools in all districts of our county have taken advantage of the programs 4-H can offer, and we are really looking forward to the opportunities that the New Year will offer.
There is a need to grow healthy food businesses in areas throughout South Carolina. These identified food deserts are often short on whole food providers, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, and heavy on local quickie marts that provide a wealth of processed, sugar, and fat laden foods, known contributors to our nation’s obesity epidemic. This food desert problem has in fact become such an issue that the USDA has outlined a map of our nation’s food deserts.

DEVELOPING HEALTHY FOOD BUSINESSES IN SOUTH CAROLINA:
Feeding Innovation is a comprehensive technical assistance program designed to support entrepreneurs interested in developing or expanding healthy food businesses in food deserts or underserved areas of the state. Examples of these types of businesses include farmers’ markets, mobile markets, corner stores, and CSAs. Participants engage in an 8-week entrepreneurial training program offered through Clemson Extension and taught by Agribusiness Extension Agent Will Culler. The program culminates with a live pitch to a panel of judges, with each business plan 1) proposing an innovative, market-based, business-oriented solution to the issue of local, healthy food access; 2) targeting a community with limited access to healthy food; and 3) incorporating community engagement to ensure local needs are met. The entrepreneur with the strongest business plan receives $12,500 in seed capital for their business. At the end of the program, all participants should know what steps to take to grow their business and how they need to execute those steps.

Impact: To date, five 8-week classes have graduated over 45 small businesses all focused on bringing a healthy food enterprise or nonprofit to an undeserved or food desert area. Of these graduates, five pitch winners have been awarded start-up funds totaling over $50,000.

Successful collaborations to date have included SC State University, USC Upstate, the SC SBDC, USC Medical School, Greenville Library, the City of Florence, and the South Carolina Community Loan Fund.
Livestock and Forage in Lexington County
Travis Mitchell, Area Extension Agent

Many livestock and forage producers in Lexington County were greatly impacted by the weather this past year. Producers saw fences washed out, stored hay under water, and were unable to get in the field for their last cutting of hay due to the October 2015 floods. The large amount of rainfall made it very difficult to plant grazing that was heavily depended on for winter-feeding and a spring hay crop. Then in the summer of 2016, producers faced a drought with very little rainfall, resulting in reduced forage yields. In both cases, Clemson Extension staff has worked with producers to assist with damage assessment and to aid them in the critical management decisions needed to move forward.

Clemson Extension continues to deliver programs on livestock and forage systems through the Lexington County Cattlemen’s Association. This active organization is an affiliate member of the S.C. Cattlemen’s Association and offers many educational opportunities to people interested in beef cattle and forage production. Program topics include pasture management, hay production, and soil health. We also deliver programs covering selection, production, and marketing of beef cattle herds.

Clemson Extension also supports the citizens of Lexington County by use of an Area Livestock and Forages Agent to assist producers in livestock and forage production. This agent aids with weed identification and fertilization requirements for hay fields and pastures. He also helps livestock producers with management decisions that influence the overall success of their herds.

Forest Finance
Beth Richardson, Area Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Agent

The Center for Heirs Properties out of Charleston was planning an event for their landowners at Voorhees College in Denmark. The Center works with minority people who have timber land and their property issues. Sam Cook, the Director, asked Beth Richardson, Area Forestry Agent, to teach Federal Income Tax as it relates to Non-Industrial Private Landowners (NIPL) at two-day event. There were about 90 participants in attendance and there were three break-out sessions. Each break-out session had three different topics so that over the two days, each landowner would have an opportunity to listen to each session.

Ms. Richardson knew that the audience had been educated on forest management practices, which plays a huge part in understanding how to use the forestry tax advantages. However, she did not realize that this program was the audiences’ first exposure to the forestry federal tax laws with the exception of one participant who was employed by the IRS.

The breakout sessions were approximately one hour which was enough time to cover all of the forestry tax advantages but one which requires 30 minutes.

The tax talk was a huge success. One participant stood up at the second day breakfast and told the audience that they all needed to hear the tax talk, that the speaker made the talk fun, exciting, and educational.

The Director, Sam Cook, has asked Ms. Richardson to come back in the future and conduct another 1.5 to 2 hour talk so that all of the provisions can be covered and how they apply to the NIPL.
Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

In June, Amanda Bremseth transferred to Lexington County to serve as our Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Nutrition Education Assistant. Upon her arrival, she began working closely with the Lexington County Department of Social Services (LCDSS) and Lexington Interfaith Community Services (LICS) to get referrals for the program.

- Through referrals from LCDSS, Amanda worked with several individuals in their homes on Nutrition Education for their families with great need of guidance on how to prepare and budget for healthy meals.
- Lexington Interfaith Community Services has provided and will continue to provide ongoing outreach and support of EFNEP through their agency by referring their food pantry clients to our classes. In the fall, LICS plans to supplement the program clients with incentives that include a broad variety of cooking utensils and supplies, as well as a take home crock pot and electric skillet for EFNEP enrollees who graduate our program.