

FOCUS

MAGAZINE 2026

NATURAL SOLUTIONS



CONTENTS

4

GETTING THE 411 ON AI

Artificial intelligence conference takes stage at Fort Valley State University



6

PROVIDING A NEEDED FORUM

Fort Valley State hosts mental wellness workshop focused on farmers, rural communities

8

STUDENTS EARN AWARDS IN WRITER'S PLAYGROUND CONTEST



10

SOUTHERN LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES STRENGTHEN RURAL CONNECTIONS



14

POSITIVE HEALTH LEADS TO PRODUCTIVE RESULTS

Fort Valley State Cooperative Extension hosts 2026 Georgia Farm Stress Summit





16 GOOD NEWS PAYS OFF

Fort Valley State agricultural communications team earns national honors

18 A CARING COMBINATION

Fort Valley State Cooperative Extension forms partnership focusing on mental well-being



20 COVER: NATURAL SOLUTIONS

Fort Valley State Extension hosts herbal workshop in Macon County

SECTIONS

Did You Know?	2
AgVice	3
4-H Updates	24
In the Field Spotlight	28
Recipe	34
Meet Your County Agent/Program Assistant	36
News & Notes	38

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DID YOU KNOW?

Twiggs County and Middle Georgia Health and Wellness Initiative

Fall is an excellent time to fall in love with walking in Twiggs County and throughout middle Georgia because the season makes walking more comfortable, social, scenic and easier to turn into a community tradition.

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension has offered Twiggs County walkathons for many years. In 2018, Twiggs Keep Jammin Walk-A-Thon brought more than 36 residents together, while another FVSU and University of Georgia Extension walkathon attracted more than 50 residents. In 2023, the Stepping into Fall Walkathon brought 75 residents to Jeffersonville, Georgia, with participants walking more than a mile and receiving health and wellness information.

As a result, these walkathons increased community engagement in physical activity, expanded access to health and wellness education and encouraged residents to adopt healthier lifestyles through regular exercise and informed health practices.

Your next community walking event could include:

- Weekly community walks.
- Culminating annual walkathon.
- Walking groups for older adults.
- Youth/family walks.
- Community garden walks.
- Healthy food demonstrations.
- Heart-health education.
- Step-count challenges.
- Health screenings.
- Recognition for individuals, families and organizations.
- Transportation assistance for older adults.

For more information about health initiatives, contact Terralon Chaney, FVSU Twiggs County Extension agent, at chaneyt01@fvsu.edu.

7 REASONS:

AGVICE

Why Fall is a Great Time to Walk, Talk, Connect, Grow

1. The weather is more comfortable.

Georgia's fall months generally bring cooler, more comfortable temperatures than the heat and humidity of summer. Georgia tourism officials describe September-November as having cool, crisp conditions that are well suited for outdoor activities.

2. Walking becomes something people can enjoy, not just exercise.

A fall walk can combine physical activity with conversation, fellowship, music, photography, gardening, local history and appreciation of the landscape.

3. It supports heart health and an active lifestyle.

Walking is a relatively accessible form of physical activity for children, adults and seniors. This is especially important for community wellness efforts because people can participate at different speeds and distances.

4. It creates intergenerational connections.

A Twiggs County fall walkathon brings seniors, families, young people, county employees, civic organizations, churches and community leaders together. The walk has become a community event rather than simply an exercise program.

5. It can connect walking with healthy eating.

This would fit particularly well with the community and senior garden work you are already doing. A walk could finish in the community garden or city park with fresh vegetables, healthy refreshments, nutrition education or a cooking demonstration.

6. It promotes mental and social wellness.

FVSU's earlier Twiggs County walkathon specifically incorporated conversation about healthy hearts, chronic illnesses, daily walking and stress relief.

7. It can showcase Georgia's natural beauty.

Fall provides opportunities to walk through parks, neighborhoods, rural roads and nature areas while enjoying changing foliage. Georgia State Parks specifically promotes fall hiking and seasonal leaf watching.



Provided by Terralon Chaney, Fort Valley State University Twiggs County Extension agent.

GETTING THE 411 ON AI

Artificial intelligence conference takes stage at Fort Valley State University

by RUSSELL BOONE JR.

To help people understand the emergence of artificial intelligence in everyday life, Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension recently hosted an event focusing on this technology.

The Cultivate AI Conference, held Sept. 18-19, 2025, at the C.W. Pettigrew Center located on FVSU's campus, drew more than 150 people.

Attendees listened to presentations from keynote speakers, professionals in education, computer technology and panels, in addition to participating in hands-on workshops and demonstrations. Topics covered included AI's use in education, entrepreneurship and agriculture. Ethical use of this technology in business and academic settings was also covered.

"Our goal is to create an accessible and engaging space where people from all backgrounds can learn, collaborate and

discover how AI is shaping the future," said Courtney Howard, National Telecommunications and Information Administration project manager for FVSU Cooperative Extension.

Howard also said that AI is no longer a buzzword, as it has become a popular part of everyday life in the way people learn, work and grow food.

"At FVSU, agriculture and education are at our core, and entrepreneurship drives innovation in our communities. By emphasizing AI, we're ensuring our students and community members are not only aware of these tools but also equipped to use them to their advantage in real-world settings," Howard said.

Paulana Hall, a 2016 graduate of FVSU (math and computer science) served as one of the keynote speakers for the conference. She currently works for Microsoft as a software engineer where she focuses on infrastructure scenarios for Microsoft Copilot using



generative AI technologies. The FVSU alumna briefly spoke on her experience working in the professional arena and returning to her alma mater to give remarks.

Courtney Howard, project manager, and Kendale Frederick, project coordinator, of Fort Valley State University's National Telecommunications and Information Administration project.

"I'm thrilled, as well as honored, to give back to my community. There is so much opportunity these students have that they don't know about. I want them to have the right insight to be able to learn all the different tools and capabilities associated with AI. This includes informing them about how it can help them with their research, careers and plans for their future," Hall said.

Donnita Bellamy, a retired social studies educator who taught in Peach and Houston counties, said she attended the conference



because she wanted to increase her knowledge of AI and the use of internet services and programs such as ChatGPT. Bellamy also said she picked up some ideas that will allow her to use AI tools more efficiently.

“AI is a tool, and it’s here to stay. To keep up with the present age, we need to increase our technology skills because technology is forever changing. It’s like going from an encyclopedia to a computer or from working out math problems to using a calculator,” Bellamy said.

Furthermore, Bellamy, who is also an FVSU graduate, said the conference was well organized, the presenters were knowledgeable and the question-and-answer sessions were free and open. The former educator said she would recommend others attend future conferences because of the networking opportunities and information disseminated by the vendors.

“This is a major undertaking at Fort Valley State, and we’re just proud to bring knowledgeable speakers here. We have speakers representing the Georgia Technology Authority, Microsoft and CDW and other major corporations,” said Terrence Wolfork, executive director of the NTIA project and FVSU’s assistant Extension administrator for communications, conferencing and technology.

Additionally, Wolfork said the event shows that the university is at the forefront of bringing the latest technology to rural communities. Furthermore, the FVSU administrator said the conference gives residents a chance to attend an event locally instead of traveling to a metropolitan city in Georgia.

Latasha Everson (far left), research communications manager, moderates a discussion during the conference.

“Our goal is to create an accessible and engaging space where people from all backgrounds can learn, collaborate and discover how AI is shaping the future.”

– Courtney Howard,
National Telecommunications and
Information Administration project
manager for FVSU Cooperative Extension

Howard said that the Cultivate AI conference will not be a one-time gathering at Fort Valley State University but the beginning of a tradition.

“The demand for conversations around AI will only continue to grow, and FVSU is committed to creating a space where those conversations can thrive,” Howard said.



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PROVIDING A NEEDED FORUM

Fort Valley State hosts mental wellness workshop focused on farmers, rural communities

by RUSSELL BOONE JR.

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that suicide rates for farmers run 3.5% over the national average.

To facilitate open discussion and to inform farmers and rural residents about resources available to the agricultural community, Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension Program, a member of the Georgia Agricultural Wellness Alliance, hosted a workshop called Change, Progress and Restoration: Community Development and Outreach Mental Wellness.

The event took place at FVSU's Agricultural Technology Conference Center on June 29. More than 50 farmers, agricultural professionals, Head Start employees and rural residents attended the event.

The GAWA works to support agricultural communities and local partners by creating and identifying resources, training and conversations in support of better mental health on the farm. GAWA is supported through the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center at Mercer University School of



Medicine in Macon, Georgia.

John McElveen, Ed.D., director of GAWA, explained the importance of providing an avenue for farmers to address their concerns dealing with stressful situations.

"The purpose of this workshop is to build on the strength of the existing network Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension has and the communities connected to it. This includes farmers integrated in Fort Valley State's Extension program, as well as the Head Start programs it supports," McElveen said.

ChaNaè Bradley, Ph.D., assistant administrator for community development and outreach, gives remarks during the workshop.

Furthermore, McElveen explained the need to include FVSU's Head Start personnel to help them cope with situations concerning people's mental well-being. He said that showing them how to effectively communicate with constituents or clients on mental health issues is extremely helpful.

"Sometimes what people consider to be uncomfortable conversations can be critical conversations to have when we're worried about them," McElveen said.

Additionally, McElveen said it is important that farmers and other agricultural professionals have peers as an outlet to discuss their mental health concerns.

"One of the best things about our farm communities is that nobody cares about their friends, neighbors and family more than they do. But they don't often know how to have those conversations because they probably weren't brought up to do so. To be able to talk about things like mental health as an actual health issue, which it is, is important because it can save somebody's life," McElveen said.

Brendia King, a farmer from Bainbridge, Georgia, was happy to

“ **Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that suicide rates for farmers run 3.5% over the national average.**

attend a workshop focused on the mental stress of the profession.

“I am so glad that we (farmers) had this. Farmers need this kind of input and help. It’s good that they’re (FVSU) putting it out there and acknowledging that there is a need for this,” King said.

Furthermore, the South Georgia farmer said she would highly recommend to her peers that they seek help from FVSU’s Cooperative Extension Program in stressful situations.

“Reach out to Fort Valley State University because not only do they cover what is needed in farming, but they deal with the whole farmer. This includes mental stability, mental health and financial health,” King said.

She also added that farmers should help FVSU bring in more students so that they can train them on the latest farming techniques.



Farmers, producers and other agricultural professionals listen to presentations.

ChaNà Bradley, Ph.D., assistant administrator for community development and outreach for FVSU Extension, expressed how farmers can benefit from FVSU’s collaboration with GRHIC.

“It’s a good partnership because Mercer has a focus on rural health care and we in Extension have a focus on helping farmers and serving rural communities. By merging our audiences and expertise, we’re able to reach a specific group of clients with information that is geared toward their mental health and wellness,” Bradley said.

Moreover, Bradley said the workshop provided training tailored to farmers and workers in rural communities with examples and scenarios linked to their daily routines. She also said due to the limited access to therapists and counselors in rural areas, farmers were connected to resources available 24/7 regardless of location.

The workshop was funded through a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant. The grant supports this training and funding for one FVSU student and one Mercer student to participate as paid summer research assistants. For the summer, the students will conduct field observations, assist with interviews and qualitative research, and develop surveys focused on farmer mental health education and evaluation in agricultural communities. To culminate their experiences, they will create a research poster.



For more information about FVSU Cooperative Extension and future programs, call 478-825-6296.

STUDENTS EARN AWARDS IN WRITER'S PLAYGROUND CONTEST

by LATASHA EVERSON

Ty Rowland of Schley County Middle/High School in Georgia and Oliver Flanagan of Santa Fe High School in Alachua, Florida, earned first-place awards for their creativity after participating in the Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension Writer's Playground Creative Writing and Spoken Word Contest.

Held during the 2025 Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Georgia, the contest featured original, on-site student submissions. Rowland received first place for creative writing, and Flanagan received first place for spoken word. Latasha Everson and Yolanda McFerrin, Ed.D., creators of Writer's Playground, presented a certificate and laptop to both students at their schools in spring 2026 to recognize them.

Writer's Playground is a free creative writing and technology course designed to enhance students' communication skills and build confidence. By studying diverse written and spoken word poems, short stories and



Yolanda McFerrin, Ed.D., and Latasha Everson, creators of Writer's Playground, present student Ty Rowland with a certificate and laptop at Schley County Middle/High School in Georgia.



TED Talks, while also engaging in artistic and technological exercises, students strengthen their imagination and critical thinking. The program provides a needed outlet for young people to be seen and heard and to share their lived experiences in creative formats. Participants presented their own creative work to family members, FVSU staff and school administrators during a closing ceremony, where each student received a laptop.

The program launched at Turner County High School in Ashburn, Georgia, in 2022, with

sessions held each Saturday in October. It later expanded to include a weeklong after-school format in Ashburn (2023) and a full-day summer session in Fort Valley (2024 and 2025). Both Ashburn and Fort Valley are rural communities, where access to enrichment programs is limited. The Writer's Playground curriculum supports student success in literature and composition with tools to help them develop their creative voices and prepare for academic and career opportunities.

As a result, impact from the program includes a student becoming interested in artificial intelligence, art and animation

after participating in Writer's Playground. She later created an online art workshop for other young people to explore digital creativity. Another participant shared that the program inspired her to pursue a mentorship role in a STEM program and dual enrollment courses to accelerate her academic progress. A returning participant showed increased engagement in her second year and became a mentor for her peers. Her parents reported a noticeable transformation, sharing that she expressed herself with more confidence and carried herself with greater assurance.

Student participants reported that the program helped them understand the power of words (how language shapes ideas, influences others and supports their success in education). They shared that the experience gave them a new perspective on writing, its purpose and the value of using their voices to express themselves confidently.

Everson and McFerrin present student Oliver Flanagan with a certificate and laptop at Santa Fe High School in Alachua, Florida.





SOUTHERN LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES STRENGTHEN RURAL CONNECTIONS

by LATASHA EVERSON & CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Land-grant universities across the South are addressing the growing demand for digital connectivity in rural areas by leading research-based efforts to expand broadband, strengthen digital skills and connect communities to essential services.

By leveraging Cooperative Extension networks and

agricultural research, these universities are helping rural communities stay connected, competitive and prepared for the future.

In Georgia, Fort Valley State University is bridging the digital divide in rural communities by addressing the critical need for broadband access and digital literacy as foundational elements

of economic growth, education and social connectivity.

The initiative began with a data-driven analysis of digital connectivity in counties surrounding FVSU. Researchers identified significant gaps in broadband access and digital skills, particularly in areas with high poverty rates,

aging populations and limited educational attainment.

FVSU Cooperative Extension secured funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration through the Connecting Minority Communities grant, along with support from the Southern Rural Development Center. These funds enabled the deployment of wireless infrastructure and the distribution of technology in areas with limited resources.

FVSU also developed customized digital literacy programs with training that included a six-hour Digital Literacy course and multi-day technology camps tailored for seniors, working adults and young people. These sessions enhanced technical skills, confidence and cyber safety awareness.

The initiative fosters resilience through digital empowerment. Early results show increased online engagement and improved access to essential services, with residents reporting greater confidence navigating digital environments safely.

The University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offers students from rural communities access to a world-class agricultural education without leaving home.

The Hancock family is a prime example of this educational journey. Beginning with the Young Scholars Internship Program, each of the three Hancock brothers is building a transformative career. Guy Hancock earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural and applied economics from UGA's Athens campus and a master's degree from the UGA Tifton campus. Now an agricultural data scientist and UGA Cooperative Extension specialist, he works on the campus that launched his path.

Ben Hancock, who earned a CAES bachelor's degree in agribusiness, used his experience at UGA-Tifton and the Young Scholars Program to become a practicing attorney in his hometown. Jarrett Hancock, an agriscience and environmental systems major with a focus on precision agriculture, continues the family legacy while serving as a CAES Ambassador.

To build on these successes, the Transfer Pathways Program allows students from rural technical colleges to begin their education close to home before completing their UGA degrees at the Tifton, Athens or Griffin campuses. This initiative expands access and supports Georgia's agricultural workforce needs in high-demand fields like precision agriculture.

In Louisiana, the Southern University Ag Center's Cooperative Extension Program's Mobile Technology Center (M-TEC) is bridging the digital divide in Louisiana's urban and rural communities.

“...faster connections could mean an increase in housing values between 2% and 9%.

**- Brian Whitacre,
Jean and Patsy Neustadt Chair in
Agricultural Economics and Oklahoma State
University Extension rural development
specialist**

M-TEC provides internet access and educational resources to some of the most remote areas of the state. It is equipped with touchscreen monitors, laptops, a central processing unit and satellite systems, which enable it to serve as a mobile classroom for onsite trainings. The core mission of the unit is to improve access to education and resources in times of crisis, and it has been instrumental in disaster recovery efforts, serving as a mobile hub for vital information.

The unit also supports the Ag Center's CEP community outreach initiatives, such as the JagFresh Farmers Markets, the Small Farmer Produce Giveaway in food deserts, the Rural Connections for Rural Resilience free virtual mental health program and the center's Agricultural Certification Programs.

The Oklahoma State University Department of Agricultural Economics has focused on the value of broadband connectivity to rural communities. It is partnering with 30 libraries in small, rural communities (with populations of 2,500-7,000) across Oklahoma to provide mobile handheld devices that use cellular networks to offer broadband connections for library customers to take home or on the road. These internet hotspots can support up to 10 devices at a time for households lacking a regular internet connection.

OSU's Brian Whitacre, Jean and Patsy Neustadt Chair in Agricultural Economics and OSU Extension rural development specialist, was appointed by the state Senate in 2020 to serve on the Oklahoma Rural Broadband Expansion Council, where he currently serves as chair. Oklahoma set up a state Broadband Office that has now distributed more than \$450 million in grants to provide connectivity for more than 65,000

households or businesses. Another \$750 million will soon be provided to connect the remaining 75,000 households that still lack high-speed internet. The goal of the council is to get all the 1.7 million households across the state access to the internet.

According to 2024 studies conducted by Whitacre, these faster connections could mean an increase in housing values between 2% and 9%, with speed improvements beyond 100 Mbps/20 Mbps, resulting in new business births. Whitacre also led the effort to install telehealth booths at three rural libraries across the state, where patrons can connect to a physician, often a specialist not available in rural locations.

Extension programs at Langston University in Oklahoma are leading a coordinated effort to expand high-speed internet access across 13 small towns across the state. These rural communities have long faced barriers to digital connectivity, limiting access to modern education, health care, business development and agricultural technologies.

By working together with local leaders, LU Extension has helped towns identify critical infrastructure needs, collect accurate service data and prepare competitive grant applications to secure broadband investment. This hands-on support will ensure that small communities often

overlooked in statewide planning have a strong voice and proposals backed by real evidence of their needs.

Several towns have now been awarded funds, and broadband construction is already underway — a milestone that promises lasting economic and social benefits. Improved internet access supports economic growth, educational opportunities, health and wellness, agricultural innovation and government and community services.

The Oklahoma Broadband Office has worked closely with LU Extension to prioritize areas with limited resources and allocate critical resources. As a result, in Boley, Oklahoma, broadband installation is approximately 75% complete, marking a significant leap toward full digital access for residents and businesses.



Fort Valley State University, the University of Georgia, Southern University, Oklahoma State University and Langston University are part of a system of agricultural research centers at 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities across the southern U.S. Our scientists collaborate to conduct research and outreach focused on preserving the region's natural resources and enhancing food production for a growing global population.

LIFE^{on}the FARM

Bringing Agriculture to Communities

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<http://fvsu.ag/lotf>

Also, visit fvsu.ag/lotffestival to check out this newly released children's book to learn more about the **ag**venturous world of farming.



Farmers, landowners, members of the agricultural community and mental health advocates gathered on March 12 at Fort Valley State University to network and build partnerships.

The fifth annual Georgia Farm Stress Summit, held at FVSU's C.W. Pettigrew Farm and Community Life Center, drew more than 150 participants. The Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center's Georgia Agricultural Wellness Alliance sponsored the event.

The Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center is part of Mercer University's School of Medicine. Members of the Georgia Agricultural Wellness Alliance include the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, UGA College of Family and Consumer Sciences, UGA College of Public Health, Georgia Department of Agriculture, Georgia Foundation for Agriculture, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Georgia Farm Bureau and FVSU Cooperative Extension.

The theme of the summit, "Deep Roots, Strong Communities: Building Healthy Ag Networks," emphasized forums and panels focusing on the mental well-being of the farming community.

John McElveen, Ed.D., director of GAWA, said it is critical that

POSITIVE HEALTH LEADS TO PRODUCTIVE RESULTS

Fort Valley State Cooperative Extension hosts 2026 Georgia Farm Stress Summit



farmers have a forum to discuss the factors that make farming stressful.

"Farmers face challenges that are unprecedented in this era. As a group, they are traditionally so self-reliant. They like to help people, but they don't like to ask for help. A lot of times, that self-reliance is a real asset, but when it comes to their struggles with mental health, farmers become overwhelmed, and they don't know where to turn," McElveen said.

Additionally, McElveen said that farmers need to be able to seek help.

"In this day and age, farmers need a lot of help, and they need to know that they are not the only ones going through this (mental stress)," he said. He added that by attending the summit, farmers can benefit from listening and learning from researchers, leaders in agriculture and fellow farmers.

Furthermore, McElveen said farmers at the summit had an opportunity to share their perspective and expertise that can be beneficial to researchers like himself.

Farmers and producers conduct an open forum during the 2026 Farm Stress Summit.

“It is a two-way street. The participants are learning, but we’re learning from them, too, in our work,” he noted. He said that by getting information from a farmer’s point of view, the GRHIC can be more effective in coming up with solutions.

Rocio Palomares-Childers is the chief executive officer and owner of Harvest Fresh Farms LLC in Moultrie, Georgia. She attended the summit because of her background in mental health and her duties as a full-time farmer.

Furthermore, the Colquitt County farmer said she plans to attend more summits in the future and explained why.

“I believe that we are always hungry and need to eat. The mental health crisis in agriculture keeps getting worse, and this problem is not going away. We need to talk about how we’re going to fix it and change things until we get it right. We need to do this not only for our elderly farmers, but for our young farmers who are coming up,” she said.

Palomares-Childers also discussed stressful situations with fellow farmers and how it’s helpful to her.

“The benefit for me is that I don’t feel alone. When I talk to other people who are having the same issues and dealing with the same things, it makes me feel better knowing that it’s not just me,” she said.

Mark Latimore Jr., Ph.D., FVSU’s associate dean for Extension, explained how Cooperative Extension’s relationship with the GAWA will help farmers.

“It’s an honor and a privilege to have a positive relationship with the Georgia Agricultural Wellness Alliance, thanks to the efforts of ChaNaè Bradley working with Mercer University’s School of Medicine and John McElveen. What we’re trying to do through our Extension program is inform farmers of outlets available for them when they feel stressed,” Latimore said.

Additionally, Latimore said the

Al Pearson of Pearson Farms hosted a tour of his facilities for summit attendees.

summit presented an opportunity for FVSU county agents to become familiar with key state agencies and contacts needed when farmers request assistance with mental health and stress. “This is beneficial for our county agents and the Extension program as a whole for our outreach efforts in rural Georgia,” Latimore said.

In addition, ChaNaè Bradley, Ph.D., FVSU’s assistant administrator for community development and outreach, served as co-chair of the 2026 Georgia Farm Stress Summit planning committee. Bradley said she was excited to see Fort Valley host the summit and engage FVSU Extension and College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology faculty with this topic, as well as members of the community.

“I had a vision to host the summit on campus after attending it in Statesboro in 2025,” she said. “It’s rewarding to see it come to fruition with additional programming like the pre-conference and farm tour. This work is important. People are in need, and professionals in agriculture and behavioral health are committed to providing resources and solutions. I look forward to continuing this work in my new role in Extension.”



For more information about GAWA and the services provided, contact McElveen at mcelveen_j@mercer.edu.



GOOD NEWS PAYS OFF

Fort Valley State agricultural communications team earns national honors

RUSSELL BOONE JR.

Fort Valley State University's (FVSU) Agricultural Communications Department recently earned awards from a national organization.

The Association for Communication Excellence (ACE) held its annual conference in Billings, Montana, June 15-17. Out of the more than 300 submissions for its Critique and Awards (C&A) Program, FVSU's AgComm team walked away with a total of six awards.

As a unit, FVSU won three awards. In the Graphic Design category, Rebecca Evans, Latasha Everson and Jeff Brothers captured a silver award for the Deep-Water Culture Hydroponic System illustration. The trio also claimed a bronze award in the same category for the Identifying Sericea Lespedeza illustration. Both works were featured in the 2024-25 Engage Research Report.

Additionally, in Technical Publications, Everson, Evans, Brothers, Russell Boone Jr. and

ChaNaè Bradley, Ph.D., earned a bronze award for the 2024-25 Engage Research Report.

Individually, Everson and Boone both won awards for their writing.

Everson, research communications manager, earned a silver award in Writing for a Diverse Audience for the 2025 AgComplish publication article "Rooted in Agriculture, Driven by Passion." She followed that with a bronze award in the Writing Within a Specialized Publication for the article "Insects

Inspire Incredible Career” featured in the 2025 AgComplish.

Boone, editor/writer for Cooperative Extension, claimed a silver award in Writing Within a Specialized Publication for the article “Prime Results” featured in the 2025 Focus magazine.

FVSU AgComm is also a member of the 1890 Land-grant Communications Committee. The collaborative team earned a gold award in Publications for Diverse Audiences for the 2025 1890 Impact Report, “The 1890 Voice: Empowering Communities, Elevating Futures,” and a silver award in Newsletters for Extension Today.

Marquinta Gonzalez, director of FVSU’s Agricultural Communications Department, gave kudos to the staff for being honored by their peers on a national level.

“We are very fortunate to have personnel who take pride in producing high-quality work,” Gonzalez said. “Their efforts are well appreciated by the College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology and Cooperative Extension.”

In addition to earning awards, Everson also accepted the gavel as ACE president for 2026-27.

“ACE has impacted my professional career since I joined in 2018. I have grown as a

communicator and leader, made so many friends and learned from my peers, whom I admire and respect,” Everson said. “Now to serve in the president’s role for 2026-27 and to represent my university, I am extremely grateful and honored. I appreciate all that ACE offers and look forward to creating meaningful opportunities for our outstanding current and future members across land-grant universities and the broader community.”

Furthermore, ACE’s newest leader says that she is excited to work with a dedicated board and members to continue elevating the organization’s association as the premier communications network.

“At the Member Meeting during the conference in Billings, I shared several goals to help fulfill that vision,” Everson said. “This includes building on strategic initiatives by developing a comprehensive plan for ACE that advances the organization’s mission and supports long-term growth. I would also like to strengthen institutional membership and overall retention, which includes increasing student membership and engagement.”

She added that partnering with businesses and organizations to expand ACE’s reach, impact and sponsorship opportunities is also on the to-do list.

In discussing the benefits of becoming an ACE member,



Everson gave an enthusiastic answer.

Outgoing 2025-26 ACE President Stacey Stearns (left) hands gavel to incoming 2026-27 ACE President Latasha Everson.

“Building on our 2027 conference theme, ACE is the place to ignite curiosity, imagine possibilities and inspire change,” she said. “As I shared during the Member Meeting in Billings, our mission and values remain strong. In ACE, you can be your best self with countless supporters in your corner, encouraging you every step of the way in your career.”



ACE is an international association of professionals who practice in all areas of communication. It offers professional development and networking for individuals who extend knowledge about agriculture, natural resources, and life and human sciences. For more information about ACE, visit aceweb.org. To read FVSU's winning works, visit fvsu.ag/publications.

A CARING COMBINATION

Fort Valley State Cooperative Extension forms partnership focusing on mental well-being

by **RUSSELL BOONE JR.**

Through the efforts of Yolanda McFerrin, Ed.D., technology curriculum specialist for Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension, a partnership has been developed with A Better You Integrated Health and Counseling LLC.

McFerrin says this collaboration demonstrates how community education and wellness can come together to support women in meaningful ways. One example of this is the Loving Yourself to “A Better You” Women’s Conference, put on by both entities. The FVSU specialist took the time to answer some questions, explaining the importance of this effort.

Q: *What are the benefits of FVSU Cooperative Extension developing a team effort with A Better You Health and Counseling to address women’s issues?*

By joining forces, FVSU Extension can extend its reach beyond traditional educational programming. This also offers women access to licensed counselors, life coaches and health professionals who specialize in emotional wellness, mental health support and personal development.

Q: *What were some of the topics of discussion covered during the conference?*

The conference itself brought together a diverse group of



Yolanda McFerrin, Ed.D., with Gabrielle Reynolds of Warner Robins.

presenters whose backgrounds shaped the topics discussed throughout the day. The host and owner of A Better You, Tameka Mack, set the tone by centering the event on self-love and holistic well-being. Georgia State Representative Patty Stinson offered insight into women's advocacy and the importance of understanding public policy issues that affect women's daily lives.

Barnesville Chief of Police, Belinda Penamon, delivered the keynote address. She encouraged women to embrace leadership, personal safety and community involvement. Tanya Swygert, Ph.D., discussed faith-based healing and spiritual guidance. Anissa Howard, Ph.D., Bridget

Moss, Ph.D., and Ana Hernandez, LPC, conducted breakout sessions focusing on mental health education, emotional balance, trauma awareness and healthy relationships. Other sessions covered motivation, goal setting and physical wellness.

Q: Will FVSU Cooperative Extension continue to work with the organization on future programs?

The intent is to hold Loving Yourself to "A Better You" Women's Conference yearly.

Q: How many people attended the event?

We had more than 47 guests register and attend the event.

Q: Overall, did the conference achieve its objective?

Together, these sessions created a comprehensive experience that addressed women's issues from multiple angles: emotional, physical, spiritual and social. The collaboration between FVSU Cooperative Extension and A Better You Integrated Health and Counseling LLC allowed the program to offer women not just information but a supportive environment where they could learn, connect and begin taking steps toward becoming "A Better You."



Georgia State Representative Patty Stinson addresses conference attendees.

Edythe Washington of Ashburn with Stinson.



NATURAL **SOLUTIONS**



Fort Valley State Extension
hosts herbal workshop in
Macon County



Local farmers and gardeners looking to “spice up” their health using natural herbs traveled to Oglethorpe, Georgia, for a workshop sponsored by Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension.

The first edition of The Herbalist Talks Workshop Series was conducted at the Macon County Extension Office on April 1. More than 25 people attended the event themed “Herbs and Edible Backyard Plants.”

Some topics of discussion included “Herbs: What they are and how they are used” and “How to find and identify local herbal plants.”

Terrence Lewis, FVSU agent for Macon County, stated that

many individuals have numerous plants surrounding them, yet are unaware of their potential health benefits.

“The utilization of herbs for alleviating certain ailments has become a largely forgotten practice. Our grandparents frequently relied on plants to self-medicate. Therefore, I strongly believed a workshop was necessary to educate people on the medicinal properties of plants that may be growing in their own yards,” Lewis explained.

Furthermore, the Macon County Extension agent emphasized his desire for workshop participants to gain a deeper appreciation for the value of herbs.

“While aesthetically pleasing yards are certainly desirable; it is equally important to recognize that some plants we consider weeds may possess properties that could provide relief from various health issues,” Lewis said.

Additionally, Lewis stated that the use of herbs is not meant to replace pharmaceuticals but can play a preventive role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Amber Jackson, owner of Amber’s Herbs and co-owner of the Hazy Daisy Farm in Hawkinsville, Georgia, served as the guest speaker. She said she has been growing herbs for more than 10 years but increased her efforts in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kimaya Gallimore demonstrates how to make an ointment from herbs during the workshop.



Ointments and other products made from herbs and plants on display.



More products on display at the herbal workshop.



“ It’s very important we relearn that our food and medicine originally came from plants.

– Amber Jackson,
Owner of Amber’s Herbals and co-owner of the
Hazy Daisy Farm in Hawkinsville, Georgia

“I’ve always been interested in plants. After starting my garden, I found out I was good at growing herbs. After plants started growing, I asked, ‘What am I going to do with all of these herbs?’ So, I began doing some research, learned about all the medicinal properties in them and started from there,” she said.

Moreover, Jackson added some more advice for people interested in using herbs.

“It’s very important we relearn that our food and medicine originally came from plants,” Jackson said. She also cautioned that one should do their research because some plants may not be healthy.

Subsequently, Jackson said she would once again collaborate with FVSU Extension in putting on another herbal workshop. “This is what I’m passionate about. I love

talking about plants and educating people on herbs,” she said.

Nikki Thompson, a native of Andersonville, Georgia, said she attended the workshop because she wants to utilize herbs in keeping her family healthy. “I have an herb garden and lots of plants at home. I also wanted to find different uses for the same herbs, along with some new ones,” she said.

Furthermore, Thompson said she would attend more FVSU-sponsored workshops in Macon County due to the proximity to her home.

“The programs and information are free of charge, so why not come?” Thompson said. She also recommended that others interested in growing herbs attend future workshops because plants grow everywhere, and

people should learn how to use

The second of The Herbalist Talks Workshop Series focused on showing participants how to create topical salves using oils and herbs. Kimaya Gallimore, a plant wellness entrepreneur and FVSU alumna, conducted the activity.

Amber Jackson explains the techniques and benefits of producing homemade herbal products.



For more information on future herbal workshops, contact Lewis at 478-472-7588 or lewist@fvsu.edu.

4-H UPDATES



Fort Valley State 4-H'ers make presentations at national conference

by **RUSSELL BOONE JR.**

Two Fort Valley State University senior 4-H members recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in a national event.

Aniya Green, a senior at Twiggs County High School, and Evann Petway, a senior at Peach County High School, represented FVSU's 4-H delegation at the National 4-H Conference held April 15-19.

They were two of the many 4-H'ers from across the country aged 15-19 in attendance who participated in several team-building activities. One of them included forming a roundtable group with their peers after selecting a topic of interest, developing a 45-minute briefing and presenting their recommendations to a selected



federal agency or partner at their federal building.

Green's presentation to the U.S. Peace Corps covered the question, "How might the Peace Corps better engage with communities, partners and individuals to encourage and facilitate employment opportunities for young people in the agricultural sector?"

Evann Petway's presentation to the National Park Service answered the question, "How can we use technology to help inform people about what parks represent?" The Peach County High student also led the Pledge of Allegiance at the National 4-H ceremony at the U.S. Department of Agriculture headquarters.

Phillip Petway, FVSU's Twiggs County 4-H agent, served as the lead chaperone for the delegation. He was pleased that the two FVSU 4-H'ers experienced speaking at a national event.

"They successfully used their skills and attributes in preparing their presentations for the national conference and participating in roundtable group discussions. Additionally, I was proud of how actively engaged and vocal they were in sharing their thoughts and ideas," Petway said.

(From left) Senior 4-H students Aniya Green and Evann Petway travel to Washington, D.C., with Twiggs County 4-H agent Phillip Petway (far right) for the 4-H conference.

The group also toured several sites and monuments, including the National Mall.

The FVSU Twiggs County 4-H Program is part of FVSU's Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development's Beyond Ready Program.

For more information, contact Phillip Petway at 478-825-6296 (petwayp@fvsu.edu) or Woodie Hughes Jr., assistant Extension administrator 4-H program leader, at 478-825-6296 (hughesw@fvsu.edu).

Fort Valley State 4-H Program receives financial gift from Blue Bird Foundation

by **RUSSELL BOONE JR.**

Fort Valley State University's Twiggs County 4-H Program recently received a donation from a local company's foundation.

The Blue Bird School Bus Foundation donated \$5,000 to FVSU's Twiggs County 4-H Program during a community empowerment event.

Phillip Petway, FVSU's Twiggs County 4-H agent, learned about the foundation from a community

member who directed him to its website. He spoke about the impact the grant will have on the university's 4-H program.

"This will allow us to successfully complete the 4-H mission of assisting youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and forming attitudes that will help them become productive members of society," Petway said.

Additionally, Petway said the grant will help Twiggs County young people cover full or partial registration costs for several 4-H events. This includes 4-H state conferences, judging competitions and 4-H summer camp opportunities.

Furthermore, the FVSU Extension agent discussed the importance of a company like Blue Bird taking an interest in FVSU's 4-H program.

"It feels great that a nationally recognized company like Blue Bird, which is in the same city as Fort Valley State University, is pouring support back into the community and surrounding areas. More importantly, it is giving back by investing in the future of young people," Petway said.

Since its start in 2015, the Blue Bird School Bus Foundation has supported organizations that help school-aged children under 19 and organizations that directly support limited-resource communities. This includes promoting education, health and safety of children in Georgia.

“It feels great that a nationally recognized company like Blue Bird, which is in the same city as Fort Valley State University, is pouring support back into the community and surrounding areas. More importantly, it is giving back by investing in the future of young people.”

- Phillip Petway,
FVSU Extension Twiggs County 4-H agent

More than \$715,000 has been donated to these organizations, including more than 80 nonprofit entities in the state.

FVSU's Twiggs County 4-H Program is part of the FVSU Cooperative Extension 4-H Positive Youth Development Program.

For more information about FVSU's Cooperative Extension 4-H Positive Youth Development Program, contact Petway at 478-825-6296 (petwayp@fvsu.edu) or Woodie Hughes Jr., assistant Extension administrator 4-H program leader, at 478-825-6296 (hughesw@fvsu.edu).



Fort Valley State University 4-H program travels to national convention

by RUSSELL BOONE JR.

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program recently took a group to the nation's capital for a civic leadership event.

A party of more than 18, consisting of 4-H students, FVSU Extension 4-H Youth Development Program Ignite youth mentees and adult volunteer mentor chaperones, traveled to Washington, D.C., March 24-29. They were there to participate in the National Citizenship Washington Focus Ignite 4-H event.

More than 1,800 people attended the conference, considered to be a cornerstone for leadership experience amongst the 4-H Ignite community. It informed students that by participating in civic engagement, public policy and advocacy, these actions can lead to changes in their communities. Participants



also learned more about the democratic process and how it helps cultivate skills rooted in 4-H civic responsibility. By being exposed to these foundations, students gained knowledge on how local action can have an impact on national and global issues.

Additionally, the summit included panels, workshop sessions and a tour of Washington, D.C. It also provided a showcase of what 4-H has to offer in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), agriscience, healthy living, animal science, civic

engagement and career readiness.

The road trip to the nation's capital also influenced a student to further their education by attending college.

Ja'Mari Little, a senior 4-H'er from Fulton County, Georgia, decided to enroll at FVSU for the 2026 fall semester after participating in the CWF Ignite 4-H event.

Students, chaperones, mentors and staff of Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program participate in the Ignite 4-H conference in Washington, D.C.

“Attending the National Ignite 4-H event in Washington, D.C., was a pivotal experience that inspired me to pour back into my community. It motivated me to actively encourage and guide my peers in their 4-H, college and career development by helping them explore pathways they may not have previously considered,” Little said.

Furthermore, Little added that through his 4-H Lead to Change Project, he was able to advocate for students and help them implement an agricultural program within the Fulton County school system.

“This initiative ensures that more students are exposed to 4-H and the opportunities it provides, allowing them to develop valuable skills and discover their own passions. Overall, 4-H has not only helped me identify my interests, but has empowered me with the leadership skills, confidence and determination to pursue my goals,” Little said.

He noted that 4-H has prepared him to make a lasting impact on society by combining agriculture, technology and service to help better the world for future generations.

“Through the 4-H experience, I developed a deeper understanding of teamwork, but more importantly, I learned what it truly means to ‘step up and lead’ when it matters most. I also learned how to guide others toward a shared goal,” Little said.

Woodie Hughes Jr., FVSU assistant Extension administrator 4-H program leader, is extremely proud of the program’s impact on young people.

“When I think about how the Fort Valley State University 4-H Youth Development Program is shaping today’s young people for tomorrow, I feel blessed and humbled. It is an honor to serve in a capacity that prepares Georgia’s youth from rural and urban backgrounds for success in college, career readiness, leadership and life so that they become 4-H Beyond Ready,” Hughes said.

Moreover, the FVSU administrator talked about taking strong 4-H’ers who participate weekly or monthly in their community programs to the national CWF Ignite 4-H event. He said it is a positive action that benefits the student and FVSU 4-H and is an opportunity to help a student or family who cannot afford the cost of such a trip.

“This is a good example of how the Fort Valley State University 4-H Youth Development Program can have a positive impact on their life,” Hughes said.

He acknowledged the many individuals and organizations who made the trip possible. “On behalf of the Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program and all the youths and families we serve throughout the state of Georgia as an 1890 Land-grant University, we graciously thank you,” he said.

For more information about FVSU’s Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program, contact Hughes at 478-825-6296 or hughesw@fvsu.edu.



IN THE FIELD SPOTLIGHT

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension personnel educate clients through technical trainings on campus, media services and by hosting outreach events. Being "In the Field" allows Extension to consistently serve as a resource for the state of Georgia. The following events and projects took place from 2025 - 2026.



2026 State of Agriculture

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension Program served as the panel sponsor for the 2026 State of Agriculture: Building Agriculture's Future luncheon at the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter in Perry, Georgia. The State of Agriculture was a panel discussion on the future of agriculture and its vital role in Perry, Houston County and middle Georgia. University System of Georgia Chancellor Sonny Perdue, local agricultural leaders and educators who are helping connect classroom learning to real-world careers served as the speakers.

Life on the Farm Visit

Middle and high school agriculture students from the towns of Live Oak and Cottondale, Florida, toured Fort Valley State University's agricultural facilities, including stops at the Life on the Farm animal exhibit and the goat research building.



Georgia National Fair & Sunbelt Ag Expo

From refreshing goat's milk ice cream to engaging educational experiences, Fort Valley State University brought excitement and learning for all ages to the 2025 Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie and the Georgia National Fair in Perry.



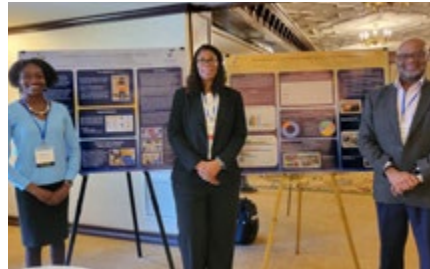
Healthy Gardens

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension has collaborated with the Twiggs County Senior Center for many years, providing healthy gardens and promoting healthy living initiatives. This year's spring and summer garden items included squash, chocolate bell peppers, bell peppers, cucumbers, jalapeños and different varieties of watermelon.



Association County Commissioners of Georgia Conference

Fort Valley State University highlighted its Extension and research programs at the 2026 Association County Commissioners of Georgia Conference in Savannah, Georgia, creating opportunities for partnerships and statewide outreach.



National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals Conference

Fort Valley State University Extension team members Latasha Everson, Dr. Yolanda McFerrin and Terrence Wolfork presented their work at the 2025 National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Their posters highlighted creative expression, digital literacy and FVSU's approach to digital equity and community empowerment.

Bridging the Generations Workshop

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension, A Better You Integrated Health and Counseling LLC and the Hancock County Health Department collaborated to host the Bridging the Generations Workshop in Sparta, Georgia. More than 12 Hancock County grandparents attended the event. Participants who completed the computer training received free laptops.



IN THE FIELD SPOTLIGHT



Georgia Farm Bureau's Leadership Program

Members of the Georgia Farm Bureau's Leadership Program, composed of farmers, ranchers and agricultural professionals, toured Fort Valley State University's College of

Agriculture facilities. Stops included the Cold Vegetable Processing Facility, Meat Technology Center and Solar Demonstration Site.



Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education Conference

Fort Valley State University's Dr. Yolanda McFerrin, Terrence Wolkoff and Latasha Everson presented their work on creative expression, digital literacy and technology anxiety in the aging population at the 2026 Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education Conference in San Jose, Costa Rica. They also engaged in roundtable discussions for idea sharing on their research.

Minority Professional Truckers Association



The Minority Professional Truckers Association conducted its 2026 Summit at Fort Valley State University's Agricultural Technology Conference Center. Participants were treated to a brief tour of FVSU's Cold Vegetable Processing Facility.

Dart Drones Professional Wings Program

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension administrators and agents seeking to use drones participated in the Dart Drones Professional Wings Program. During the

training, attendees took part in hands-on flight sessions and learned what is needed to earn a Federal Aviation Administration drone license.





Twiggs County Walkathon and Free Garden Seeds Giveaway

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension hosted the 15th edition of the Twiggs County Walkathon and Free Garden Seeds Giveaway in Jeffersonville, Georgia. Participants included Twiggs County elected officials and residents. The Georgia Department of Family and Children Services also conducted classes in FVSU's Mobile Health Unit on-site.

Citrus Grove

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension Agricultural and Natural Resources agents Austin Roper and Ashton Roper collaborated with University of Georgia Extension agents Vivek Bist and Mary Sutton to collect data on how citrus trees can withstand freezes in south Georgia. The quartet is seen here at the Nila Plantation in Albany, Georgia.



Health Resources and Services Administration

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension Program and the Health Resources and Services Administration offered a free workshop at FVSU's C.W. Pettigrew Center. Priya Shah, public health analyst for HRSA, provided an overview

of HRSA, its role in supporting rural communities and federal resources available to address rural health challenges. Participants learned about current funding opportunities, the federal grant application process and best practices for developing competitive applications.



IN THE FIELD SPOTLIGHT



Health Living Festival

The Fort Valley State University chapter of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences held its Health Living Festival on FVSU's campus. Several vendors and organizations were present with information booths. FVSU's family and consumer sciences staff conducted a healthy snack demonstration in the Mobile Health Unit.

Supply Chain Roundtable

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension Program recently hosted a Supply Chain Roundtable. Topics of discussion included the vision and purpose of FVSU's Cold Vegetable Processing Facility and how it will support students and producers. Roundtable participants also toured the complex.



Annual Heritage Day

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension and the Flint River Farms School Preservation Society Inc. co-hosted the Annual Heritage Day celebration in Montezuma, Georgia. Some of the learning opportunities included an old-fashioned hog dressing, museum tours and the cooking of pork skins. FVSU's Life on the Farm exhibit and Mobile Health Unit were also on site.

Ocmulgee Regional Library System



Fort Valley State University partnered with the Ocmulgee Regional Library System to offer computer fundamentals training for older adults. The program included four two-hour sessions designed to help participants build essential computer skills. The first cohort was held in Eastman, Georgia.



CARET Conference

Fort Valley State University Extension and College of Agriculture leadership met with Georgia legislators during the 2026 Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Conference in Washington, D.C., to highlight the university's land grant impact and underscore the need for continued support. They also shared the regional contributions of the 1890 Land grant Universities. Read the latest report at https://1890aea.org/download_file/1463/200.

Profitability and Production Workshop

Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension hosted the Profitability and Production Workshop. More than 57 people in attendance listened to presentations covering subjects such as farm collaboratives, food banks and Good Agricultural Practices audits. Attendees also toured FVSU's Cold Vegetable Processing Facility.



27th Annual Gladyce C. Sampson Memorial Lecture Luncheon

Fort Valley State University's Family and Consumer Sciences program hosted the 27th annual Gladyce C. Sampson Memorial Lecture Luncheon. Past and present FVSU FACS faculty, staff and students returned to enjoy fellowship and food. Rose Hunter McRae, Miss FVSC 1975 and Jordan Gallemore, Miss FVSU 2025 served as keynote speakers.

RECIPE

Oven-Baked Fried Fish



Southern fried fish is a welcomed delicacy, but oven-fried fish? Sabrena Johnson, Fort Valley State University family and consumer sciences agent for Peach County, shows how this well-liked staple can be prepared in a heart-healthy manner.



YOU WILL NEED

- 2 pounds fish fillets
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ¼ cup fat-free or 1% buttermilk
- 2 drops hot sauce
- 1 teaspoon fresh garlic, minced
- ¼ teaspoon ground white pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ cup cornflakes, crumbled or regular breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 fresh lemon, cut in wedges

NUTRITIONAL FACTS

Serving Size: 1 cut piece

Servings per recipe: 6

Amount per serving:

Calories 183

Calories from fat 18

Total Fat	2g
Saturated Fat	0g
Trans Fat	0.0g
Cholesterol	80mg
Sodium	325mg
Total Carbohydrates	10g
Dietary fiber	1g
Sugars	0g
Protein	30g
Potassium	453mg

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 475 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Clean and rinse fish. Wipe fillets with lemon juice and pat dry.
3. Combine milk, hot sauce and garlic in a mixing bowl.
4. Combine white pepper, salt and onion powder with cornflakes or breadcrumbs and spread on a plate.
5. Let fillets sit briefly in milk mixture. Remove a fillet and coat on both sides with seasoned cornflakes or breadcrumbs and let stand briefly until coating sticks to each side of fish. Repeat step for each fillet.
6. Arrange fillets on lightly oiled shallow baking dish or sheet.
7. Place dish or sheet on middle rack. Bake for 20 minutes without turning.
8. Cut into six pieces. Serve with fresh lemon.

Source: Heart Healthy Home Cooking from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

MEET YOUR AGENT

Talbot County



Collie Graddick

County Extension Agent

Coverage Area: Talbot County

Type: Agriculture and Natural Resources

Talbot County and west Georgia residents looking for assistance in small- and large-scale vegetable production and livestock can rely on the knowledge of Collie Graddick. Graddick has experience working with farmers and ranchers locally, regionally and across the southeast. He also specializes in several areas focused on helping farmers. This includes farm management plans, food safety certifications, value-added production, cooperative marketing and economics. Currently, Graddick is researching organic System

of Rice Intensification rice production systems.

Graddick provides services in the following areas:

- Backyard and community gardening projects.
- Small- and large-scale fruit and vegetable production and marketing.
- Livestock production and marketing.
- Food safety plans and certifications.
- Farm management and production plans.



FORT VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY

EXTENSION



For more information about programs offered in Talbot County, contact Graddick:

401 S. Washington Ave.
Talbotton, GA 31827
Cell: 478-722-5226
Office: 706-665-3230
Collie.Graddick@fvsu.edu

WHAT IS EXTENSION?

The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide educational network. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at a land-grant university, such as Fort Valley State University, which has a network of regional offices.

Within these offices staff and experts are available to provide useful, practical and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youths and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

Collie Graddick, based in Talbot County, is one of 13 county agents and program assistants who work personally with residents in 30 counties throughout middle, east and south Georgia.

WHO DOES THE EXTENSION PROGRAM SERVE?

Extension has something for every Georgian, including limited-resource farmers. One-on-one assistance, agricultural events and workshops are available to address an array of issues facing clients. Services and expertise vary with each coverage area.

Extension is here to help Georgians with their challenges. Clientele include:

- Animal Producers
- Families
- Future and Current Homeowners
- Gardeners
- Limited-Resource Farmers
- Parents
- Seniors
- Youths

NEWS & NOTES

Ribbon cutting marks grand opening of Cold Vegetable Processing Facility

By Dr. ChaNaè Bradley



Excitement and expectation filled the cool October air for the official ribbon cutting and grand opening of the new Fort Valley State University Cold Vegetable Processing Facility.

Nearly 75 alumni, elected officials, students, faculty and staff witnessed the ribbon cutting and walked inside the 5,520-square-foot building for a short tour and demonstration of its use.

The facility houses equipment for shelling, washing, grading, chopping, slicing and packaging of fresh vegetables. The equipment can handle large quantities of produce in an efficient and safe manner inside an air-conditioned and well-lit facility.

Ryan Golphin, who oversees operations for the facility, is one of many who helped to bring the operation to fruition. After a visit to a similar site housed at Alcorn State University, Golphin said he was able to envision the same idea for FVSU's campus.

"I'm very excited about this facility. It also provides our students with an edge, especially those who are majoring in agriculture, to gain hands-on experience," Golphin said. He also shared the importance of helping farmers create value-added products

and obtain Good Agricultural Practices certification, a training offered by FVSU to help farmers prepare their produce for grocers.

Furthermore, Golphin said the facility can handle leafy greens such as collards, kale and cabbage, as well as peas like black-eyed peas and purple hull peas. He said this is helpful to farmers due to prices and equipment.

"Small farmers can't always afford top-of-the-line equipment, so we have it here for them. Storage has also been an issue for small farmers. We have storage here, to include walk-in coolers and freezers, which can help," Golphin said.

In addition to farmers, community groups also see opportunities with the FVSU Cold Vegetable Processing Facility.

Mike Morrison, food procurement manager with the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank, shared how he could find use for the facility.

"This here is going to be a tremendous help," Morrison said, referencing the distribution of fresh produce to soup kitchens, food pantries and churches. "This can help us get more food out to those in need."

Mark Latimore Jr., Ph.D., associate dean for FVSU's Cooperative Extension Program, said this is another way to engage and provide services to our community.

"We want to help farmers build markets and help them make more money," Latimore said. Furthermore, he said this provides an opportunity to grow more produce on campus to supply Sodexo, the food service provider for FVSU's cafeteria. It also allows students to receive specialized training beyond the classroom.

The FVSU Cold Vegetable Food Processing Facility will release its

prices for processing soon. For more information about the facility, call 478-825-6296.

Farmers, legislators attend breakfast hosted by Fort Valley State

By Russell Boone Jr.



Farmers, ranchers and the public gathered at Fort Valley State University to receive the latest legislative news involving agriculture while enjoying an old-fashioned country breakfast.

FVSU's Cooperative Extension hosted the 44th annual Ham and Egg Legislative Breakfast on Thursday, April 9, at the C.W. Pettigrew Farm and Life Community Center on FVSU's campus. More than 150 people attended the event.

U.S. Rep. Sanford D. Bishop Jr. of Georgia's 2nd Congressional District presided over the breakfast. Other legislators making remarks included State Reps. Robert Dickey (District

134) and Patty Marie Stinson (District 150).

Tyler Harper, Georgia's commissioner of agriculture, also gave an update on the state of Georgia's agriculture industry.

Bishop said that 2025 was a bumpy and rough ride due to executive orders that circumvented the constitutional role Congress usually has in appropriating funds.

"Funds that the appropriations committee in Congress passed and provided that were in fact signed into law, were paused, frozen, withheld and rescinded," the lawmaker said.

Furthermore, Bishop said many farmers were denied Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding for months, and their contracts with industry groups were placed on hold. This was due to the word "climate" being used in the program. This also had an adverse effect on National Institute of Food and Agriculture funding received by land-grant universities such as FVSU and the University of Georgia.

Additionally, Bishop said that more than \$120 million in funds authorized by Congress designated for Georgia's producers, rural residents, seniors and school cafeterias were cut.

"I do my dead level best to work in a bipartisan fashion to get a funding bill passed. When it becomes law, we expect that it will be executed and abided by," Bishop said.

Moreover, Bishop discussed a bright spot, focusing on a federal and state coordinated response in acquiring funds for Georgia farmers still seeking relief from Hurricane Helene. He thanked Georgia's Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper for taking the time to ensure the process is completed in a smooth and fair manner.

"He has done a great job leveraging his relationships within the administration to get our farmers, ranchers and forestry people the help

they need to recover and rebuild," he said. Bishop also thanked Governor Brian Kemp for the development of a forestry task force to address the challenges of timber growers in the state.

Furthermore, Bishop announced that more than \$60 million in scholarships for students attending 1890 Land-grant Universities like FVSU has been approved.

Harper said forums such as FVSU's Ham and Egg Breakfast present a great opportunity for policymakers, farmers, business leaders, educators and others to meet and discuss the challenges associated with agriculture.

"These forums help us to have honest, open discussions about what those concerns and issues are," he said. "They are critically important for the ability of us to gather as leaders to address challenges head-on and allow young men and women who are attending Fort Valley State and other institutions like this to continue to have success and opportunities in the state's No. 1 industry."

As Georgia's agriculture commissioner, Harper said that having two land-grant universities, such as FVSU and UGA, is a big plus due to their having the resources to help farmers overcome agricultural challenges.

"What's awesome about Georgia and the opportunity I have as commissioner is that a lot of my counterparts across the country don't have two land-grant universities as we have in our great state," Harper said.

He said that the mission they play in education, research and Extension is critically important to the future of agriculture in the state. "Having two land-grant universities that are working hand-in-hand in partnership and with our leadership and agricultural industry across the state is what allows our farmers to have information at their fingertips," Harper said.

Keith Howard, Ph.D., dean of FVSU's College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology, discussed the important role that the Ham and Egg Breakfast plays in promoting agriculture in Georgia.

"It's really wonderful. We get to interact with some of the key officials and legislators who are on agricultural committees and with farmers. The fact that it's here at an 1890 Land-grant University is fantastic," Howard said.

For more information about FVSU's Cooperative Extension, visit ag.fvsu.edu or call 478-825-6296.

Extension provides west Georgia residents with computer training

By Russell Boone Jr.



A recent collaboration involving Fort Valley State University's Cooperative Extension Program provided residents of LaGrange, Georgia, with laptop computer training.

Through a partnership made possible with the First Baptist Church Fannin Street, the West Georgia Council for African American Women and FVSU's West Georgia Alumni Chapter, arranged a four-day computer training program targeting residents age 60 years or older.

The training program was developed through FVSU Cooperative Extension using a curriculum provided by the Southern Rural Development Center.

For successfully completing the program, 15 participants received laptop computers donated by

The Family Life Center Foundation from Hogansville, Georgia. Jimmy McCamey, Ph.D., the foundation's chairman, is also an instructor in FVSU's Social Sciences Department.

"The purpose of this training is for older adults to gain computer skills. This includes learning how to use email and understanding hardware, software, website navigation, cybersecurity and how to use Zoom," said Yolanda McFerrin, Ed.D., technology curriculum specialist for FVSU's Cooperative Extension Program.

Furthermore, McFerrin said that FVSU has conducted similar programs in various communities across Georgia for the past 18 months.

J.T. Thornton, a retired truck driver, said he enjoyed the program. He said that as an older person who is self-taught, he needed to improve his knowledge of computers. "A person with limited computer skills should take advantage of the knowledge gained in this class," Thornton said.

Additionally, Thornton said he now feels more comfortable using a computer. He said that by understanding and learning the computer's capabilities, he can use more of its features.

Yvonne Pittman, a retired Bank of America employee, currently serves as an assistant for her daughter's real estate business. She said she already knew how to work on a touch screen computer but was uncomfortable using a laptop's toggle arrows on the keyboard.

"I learned how to use the arrows on the keyboard because I was familiar with using a touch screen on my laptop. Now I'm excited because I can use the arrows to navigate the screen, and I really enjoyed the class," Pittman said.

Bessie Curry, a 1974 graduate of Fort Valley State College (early childhood education), is the president of the FVSU West Georgia Alumni Chapter,

which includes LaGrange. She said she received her inspiration to help organize the training after seeing the Mobile Information Technology Center and Mobile Health Unit during a tour of the FVSU campus.

"There are some senior citizens who have never touched a keyboard. They have the knowledge but never had the experience to be able to connect with the technology world. We had to expose them to this, and we did," Curry said.

The FVSU alumna further explained that McFerrin's instructions on how to use the computers put the participants at ease and they are more than eager to put their newfound skills to work. She said after each day, the participants gained confidence using computers.

"Usually, when you get a computer, if you give someone something and they have no background of it, the first place they're going to put it is in a closet or give it as a gift. They are working on the computers, holding them tightly and can't wait to get home and start using them," Curry said.

For more information about future Cooperative Extension computer trainings, contact McFerrin at 478-825-6706 or (Yolanda.mcferrin@fvsu.edu).

Northeast Georgia residents receive education on estate planning, trusts, financial management

By Russell Boone Jr.

Wilkes County residents seeking information about wills and estate planning recently attended a workshop co-sponsored by Fort Valley State University and the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension programs.

The "Your Legacy, Your Plan" workshop is part of the Georgia Farmer's Initiative for Training and Sustainability program. The event

took place at the Edward B. Pope Conference Center in Washington, Georgia.

The GA-FITS program is a collaboration between FVSU and UGA's Cooperative Extension programs. It focuses on educational workshops pertaining to estate planning and helping farmers with sustainability and training initiatives.

More than 50 people listened to presentations from Gracy Barksdale, attorney at law, John Donsbach of Donsbach Lewis LLC and Travis Mountain, Ph.D., assistant professor and Extension specialist with a focus on financial planning at UGA. Topics of discussion included wills, power of attorney, healthcare directives and financial management.

"Developing a program on wills and estate planning directly supports the Extension mission of helping individuals, families and communities effectively manage resources and prepare for the future," said Ida Jackson, facilitator for the workshop, who also serves as the UGA family and consumer sciences agent for Wilkes County.

In further discussing the need for a wills and estate program, Jackson said that many households, particularly in rural and underserved communities, lack a formal estate plan. This could lead to family disputes, financial strain and the loss of generational wealth involving land and property.

"A will and estate planning program is about more than preparing legal documents. It is about protecting families, preserving property, reducing financial burdens and strengthening communities for future generations," Jackson said.

Gracy Barksdale, a 1983 criminal justice graduate of Fort Valley State College, (now FVSU) served as one of the presenters. The attorney stated her views on the importance of attending such workshops.



“By participating in an estate planning workshop, you empower yourself to make choices that will protect your legacy and provide peace of mind for you and your loved ones. Estate planning is accessible to everyone, regardless of economic status and it is crucial not to leave your future to chance. Take control of your estate planning and ensure that your wishes are respected and your loved ones are cared for through your legacy,” Barksdale said.

Furthermore, Barksdale said the workshops provide an avenue for people to gain knowledge about estate planning documents such as wills, trusts, power of attorney and advance directives for healthcare. She said these are all vital for protecting one’s estate.

Dorothy Howard, a native of Rayle, Georgia, decided to attend the workshop because she does not have many relatives. “I wanted to make sure that at the end of my life, my remaining relatives will have an easy process with everything I’m leaving behind,” Howard said.

Additionally, the Wilkes County native said she enjoyed the way Barksdale explained details such as what is needed inside of a will. “It was a good reminder that some things

we think are taken care of are not necessarily included,” Howard said.

Furthermore, Howard said she would recommend others attend the next workshop.

“I already have a list of folks that I want to invite,” she said with a smile. “The first thing I would say is that always when planning end of life affairs, just because you don’t think you have anything, you’ll still need to come. You’ll figure out something that you will need direction on,” she said.

Jackson further elaborated on the successful partnership between FVSU and UGA in developing the GA-FITS program.

“The collaboration between FVSU and UGA Extension is successful because both institutions share a common mission of strengthening families, individuals and communities through researched based education. Each organization brings unique strengths that complement one another, creating a more comprehensive approach to addressing community needs,” Jackson said.

For more information about the GA-FITS program and future workshops, contact Ida Jackson at 706-678-2332 (ida.jackson@uga.edu) or Marc Thomas, director of field operations for FVSU Extension at 478-825-6112 (thomasm@fvsu.edu).



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