

North Carolina Cooperative Extension
Montgomery County Center
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Monthly Newsletter
October 2026

From the Director's Desk

Chrissy Haynes, County Extension Director

Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost

Fall is here and the holiday season is quickly approaching. Whether you're planning a meal for one or ten, it's never too early to start preparing. Let's look at a few strategies that will help to keep the season joyous. Planning and starting early go a long way toward managing both stress and costs. Planning your menu ensures all your favorite dishes are included and will help to spend smarter. You will shop more efficiently, reduce the likelihood of not having an ingredient on-hand, and decrease costs by avoiding unnecessary purchases.

Start your menu now. Do not wait until the week before a holiday to start planning and deciding what you want to make for your family. Once the menu is established, allot time to look for sales or coupons both online and at local stores, to maximize your food budget. Then check your pantry and take note of everything you already have at home, so that you only buy the ingredients necessary to complete the dishes. Now you are ready to buy shelf-stable items as they go on sale. Items like spices, canned goods, and dry ingredients are great candidates for early purchase.

Buy frozen and canned goods to help save time in the kitchen. Fresh fruits and vegetables are a great addition to your plate, but frozen or canned produce is just as good for your health as they retain the same nutrients. Moreover, depending on the season, it may be cheaper to buy frozen or canned produce versus fresh ones.



As a tradition, you might buy a certain type of meat. **Being flexible and considering other types or cuts of meat can be gentler on your food budget and still taste great.** According to the American Farm Bureau, the production environment and strong demand for meat contributed to price increases in 2026. Even so, shoppers looking to save money can often find promotional sales and specials on meat as holidays approach.

A less expensive approach for this time of year may mean building a meal around a whole roasted chicken or lean pork roast. You can round out your meal with a soup such as cheese and corn chowder, pumpkin, or potato soup. You can find these and other soup recipes at USDA's "Affordable Nutrition from American Crops" website at https://www.fna.usda.gov/americasharvest/budget

Again, make sure to spend some time **considering your food budget** and deciding how much you can spend this holiday season. You can adjust your dishes accordingly. What people enjoy most is the time spent together sharing the meal.

If you are celebrating the holidays with friends and family, a good way to guarantee everyone saves is to **have a potluck for your holiday meal.** Not only will it be fun to try different dishes, but it also helps save time in the kitchen. Discuss with everyone what you would like to have served and divide the responsibilities either by types of dishes (main dish, dessert, sides) or by each person's specialty.

Another great way to stretch your budget is to **find local resources.** There are many organizations that support families during the holiday season such as churches, food banks and private groups. SNAP can be very beneficial to you this time of year. SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and was formerly known as Food Stamps. In North Carolina, this program is called Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). To find out if you are eligible for SNAP or to apply for the program, go to ncdhhs.gov and search for "apply for SNAP." You will find instructions for a 3-step application process, a link to a PDF of the application, and the phone number for the EBT Call Center.

Youth Leadership Montgomery

Montgomery County 4-H is excited to once again be holding their annual Youth Leadership Montgomery Program. This program will take place this year from October to May. This program invites high school students from Montgomery County to learn more about Montgomery County and gain leadership skills to utilize in their futures. Applications for this program have to be submitted by October 22nd and our first meeting will take place on October 29th. We cannot wait to see what these amazing future leaders do this year! Reach out to Chrissy Haynes with any questions at 910-576-6011.

4-H Youth Development
Vacant, 4-H Youth Development Agent
Elizabeth Callicutt, 4-H Program Assistant

4-H

Shooting Sports Club

Our upcoming shooting sports club meeting is scheduled for October 17th at 9:00 AM at a local shooting range here in Troy, and we need everyone's help to support our team! We are currently selling $10.00 raffle tickets through the North Carolina National Wild Turkey Federation (NCNWTF), alongside calendars and $100 high-tier raffle tickets. For every $10.00 raffle ticket our members sell, $5.00 goes straight back to our club to help cover essential supplies and ammunition for the club. On top of this incredible partnership, the NCNWTF has generously donated two rifles directly to our club!



Reptile Club

This club is dedicated to promoting hands-on STEM education, responsible exotic pet ownership, and local wildlife conservation. Through interactive educational showcases and community outreach, we give residents of all ages—especially youth—the opportunity to learn about herpetology, biodiversity, and the vital role reptiles play in our local ecosystem. Our reptile club meets on the last Tuesday of every month at 6:00 PM at the Montgomery County Agriculture Building located at 200 Glenn Road in Troy. We would love to see more smiling faces and would love to have new participants join us!





Tree of Hope Christmas Assistance Program

The Montgomery County Tree of Hope Program was started in 2007 and provides holiday gifts for children in Montgomery County whose families need a little extra support during the holiday season, from newborn through the fifth grade.

The program takes applications through the Montgomery County Partnership for Children, Montgomery County Schools, Communities In Schools and NC Cooperative Extension Office. Once approved in the program the parents will list a wish, a need, and the child's clothing and shoe size. The child's information is listed on a card, and this card is placed on Christmas trees, which will be located at local restaurants/businesses, First Banks, Fidelity Banks, and Walmart. A donor then adopts the child. They will purchase clothing and/or toys for this child. We will use all monetary donations from the community to purchase the needs and a few toys for the unadopted children.

The Tree of Hope Program provides gifts for all children that are approved; therefore, due to the expectation of higher numbers this year we are asking for donations. Donations of money, toys, coats, books, and Bibles would be greatly appreciated.

This program is strictly volunteer based and there are no overhead costs for this program so all donations go directly to the children of Montgomery County. There are multiple ways you or someone you know can become involved, including volunteering time to pack bags for distribution to kids. If you would like to volunteer your time or give donations, we will greatly appreciate them! Give us a call at the office at 910-576-6011 or email me at eathom22@ncsu.edu.



Agricultural Updates

Emi Bigford, Livestock & Field Crops
Owen Washam, Horticulture & Forestry

2026 Montgomery County Agricultural and Crafts Fair

NC Cooperative Extension hosted the 2026 Montgomery County Agricultural and Crafts Fair on September 4, bringing together community members to celebrate local agriculture, creativity, and talent. The fair featured 89 entries across categories including produce, honey, photography, artwork, quilts, crafts, and creative writing. The event also included hands-on agricultural activities, local vendors, and food trucks, providing an opportunity for families and community members to learn, participate, and showcase what Montgomery County has to offer. NC Cooperative Extension appreciates the support of Montgomery County Farm Bureau and our local partners who helped make this year's fair possible.

2026 Montgomery County Chicken Show

The 2026 Montgomery County Chicken Show provided youth with an opportunity to showcase their chickens and the knowledge and skills they have developed through raising and caring for their animals. The show had 19 entries and included opportunities for youth to participate in showmanship and breed classes, as well as unique classes such as rooster, parent, and costume. The event encouraged youth to build confidence, responsibility, and animal husbandry skills while connecting with other young people and community members interested in agriculture.

NC 4-H Eggcellent Egg Competition

Montgomery County 4-H participated in the NC 4-H Eggcellent Egg Competition, with 10 half-dozen egg entries submitted by local youth. The entries showcased the variety of eggs produced by backyard and small-flock poultry, with eggs ranging in color from white and brown to blue and green. As part of the competition, youth learned how to properly grade eggs for quality, including evaluating factors such as cleanliness, shell quality, and interior quality. Participants also completed a supplemental educational component focused on chicken and egg production, giving them a deeper understanding of poultry care and the process of producing quality eggs. The competition provided a hands-on way for youth to apply what they learned while showcasing eggs produced by their own flocks. The competition winners will be announced soon.

2026 Montgomery County Livestock Show

NC Cooperative Extension hosted the 2026 Moore/Montgomery County Livestock Show on 9/26, bringing youth and families together for an opportunity to showcase their livestock and the work they have put into raising and caring for their animals. This year, the show had 98 youth entries, highlighting the strong interest and participation of local youth in livestock agriculture. Youth demonstrated their skills in showmanship and animal handling while gaining valuable experience in the show ring. The event highlighted the dedication of local youth and families involved in livestock agriculture and provided a positive opportunity for the community to support the next generation of agriculturalists.

Montgomery County Cattlemen's Association

The Montgomery County Cattlemen's Association kicked off its fall meeting season on 9/8/26 with a meeting focused on financial resources available to local cattle producers. Representatives from Fidelity Bank spoke with members about operating loan options and other financial services available to support agricultural operations. The presentation provided producers with an opportunity to learn more about financing options and ask questions related to managing the financial needs of their farm or livestock operation. The Cattlemen's Association will continue meeting throughout the season with additional educational programs and guest speakers planned for local cattle producers.

Middle School Agricultural Career Talks

NC Cooperative Extension helped connect local agricultural professionals with students in a middle school agriculture class to introduce them to careers and opportunities within the agricultural industry. Matt Henley, a local regenerative farmer, spoke with students about regenerative agriculture, his experiences in farming, and the many opportunities available within the agricultural industry. Dr. Alex Hartsell, DVM, with Rocky River Large Animal Veterinary Clinic, also visited the class to discuss veterinary medicine, animal health, and her career working with livestock. Students had the opportunity to ask questions, hear firsthand experiences, and learn how their agricultural education can connect to a variety of careers.

Livestock Club Meeting

The Montgomery County 4-H Livestock Club held a fun and educational meeting focused on turkeys in preparation for the NC State Fair. Club members learned about turkey breeds, anatomy, production, and interesting facts before putting their knowledge to the test with a round of Turkey Trivia. The activity gave youth an engaging way to review what they learned while preparing to compete and showcase their knowledge at the State Fair. The meeting combined agricultural education, friendly competition, and hands-on learning to help club members build confidence and expand their livestock knowledge.

Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Meeting

The Montgomery County Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Advisory Board met and approved the application of Danny Sedberry to enroll 408.198 acres in the Voluntary Agricultural District. The addition will help preserve and recognize agricultural land in Montgomery County and support the county's efforts to protect working farmland for future generations.

Landowner Resource Workshop

Sponsored by Henderson Forestry Consultants and Troy Lumber

Join NC Cooperative Extension Anson and Montgomery County Agents, and NC State Extension Forestry on November 5, 2026 at Montgomery Community College in Troy, NC. The main program will begin with a networking hour from 5 - 6 pm. Dinner will be served at 6 pm with a word from our sponsors. From 6:30 - 7:30 pm, Jacob Comer from Quail Forever (quailforever.org) and Gregory Godwin from NC WRC (ncwildlife.gov) will speak on government funding opportunities and managing land for wildlife value.
Sponsorships are available.
Register by Oct. 30 and learn more:
montgomery.ces.ncsu.edu/news/lrw/



Ask A Master Gardener @ Troy Farmers Market

Vegetables sick? Tree tipped over? What's with all the rain? Visit the Montgomery County Extension Master Gardeners on October 1 and 15, 2026 from 8 to 11 am at the Troy Farmers Market. Certified Volunteers trained in science based horticulture are ready to answer your questions - or look up research based solutions! Find upcoming events on our calendar: https://montgomery.ces.ncsu.edu/events/.



Certified EMGVs Jennifer (left) and Lisa (right) ready to field horticulture questions from Market visitors.

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

The EMGVs convened for their monthly meeting on August 31 for their September business. The volunteers are working at an accelerated pace this year in order to get officer transition documented prior to January 1, 2027, mainly at the request of their bank. Their next business meeting will be October 5th at 5:30 pm, at the Demo Kitchen on West Spring Street.

Interested in volunteering at an EMG demonstration garden? Contact Owen! We have a particularly strong need in Mt. Gilead.



Certified EMGVs Carolyn and Lou stepped up as leaders at the Mt. Gilead Gathering Garden.



Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Initial Training

New students have been hard at work in the classroom learning horticultural theory and best management practices. In September students learned about weeds, fruit trees, and nut trees. On September 25, students took an all day field trip to learn about volunteer opportunities in Montgomery County. We also toured Sandhills Horticultural Gardens on this trip - a valuable resource for seeing horticultural practices and volunteerism in action. Classes are Friday afternoons from 2 pm - 4:30 pm, and are open to the public. However, only enrolled students will receive credit for the training.

Plant Botany

On September 29, Owen Washam taught 35 participants the fundamentals of botany. A lot of ground was covered in 3 hours, where the class learned:

- How to identify and describe different plant parts
- Differences and considerations of monocot vs eudicot species
- The importance and significance of vascular systems
- Effects of environmental forces: photosynthesis, respiration, transpiration, growth
- Common plant hormones and their functions
- How to use botany for plant identification, problem solving, and management recommendations

This class was in Lexington, where Owen partners with the Davidson County Agent Sam Boring to extend research based information to our respective clients. Sam will be lecturing in Troy on Lawns and Small Fruits, some of his specialties, on October 16.

Family & Consumer Science

Rhonda Peters, FCS Agent

Safe Plates

As part of our ongoing commitment to community health and education, Montgomery County Cooperative Extension recently partnered with the Moore County Extension Director to deliver the NC Safe Plates program for local school nutrition leaders. School food service operations face strict public health mandates, and maintaining proper certification is essential for preventing foodborne illness—especially in a district like ours where roughly 75% of students rely on school dining facilities for their primary meals each day. To address this need, we provided 12 hours of intensive classroom instruction to five school food service professionals from four of our campuses: Star Elementary, Troy Elementary, Candor Elementary, and East Middle School. The training reached four cafeteria managers and one assistant cafeteria manager, three of whom had never held food safety certification before.

Our goal was to equip these frontline kitchen leaders with the advanced knowledge needed to strictly enforce the North Carolina Food Code and safeguard campus dining environments. Through a dynamic mix of lectures, real-world case studies, group discussions, and interactive activities, participants mastered critical concepts including time and temperature controls, cross-contamination prevention, personal hygiene policies, foodborne pathogens and allergens, receiving and storing food safely, cleaning and sanitizing protocols, and facility maintenance. Following the two-day course, all five participants took the proctored national exam through the National Registry of Food Safety Professionals, and I am proud to report a 100% pass rate. All five earned their national certification, valid for five years, securing qualified, certified leadership in these four school kitchens.

This outstanding achievement brings immediate, practical benefits to Montgomery County by ensuring that thousands of student meals served each week meet the highest safety standards. Protecting student health keeps our children present in the classroom and ready to learn, while giving parents, school staff, and campus visitors complete peace of mind. Looking ahead, this success demonstrates how targeted local Extension programs and cross-county partnerships can directly strengthen county infrastructure and public health. By investing in the professional development of our local school staff, we are building a safer, healthier future for Montgomery County families and creating a sustainable model for food safety leadership across our rural school district.





Fall Canning

As autumn arrives, many Montgomery County residents turn to home food preservation to capture the seasonal harvest and stock their pantries for the winter months. Whether processing local orchard harvests into spiced apple butter, canning sweet potatoes, or putting up late-season crops like tomatoes, green beans, and winter squash, preserving food at home carries significant public health responsibilities. Outdated recipes found in old cookbooks, passed down through generations, or shared on social media often lack the tested acid levels and heat processing times necessary to kill harmful bacteria, most notably Clostridium botulinum. To prevent serious foodborne illness, home canners must exclusively rely on research-tested resources and recipes, such as those published by USDA guidelines and/or the National Center for Home Food Preservation. Using trusted, research-backed procedures ensures that low-acid fall produce like cubed pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and root vegetables—as well as high-acid applesauce, jellies, and green tomato relishes—are processed safely for family and friends to enjoy.



Equipment maintenance is equally critical to home canning safety, particularly when using dial-gauge pressure canners required for low-acid fall vegetables. Over time, pressure gauges can drift out of calibration, leading to under-processing if the actual pressure inside the canner falls below recommended safety levels. Montgomery County Cooperative Extension provides dial-gauge testing services to ensure gauges register accurate readings before the heavy canning season begins. By routinely having pressure canners inspected, following verified processing times, and turning to local Extension agents for trusted advice, residents can confidently preserve their fall harvest while protecting the health and safety of their households.

Opportunities Coming Up in Cooperative Extension

- Fridays July - Dec.: EMGV Initial Training Orientation, County Demo Kitchen
- October 5th :EMGV Monthly Business Meeting, County Demo Kitchen (5:30pm)
- October 9th : Youth Market Turkey Show
- October 13th : Montgomery County Cattlemen's Association Meeting (6:30pm)
- October 13th : Diseases & Diagnostics with Davidson County EMGVs
- October 14th : Tree of Hope Application Take-in Day @ Cooperative Extension
- October 15th : Montgomery County Beekeepers, MCC Rm. 200 (6pm)
- October 17th : Montgomery County 4-H Shooting Sports Club Meeting (9am)
- October 19th : Montgomery 4-H Livestock Club Meeting (6pm)
- October 22nd : NC Peach Growers Society Fall Meeting, Blakes Restaurant (11am)
- October 22nd : Youth Leadership Montgomery Applicants due
- October 23rd : EMGV Initial Training Field Trip 2, NC State and UNC-CH
- October 26th & 27th : Animal Waste Operator Initial Certification Training
- October 29th : Youth Leadership Montgomery Orientation, Demo Kitchen (4-7pm)
- November 5th : Forestry Landowner Event, MCC Rm. 200 (3-8pm)
- November 5th : Montgomery County 4-H Teen Council Meeting (5-6:30pm)
- November 9th : Composting with 8th graders
- November 9th : EMGV Monthly Business Meeting, County Demo Kitchen (5:30pm)
- November 10th : Medicinal Plants and Mushrooms of the Piedmont, Gaston County
- November 10th : Montgomery County Cattlemen's Association Meeting (6:30pm)
- November 13th : Youth Leadership Montgomery Team building Day (4-9pm)

Please call our office at (910) 576-6011 for information on how to get involved with any of these opportunities.

Staff Directory

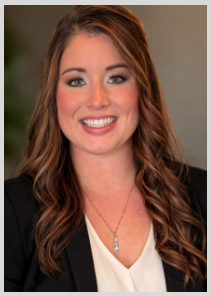


Chrissy Haynes
County Extension Director

Vacant
4-H Youth Development Agent



Elizabeth Callicutt
4-H Program Assistant



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