

North Carolina Cooperative Extension
Montgomery County Center
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Monthly Newsletter
September 2026

From the Director's Desk

Chrissy Haynes, County Extension Director



I want to take the time to thank our volunteers and our donors for all that you do each and every year to support all of our programs with NC Cooperative Extension. We have many donors who give annually to help ensure that we are able to provide quality programming for our kids in our community throughout the summer months. Without your support, we would not be able to. My team has highlighted many of our programs all summer through these newsletters. I want to stop and thank those who specifically helped provide the opportunity for kids to travel to camp (whether it be day camp or overnight camping programs).

Cloverbud Camp & Traditional Camp at Millstone 4-H Camp

When you drive into Millstone 4-H Camp there is a sign that reads "**You will leave here a different person. We hope you leave here a better person.**" - LR Harrell, founder of Millstone 4-H Camp.

This year, 6 little Cloverbud campers and 18 traditional campers had the time of their lives attending camp! Youth spent their time at camp participating in crafts, ropes courses, swimming, canoeing, sing-alongs and a talent show.





This year, we had 20 youth (ages 5 – 14) to attend Day Camp at Millstone 4-H Camp daily during the week of August 3rd – 7th. Thank you to all of the private and business donors in our community as well as the NC Community Foundation for their grant support through the Montgomery Fund for choosing to help support youth from Montgomery County to have the opportunity to attend day camp this summer and to Montgomery County Schools for providing bus transportation daily for us. We cannot thank you enough for the difference that you made in these children's lives by providing them with this opportunity. If you are interested in helping us fund programs in the future, please contact Chrissy Haynes at (910) 576-6011.

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

4-H

Our established 4-H Reptile Club continues to be one of our most engaging pathways for local youth to dive into hands-on STEM education and environmental stewardship. While the club has been running successfully, we are actively looking to grow our membership and welcome new faces to our regular meetings. Members gain direct experience with reptile care, anatomy, handling, and conservation—moving beyond traditional textbook learning to build real-world scientific literacy. By caring for and learning about these often-misunderstood species, young people develop critical thinking, empathy, personal responsibility, and public presentation skills in a supportive, team-oriented environment. So bring a friend and come on out and enjoy learning new things!

NEW in 4-H

Looking ahead, we are also preparing to broaden our outdoor skills programming with the launch of our first-ever 4-H Shooting Sports Club. This new initiative will focus on teaching discipline, deep focus, self-control, and uncompromising safety under the direction of certified adult instructors. Marksmanship programs in 4-H are highly regarded for building confidence and personal accountability in young people. The first club meeting will be held September 12th from 9:00 to 10:00/10:30 at The Range on Mount Olive Church Road. We are SO excited to bring this NEW club into Montgomery County teaching kids about the safety of guns and how to handle them!

Agricultural Updates

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

4- H Livestock club

At the August 17, 4-H Livestock Club meeting, members learned about egg grading and how eggs are evaluated for quality before reaching the grocery store. Youth learned that egg grades are based on factors such as the condition of the shell, the size of the air cell, and the quality of the yolk and white.

Members learned that Grade AA eggs have firm whites, round, centered yolks, and small air cells, while Grade A eggs have slightly less firm whites and larger air cells. Grade B eggs have thinner whites and flatter yolks and are often used in processed egg products rather than sold as shell eggs.

Youth also learned the difference between egg grade and egg size. Grade refers to the quality of the egg, while size (such as medium, large, or extra-large) is based on the minimum weight per dozen. Through this lesson, members gained a better understanding of egg quality and how poultry production connects to the food products consumers purchase every day.

Eggcellent egg

Participants in the Eggcellent Egg Project have been busy preparing for their upcoming project through two Zoom training sessions. During these sessions, youth learned how to successfully complete their project, including proper egg handling, storage, and care. Participants also learned about egg grading, including the differences between Grade AA, Grade A, and Grade B eggs and how egg quality is evaluated. These training sessions have helped youth build their knowledge and confidence while gaining a better understanding of the journey from the chicken coop to the kitchen. The youth will submit their eggs in a few weeks to compete for who has the best eggs in their age group, in the contest, in the state.

State fair entries

N.C. State Fair Entry Reminder!

Planning to show at the 2026 N.C. State Fair? Don't forget to complete your livestock entry! All livestock entries must be submitted through ShoWorks by September 15, 2026, at midnight. If you plan to exhibit livestock at the State Fair, make sure you complete your entry before the deadline. Nominations and the actual State Fair entry are separate steps, so completing the nomination process does not automatically enter you into the fair.

Don't wait until the last minute! Get your entry submitted and make sure you're ready to show at the 2026 N.C. State Fair, October 15–25, in Raleigh.

Good luck to all of our Montgomery County exhibitors!

Beekeepers

At the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association meeting, members took a closer look at the business and marketing side of honey production. The group discussed how to determine the actual cost of producing a jar of honey by considering expenses such as bees and queens, hive equipment, feed and treatments, harvesting equipment, jars, labels, and the beekeeper's time and labor. Members learned that honey pricing should be based on total production costs plus a desired profit margin, rather than simply matching the price of other honey producers. The group discussed how $14.44 per pound of honey as a potential selling price and how this price point could help beekeepers account for production and packaging costs while working toward a positive return on their investment. This is typically the average cost of one pound of honey to produce, especially in the first several years of start of production. Beekeepers also discussed ways to increase the value of their product through attractive packaging, clear labeling, local branding, farmers markets, direct sales, and educating customers about the benefits of purchasing locally produced honey. The meeting emphasized that understanding cost of production, pricing, marketing, and return on investment can help beekeepers make informed decisions and determine whether their honey operation is generating a sustainable profit. The NCDA&CS south central apiary inspector also gave an update on the yellow-legged hornet life cycle and how to hide them. If you think you have spotted one, give NCDA a call to report the sighting.

Hay samples

This year, Montgomery County Cooperative Extension continued to assist livestock producers with hay sampling, forage analysis, and nitrate testing. Producers were encouraged to have hay tested to better understand its nutritional value and identify potential nitrate concerns before feeding it to livestock.

Through the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) Agronomic Division, producers can submit forage samples for analysis. Proper sampling is important because hay quality and nitrate levels can vary between fields, cuttings, and even bales. A representative sample is collected using a hay probe, with multiple bales sampled from the same lot to provide a more accurate picture of the forage.

The testing process provides producers with information about important nutritional factors such as crude protein, total digestible nutrients, and other forage quality measures, while nitrate analysis can help identify potentially unsafe levels. Producers can use these results to determine appropriate feeding strategies, supplementation needs, and whether additional precautions are necessary before feeding the hay to livestock.

Nitrate testing is especially important for forage harvested following drought conditions, heavy nitrogen fertilization, or other plant stress, which can contribute to nitrate accumulation. Extension worked with producers to help them understand the NCDA&CS sampling and submission process and interpret their results.

Providing access to hay and nitrate testing helps Montgomery County livestock producers make informed, science-based decisions, protect livestock from potentially dangerous forage, and improve the efficiency and profitability of their feeding programs. Give us a call if you are in need of getting your 2026 hay tested!

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

The EMGVs convened for their monthly business meeting on August 3 and 31 after a break in July. The volunteers are working towards officer elections for 2027, as well as planning for the County demonstration spaces 2027 needs and goals. Their next business meeting will be October 5th at 5:30 pm, at the **Demo Kitchen** at 303 West Spring Street.



Youth enjoying the Brutonville Gardens led by EMGV Remonia McBride.

Great Southeast Pollinator Census

On August 23, a Horticulture Extension Agent and EMG Volunteers organized a citizen science project at Starwork's Native Pollinator Plant Demonstration Garden. This effort was part of the wider Great Southeast Pollinator Census across the Southeast. Participants learned about various pollinators, the yellow legged hornet, and had the opportunity to participate in crafts and enjoy a special drink made by Starworks for the event.





Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Initial Training

New students have been hard at work in the classroom learning horticultural theory and best management practices. In August students learned about native plants, insects, vegetable gardens, organic practices, and integrated pest management. In September, students will take a field trip to learn about volunteer opportunities in Montgomery County. We also plan to do a formal botanical garden tour on this trip. 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 trainings.

Plant Propagation for Seniors

On August 6 and 19, the Horticulture and Forestry Extension Agent taught Plant Propagation at two community centers. Over 40 adults participated in the plant propagation program and hands-on activities at Troy-Montgomery Senior Center (Troy) and Highland Community Center (Mt. Gilead).

Pesticide Safety

Horticulture and Forestry Agent Owen has two successes to share in this field. On August 20, Owen was examined and approved for the FAA 107 UAS (Drone) License. Owen is pursuing additional training in pursuit of offering local programming on using drones in agricultural settings. On August 25, Owen was an associate teacher at the Monroe Pesticide School in Union County. Over 50 participants attended and were examined for pesticide licensing. The schools are a partnership between NC State and NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Family & Consumer Science

Rhonda Peters, FCS Agent

Fall Fitness



As autumn arrives, the crisp air and changing leaves offer a refreshing backdrop that makes this season an ideal time to revitalize our community's commitment to regular physical activity. Cooperative Extension highlights that remaining active year-round is vital for every age group, supporting cardiovascular health, mental well-being, and chronic disease prevention. While autumn outdoor strolls and visits to local parks are excellent ways to enjoy the season, it is equally important to remember that physical activity is not limited to the outdoors. Indoor routines—such as structured living room workouts, walking in local community centers, indoor gardening, or chair-based exercises—are just as effective at keeping community members of all ages moving regardless of the weather

To achieve meaningful health benefits, evidence-based national guidelines outline specific activity targets for each stage of life. Children and adolescents (ages 6–17) require at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily, incorporating aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities. Adults need a minimum of 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, paired with muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days. For senior adults, the target remains 150 minutes weekly, with a critical emphasis on multicomponent physical activity that combines aerobic movement, muscle strengthening, and balance training.

For older adults, addressing common misconceptions around movement is essential to promoting lifelong independence. Many seniors hesitate to engage in physical activity due to a fear of falling; however, public health evidence clearly demonstrates that physical inactivity presents a significantly greater risk to senior health than falling itself. Sedentary lifestyles lead to muscle atrophy, reduced bone density, and impaired coordination, which paradoxically increases fall risk over time. Regular, tailored exercise builds core strength, improves balance, and enhances mobility—directly lowering the likelihood of falls and related injuries. Through Cooperative Extension's evidence-based health and wellness programming, we continue to provide accessible, safe resources that empower residents across all age groups to build sustainable, lifelong exercise habits. Look for information in the coming months about our LIFT class, which will be held at the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center beginning in January.

Safe Plates to Be Held in September



This September, Cooperative Extension is proud to partner with Montgomery County Schools to deliver the Safe Plates training program to local school food service staff. Developed by NC State University, Safe Plates is a comprehensive, 12-hour training program designed to equip retail food service personnel with foundational food safety knowledge, best management practices, and practical risk reduction strategies. The curriculum thoroughly covers essential industry standards—including personal hygiene, cross-contamination prevention, time and temperature control, and proper sanitation procedures—to ensure school cafeterias operate at the highest level of health and safety. Beyond daily kitchen operations, this rigorous course directly prepares food service professionals to earn their national Food Protection Manager certification, reinforcing our commitment to protecting student health and maintaining excellence across Montgomery County's school nutrition programs.

With New Features!
POWERPAY
HELPING DEBTORS BECOME SAVERS

Plan for Holiday Spending Now to Avoid Holiday Debt Later

Although the holiday season is still months away, early autumn is the strategic time for households to begin financial planning for holiday expenses. According to research from Cooperative Extension financial management specialists and consumer protection agencies, proactive holiday budgeting significantly reduces post-holiday debt stress and prevents high-interest credit accumulation. Establishing a dedicated holiday budget in September allows families to inventory expected costs—including gifts, travel, decorations, and seasonal meals—and calculate a realistic overall spending cap. By spreading purchases across several months rather than relying on last-minute spending in December, consumers can absorb holiday expenses into their regular monthly cash flow, take advantage of genuine seasonal sales, and avoid the financial strain of large, unexpected year-end balances. A critical focus of Extension financial literacy education is helping consumers navigate aggressive retail marketing tactics that masquerade as cost-saving opportunities. During the shopping season, retailers frequently offer immediate discounts—such as 15% to 20% off a total purchase—in exchange for opening a store credit card. While the upfront savings appear attractive, store credit cards notoriously carry APRs well above the national average (often exceeding 28% to 30%). If the balance is not paid in full immediately, compounding interest quickly outweighs the initial discount, causing items to cost far more than their original retail price over time. Furthermore, many store cards utilize "deferred interest" promotions; if the balance is not paid off entirely within the promotional window, backdated interest is applied to the full original purchase price rather than the remaining balance. In addition to credit offers, retailers employ psychological shopping "gimmicks" designed to encourage overspending under the guise of savings. Common tactics include threshold promotions (e.g., "Spend $100 to get $20 off"), which induce consumers to add unnecessary items to their cart simply to reach a discount tier, ultimately increasing total out-of-pocket spending. Similarly, "Buy One, Get One" (BOGO) deals and artificial urgency cues—such as countdown timers or limited-quantity alerts—exploit cognitive biases to prompt impulse purchases. By recognizing these marketing strategies and adhering to a pre-planned shopping list and cash-based or dedicated savings model, Montgomery County residents can protect their financial well-being while enjoying a meaningful, stress-free holiday season.

For those who may already be carrying debt into the fall or who want a clear strategy to prevent holiday purchases from turning into long-term financial burdens, Cooperative Extension recommends utilizing PowerPay.org. Developed by Extension financial specialists at Utah State University, PowerPay is a free, web-based tool that builds personalized debt elimination plans. By analyzing user-entered balances, minimum payments, and interest rates, the tool calculates optimal repayment strategies—demonstrating how applying freed-up funds from one paid-off debt to the next (the "power payment" method) can drastically shorten debt payoff horizons and save hundreds in interest fees. Whether planning how to handle holiday spending or seeking to eliminate existing credit balances, community members are encouraged to visit PowerPay.org and contact our local Extension office. Our staff is available to help residents input their information, interpret their customized PowerPay reports, and construct practical, sustainable spending plans for a financially secure holiday season and new year.

Opportunities Coming Up in Cooperative Extension

- Fridays July - Dec.: EMGV Initial Training Orientation, County Demo Kitchen
- September 4th : Agricultural and Crafts Fair and Chicken Show, Ag Center
- September 8th : Montgomery County Cattlemen's Meeting (6:30pm)
- September 12th : 4-H Shooting Sports Club Meeting (9am-10:30am)
- September 16th : Eggcellent Egg Entry Day (8am-5pm)
- September 17th : Montgomery County beekeepers Association meeting (6pm)
- September 19th & 21st, EMGV Workday, Location TBD
- September 21st : 4-H Livestock Club Meeting (6pm)
- September 22nd : Reptile 4-H Club Meeting (6pm)
- September 25th : EMGV Initial Training Field Trip 2, Montgomery County
- September 26th : Moore/Montgomery County Livestock Show (8am-5pm)
- September 29th : Botany with Davidson County EMGVs
- September 29th : Eggcellent Egg Contest Virtual Ceremony
- 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 15th : Montgomery County Beekeepers, MCC Rm. 200 (6pm)
- October 19th : Montgomery 4-H Livestock Club Meeting (6pm)
- October 23rd : EMGV Initial Training Field Trip 2, NC State and UNC-CH
- October 26th & 27th : Animal Waste Operator Initial Certification Training

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

Staff Directory



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County Extension Director

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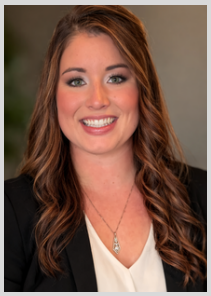
4-H Youth Development Agent



Elizabeth Callicutt
4-H Program Assistant



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