2016

2015-2016 Piscataquis County Cooperative Extension Annual Report

Donna Coffin

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Putting university research to work in homes, businesses, farms, and communities for over 100 years.

Our annual report features highlights of recent accomplishments and the difference we make in the lives of Maine citizens and their communities.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension
Piscataquis County
Annual Report 2015 - 2016
Maine Harvest for Hunger
Maine has the highest rate of food insecurity in New England, and ranks twelfth in the United States. Forty-three percent of food-insecure people do not qualify for food stamps or other government program. It is challenging for food-insecure people to afford fresh, nutritious food, and donations of fresh produce to Maine’s emergency food system have declined recently. Since 2000, UMaine Cooperative Extension’s statewide Maine Harvest for Hunger (MHH) program has mobilized gardeners, farmers, businesses, schools, and civic groups to grow, glean, and donate high quality produce to distribution sites and directly to neighbors in need. In 2015, record-breaking donations of over 318,000 pounds (value of $537,000, based on an average $1.69 per pound) went to 188 distribution sites and to individuals. Nearly 500 volunteers in 14 counties collectively logged more than 5,000 hours.

4-H Camps Connecting Youth to Positive Community Experiences and Mentorship
In 2015 UMaine 4-H summer camps served 1,732 youth from all sixteen counties in Maine, thirty states, and three countries. Through living and working together, campers and staff became part of an interconnected community committed to a sustainable future. The opportunities to develop mastery of skills happens in the context of the residential camp and learning center setting where the “implicit curriculum” includes healthy nutrition and activities, inclusive and safe learning environments, and intentional leadership development. Youth and program alumni report that the 4-H Camp and Learning Center experience has helped them develop greater self-confidence, civic engagement, and personal and academic success.

Protecting Wildlife Health
Maine has joined a group of laboratories that can “link” regional agencies with local diagnostic assistance for wild animals, the Northeast Wildlife Disease Cooperative (NWDC). Collaboration with the Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife has yielded information about the health of moose. The University of Maine Animal Health Lab (UMAHL) has hosted wildlife biologist trainings, provided diagnostic information for wildlife cases, and assisted in investigations of lead toxicosis in waterfowl.

A 2014 report to the Maine Office of Tourism and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife found that moose and waterfowl hunting brought more than $33 million to Maine annually, and supported more than 450 full- and part-time jobs. The work of the UMAHL helps ensure continued hunting opportunities in Maine.

Protecting Maine Citizens Against Lyme Disease
There were approximately 1,400 reported cases of Lyme disease in Maine last year (estimated to be a fraction of the actual number of cases). Providing outreach and services related to this increasingly common public health threat is an important issue in Maine. In 2014 UMaine Extension created and implemented an in-state tick identification program. This program has been expanded by creating and consistently updating an informational website, providing public presentations on ticks and vector-borne disease, and developing informational tick cards for distribution. Program activities also aided in the passage of an $8 million bond for a new biosecure laboratory that will be able to test ticks for pathogens. Tick specimens can be identified more quickly within the state, and upon completion of the new lab, ticks will be tested for pathogens, a service that is not currently offered in Maine.
Piscataquis County Extension Association Executive Committee

PRESIDENT: Walter Boomsma - Abbot

VICE PRESIDENT: Georgia Underwood – Dover-Foxcroft

TREASURER: Janet Yelch-Weatherbee – Dover-Foxcroft

MEMBERS: George McKay – Dover-Foxcroft
Thelma Regan – Wellington
Wally Sinclair – Brownville
Natasha Colbry – Dover-Foxcroft
Richard Neal – Parkman
Dottie Hadler – Dover-Foxcroft
Tish Dutson – Willimantic
Beth McEvoy – Dover-Foxcroft

Volunteers help expand the reach of our programs by donating their time, energy and enthusiasm as well as the use of their farms, homes, businesses and supplies for our activities. This adds an estimated value of $72,000 to our programming efforts.

Local Partnership

Our County Extension Association is the vital link between the county, our communities and UMaine. The Association’s Executive Committee is comprised of local volunteers who represent community interests by advising UMaine Extension staff on educational programs, advocate for and secure funding from county government to support the county office, oversee the office budget and facilities, and guide UMaine Extension staff in identifying their programming goals.
Statewide Highlights

Protecting Maine’s Poultry and Egg Industry
Maine’s poultry and egg industries are worth over $75 million yearly. Because the University of Maine Animal Health Lab (UMAHL) provides the FDA-required salmonella testing for medium- to large-sized egg producers in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, these farms can operate within FDA’s Egg Rule. This work aids in prevention of human salmonellosis (SE) that might be acquired through eggs. The estimated cost to the egg industry of an SE outbreak could be higher than 10% of production. The impact of salmonella prevention is estimated to be more than $7 million per year. UMAHL handled over 6,000 avian samples during reporting year 2015.

During 2015, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) caused the death of more than 49 million poultry in the United States. If this disease comes to our region, substantial losses to the commercial egg industry would result. UMAHL is working with small and large producers to increase biosecurity and preparedness for emergencies such as HPAI.

Protecting Maine’s Dairies
Many of Maine’s more than 8,000 small farms have dairy animals. Increasingly, organic and small ruminant dairies are producing a diverse collection of artisanal cheeses and alternative milk products. For public safety and quality control, dairies must keep pathogenic bacteria out of their dairy animals and dairy products. Culturing milk samples is key to protecting all of Maine’s dairies.

In 2014-2015, the UMaine Animal Health Lab cultured approximately 2,000 milk samples for mastitis; 4.5 percent were positive for Staphylococcus aureus, which can cause serious human illness. Because S. aureus cannot usually be cleared from the udder, culling chronically infected cows is advised to protect the public and avoid the spread of this disease on dairies. Maine’s dairy owners and dairy product consumers benefit from our local, responsive mastitis diagnostic service. We screen samples from both large and small dairies for mycoplasm, S. aureus, and other pathogens. Allowing farmers to administer antibiotics appropriately, and to avoid excessive antibiotic use by culling animals with incurable infections, saves money and protects public health.

IPM Strategies for Sweet Corn
Sweet corn comprises nearly half of the commercial vegetable acreage in Maine but may bring only marginal profits due partly to high pest management costs. Sweet corn is an ideal candidate for integrated pest management (IPM) strategies. UMaine Extension set up insect traps and trained student field scouts to monitor sweet corn pest populations. Information gathered was summarized and shared with growers, ag consultants, and extension educators around Maine through a weekly newsletter and blog. Corn IPM techniques were demonstrated at two grower field days.

Growers adopting these techniques noticed significant reductions in pest management costs and reduced risk of pesticide exposure to themselves and the environment. Of the participants responding to a post-season survey, 61% used the information to reduce the number of pesticide sprays they applied, 69% found the program significantly reduced pest management costs, and more than 75% found that IPM techniques improved their crop yield and quality. Applying sample results to numbers from recent state agricultural statistics suggests that Maine growers conservatively reduced insecticide applications by over 100,000 gallons this season and saved over $100 per acre on insecticide costs.
**Piscataquis County Budget FY- 2016**

Each year, Piscataquis county tax dollars support the UMaine Extension with physical office space, support staff salaries, office supplies, equipment and some programming expenses.

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| Financial Support for Piscataquis Extension Office Over Time |

The Extension is a priceless tool for networking with local growers, educators and policy makers to improve the dynamics of agriculture in Piscataquis County for the current and future generations of farmers.
School Gardening

Starting seeds, digging in the dirt, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and eating are all activities that youth experienced with the school garden at SeDoMoCha in Dover-Foxcroft. Trisha Smith, Piscataquis Extension Home Horticulture Aide, has overseen garden activities with Mr. Murray’s second grade class as well as with Free Summer Meals program participants.

This spring and summer kids at SeDoMoCha planted kale, broccoli, and squash seedlings; sampled peas in the pod, salad turnips, and garlic scape-arugula pesto dip made from school garden produce; and harvested garlic, beet greens, green beans, and cucumbers.

The Piscataquis County Extension Executive Committee funded and installed a number of garden improvements. The garden now has a fence to discourage deer, and 7 raised beds with pathways defined by weed barrier and wood chips. Members of the Executive Committee also installed gutters on a nearby building, food-grade barrels to collect rainwater, and hoses and drip lines to bring the water to the garden.

Trisha donned a carrot costume to encourage kids at the summer meals program to promote healthy food choices in cooperation with Healthy Piscataquis. Sheila Norman, 4-H Program Aide assisted Trisha last fall on pumpkin day when pumpkin based foods were prepared with the help of the youth. It including cleaning and roasting pumpkin seeds, making cookies and preparing pumpkin-yogurt smoothies.

Winter gardening activities included starting worm bins in pre-K, second grade and high school classrooms.

4-H Youth Programs

4-H Clubs, Teams and Groups

Towns listed are where the clubs, teams or groups meet, but youth from anywhere are welcome to participate if they are willing to travel.

Parkman Adventure Club – Parkman
Greenville Super Science Club – Greenville
Piscataquis Animal Club – Dover-Foxcroft
4-H Infinity (Rainbow Unicorn Club) – Milo
Wild Blueberry Adventure 4-H Club - Greenville
4-H Afterschool SPIN Club – Milo
YVYC High School Program- Milo

4-H Clubs

Piscataquis County 4-H Clubs have been very active this year with projects, fundraisers, events, and trips.
Farming Programs

Backyard Poultry
The entry level livestock enterprise for folks new to farming is poultry and, with the dramatic increase in egg prices last fall due to Avian Influenza outbreaks in the west, many folks considered getting into raising poultry. What type of poultry is best for your situation, how to feed and house them, what health issues to watch out for, etc. were addressed in Backyard Poultry program held in collaboration with the PVAEC. Our own Dr. Beth McEvoy helped teach the class to the sixteen folks who attended.

Though out the year over 35 individuals were assisted with poultry questions by phone, email and Facebook posts that included: disease prevention options, rules and regulations, marketing meat and eggs from backyard flocks, etc.

Dover Cove Farmers Market
During the spring the Dover Cove Farmers’ Market vendors were assisted in organizing for the coming season by Extension staff Trisha Smith and Donna Coffin. Information was shared on determining benchmarks for successful sales at farmers’ markets considering income potential and marketing variables.

During the market, Master Gardener volunteers staffed the information booth at the market and assisted with the EBT and Maine Harvest Bucks program. Maine Harvest Bucks vouchers allow SNAP customers to buy more fresh fruits and vegetables, which helps farmers increase sales.

A plant clinic was held during one of the markets to help gardeners and home dwellers with insect and disease pests that they might encounter.

Gardening Programs

One Tomato
If you haven’t grown a garden ever or it has been a long time since you had a garden, planting a garden seems intimidating and overwhelming to some folks. To encourage more people to grow their own vegetables UMaine Extension Piscataquis County Executive Committee adopted the One Tomato™ project.

In the past three years one cherry tomato plant was given to 842 folks at food cupboards, a community event, and at the Extension Office, to plant in a container or in a garden to take care of and harvest during the growing season. They were given factsheets on container gardening and could sign up for a newsletter or view Facebook postings. 120 plants were given to a prison garden that provides food for the food cupboards.

Of the 748 people who completed the initial survey, 144 (19%) had never gardened and this was their first garden, 153 (20%) have only gardened 1 to 3 years. In 2016 a record 23% had never gardened! 379 (45%) signed up for the electronic newsletter. For 25% of the people, this was the first contact they had with UMaine Extension.

At the end of the season a survey found 19% had no harvest, 38% harvested a handful of cherry tomatoes, 19% harvested a bowl full and 25% said they harvested a bucket full of tomatoes. If the handful (cup) was valued at $1, the bowl full (pint) at $5 and the bucket full (gallon) at $20 then the estimated value of harvest of all plants distributed was over $3,150.
Five Piscataquis County youth attended the 4-H@UMaine as teen leaders. This is a fun filled, educational opportunity for youth 12 – 18 where the youth experience sleeping in the dorm, eating in the cafeteria, and learning from professors and graduate students in many different disciplines on the Orono campus.

Two youth participated in the 4-H Day at the Legislature. Youth act as pages for the Senators and Representatives that serve their counties for the day. At the Piscataquis Valley Fair the clubs will once again conduct a silent auction to raise funds for scholarships. The total raised at the 2015 fair was $1,300. Thanks go to all contributors and bidders with an invitation to participate at the 2016 fair.

Adventures in Health Science
The Adventures in Health Science was held at C. A. Dean Hospital in Greenville and focused on the respiratory system this year. Ten youth participated, five of whom were new to 4-H in this three-day summer immersion experience. The hands-on activities were fun as well as educational and offered the youth the opportunity to learn about careers in the field of health care through direct interaction with medical professionals who practice in Piscataquis County. Many thanks to the C. A. Dean Hospital staff for their continued support and to Dr. Beth McEvoy for teaching the youth using cow and lamb respiratory specimens.

GrowME
The GrowME program celebrated its fifth year where an informal group of volunteers provide hands-on activities that would develop agricultural literacy. During Maine Agriculture Week volunteers work with teachers to schedule an agricultural activity in their classroom. This program is a collaboration between Valley Grange, PCSWCD (Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District) and UMaine Extension in Piscataquis County. This year over 40 classrooms teachers signed up for a volunteer to visit and activities were developed for kindergarten through third grade. The program has grown to more classroom but continues to focus on the third grade and younger students and has reached an estimated 3,500 kids since the program launched!

Rural Living Day Survey – Your Help Needed!
The University of Maine Cooperative Extension and Soil and Water Conservation District in Piscataquis County are interested in co-hosting an annual Rural Living Day.

The goal is to help people be more self-sufficient, make a living and live well in Piscataquis County. There will be fun activities for kids and adults; the whole family can enjoy learning many different types of topics. We envision some hands-on activities and some classroom sessions.

Please help us in planning this event by letting us know what you would like to learn about. Also, we would like to know if there are other organizations who would like to partner in planning and putting on this event.

Here is the survey link: http://www.bit.ly/ruralliving
Without statewide support, UMaine Extension would not be present in this county. Funds for projects are provided through the University of Maine, Federal Formula Funds, grants, contracts, and fees. Dollars from other sources support salaries and benefits for Extension Specialists, County Educators, Extension administration, computer equipment and networking, publications, postage, telephone, and travel.

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Statewide Extension Funding

As a unique partnership among federal, state and county governments, UMaine Extension uses funding from Maine counties and the University to match and leverage support from the United States Department of Agriculture, other federal grantors, state agencies and private foundations. Each county UMaine Extension office is also part of a statewide organization and the national Extension system.
UMaine Extension secured over $1 million of funding in 2015 for a diverse program that generates region-specific, research-based information and provides educational and networking opportunities for participants in the grain economy. Key collaborators include MOFGA, the Maine Grain Alliance, the University of Vermont, and the US Organic Grain Collaboration. Maine and New England farmers have access to information on local grain production, markets, quality standards, and economics. Farmers are successfully supplying new and expanding grain markets with high quality organic and heirloom grain.

**Food Safety Education for Families and Commercial Food Producers**
Each year 48 million people in the U.S. contract foodborne illnesses. Food safety risks exist in home food preparation and preservation, in people serving crowds, and in retail and commercial manufacturing and sales. These groups prepare or process food for others, often without proper food safety training, leading to increased occurrences of foodborne illness. UMaine Extension provides food safety training programs including food preservation; home food safety; Cooking for Crowds; industrial food sanitation; Good Agricultural Practices; Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) certification; and soon, Food Safety Modernization Act trainings.

In addition, the food process authority lab reviewed over 500 products, leading to added income and jobs across Maine and New Hampshire. In almost all cases one-on-one food safety consulting led to increased revenue, retention of jobs, and/or increased hiring. One new startup company hired 171 employees and said, “Extension’s work with our company has contributed to the safe production of 7.2 million pounds of lobster per year with a value of over $36 million.”

**Eat Well: Responding to Food Insecurity**
Maine Cooperative Extension's EFNEP paraprofessionals educate Maine's limited-income families and youth to help them make better lifestyle choices and improve their nutritional well-being. EFNEP participants learn how to eat well on a budget and apply what they learn to their daily lives. These positive changes will eventually help reduce the incidence of obesity and chronic disease of limited income families in Maine. As a result of completing the Eat Well program (320 adult participants surveyed): 74% showed improvement in one or more food resource management practice, 81% showed improvement in one or more nutrition practice, and 68% showed improvement in one or more food safety practice. Eat Well graduates reported increasing fruit and vegetable intake by one-half cup per day and self-reported increases in fiber, calcium, and vitamin D intake. 15% of Eat Well graduates also reported increasing physical activity to at least 30 minutes per day.
Friends and neighbors,

As you may know, the very name “Extension” is meant to identify our mission of extending the vast and varied resources of the University of Maine system into our local communities. It is my honor and pleasure to again offer some observations regarding that challenge in this annual report to the citizens of Piscataquis County.

A unique aspect of UMaine Extension is that an Executive Committee of volunteers is charged with the responsibility for securing and managing county funds and support. This same committee, in collaboration with paid extension staff, serves as both a resource and a monitor to ensure programming is relevant to local needs and opportunities. In simple terms, our challenge is to “make sure our citizens get the most bang for their buck.”

During the past year, your Executive Committee and Extension Staff have worked hard to meet the needs and opportunities of our County. The intent of this highlights report is to share just a few accomplishments and I hope you’ll find it both informative and entertaining.

I’m especially pleased to report that we have expanded our Executive Committee and now have eleven volunteer members from different communities with different backgrounds and skills. This diversity on the committee allows us to approach decisions and planning with a variety of perspectives and fosters full awareness of community resources as well as needs for Extension services and programming.

We have become increasingly aware of our reliance on the involvement of volunteers ranging from the Executive Committee to Master Gardeners to 4-H Leaders and we continue to further develop volunteer involvement. While University resources extend into our communities, it is the combining of resources and energy that makes us effective—whether we are talking about funding, programs, or people. Individually we are drops; together we form an ocean.

These are some of the reasons why we are able provide a good return on the investment we receive from Piscataquis County Taxpayers. We appreciate the building we occupy in the county complex and the county’s contribution to our operating and support costs. We are “holding the line” and our budget request remains the same as last year. I would note that while we have little ability to control the costs associated with the building, our budget request for 2017 is responsible and our operating fund request still remains at a level significantly below 2009. Not too many organizations can boast of actually increasing services and accomplishments while operating at budget levels less than eight years ago.

You are certainly part of everything we do. This brief report is really only an introduction and I’d encourage you to stop by the office, contact a staff or executive committee member and learn about the depth of our resources. Better yet, ask how you can help! There’s a place for everyone at UMaine Extension.

Sincerely,

Walter Boomsma

University of Maine Cooperative Extension’s successful educational programs result from a federal, state and county government partnership. Since 1919, when the Maine Legislature passed the County Extension Act*, the University of Maine has been in all Maine communities with a county office whose operations are funded by county government. Our educational programs anticipate and respond to local and state needs and issues. We also communicate those issues and opportunities to UMaine faculty to influence their research and development plans.

A sampling of our educational program areas:

- 4-H
- Agriculture
- Business & Community
- Food & Health
- Gardening & Horticulture
- Home, Family & Youth
- Insect & Plant Disease Management
- Maine Food System
- Natural Resources
- Safety & Preparedness
Join us at our annual meeting!
Friday, October 28th
6 pm dinner made with local products
7 pm program
Congregational Church in Dover-Foxcroft

Wild Pollinators and Honey Bees: Their Importance to Garden and Farm Crops

by Matt Scott, who has been keeping bees for over 50 years, co-founder of the Maine State Beekeepers Association (MSBA), served on the Eastern Apicultural Society of North America, He continually provides advice and bee lectures too many of Maine’s Chapter Associations of the MSBA, U of M Extension Offices and Environmental Groups. Matthew Scott is a retired Aquatic Biologist and worked for the State of Maine for 38 years. Matt holds both Bachelors and Masters Degrees, from the University of Maine. Tickets are available for dinner at the Piscataquis Extension office. Proceeds to benefit the school gardening project.