

KENTUCKY



KENTUCKY STATE
UNIVERSITY

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

UK MARTIN-GATTON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

KSU COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, COMMUNITY AND THE SCIENCES



MCCRACKEN COUNTY
REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

2024-2025



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MEET THE TEAM



Gracey Moffitt

Agriculture and Natural
Resource Agent



Rachael Davis

4-H Youth Development
Agent



Mary Dossett

Horticulture Agent



Lisa Dodson

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MEET THE TEAM



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Senior NEP Program
Assistant



Haley Martin

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Horticulture Program
Assistant



Carla Wilkey

Support Staff



Sue Rice

Support Staff



Tessa Brown

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MEET THE TEAM



Jim Hawkins

Maintenance



Danny Wright

Maintenance



Adair Baysinger

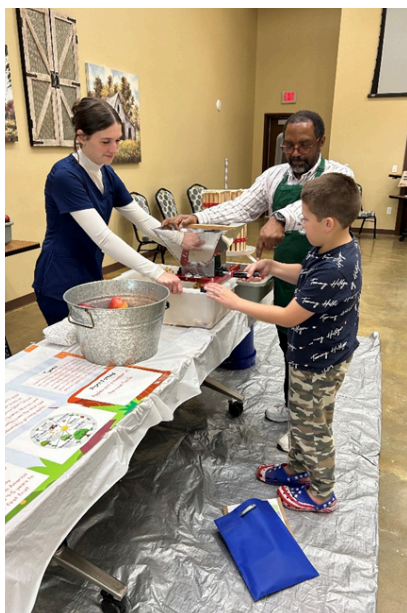
County Extension
Director

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES



HARVEST FESTIVAL

On November 15th, Ag Agent Gracey Moffitt hosted a family-friendly agricultural education event at the extension office known as the Harvest Festival. The Harvest Festival was another way to introduce different parts of the agricultural industry found here in McCracken County to the community. This evening-time event was for families to come and experience some hands-on ag related activities free of charge in a positive environment. The overall goal was for everyone young and old to learn a new fact about agriculture, specifically the three different crops: corn, pumpkins, and apples in respect of the harvest season. Thanks to the survey data collected, everyone who responded to the survey reported that they all learned a new fact about agriculture whether that fact was about information they learned from the various educational posters or by the hands-on activities they participated in. These activities were meant to appeal to all senses: smell, taste, touch, and sight. The stations included an apple press where they could make their own apple juice, a corn mill where they turned grain into meal, pumpkin painting, learning about and feeling pumpkin guts, learning about different crops on a cellular level by looking under a microscope, taste test stations where they could taste locally grown apple cider, try pumpkin in pumpkin pie bites and chocolate pumpkin muffins, and smores bites relating to the time of the year. We had nearly 150 people in attendance for this event and we have hopes of hosting it annually, noting its success in attendance and those that reported learning new facts about agriculture.





Ag Monthly

Ag Day continues to educate and inspire youth

BY ALISSON HARPOLD

For more than a decade, National Agriculture Day, known as Ag Day, is an annual event where fourth-grade students from both public and private schools visit the McCracken County Extension Office for a day of hands-on agricultural education.

The event began as an opportunity to provide students with a practical understanding of agriculture beyond the classroom. Today, Ag Day has evolved into a comprehensive educational experience. While the event may have undergone changes over the years, its core mission remains unchanged: to ignite a passion for agriculture in the hearts of young learners.

"As an agriculture education advocate, I find it very important to introduce students to agriculture where they live regardless of where they live or their background. This is an opportunity for them to learn by working with their hands outside of the classroom," said Gracey Moffitt, extension agent for agriculture and natural resources for the UK Extension Office.

For those unfamiliar with



McCracken County UK Extension Office every year to celebrate Ag Day with hands-on learning experiences.



The Mill was hosted by the McCracken County Extension Office. They taught students about the history of the mill and the importance of the mill in the community.

Fourth-graders from private and public schools in McCracken County visit the UK Extension Office every year to celebrate Ag Day with hands-on learning experiences.

Ag Day, it's more than just a field trip — it's an immersive experience into the world of agriculture.

Throughout the day, students are introduced to various aspects of agriculture through eight interactive stations: The Barnyard, All Cooped Up, Ag Jeopardy, Time in the Garden, It's Electric, The Mill, and Down by the Water. The name of each station reflected the agricultural theme it focused on. From exploring the ins and outs of poultry production to learning about the importance of electrical safety

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impression on students and educators.

"The kids really enjoyed interacting with the animals, specifically the alpacas and the donkey. I was also told the blue corn muffins the kids were able to taste test, thanks to the Master Food Volunteers, were a hit," Moffitt said.

At its core, Ag Day is about bridging the gap between theory and practice, offering students a chance to learn by doing.

For many students, traditional classroom settings may not always be conducive to effective learning. Ag Day provides an alternative approach, allowing students to connect with agricultural concepts



McCracken County UK Extension Office

It's Electric was a station hosted by Jackson Purchase Electric Company on electrical safety, which is another component of agriculture. Students learned why electricity is so important to their lives, why it is so important for linemen to wear protective equipment, and how to be safe when it comes to downed power lines.

learning while gaining a deeper appreciation for the agricultural industry.

"My favorite part about Ag Day was seeing how excited and enthusiastic the students were when they left that day, compared to when they first got there. It brings so much joy to my heart to see them

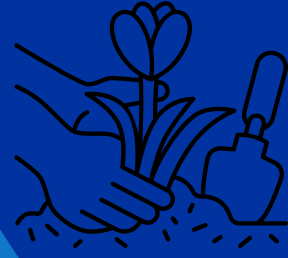
friends, families, and whoever would listen," Moffitt said.

By fostering connections between students and the land, Ag Day cultivates a deep appreciation for the agricultural heritage that sustains us all. Every year, the event reaffirms its commitment



AG DAY

On April 12th, the new Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent, Gracey Moffitt, hosted the annual Ag Day event. This event was open to all the 4th grade classes across McCracken County from the city, county, and private schools. The 3 schools that were able to attend were Morgan Elementary, St. Mary Elementary, and Lone Oak Intermediate. There were around 300 students in attendance at this Ag Day event. To address the need for agricultural education for our youth, Gracey planned to have a day of hands-on agriculture education activities. Each group of students rotated through various agriculture related stations. We had a petting zoo with various farm animals, a station to talk about chickens, they had the opportunity to mill their own corn and try different snacks made with corn, played Ag Jeopardy, learned about the different people and jobs needed in the ag industry, made their own tugboats and barges to learn about the movement of ag commodities in our waterways, learned about powerlines and electrical safety, along with learning about different insects and other aquatic critters. This day full of hands-on activities was a big hit. We are excited to see how Ag Day will grow and change in the future.



HORTICULTURE



The McCracken County Jail reached out to me about conducting a Horticulture based program at their facility for their female inmates. The inmates are classified as 'Class D', which are sentenced to less than five years. They wanted to provide resources to their inmates while they are incarcerated. I sat down with Kayla (Program Director / Educator) and Stephen Carter (Chief Deputy).

Once a week, I would go to the county jail and teach a class on gardening topics. I based these classes on a smaller version of the Master Gardener training curriculum. The inmates loved the horticulture programs especially planting flowers. The Chief Deputy set in for a couple classes, and he was thrilled at their responses. The ladies were engaged and interested in the topics that I was teaching. Mr. Carter told me the ladies looked forward to every Thursday. I had 16 females start the class and eight graduated the program. Several did not finish only because they were released from the jail.



This program was a seven-week course, where each week I would teach a different Horticulture topic. The topics were landscape, pollinators, propagating plants, pruning, gardening 101, and plant diseases/plant problems. The ladies loved learning how to plant mums, then they got to paint a plant stake for their planter. The topics I covered can help them when they get released by taking care of their landscape at home or getting a job at a local nursery. None of the ladies knew that you could take your soil test to the Extension Office before the course. They also really enjoyed learning about different types of pollinators and beneficial insects. 100% of the ladies told me they can use the information they learned from this course when they are released.





GOODWILL OPPORTUNITY CENTER

PLANTING DAY

The McCracken County Cooperative Extension Service received a Community and School Garden Grant from the Kentucky Nutrition Education Program which helped provide three raised beds for the Goodwill Opportunity Center in Paducah.

The Horticulture Assistant, Horticulture Agent, and NEP Program Assistant provided the tools and resources for a planting day in May at the Goodwill Opportunity Center. Participants helped plant a variety of vegetables and herbs to take care of and watch grow into produce for them to enjoy. The experience was very hands on, and approximately 15 individuals, all with different backgrounds and stories, were able to partake in this great opportunity to be educated in gardening and its many health benefits. Participants expressed their appreciation for the program and looked forward to seeing their work flourish. For some, it brought back memories of gardening as a child, and for many others it was a completely new experience. The raised beds are available to all clients of the Goodwill Opportunity Center and are a great way to teach them about the accessibility of gardening and healthy meal planning.



FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES



The McCracken County Cooperative Extension recently hosted a festive "A Morning with Mrs. Claus" event that delighted young and old alike. The morning was filled with holiday magic, from a charming 12 Days of Christmas story walk and a visit with the jolly Mrs. Claus herself to creative crafts and delicious treats.

Children eagerly participated in a variety of engaging activities. They transformed into miniature artists, painting their handprints on colorful ornaments and decorating sugar cookies with festive flair. The "magic" shrinking paper allowed them to pen heartfelt letters to Santa, confident that the elves would deliver them straight to the North Pole.

The event also fostered a love for nature with the creation of bird feeder pinecones, ensuring feathered friends would have a bountiful winter feast. Face painting added a touch of whimsy, transforming young attendees into reindeer, elves, and even Santa himself.

The survey results confirmed the event's resounding success. A resounding 21 out of 22 families reported enjoying the event, and a remarkable 90% expressed interest in attending future programs at the Extension. The cookie decorating station emerged as the most popular, with 10 out of 22 children listing it as their favorite.

The feedback also provided valuable insights for future events. Suggestions included incorporating fewer "make-and-take" crafts and considering alternative reindeer food options for younger children.

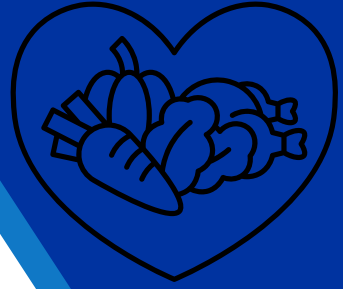
"A Morning with Mrs. Claus" was not only a joyful celebration of the holiday season but also a valuable community outreach initiative. The Extension successfully provided a fun and engaging experience for families while showcasing the valuable resources and educational opportunities available at the center.

Key Takeaways:

- The event was a resounding success, with high levels of family satisfaction and interest in future programs.
- The cookie decorating station proved to be the most popular activity.
- The survey provided valuable feedback for future events, including suggestions for alternative reindeer food options and incorporating fewer "make-and-take" crafts.
- The event successfully showcased the valuable resources and educational opportunities available at the McCracken County Cooperative Extension.

This success story highlights the positive impact of the "A Morning with Mrs. Claus" event and encourages the Extension to continue offering engaging and enriching programs for the community.





NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The McCracken County Cooperative Extension Service Senior, Nutrition Education Program Assistant partnered together with Family Service Society who helps residents of Paducah/McCracken County in need by assisting with basic needs such as food, clothing, prescription medications, emergency dental, utility assistance, personal hygiene items, household goods and Christmas food assistance.”

They were able to provide 4 families the ability to participate in a six-week event of “Cook Together Eat Together for Families” with hands on participation. The participants came to the Family Service Society facility weekly and learned new cooking skills, healthy recipes, and how to work together in the kitchen.

Many parents don’t realize the abilities that even the smallest of children can do if given the chance and the know-how. The families were able to make use of slow cookers and one pot meals that they thought would help during their busy lifestyles.

The families did an evaluation before and after the program and the results showed that they had improved overall diet quality, resource management, food safety and physical fitness with things like

- 80% ate fruit more often daily
- 80% planned meals before shopping along with a written shopping list
- 60% were making small changes to be more active
- 100% were now using a meat thermomator each time they cooked meats at home

The families received bags of groceries from Family Service Society filled with plenty of ingredients to make more of the meals prepared in class at home to enjoy with other family members.

One young man stated, “This was the best cooking he had ever tasted!”





4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Smithsonian Stories 4-History: McCracken County Youth Uncovering History Together

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kentucky's small businesses faced significant challenges. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Business Pulse Survey, 46% of small businesses in Kentucky reported a large negative impact at the beginning of the pandemic, which decreased to 36% by the end of June 2020.

To understand the impact on their community, the 4-Hers in McCracken County decided to focus on small businesses for their Smithsonian Stories 4-History project. Over 10 weeks, they engaged in research, collaboration, interviews, and historical learning about local businesses in McCracken County. Smithsonian Stories 4-History is a new program from the Smithsonian Institute's Museum on Main Street initiative. Upon completing the program, the 4-Hers achieved the following goals:

- Understanding the importance of informed citizenship and democracy in their community.
- Gaining a deeper understanding of their community and its history through intergenerational engagement and research.
- Discovering techniques to tell effective stories through a range of media.
- Building career readiness experience through skill development, leadership, and teamwork.
- Applying what they learned to advocate for change in their community.

Seven 4-Hers from McCracken County participated in this program. Five are students at McCracken County High School, and two attend Paducah Tilghman High School. Six of the participants are female, and one is male. Of the seven participants who went through the initial training program, six were actively engaged during the first six weeks, and two completed the project. Both participants who completed the project learned how to use their voices to make a positive impact on their community. They also increased their ability to tell effective stories while learning new technology and presentation methods. Additionally, both 4-Hers reported making new friends and connections within the community because of the program. These youth also formed connections at the national level through their collaboration with the Smithsonian Institute. The successful completion of this project will open great opportunities for these youth in the future.

ROCKET CLUB

NATIONAL FINALS



We introduced the American Rocketry Challenge to McCracken County High Schoolers. We had a total of 20 students from homeschool, public school, and private schools join us in this adventure. They broke up into four teams and one team qualified to go to the National Finals The Plains, Virginia.

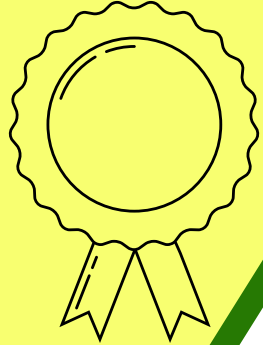
The students had to design, build, and launch model rockets while meeting strict criteria. This year's competition featured over 5,000 middle and high school students from 922 teams and 45 states. The 100 finalists competed on May 19 for the title of National Champion at Great Meadow in The Plains, Virginia, about 45 miles west of Washington, DC. In addition to the \$100,000 prize pool, the top 25 teams will automatically earn spots in NASA's Student Launch Challenge.

To qualify for the National Finals, participating teams designed, built, and launched model rockets that could safely carry a payload of one raw egg with a target flight duration of 43-46 seconds and an altitude of 820 feet. The requirements for the National Finals were modified to introduce a new challenge to the teams.

Sponsored by AIA, the National Association of Rocketry, and more than 20 industry partners, the American Rocketry Challenge is the world's largest student rocketry competition and the aerospace and defense industry's flagship program designed to encourage students to pursue study and careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The competition has inspired nearly 95,000 middle and high school students to explore education and careers in STEM fields. The American Rocketry Challenge fosters friendly competition among teams from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and geographies.

While in The Plains, Virginia the seven students who went on National Finals, were able to get a tour of Washington, D.C. They went to Monuments and several Smithsonian Museums.





4-H TAKES CENTER STAGE AT

COUNTY FAIR

The McCracken County 4-H youth made an incredible impact during the 2024 4-H division of the county fair, showcasing their talents and dedication across a variety of project areas. From arts, foods, forestry, natural resources, needlework, and sewing the fair celebrated creativity, hard work, and the power of learning through 4-H.

Record-Breaking Participation and Recognition

This year saw 157 youth participating in the 4-H fair, a testament to the program's growing reach and appeal. Among these participants, 47 Grand Champion winners were recognized for their exceptional work. The total premium payout reached \$1,880, reflecting a 47% increase from the previous year.

State-Level Achievements

The success of McCracken County youth didn't stop at the county level. Grand Champion projects advanced to the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville. Fifteen youth earned first place awards across 25 entries. Including a Grand Champion title was awarded for an outstanding cartoon drawing,

Building Community and Expanding Opportunities

The success of the fair has extended beyond the competition. Participation in 4-H Project Days—focused on developing skills has driven an increase in involvement in 4-H clubs, camps, and various other activities. The program has also increased volunteer engagement by 125%, further strengthening the support system for youth.

Developmental Impact

Participation in 4-H fair events helps youth grow in meaningful ways:

Enhanced Learning: Youth dive deeper into their core curriculum interests, fostering knowledge and skills they can use for life.

Sense of Belonging: Being part of an event with like-minded peers from their county and across the state allows youth to feel connected to a stronger 4-H community.

Positive Relationships: The fair season offers opportunities to build meaningful relationships with caring agents and volunteers who serve as mentors.

Growth mindset – Youth participants strive to learn more about their sparked interest in a particular 4-H Core Curriculum.

A hopeful purpose – Youth participants are hopeful about the life skills they have developed and hope to use these skills in the future.

Prosocial orientation – Youth participants respect the values and opinions of others as project work is judged on a standard.





OPEN MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, 8:00AM - 4:30PM

2025 NEW HOLT ROAD

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