

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

The Bucks: Top Fear

Creative solutions to the economic challenges of change.

The world will never stop changing, except probably to change faster. It's how people respond to change that matters most. As new developments arise and old standbys fall, many people and businesses need innovative ways to cope with the shifts of the times.

Payoff

- **Welfare farewell.** “Welfare to work” rolls easily off the tongue, but the reality often sticks in the craw. Many people have so little education and such poor language, work and social skills that they seem almost impossible to employ. The **Arizona** Extension Connection in Phoenix is designed specifically for the ones least able to get jobs. The program offers a six-week life skills program that teaches work skills, nutrition education and money management for people ranging from recent immigrants to former gang members and prison inmates. Of the 300 participants who completed the program, 146 have had jobs for more than a year. A **Nebraska** program, Building Nebraska Families, uses intensive one-on-one training to help people go beyond just having jobs to becoming self-sufficient on many levels. The more than 100 people who have gone through the program have raised their monthly incomes from \$446 to \$809. **New Mexico** Extension’s New Mexico Works has provided comprehensive training for 12,621 people, of whom 6,803, or nearly 54 percent, are successfully employed. **Maryland** and **Virginia State** have similar programs.
- **Green pastures.** In the past decade, nearly 30 percent of Missouri’s family dairies have failed. A **Missouri** Extension program is helping convert small farms to pasture-based dairies in an effort to lower their production costs below the \$12.50-per-hundredweight average of confinement dairies. It’s working. Farmers in the program have cut costs by a third to \$8.03 per hundredweight. Six are now considering expansions totaling \$4 million.
- **“Coopertunity” knocks.** With the growing demands of a global marketplace, farmers face formidable odds. Many find it impossible to stay in business alone. Organizing with other farmers would be out of reach, too, without others’ expertise.

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- Maryland** Extension helped farmers create the Maryland Small Farm Cooperative. The cooperative's direct-marketing livestock facility annually saves members \$30,000 over local auction sales. **Georgia's** Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development helped organize a small cantaloupe cooperative that projects profits of \$478,000 in 2002. The center also has helped establish the much bigger Georgia Oilseed Cooperative. With a stock sale under way to secure the capital to build a processing plant, economists project the co-op's impact on the rural Georgia economy at \$172 million per year. A **North Carolina A&T** effort helped small-scale farmers organize as a buying group that saved almost \$100,000 in supply purchases in 2001. A similar group of greenhouse growers saved \$150,000 in propane gas bills.
- **Common cents.** The first of the baby boomers are reaching retirement age and many aren't ready for it. Many states are using MONEY 2000+™ to help people develop a financial plan that will put them on a better financial footing for the future. The program emphasizes both increasing savings and reducing debt, and its success has been clear. The **Iowa State** program has enrolled 1,152 Iowans since 1998, with a cumulative savings increase of nearly \$1.8 million and debt reduction of about \$1.2 million. In just over a year in **Arizona**, enrollees have increased savings by \$368,000 and cut debt by \$388,354. In just eight counties, 185 **Purdue** participants increased savings by \$36,554 and trimmed debt by \$50,102 after one full year. Nationally, 29 states have more than 13,000 households enrolled, with cumulative savings increases of \$10.6 million and debt reductions of \$8.2 million.
 - **Better to switch.** As U.S. tobacco consumption declines, so do the profits of the farmers who grow it. Smaller-scale farmers especially are looking for other ways to make money. **North Carolina A&T** has helped growers convert their tobacco business to vegetables, fruits and flowers. For instance, one farmer filled an empty tobacco transplant greenhouse with 870,000 sweet potato transplants, raising his income by \$31,000.
 - **Business boost.** Shifting global markets present both golden opportunities and great hurdles for small businesses. A **Missouri** program taught 1,449 entrepreneurs the particulars of starting a new business. Of that group, 54 percent started businesses with statewide investments of \$43.5 million. The new businesses created 1,042 jobs and generated \$473 million in sales. Two businesses hit it big, with \$193 million of those sales. The **Nebraska** EDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) program gets entrepreneurs to teach others how to be successful. The strategy is working. More than 600 participants have started or expanded businesses, creating more than 600 new jobs, mostly in rural communities. **Oklahoma State** has a similar program targeting people looking to start up food businesses.
 - **Mulch success.** Sometimes the best economic responses are little changes. When Wheeler County, Ga., farmers began planting pine trees through the Conservation Reserve Program in 1986, they did little or nothing to properly manage the land for several years. But a **Georgia** Extension agent began having field days and demonstrations stressing managing pines intensively to get more pine straw and better timber growth. Now, more than 140 Wheeler County landowners are producing pine straw on 22,500 acres of well-managed trees. The economic impact of the pine straw production is more than \$2.2 million.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
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