

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Ready for the World

Specialized courses nurture growth of students' life skills.

A college graduate makes, on average, about \$800,000 more than a high school graduate over a lifetime. The USDA and Land-Grant universities provide more than a competitive edge at earning an income. They also expose students to a broad array of experiences and ideas to become well-rounded family members and community leaders. Even before young people embark on college, Cooperative Extension reaches out to ready youths for jobs and society.

Payoff

- **Spicing up the resume.** To get students involved in community service projects that teach and demonstrate the benefits of a free-market economy, **Arizona** sponsors the award-winning Students In Free Enterprise program. In 2002 more than 75 students were involved in free-enterprise activities and volunteered 15,631 hours in the community. The students created their own brand of salsa, "Tomate Loco Salsa," using tomatoes grown in university greenhouses. For the past three years, 24 students have given national presentations and 83 percent had job offers upon graduation with companies they met at the national competition. "I know I was offered a product-development position because of my involvement with the salsa project," one student said. The **Illinois** career services office provides internship and job placement, resume workshops and an annual career expo. In 2002, graduates reported an average starting salary of \$30,900; and since 1982, placement percentages have remained steady, regardless of the economy.
- **Milk comes from a cow, not a carton.** The "Close Encounters with Agriculture" program introduces fourth-graders to agriculture, nutrition and the environment. **Maryland** Extension provides teachers with lesson plans and other educational materials. In 2002 more than 2,700 children and teachers from 30 schools participated. Teachers ranked the program 4.75 out of a high of 5 in importance of topics, relevance and other criteria. Students scored an average of 21 percent correct on the pretest and 68 percent correct on the posttest.
- **A virtual university.** Faculty from many disciplines from **California Polytechnic**, **California State-Fresno** and **California-Davis** developed a Web-based class in

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precision agriculture for college sophomores. The three universities use the material, and the course content is also available for community college instructors and the agricultural industry. The Web provides an excellent method to quickly and cost-effectively distribute information. Using this material, community college instruction can more easily support the student's future education at a four-year university.

- **Mentoring young men and women.** With help from more than 50 organizations and agencies, **Alabama** Extension provided mentoring to 9,500 urban young people to develop leadership skills while addressing community issues. Teenage mothers participated in the Mentor Mom program, which fosters parenting, budgeting, health and career development skills. Of those participating, 23 percent improved their grades, while 21 percent improved their behavior. An after-school program uses **Missouri** 4-H curricula to help kids age 5 to 18 do their homework, acquire computer skills and learn how to get along with their peers. Teachers from one school reported that 85 percent of the 55 students attending improved their classroom skills, 76 percent improved responsibility and 58 percent improved math skills.
- **Enviably environmental efforts.** Trap Pond State Park has an agreement with **Delaware State** for its students to use the park for hands-on resource management training. In return, students collect and analyze data pertinent to park management issues that might otherwise go unstudied due to staffing or financial constraints. Students have provided two years of environmental data. The program has attracted over \$250,000 in funding for new field equipment, student scholarships, internships and summer stipends. The field opportunities familiarize students with real-time resource management issues and methodologies.
- **Preparing for the real world.** **Purdue** Extension conducted seminars emphasizing financial management and work-force preparation skills for 81 high school students. With their new knowledge about financial planning, 60 percent of participants started a weekly savings plan; 95 percent began recording income, savings and personal goals and objectives; 75 percent began tracking their expenses; and 85 percent committed to saving on a regular basis. In **Maine** Extension's

Gender Project, parents and teachers discuss with youth the gender-related concerns of bullying and violence, body image and eating disorders, dangerous risk-taking behaviors, sexualized violence and more. Participants reported changes in behavior, such as regarding communication and incorporating gender bias and stereotype awareness into their lives.

- **The plant doctor is in.** To prepare students for careers in plant protection, **North Dakota State** offers an undergraduate program that focuses on weed science, entomology and plant disease. **Florida's** Plant Medicine is a graduate program that equips students to diagnose plant health problems and offer control recommendations, regardless of whether the problem is caused by an insect, a nematode, a fungus, a weed, a nutrient deficiency or mineral toxicity. Typically, different specialists – an entomologist, nematologist, plant pathologist or weed scientist – are required to diagnose and offer management recommendations. With multidisciplinary training, graduates can better advise growers.
- **Cultivating researchers.** To encourage undergraduate research in agricultural and natural resources as an integral part of the education process, **Texas Tech** offers courses in research methodology and practice. Students receive formal training in the general principles of conducting research and problem solving. It sharpens their analytical skills and stimulates more undergraduates to consider graduate education and becoming members of the scientific community.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
and Extension Service**
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Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service in cooperation with the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, the Academic Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, the International Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, and the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

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