

COLUMBIA COUNTY ENVIRONMENT MATTERS LUNCH AND LEARN

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The Environment Matters Lunch and Learn series is an educational program series to educate the public on the impact we have on the environment and highlight the resources the county offers to protect and provide an eco-friendly environment in Columbia County, Georgia. The series also satisfies the State of Georgia Environmental Protection mandate for public education on pollution prevention for the county. The Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, Tripp Williams, collaborated with the Columbia County Environmental Public Education Coordinator, Margaret Alligood, and the Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library Board to provide free classes to the public during lunchtime. The two-part structure of the program included an environmental presentation by the agent followed by a presentation by the coordinating Columbia County Department responsible for the prevention or oversight of the environmental matter. The partnership with the library and local county departments enable the agent to engage a new audience for Extension. In addition, the designation of a lunchtime series allowed working individuals to attend. The agent created each presentation and presented at 14 monthly meetings reaching 492 participants. He also received \$3,000 in-kind support from the Evans Library and \$1,500 from the Columbia County Environmental Public Education Coordinator.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE

- Strengthen partnership with Columbia County Departments that reduce the impact on the environment
- Provide adult educational outreach for the environmental protection of our watershed, natural water resources, and pollinators
- Satisfy the State of Georgia Environmental Protection mandate, set by the Environmental Protection Division of Georgia, for public education on pollution prevention for Columbia County

ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS

Programmatic Efforts: The partnership with the library and local county departments enable the agent to engage a new audience for Extension. In addition, the designation of a lunchtime series allowed working individuals to attend. Subject matter during the 2018 Lunch and Learn series included: introduction to soils;



Classroom photo taken by Columbia County's drone during watershed inspection presentation. Photo credit: Scott Gordon

chemistry of soils; understanding fertilizers; management tools for landscape plantings and turfgrasses to minimize pollutants. Subject matter during the 2019 Lunch and Learn series focused on pollinator protection: identifying pollinators; selecting plant materials to attract pollinator; creating habitats and building nesting sites; pesticide interaction with pollinators. Unfortunately, COVID-19 halted this program in 2020.

Educational Materials: The agent researched the topic and presented the material via PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint was printed and given to each participant for notetaking. Participants were provided additional plant fact sheets, garden signage, seed packets (pollinator attracting plants), and materials to construct pollinator habitats.

Teaching Methods: Classroom style presentation followed by county department lead tours and hands-on demonstrations.

Columbia County departments involved:

- Columbia County Code Enforcement
- Environmental Services
- Flood Plain Management
- Keep Columbia County Beautiful
- Recycling & Green Program
- Roads and Bridges
- Storm water Utility
- Water Utility



Tour of Reed Creek watershed (20 acre reclamation project)



Stormwater Utility demonstration of stormwater camera system

RESULTS

The Environment Matters Lunch and Learn series was developed to educate the public on the impact people have on the environment and highlight the resources the county offers to protect and provide an eco-friendly environment in Columbia County, Georgia. The Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, Tripp Williams, collaborated with the Columbia County Environmental Public Education Coordinator, Margaret Alligood, and the Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library Board to provide free classes to the public during lunchtime. Presentations were made by the agent on various environmental topics and then followed by presentation by the Columbia County Department that was responsible for the

prevention, oversight, or potential clean up. Since 2018, Mr. Williams created each presentation and presented at 14 monthly meetings reaching 492 participants.

2018 sessions

- **66%** of attendees indicated learning the importance of soil pH and how pH affects availability of fertilizers.
- **84%** of attendees indicated learning something new about a department within the county and its role in protecting the environment.
- **100%** of attendees learned that mulches, grass, and plantings act as a filter and help reduce pesticides and fertilizers from entering our vital natural waters.

2019 sessions

- **87%** of attendees indicated learning the importance of pesticide usages in the landscape when creating a pollinator garden.
- **71%** of attendees indicated learning the importance of creating alternative pollinator habitats in the landscape.
- **55%** of attendees learned that the honeybee is not the only pollinator of fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

IMPACT STATEMENT:

The Environment Matters Lunch and Learn series was developed to educate the public on the impact we have on the environment and highlight the resources the county offers to protect and provide an eco-friendly environment in Columbia County, Georgia. The series also satisfies the State of Georgia Environmental Protection mandate for public education on pollution prevention for the county. The Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, Tripp Williams, collaborated with the Columbia County Environmental Public Education Coordinator and the Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library Board to provide free classes to the public during lunchtime.

Columbia County ranks number one in the state of Georgia ornamental horticulture, or the production of flowers and landscape plants with a Georgia farm gate value of \$93,615,743. Columbia and Augusta-Richmond Counties have a population of approximately 325,000 people. There is a tremendous demand on the agricultural agent to serve this many people in an area as vast as horticulture. Mr. Williams composed a seven member Extension Leadership System Team that consists of green industry professionals, county leaders, master gardeners, and homeowners. Special emphasis was desired for educational programming in homeowner agriculture as well as new techniques and applications in the green industry.

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provide free classes to the public during lunchtime. A presentation was made by Tripp Williams on the various topics and then followed up by the Columbia County Department that was responsible for the prevention, oversight, or potential clean up. Mr. Williams created each presentation and presented at 14 monthly meetings reaching 492 participants. Columbia County departments involved in the presentations: Columbia County Code Enforcement, Environmental Services, Flood Plain Management, Keep Columbia County Beautiful, Recycling & Green Program, Roads and Bridges, Storm water Utility, and Water Utility.

Mr. Williams has received \$3,000 in in-kind support from the Evans Library and \$1,500 from the Columbia County Environmental Public Education Coordinator. The donations provided a light-snack for lunch, and participants could bring their lunch to the presentation. Mr. Williams presented at 14 monthly meetings reaching 492 participants. Mr. Williams measured impact through post-training evaluations. Of particular environmental impact, attendees of the 2018 sessions indicated learning about the impact of rainwater and its ability to pick up pollutants from impervious surfaces that can contaminate fresh water resources. Attendees also learned that greenery, grass, and plantings act as a filter and help reduce pollutants from entering our vital natural waters. Attendees of the 2019 sessions learned about enhancing their landscape for pollinators. The presentations detailed the selection of trees, woody ornamentals, and herbaceous annual and perennial plants that would draw pollinators to the landscape. The candidate invited speakers from many county departments who shared how their department protects the natural resources of the county. The citizens of Columbia County overwhelmingly requested to hear more from employees in future sessions. One of the feedback surveys expressed this sentiment well - "It was very interesting, comforting, and eye opening what goes on daily in various departments and behind the scenes. We think other people would enjoy hearing from the experts on how they proactively look out for the environment and safety of people in our area...we had no idea. Please continue the sessions and the workers visiting!" One of the participants was chosen as "Eco-citizen of the Year" by the committee in recognition of participation throughout the entire series.

EVALUATION:

The agent measured impact through post-training evaluations. Overall satisfaction with the programs were rated excellent by 93% of attendees, 100% of which indicated they would definitely use the information provided. For all sessions, those participants who had no prior knowledge of the topic stated that they were more knowledgeable after the presentation. For those attending and returning the evaluations (n=56) for the 2018 series, 66% of the attendees sessions indicated learning the importance of soil pH and how that effected the availability of fertilizers. 84% also learned of departments in Columbia County that protect the environment they did not even know existed. Lastly, 100% of the attendees learned that mulches, grass, and plantings act as a filter and help reduce pesticides and fertilizers from entering our vital natural waters. For those attending and returning the evaluations (n=62) for the 2019 series, 87% of the attendees indicated learning the importance of pesticide usages in the landscape when creating a pollinator garden. 71% of them learned the importance of creating alternative pollinator habitats in the landscape. Lastly, 55% of them learned that the honeybee is not the only pollinator of fruits, vegetables, and nuts.