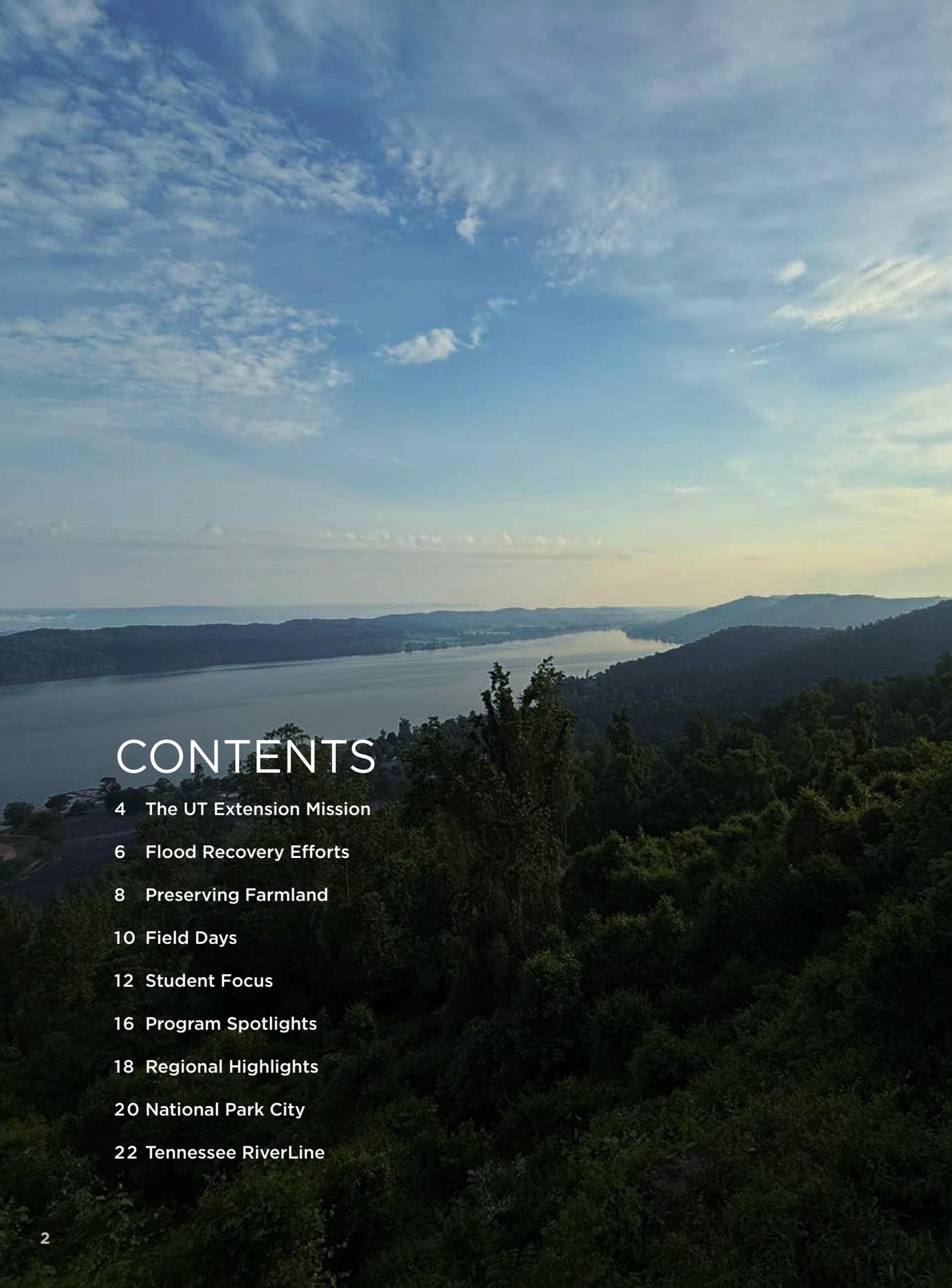


UT EXTENSION ANNUAL REPORT 2025





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A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF EXTENSION



Dear community members and partners,

It is my distinct honor to present this year's annual report. Officially stepping into the dean's role this year, I continue to be inspired by the dedication and excellence of our entire team across the state. Together, we are part of what I believe is the most impactful state Cooperative Extension Service in the nation, serving the people of Tennessee with unwavering commitment. This would not be possible without the willingness of partner organizations to sustain those relationships and the willingness of our stakeholders to continue trusting that we will respond to your needs.

In this report, you will find a review of our programs and productivity and a reflection of the hard work we have done across all our program areas. From agriculture and natural resources, community economic development, 4-H youth development, and family and consumer sciences, each section of this report highlights how we are growing stronger and making a difference in every corner of the state.

We have faced a changing funding environment over the past year, and I want to acknowledge the resilience of our team. Despite these challenges, we have remained balanced and adaptable, ensuring that we continue to deliver on our mission and improve the education we provide.

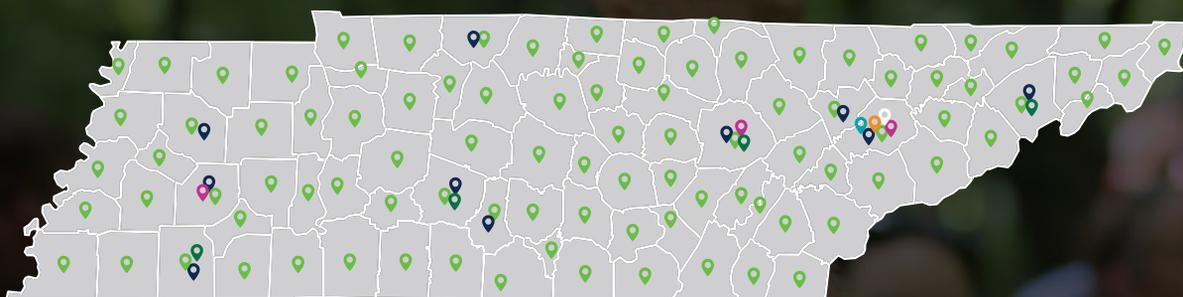
As you read through these pages, I hope you will see the collective impact of our work and the dedication of our faculty and staff. Thank you for your continued support and for being part of the UT Extension family.

Justin Rhinehart
Dean and Professor
UT Extension

OUTREACH IS OUR MISSION

University of Tennessee Extension is a unit of the UT Institute of Agriculture.

Established in 1968, the statewide UT Institute of Agriculture is one of the few land-grant university institutes of its kind in the country. We are proud to improve life for Tennesseans and beyond one discovery, one community, one classroom, one home, and one farm at a time. Through our Real. Life. Solutions. we create outstanding opportunities in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences. We strive to be the model of how a land-grant university can positively impact the world, now and into the future.



 UT AgResearch and Education Centers

 UT Gardens

 UT College of Veterinary Medicine

 Smith Center for International Sustainable Agriculture

 UT Extension Offices

 Herbert College of Agriculture

 4-H Youth Development Centers

OUR IMPACT

UT Extension offices in **all ninety-five counties**

UT AgResearch saw a **60 percent increase** in sponsored research expenditures over the past six years

Largest in-school 4-H club program in the country

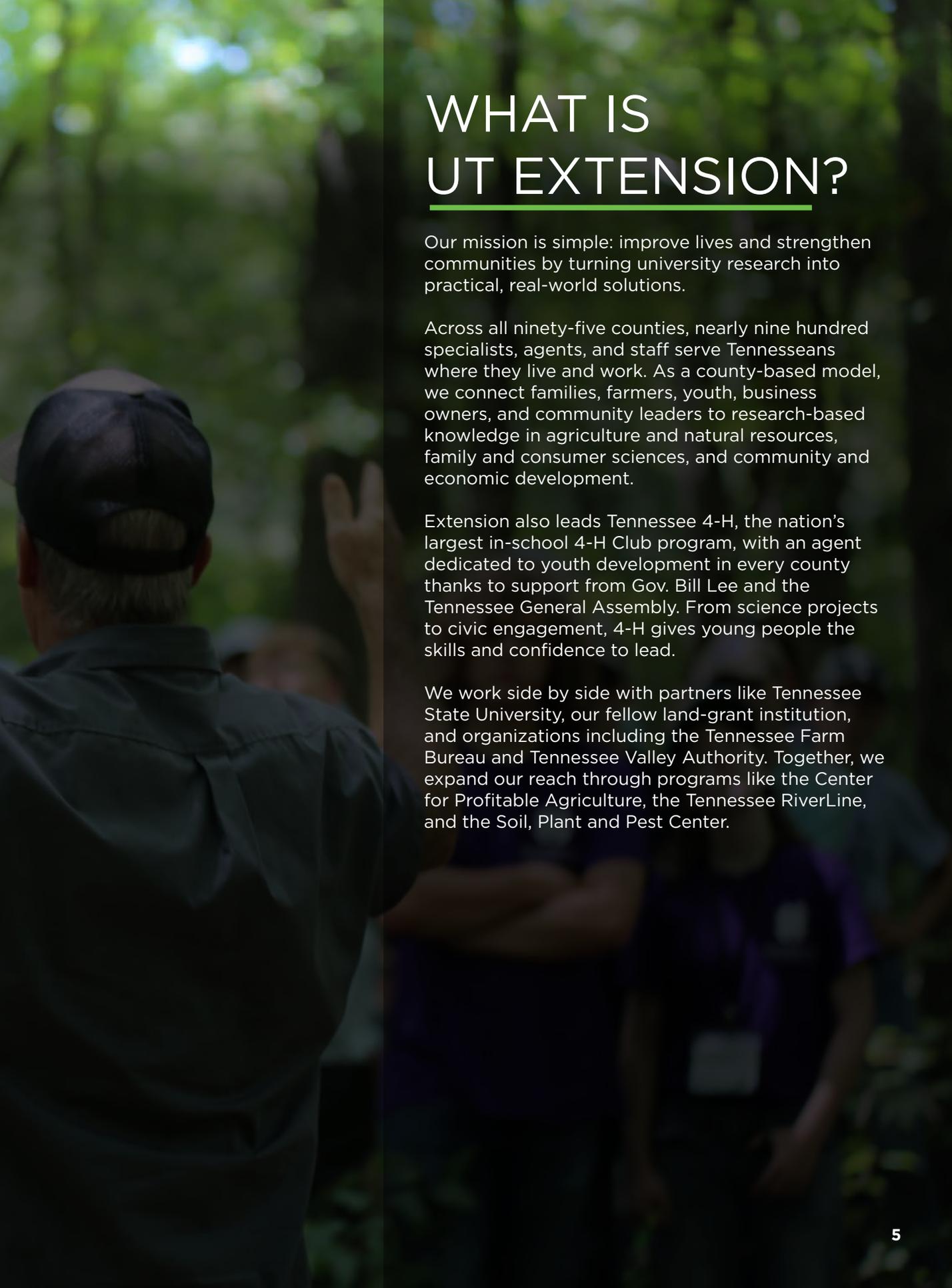
The College of Veterinary Medicine—home to the **state's only academic veterinary medical center**—is experiencing high enrollment

The Herbert College of Agriculture boasts **record enrollment**

The Smith Center for International Sustainable Agriculture has almost **doubled the student global experience**

Strong partnerships with the Tennessee Farm Bureau, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, producers and commodity organizations across the state and world



A person wearing a dark cap and shirt is seen from behind, pointing towards a group of people in a field. The background is a lush green field with trees.

WHAT IS UT EXTENSION?

Our mission is simple: improve lives and strengthen communities by turning university research into practical, real-world solutions.

Across all ninety-five counties, nearly nine hundred specialists, agents, and staff serve Tennesseans where they live and work. As a county-based model, we connect families, farmers, youth, business owners, and community leaders to research-based knowledge in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and community and economic development.

Extension also leads Tennessee 4-H, the nation's largest in-school 4-H Club program, with an agent dedicated to youth development in every county thanks to support from Gov. Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly. From science projects to civic engagement, 4-H gives young people the skills and confidence to lead.

We work side by side with partners like Tennessee State University, our fellow land-grant institution, and organizations including the Tennessee Farm Bureau and Tennessee Valley Authority. Together, we expand our reach through programs like the Center for Profitable Agriculture, the Tennessee RiverLine, and the Soil, Plant and Pest Center.

“Extension gave us a way forward when we couldn’t see one.”





RESILIENCE IN ACTION

Flood Recovery Field Day

When the floodwaters from Hurricane Helene receded, Tennessee families were left with more than damaged homes and fields. They faced uncertainty. Crops ready for harvest were buried in debris, fences and equipment were gone, and years of hard work seemed lost in a matter of hours.

Across the state, UT Extension agents were among the first to respond. They live and work in the same communities as the people they serve, and they showed up quickly—walking fields with farmers, listening to concerns, and connecting families to disaster relief programs that eased financial strain. They offered guidance on soil testing, debris removal, and pasture recovery, helping producers take their first steps toward rebuilding.

Through the Flood Recovery Initiative, led by UT Extension and the UT Institute of Agriculture, families received hands-on help rebuilding and planning for the future. Soil scientists measured nutrient loss, specialists advised on reseeding and erosion control, and economists worked with producers to strengthen their operations. More than six hundred families have received direct support, and farms across Tennessee are already showing new growth where floodwaters once stood.

In Limestone, a hands-on field day demonstrated how research can drive recovery. Farmers saw practical solutions in action, from soil restoration and pasture reclamation to drone seeding and biochar application.

“Extension gave us a way forward when we couldn’t see one,” one farmer shared.

From the first call for help to the final stages of recovery, UT Extension stands with Tennessee farmers, rebuilding not just farms but futures.



Preserving Farmland

Tennessee has lost more than 430,000 acres of farmland since 2017, according to the American Farmland Trust. To better understand and address this loss, UT Extension researchers created the Tennessee Land Loss Dashboard using data from the USDA Cropscape Datalayer.

The dashboard tracks how land use has changed across all ninety-five counties since 2010, showing shifts in cropland, pasture, hay, forest, and developed areas. This research directly informed the Tennessee Farmland Preservation Act, which secured \$25 million to protect farmland and support a public database to guide decision-makers and communities.

Through the UT Center of Farm Management, UT Extension helps families plan for the future of their land. The program connects farmers, attorneys, and Extension specialists to discuss succession planning and long-term preservation.

Agents Earn National Honors

Thirteen Tennessee agriculture Extension agents were honored at the 2025 National Association of County Agricultural Agents Annual Meeting in Billings, Montana.

Distinguished Service Awards went to Celeste Scott, Blake Ramsey, and Shannon DeWitt, recognizing their outstanding careers.

Early-career Achievement Awards were presented to Haley Treadway, Amy Dunlap, and Ryan Brown. Treadway and her team also earned a national award, while projects by Justin Thomas and team, Rachel Painter, and Alaina Boyd were named finalists. Agents including Anna Duncan, Terrell Davis, Jessica Smith, Sarah Orr, Tracey Sullivan, and Jason de Koff shared their expertise through professional presentations.





FIELD DAYS:

Research to Practice

Every year, thousands of visitors from Tennessee and beyond attend UTIA field days, events that demonstrate the strong partnership between UT Extension and UT AgResearch. Field days bring research-based information directly to farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and residents. The events are held at many of the UT AgResearch and Education Centers across Tennessee and feature talks by researchers and UT Extension specialists and agents. They are opportunities for citizens to connect with research that impacts their daily lives and to ask questions of the scientists and experts conducting the research.

For a 2026 field day schedule, visit agresearch.tennessee.edu/field-days.





STUDENT FOCUS



4-H Roundup: Building Leaders for the Future

More than three hundred students came to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in July for the annual Tennessee 4-H Roundup and All-Star Conference. Over the course of the week, participants demonstrated their skills in project competitions, elected new state council officers, and took part in leadership workshops designed to strengthen their ability to serve their communities.

A college and career fair connected students with future pathways, while the Vol State Awards highlighted the accomplishments of outstanding 4-H members across Tennessee. Beyond recognition, Roundup inspired youth to grow as leaders, communicators, and citizens.



National Stage in Wildlife Education

Tennessee proudly hosted the National Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) Contest at the Clyde York 4-H Center in Crossville. Sixty students and thirty-one coaches from thirteen states competed in this premier wildlife judging event, testing their knowledge of habitat management and conservation.

For Tennessee, the event was more than a competition; it was a homecoming. WHEP began at the University of Tennessee to teach young people how land use decisions affect wildlife and habitat. The Tennessee team from Knox County earned a first-place finish, with two members posting the top individual scores. The contest was made possible through the School of Natural Resources, UT Extension faculty and staff, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and the National WHEP Committee, with support from partners including the National Wild Turkey Federation, Turkeys for Tomorrow, Tennessee Farm Bureau, and the USDA Forest Service.



Next Chapter: Opening Doors to College Pathways

The 4-H Next Chapter Program relaunched this year with a renewed focus on helping young people prepare for life after high school. A collaboration between UT Knoxville's Division of Enrollment Management, UTIA, the Herbert College of Agriculture, and Tennessee 4-H, the program equips students with the tools and confidence to take their next steps.

In August, agents from Scott, Sevier, Bedford, Wilson, Stewart, and Houston counties connected with enrollment management leadership to learn about university resources and strengthen their ability to guide students through the transition from high school to college.



Beyond Ready: Leadership Recognized with the Peyton Manning Scholarship

Extension's commitment to preparing youth for the future was celebrated in a special way this year when 4-H'er Caroline Garrell was named a recipient of the prestigious Peyton Manning Scholarship. UT alumnus and retired NFL quarterback Peyton Manning joined university leaders to honor the awardees, each of whom receives a four-year scholarship recognizing academic excellence, service, and leadership.

For Garrell, the recognition reflects years of growth through 4-H project work, leadership experiences, and community service. The award is a milestone that connects her 4-H journey to future opportunities in higher education and beyond.

Picnic at the Fair Supports Tennessee 4-H Youth

The fourth annual Tennessee 4-H Picnic at the Fair raised \$93,000 to support camps and educational scholarships statewide. Wilson County 4-H members prepared the meal, giving young people the chance to showcase their skills while serving their community.

Funds raised through the picnic open doors for youth to attend 4-H camps, explore career paths, and take part in leadership opportunities that shape their futures.



STEM Centers Bring Opportunity Closer to Home

Tennessee 4-H is expanding opportunities for young people through the creation of dedicated STEM centers across the state. Backed by significant new funding, proposed by Gov. Bill Lee and approved by the General Assembly, the centers will serve as community hubs where students can explore science, technology, engineering, and math in hands-on ways that spark curiosity and build confidence.

Students will have access to advanced tools, experiments, and mentorship in areas such as robotics, coding, and environmental science. These investments are more than new buildings or labs. They represent a commitment to preparing the next generation for careers in high-demand fields and giving them the skills to thrive in a changing world. Each center will be a place where young people not only learn about science and technology, but also see themselves as innovators, problem solvers, and leaders for their communities.

STEMOVATE: Innovation Through Partnership

Tennessee 4-H launched STEMOVATE, an innovative partnership with the UT-Oak Ridge Innovation Institute, the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, and UT-Battelle. STEMOVATE equips agents and teachers with ready-to-use curriculum in areas such as artificial intelligence, engineering, nuclear energy, and invasive species.

The program will expand statewide by 2027 and reach middle school youth by 2030. Blending university research with Extension's community reach, STEMOVATE ensures that students across Tennessee, regardless of where they live, can engage with some of the most pressing challenges and exciting opportunities in science.





Pat's Gameplan for Caregivers: Extending Support Across the Nation

Inspired by legendary Lady Vols coach Pat Summitt, Pat's Gameplan for Caregivers is a \$1.3 million public-private partnership between the Pat Summitt Foundation and UT Extension's Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. The initiative addresses a critical need, supporting family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia while carrying forward Summitt's legacy of leadership and strength.

At the heart of the program is UT Extension, which develops and delivers the resources caregivers use every day. Faculty provide expert-led webinars, cooking tutorials, and practical guides on health, financial care, and overall well-being. These lessons, grounded in Extension's educational mission, give families both confidence and tools to manage daily challenges.

Since its launch, Pat's Gameplan has reached nearly 389,000 individuals, averaging 1,400 daily users and 43,620 monthly visitors.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS



Stronger Families, Stronger Communities: Extension's FCS Programs at Work

Across Tennessee, UT Extension's Department of Family and Consumer Sciences programs help families live healthier, more secure, and more sustainable lives. From reducing food waste to preparing students for financial decision-making and supporting first-time homeowners, FCS agents are addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing communities today.

During Food Waste Prevention Week, agents in thirty-five counties collected 14,200 pounds of food—enough to provide more than 17,300 meals. These efforts not only diverted food from landfills but also directly improved food security for families in need. By raising awareness and mobilizing local resources, Extension turned education into immediate community impact. Homeownership support is another area where Extension is making a measurable difference. HUD-certified Extension counselors were recognized by the Tennessee Housing Development Agency for helping families secure 669 home loans in 2024, totaling \$138.6 million. Each home loan represents more than financial stability—it's a foundation for stronger neighborhoods and lasting community growth.

Extension also prepares the next generation for financial responsibility. The statewide Money Week program, recently featured in the Tennessee Financial Literacy Commission's Annual Report, teaches elementary students skills like counting money, managing spend/save/share banks, and distinguishing between wants and needs. Since 2020, Money Week has reached 3,590 students in thirty-four schools, building lifelong habits of financial confidence and responsibility.



West Tennessee

For more than thirty years, the Savannah Feeder Calf Sale has been a highlight for beef producers in West Tennessee. Held each August under the direction of UT Extension Hardin County's Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, the sale gives local producers an opportunity that goes far beyond the weekly market.

By co-mingling steers and heifers into larger, like-kind groups sorted by grade, weight, and breed, the sale allows even small producers to compete with larger operations. A certified livestock grader from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture ensures that every lot is ready for buyers, resulting in better prices and stronger market opportunities.

In 2025, the sale added more than \$26,000 in value for participating producers. On average, sellers receive a \$5 to \$8 per hundredweight premium compared to the weekly market. Each year, the sale benefits fifty to seventy producers, proving the power of partnerships between Extension, Hardin County Stockyards, and agriculture students from the Tennessee College of Applied Technology at Crump.

Beyond the dollars, the Savannah Feeder Calf Sale represents trust, grit, and three decades of working together—neighbors helping neighbors, with Extension at the heart.



REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

 *UT Extension Office in all 95 Counties.*



County Highlight: Williamson

Where rural life meets suburban, pastures meet corporate offices, Williamson County keeps to the heart of Extension's roots through hands-on learning experiences. Whether it is an adult or youth, citizens invest in opportunities that improve quality of life, health, environment, and education for future generations. Williamson County Extension team has worked to provide solutions through 181 site and farm visits, teaching 126 adult classes in agriculture, horticulture, and family and consumer sciences, and providing 225 classes to youth in 4-H programs, all in the first three quarters of 2025. Innovation (drone soccer), tradition (livestock), and function (home wiring) are among many opportunities preparing 4-H'ers to be leaders in their communities. Hands-on classes and Master programs sustain generational farms and train first year producers. Tai Chi classes connect mind to body helping Williamson County become a healthier community. Serving an entire community takes a community. The volunteer-led diagnostic team addresses more than six hundred cases annually through calls, walk-ins, and site visits, solving plant health challenges but more importantly, building lasting relationships with community members.



Middle Tennessee:

The 4-H Horse Project often depends on sight. Students are asked to evaluate horses, identify feed, and study tack—all activities rooted in visual learning. But for one Maury County member, a love for horses came with a challenge: how to participate fully without relying on sight.

UT Extension Agent Sarah Keenan focused on the student's strengths and created new methods of teaching hippology that relied on touch and sound instead of sight. Using raised lines, varied textures, Braille, and even a swell-form machine, she developed tactile and verbal study tools that made the project accessible in a whole new way.

What once seemed out of reach became possible. The student not only participated but thrived, experiencing the same sense of belonging and achievement as her peers.

TN 4-Her Not Letting Her Disability Get in the Way of Her Passion for Horse Judging Video: tiny.utk.edu/4horsejudging.



East Tennessee

UT Extension is at the center of a growing movement in Southeast Tennessee. In 2018, Extension agent Sarah Kite partnered with Sheriff Joe Guy to launch Healthy Relationships McMinn. What began as a small group of local leaders has now grown into a network of more than one hundred professionals from schools, law enforcement, health providers, and social service agencies. Together, they are strengthening families and building healthier communities.

Extension's leadership has helped turn community needs into practical solutions. The Community Resource Van, led by Sheriff Guy and his deputies, delivers supplies, information, and personalized support directly to families identified as being in need. Another project, Hidden in Plain Sight, equips parents and caregivers with strategies to better connect with teens and prevent risky behaviors.

Extension has also brought Adverse Childhood Experiences training to schools, volunteer groups, and professionals across the county, teaching how to respond with compassion and resilience.





NATIONAL
PARK CITY

Chattanooga.

America's FIRST
National Park City

April 19th, 2025



NATIONAL
PARK CITY

“Being involved with the National Park City movement is a natural fit.”



Extension Helps Chattanooga Earn National Park City Designation

When Chattanooga became the first National Park City in North America, UT Extension was central to the achievement. The honor recognizes cities that integrate nature into daily life, improve sustainability, and connect people with their environment. Extension’s long-standing work in Hamilton County provided the educational foundation that helped the city stand out on the world stage.

Chattanooga’s National Park City application featured many of these Extension-led efforts, from community garden projects to environmental workshops. By connecting individual choices—like planting a backyard vegetable garden or reducing food waste—to larger environmental goals, Extension demonstrated how small actions add up to big change.

The Master Gardeners of Hamilton County, supported by UT Extension, played an important role in Chattanooga’s journey. Their workshops and demonstrations provided residents with tools to make their homes and neighborhoods more resilient, beautiful, and sustainable.

“Being involved with the National Park City movement is a natural fit,” said Haley Treadway, UT Extension agent in Hamilton County. “It connects our programs to a larger network of passionate individuals committed to making life better for people, places, and nature.”



TENNESSEE RIVERLINE



Serving fifty-eight cities and counties in four states, the Tennessee RiverLine has advanced UT's land-grant mission and its bold vision of a 1.2-million-acre river park by expanding recreation, fostering stewardship, and moving projects from ideas to implementation. Highlights include:

- **Ninety-five community and regional events** hosted, reaching thousands of residents and visitors through river recreation, education, and stewardship.
- **“Plan Your Journey” tools** updated to help users plan river adventures.
- **Paddlesports Leadership Academy** graduated its fourth cohort of community paddling leaders, expanding safe and welcoming river experiences.
- **iSpy652 launched**, making connections to the river's biodiversity through community science.
- **2025 Summit** drew 170 leaders from across the Tennessee Valley and beyond to celebrate progress and align future priorities.
- **Infrastructure designs completed for Knoxville, Spring City, and Jackson County (AL)**, sharing visions for new parks, trails, and water access.
- **Demonstration projects** advanced toward implementation for shared river access in Knoxville and The Shoals (AL).
- **Signage packages completed in Benton and Perry Counties**, with wayfinding markers installed in additional RiverTowns.



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02/26 26-0033

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and County governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.