

Turning Research into Impact:

How UGA Cooperative Extension Works with Georgia Communities

*Laura Perry Johnson, Associate Dean for Extension, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
Anna Scheyett, Professor, School of Social Work and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
Andrea Scarrow, Southwest District Extension Director, Cooperative Extension*

Research **Live**



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

A Bit of History....

- **Morrill Act** – July 2, 1862 Established public colleges funded by sale of federal land
(1785 – UGA first state-chartered University in US)
(1890 and 1994 Institutions)
- **Hatch Act** – 1877 Established Experiment Stations (Research)
- **Smith-Lever Act** – 1914 Established Cooperative Extension



Our Purpose, Our Pillars

We translate the science of everyday living for families, farmers and communities to foster a healthy and prosperous Georgia.



LOCAL



PERSONAL



SCIENCE-BASED



RESULTS-DRIVEN



COLLABORATIVE



MULTI-
GENERATIONAL



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



4 Districts

- Northwest
- Northeast
- Southwest
- Southeast



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



DISTRICT OFFICES

NORTHWEST DISTRICT EXTENSION CENTER, GRIFFIN

Clinton McRae
DISTRICT EXTENSION DIRECTOR
clinton.mcrae@uga.edu
770-228-7274

Jule-Lynne Macie
ANR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
jlmacie@uga.edu
770-233-5561

Kisha Faulk
FACS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
kfaulk@uga.edu
770-233-5561

Lori Bledsoe
4-H PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
lpurcell@uga.edu
770-229-3408

NORTHEAST DISTRICT EXTENSION CENTER, ATHENS

Denise D. Everson
DISTRICT EXTENSION
DIRECTOR
deverson@uga.edu
706-542-1612

Amanda Tedrow
ANR PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
atedrow@uga.edu
706-542-3503

Leigh Anne Aaron
FACS PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
laa@uga.edu
706-542-2363

Al Parker
4-H PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
alparker@uga.edu
706-542-2163

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT EXTENSION CENTER, STATESBORO

Arch D. Smith
INTERIM DISTRICT EXTENSION
DIRECTOR
asmith@uga.edu
912-478-8983

Stephanie Hollifield
INTERIM ANR PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
smh@uga.edu
229-386-3409

Lisa D. Jordan
FACS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
lisajord@uga.edu
912-478-8991

Lee Anna Deal
4-H PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
leeannam@uga.edu
912-478-8991

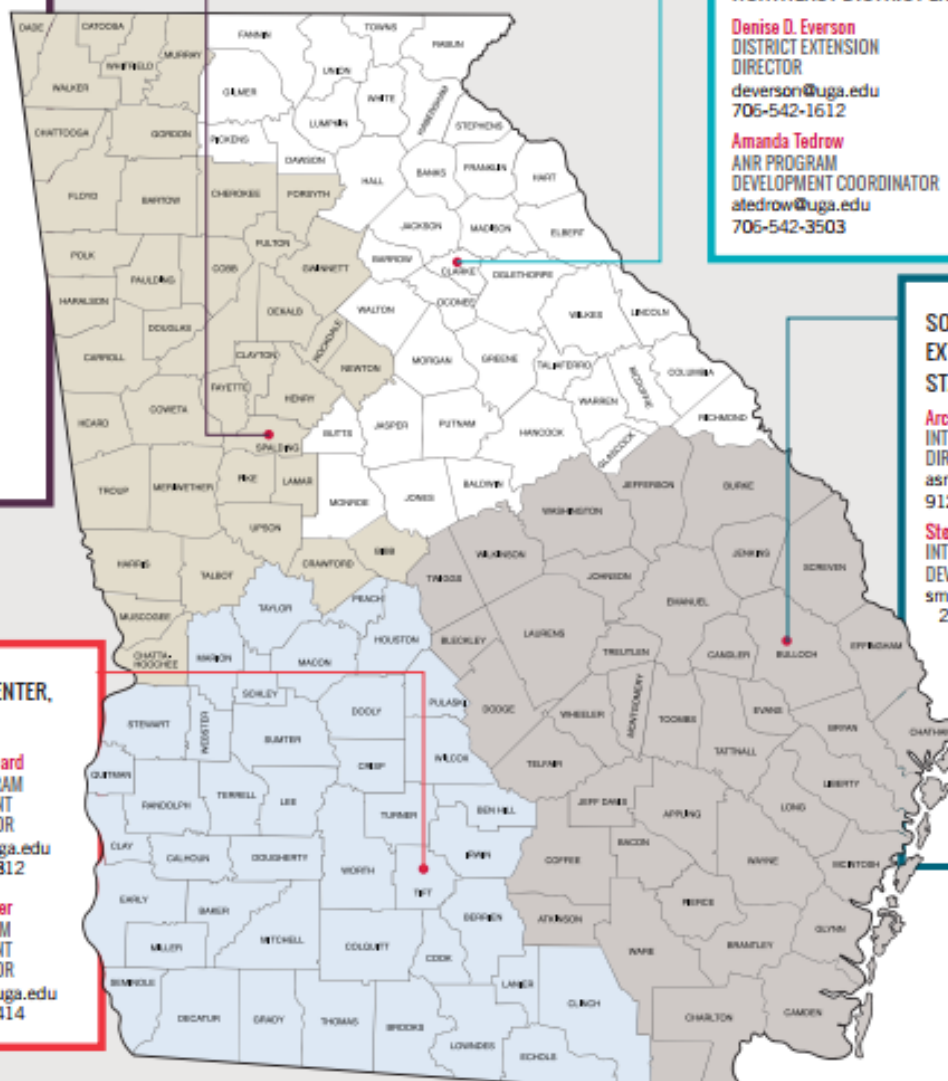
SOUTHWEST DISTRICT EXTENSION CENTER, TIFTON

Andrea Scarrow
DISTRICT
EXTENSION
DIRECTOR
ascarrow@uga.edu
229-386-3413

Stephanie Hollifield
ANR PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
smh@uga.edu
229-386-3812

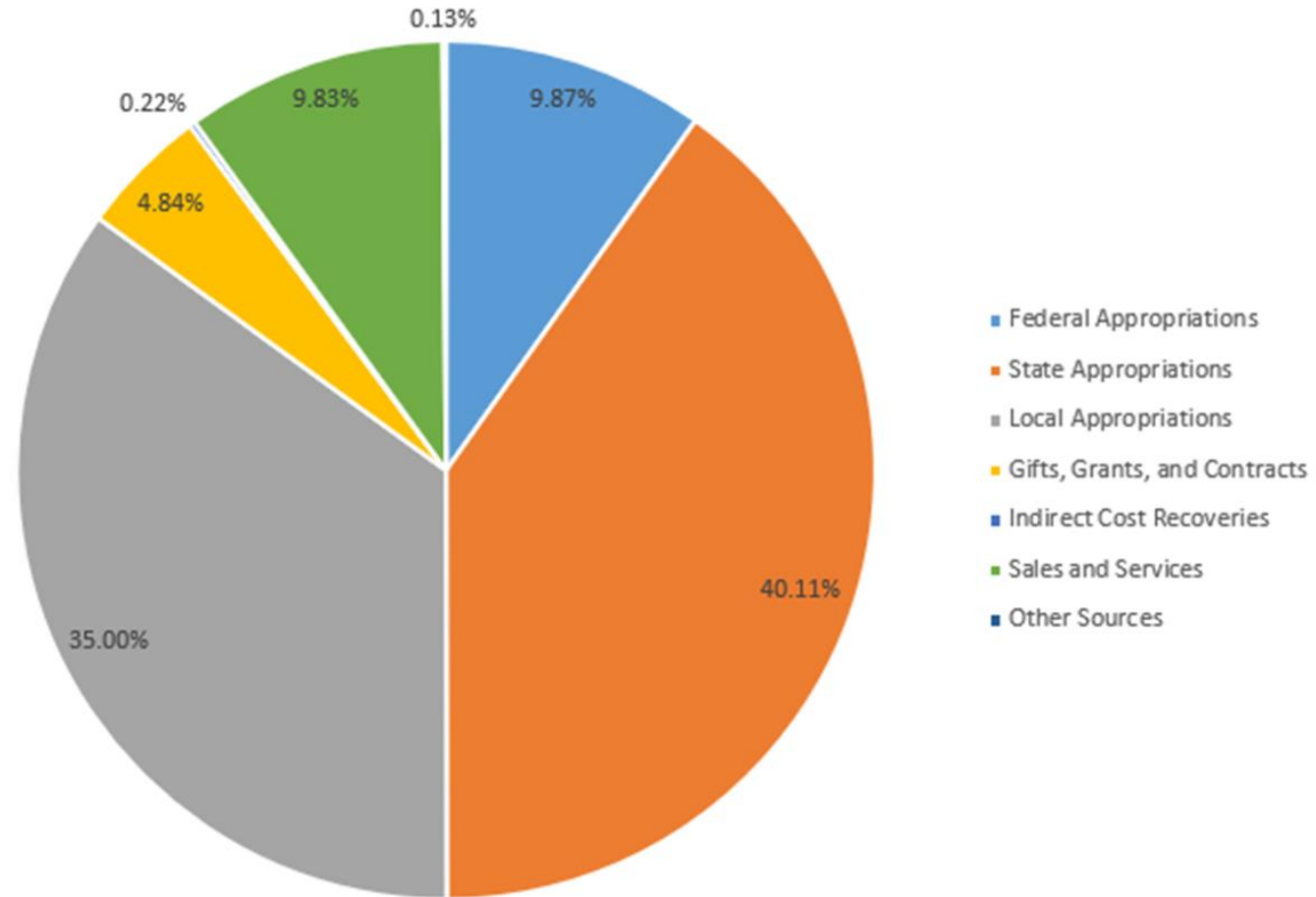
Rachel Hubbard
FACS PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
rubynell@uga.edu
229-386-3812

Melinda Miller
4-H PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR
mdmiller@uga.edu
229-386-3414



- NORTHEAST DISTRICT
- SOUTHEAST DISTRICT
- NORTHWEST DISTRICT
- SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

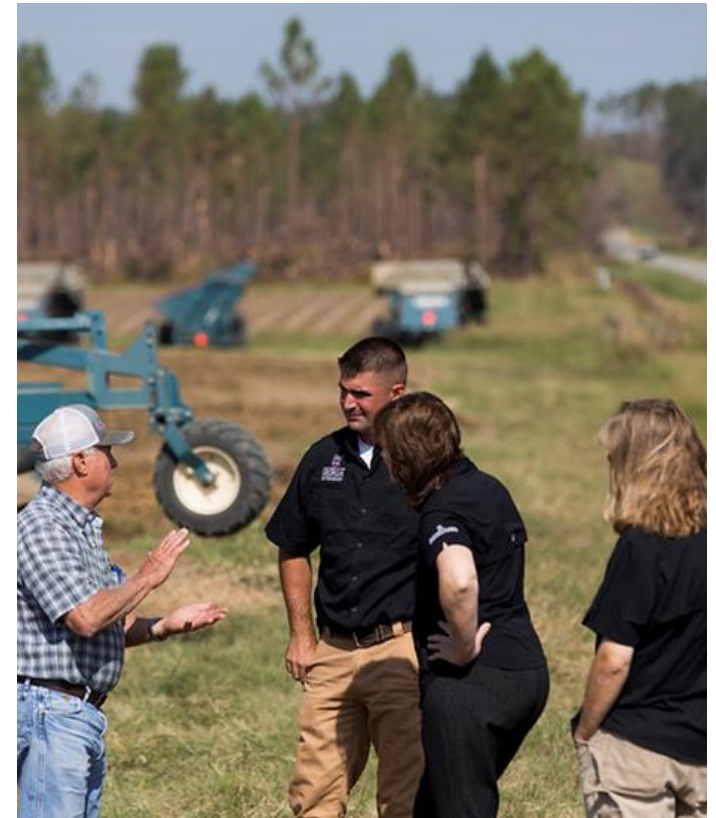
FY22 Cooperative Extension Funding



~ \$114,000,000

County Operations

- **319 County Extension Agents (Public Service Faculty; MS or higher)**
 - 138 Agriculture and Natural Resources
 - 58 Family & Consumer Science
 - 123 4-H Youth Development
- **69 Educators (BS Degrees)**
- 175 Program Assistants (Paraprofessionals)
- 180 Administrative Assistants
- 24 AmeriCorps Volunteers
- **Total of 750 – 800 people located in 159 counties**



Extension Specialists

140 Tenure Track or Public Service Faculty located in academic departments or units with subject matter expertise in:

- 9 Academic Departments in College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (112)
- 3 Academic Departments in Family & Consumer Science (9)
- Office of Learning and Organizational Development (5)
- 4-H Youth Development (14)

10 – 100% Extension Allocation of Effort





Agriculture and Natural Resources



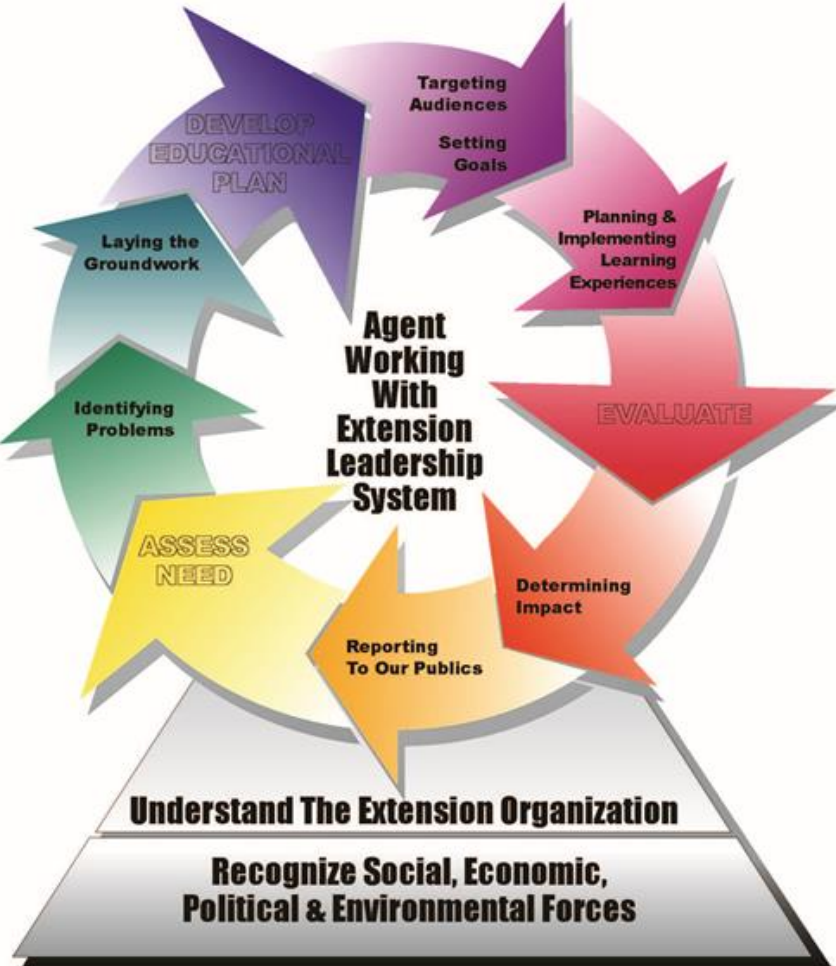
Family and Consumer Sciences



4-H Youth Development

Program Areas Focus on Community Development

Georgia Program Development Model



Rural Georgia, **GROWING STRONGER**

**Addressing Farm
Stress:**

YOU are the most
important asset on
your farm!



Assessing the Need:

- In 2018, ag agents in Southwest District did not feel they had a role to play in addressing farm stress and mental health.
- And then . . .
Hurricane Michael hit.



Laying the Groundwork:

- In 2019, at our district annual conference, Marshal Sewell, a young agriculturalist shared his story with us. His dad, a farmer, died by suicide.
- We asked 3 agents to help us start the Southwest Rural Stress Partnership. We invited local partners who had a vested interest. We invited UGA experts who could share the data with us.
- We brainstormed about how to connect with the farmers on this topic – the ag agents were the key – the ones the farmers trusted.



Engaging our partners:

Southwest Rural Stress Partnership

UGA Partners:

The Archway Partnership

College of Family and Consumer Sciences

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

UGA School of Social Work

UGA Small Business Development Center

Regional agency partners include:

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Region 4),

South Georgia Medical Education and Research Consortium

Colquitt Regional Medical Center

Philadelphia College of Medicine of South Georgia

Family Recovery of South Georgia (Licensed Social Workers – private practice)



Developing a Pilot Intervention to Learn More

The Farm Stress Production Meeting Model



Farm Stress Production Meeting Pilot (FSPM)

- 3 production meetings in Jan./Feb. of 2020
 - ✓ 291 participants
 - ✓ 132 BP checks
 - ✓ 173 packets distributed
- Virtual UPW trainings in 2021 – 3,000 farmers
- 6 production meetings in Jan./Feb. of 2022
 - ✓ 375 participants
 - ✓ 32 BP checks
 - ✓ 182 packets distributed
- 6 women's focus groups in these same counties, August 2022



FSPM Impact on Extension Agents (N=6)

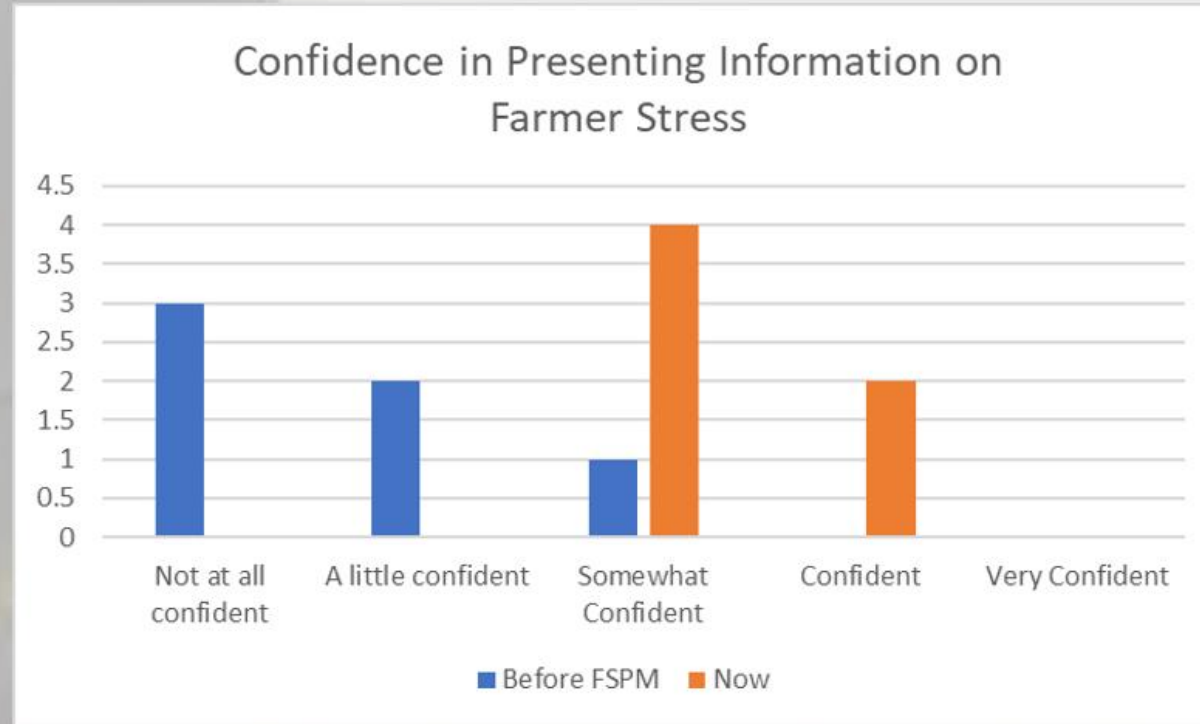
- How felt about farmer stress *before* FSPM:
 - “I always felt like this was an issue”
 - “I knew that there are many stressors in the farming occupation, but it is seldom (if never) mentioned”
 - “Prior to the project I had been concerned about farmer stress/health, and have held several brain storming meetings with another Agent to discuss potential programs that could be implemented to help with this issue.”
 - “I thought it wasn’t a big problem.”
 - “I knew it was real but I did not feel that Extension needed to be on the front lines because we had not been properly trained nor could we because mental health is a career’s worth of work and knowledge not a couple trainings...”
 - “I was unsure how presenting this information in a production meeting would go.”

A person wearing a cap and a dark shirt is standing in a field, looking towards the right. The background is a soft-focus landscape with a horizon line. The image is semi-transparent, allowing text to be overlaid.

FSPM Impact on Extension Agents

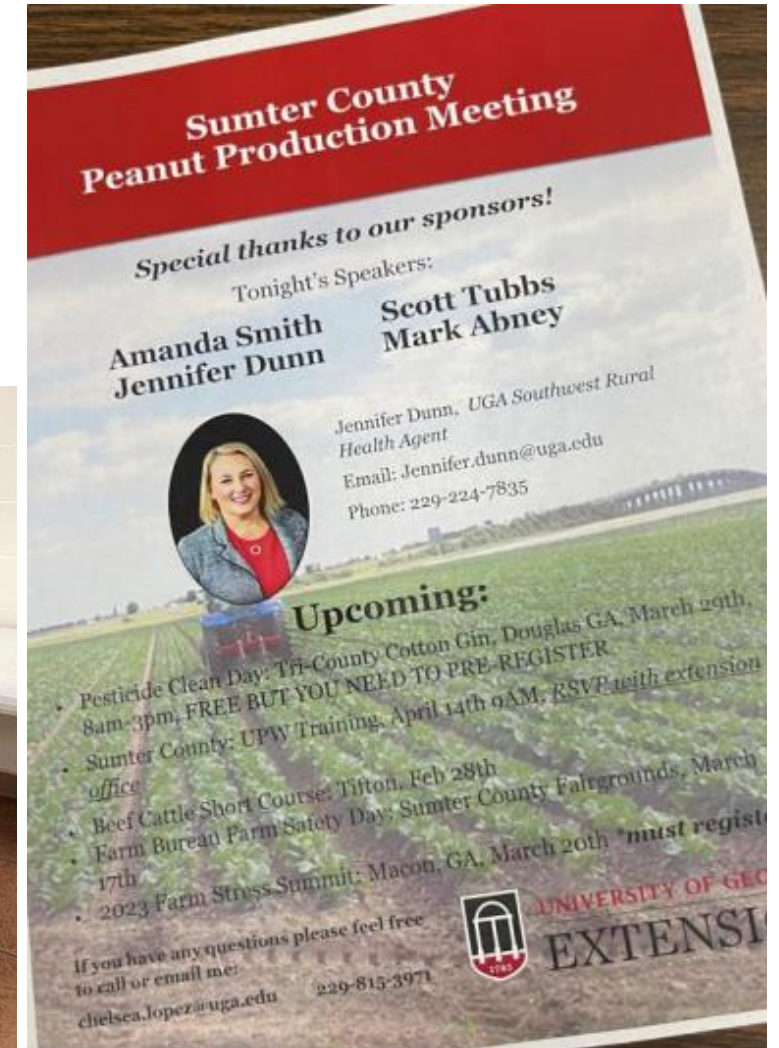
- How felt about farmer stress *after* FSPM:
 - “Farmer stress is something I care deeply about and I want to help in any way I can.”
 - “It is hard to open discussions about this subject with growers...it can be addressed, if you do it correctly”
 - “It is something that needs to be addressed, but not pushed on farmers, almost like it needs to be their idea.”

FSPM Impact on Extension Agents



FSPM expanded in 2023:

- Rural Health Agent Hired for Southwest District
- 12 Counties Participating
- Increased Partnerships with Local Health Care



A social work researcher walks into a bar(n)....



Anna Scheyett, Professor, School of Social Work & CAES

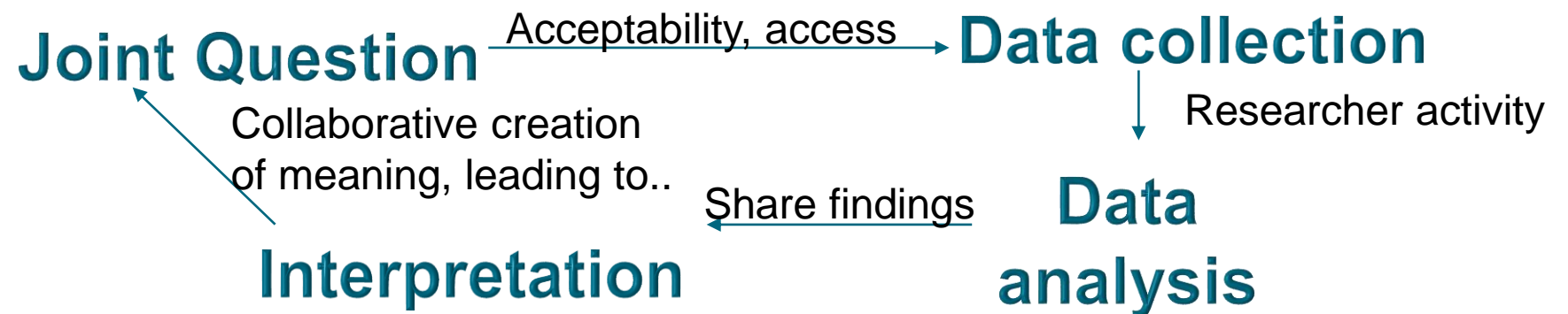
How it began

- CDC study revealed Farming, Fishing, Forestry had 3rd highest suicide rate of any occupation.
- In Georgia, rate was nearly 51 per 100,000, compared with 14.9 per 100,000 for overall population of workers (Lavender et al., 2016).
- Sense of urgency created unusual partnership between Social Work and Extension



Approaching the collaboration

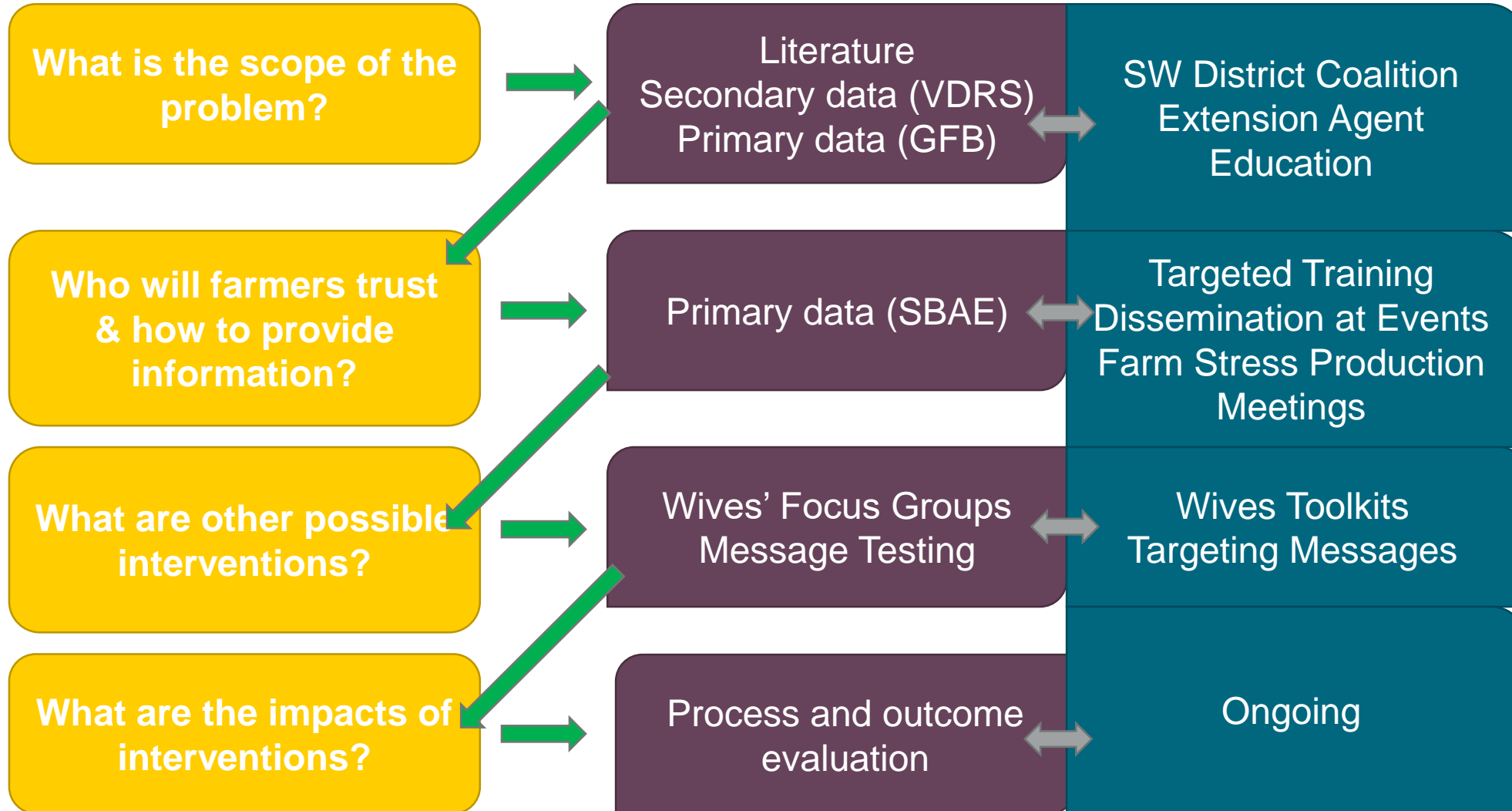
- Social work principle of cultural humility
 - Listen
 - Visit
 - Offer your help
- Need a cultural guide
- This must be applied research, grounded in and going back to Extension and to the communities Extension serves
- Iterative process



Interactive Framework

QUESTION

Research



Secondary Data: GA Farmer Suicide Study (Based on Scheyett, A., Bayakly, R., &

Whitaker, M. (2019). Characteristics and Contextual Stressors in Farmer and Agricultural Worker Suicides in Georgia From 2008–2015. *Journal of Rural Mental Health*.

- Used GA VDRS data from 2008-2017
- Extracted all cases positive for variable *Cause of death: Suicide*
- Reviewed all cases containing the terms “farm,” “farmer,” “agricult” “poultry,” or “cattle” and extracted all case with indication that the individual was an agricultural worker or farmer. N=137 out of 12,453
- Quantitative: Death per year, demographics, means of death, presence of substances
- Qualitative: thematic analysis of coroner/ME report and law enforcement report summaries



Factors Associated with Suicide

- Relationship problems 28.4%
- Health problems 22.6%
- Mental health problems 18.9%
- Finances 12.4%

Noted that 13.8% had signs and “hints” of suicide

Primary Data: Georgia Farm Bureau Conference

(Scheyett, A. (2020) Farmer Stress in Georgia)

- 118 attendees of 2019 GA Farm Bureau Conference
- 77 identified as farmers, remaining were “farmer-adjacent”

Assessment of Stress Levels in Georgia Farmers (N=118)

	Mean	StD
<i>I think that the stress levels in Georgia Farmers are: (1=very low, 3=average, 5=very high)</i>	4.13	0.66
<i>Compared to one year ago, I think that stress levels in Georgia farmers are: (1=much lower, 3=the same, 5=much higher)</i>	3.81	0.79

Primary Data: Georgia Farm Bureau Conference

(Scheyett, A. (2020) Farmer Stress in Georgia)

Comparison of Response Means by Gender

	Male	Female	t (2-tailed)	df	p-value
<i>Stress Levels in GA Farmers</i>	3.89	4.21	2.5021	113	0.0138*
<i>Stress Levels are Higher than 1 year Ago</i>	3.51	3.94	2.6641	113	0.0088*
<i>Confident Would Know How to Help</i>	2.80	3.18	1.5388	111	0.1267



Sunbelt Ag Expo Survey (220 responses)

Who will a farmer trust and talk with when experiencing extreme stress?

	Total		Farmer		Non-Farmer		<i>p</i>
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Wife/Husband	159	72.3	68	73.1	91	71.7	<i>ns</i>
Friend	92	41.8	30	32.3	62	48.8	.014
Other Farmers	86	39.1	29	31.2	57	44.9	.040
Child	16	7.3	12	12.9	3	3.1	.006
Doctor	55	25.0	22	23.7	33	26.0	<i>ns</i>
Pastor/Faith Leader	80	36.4	28	30.1	52	40.9	<i>ns</i>
Banker/Financial Advisor	20	9.1	5	5.4	15	11.8	<i>ns</i>
Local Shop/Restaurant Worker	6	2.7	2	2.2	3	2.4	<i>ns</i>
Extension Agent	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.8	<i>ns</i>
Other	4	1.8	2	2.2	2	1.6	<i>ns</i>

Farm Wives Focus Group Study

(Aug. 15-17, 2022)

- Since “spouse” most frequently identified as the person a farmer would trust and talk with about stress
- 6 counties recruited with support from regional FB and Extension agents
- Themes about what they are seeing/experiencing:
 - Farmers: high stress, reluctance to admit
 - Stress in other family members (children)
 - Stress in self
 - Coping mechanisms exist—faith, family, friends
 - Time is a precious commodity
 - Any education/supports must be woven into existing events



The UGA Precision Ag Stress Support (PASS) Initiative

(Porter, Scheyett, Virk, Bastos, Croom)

- The primary benefit of this project is the ability to identify high stress areas, save lives, and improve overall well-being in agricultural communities within Georgia.
- The main goal of this project is to:
 - Develop and test a beta version of a predictive GIS model to identify high-stress farming conditions at the county level
 - The model will label Georgia counties with a ranking scale (1-10, with one being no need for involvement and 10 being critical) for response intervention.
 - Test and improve the on-the-ground response protocol for identified high-stress communities
 - Develop an automated workflow to import public data into the mapping process rather than manual entry, to ensure continuous data update and map generation.



Beta testing

- So far, bivariate analyses to demonstrate proof of concept
- Ultimately, will overlay more static health and social data with more real time variables (e.g. weather)



Lessons Learned

- It is all about the **relationships**
- Relationships take **time**
- **Humility** and **listening** are essential
- Building **common language** takes effort
- **Co-definition** of research questions, strategies, analyses
- Focus on pragmatic and useful **outcomes**
- Get comfortable with **action**—Extension moves fast!

Extension is...

- A collaborator
- A guide to rural communities
- A bridge to rural and agricultural connections
- A consultant
- A conduit for dissemination and translation
- A catalyst for change
- A community researchers' best friend