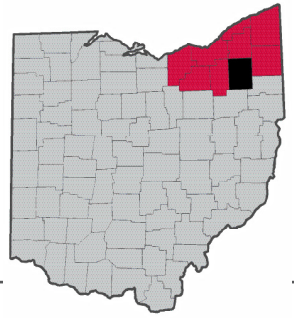# 2015 County Highlights

Portage County

Western Reserve Extension Education and Research Area

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ENHANCING AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Trained by OSU Extension, Portage County Master Gardener Volunteers share research-based information with all types of gardeners through workshops, community gardens and one-on-one consultations. Master Gardener Volunteers also provide the Garden Information Hotline, delivering over 252 hours of service. In 2015, more than 150 calls, emails and walk-ins were assisted with home horticulture questions. Also in 2015, the Portage County Master Gardener Volunteers program renewed 31 active volunteers, and 10 new Master Gardener Volunteer interns were working toward graduation. Master Gardener Volunteers contributed 1,540 volunteer hours and 417 hours of education to Portage County projects and programs. They also volunteered over 4,650 miles in drive time to and from programs.

PREPARING YOUTH FOR SUCCESS

- More than 858 4-H members developed valuable life skills by completing more than 1,697 4-H projects. The program utilizes over 160 volunteers across 46 clubs and 15 committees to carry out the mission and vision of Ohio 4-H. The 4-H volunteer base increased from 135 to 168 in 2015.

- Twelve teens served as 4-H Camp Counselors, completing a comprehensive 4-H Camp Counselor Training program with 12 Mahoning County counselors. They completed 24 hours of training on program-planning, working with youth, risk management, emergency procedures and first aid.

- In 2015, 46 campers from Portage County went to 4-H Camp, and 133 campers total participated in the Portage and Mahoning counties week at Camp Whitewood with 27 camp counselors and volunteer staff. This seven-day camp provided youth with activities to develop leadership skills, team-building, interpersonal skills and lasting friendships. This year, campers took part in the 4-H Ag Innovators Water Windmill Challenge, a new program sponsored by Monsanto and the National 4-H Council that connects students, STEM education and agriculture. One 4-H member from Portage County went to a specialty camp at Camp Whitewood. Eighteen Cloverbuds participated at Camp Whitewood for Cloverbud Day Camp. They were able to experience camp by swimming, hiking, making crafts and spending time with youth their age.

- Portage County 4-H provided 25 $100 camp scholarships for Portage County 4-H members to attend camp. This was supported through the advisory and benefit committees, and the Aeschilmen Family.

- Led by over 20 certified volunteers, more than 290 youth completed Quality Assurance Training, an ODA requirement for Portage County Junior Fair participation in market and lactating project areas. This program enabled 4-H and FFA youth to participate in the 2015 Junior Fair livestock auction. This money earned by youth was then reinvested locally by Portage County 4-H and FFA Youth.

- Nine 4-H members and 14 volunteers learned valuable skills and gained information about 4-H youth development by participating in the Ohio 4-H Teen Conference

- Three classrooms participated in 4-H ChickQuest. Each classroom was provided with incubators, curriculum support materials and starter feed donated by Western Reserve Farm Co-Op. Portage County Extension, in cooperation with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, sourced the fertilized eggs and connected local producers with the schools.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- Obesity, poor nutrition and physical inactivity disproportionately affect minority and low-income citizens. Of the estimated 163,419 residents living in Portage County, 19 percent of families with children live in poverty. In an effort to reduce this disparity and improve the health and well-being of Ohioans, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) teaches an eight-lesson nutrition education series to low-income families

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with children. EFNEP, funded by USDA-NIFA, contributed $30,000 to our county this year. This funded a .8 FTE staff position in the OSU Extension office. In 2014, a total of 539 family members were impacted by EFNEP. The 127 graduates significantly increased knowledge and improved behaviors in diet quality (94 percent), food resource management (91 percent), and food safety (56 percent), resulting in healthier choices in Portage County. Chronic diseases are largely preventable through a healthy lifestyle involving a balanced diet and regular physical activity. Over half of graduates increased their physical activity levels and fruit and vegetable consumption upon completing EFNEP.

- EFNEP nutrition classes are held for teenage mothers. One participant, Mary, was 16 years old with a 5-month-old son in 2015. Mary was still in high school and living with her mother who did the grocery shopping and cooking in the home. Mary ate whatever her mom prepared or bought. She also reported eating junk food and soda on a daily basis and was not open to trying healthier food choices. During the third EFNEP lesson, which was about veggies and fruits, the EFNEP professional brought in pumpkin muffins for the participants to sample. The mother said she really didn't like pumpkin but was willing to try the sample. Mary not only liked the muffin, she asked for the recipe. The following week, the young mom reported that she had asked her mom to buy the ingredients for the pumpkin muffin recipe. Mary took responsibility for preparing the muffins for the family to try. She proudly stated that her mom liked the muffins, and Mary planned to make them again and receive weekly educational enhancements that encouraged skill implementation outside the classroom.

- EFNEP community partners include Portage County Department of Job and Family Services, Horizon House, Kent Roosevelt High School, ORC, Root House, and Passages.

Portage County receives $30,000 in federal funding for nutrition education for low-income people, thanks to Extension's local-state-federal partnership.