



EMPOWERING MARION FOR SUCCESS II

Extension Services Department

FY 2025-26 3rd Quarter Accomplishments (April – June):

Organizational Experience

1. Prioritize Customer Service
 - a. Customer service remains an ongoing priority, with faculty, staff, and volunteers continuously assessing service strategies and identifying opportunities to enhance the overall customer experience. Through regular collaboration, feedback, and evaluation, the team works to create a welcoming, responsive, and customer-focused environment.
 - i. Faculty, staff, and volunteers regularly participate in professional development and engage in discussions on customer service best practices. This ongoing commitment to learning and continuous improvement strengthens service delivery and supports a culture of excellence in meeting the needs of clientele.

Resources and Facilities

1. Highlighting Outdoor Assets
 - a. Extension programming promotes the effective use of land and outdoor spaces by providing research-based education that helps residents create productive, sustainable, and attractive landscapes. Programs emphasize foodscaping, Plant-to-Plate initiatives that connect gardening with nutrition and healthy eating, and the adoption of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles to encourage environmentally responsible landscape practices.
 - i. The outdoor demonstration garden continues to serve as a living classroom, showcasing educational features such as hydroponics, edible landscapes, pollinator habitats, and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices. New educational signage has been added throughout the gardens to enhance self-guided learning and reinforce key concepts. Hands-on educational opportunities, including the Pollinator Habitat Ambassador Academy and other landscape-focused programs, provide residents with practical skills to create sustainable, productive, and wildlife-friendly outdoor spaces while maximizing the use of their own properties.

Public Infrastructure

1. Protect Water Resources
 - a. Protecting and conserving Marion County's water resources is a core focus of Extension programming. A variety of research-based educational programs equip residents with the knowledge and skills needed to safeguard both water quality and water quantity through responsible landscape and property management. Key initiatives include Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, septic system maintenance, private well stewardship, and water conservation education. Collectively, these efforts have contributed to saving millions of



EMPOWERING MARION FOR SUCCESS II

gallons of water annually while reducing the potential for pollutants to reach Florida's groundwater, springs, rivers, and other natural water resources. By encouraging the adoption of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, residents also support Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) water quality goals through practices such as:

- **Right Plant, Right Place:** Selecting plants suited to existing soil, sunlight, and moisture conditions to reduce irrigation needs and improve plant health.
- **Fertilize Appropriately:** Conducting soil tests before fertilizing and using slow-release fertilizers to minimize nutrient runoff and leaching.
- **Manage Yard Pests Responsibly:** Applying Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies to reduce pesticide use while effectively managing pests.
- **Reduce Stormwater Runoff:** Directing downspouts to vegetated areas, installing rain barrels, and incorporating other practices that slow runoff and help prevent nutrients and pollutants from entering the aquifer and local waterways.

Public Safety

1. Promote Access to Community Wellness Resources
 - a. Promoting access to community wellness resources through education by partnering with the hospital district and other organizations to deliver programs that support healthy lifestyles. Educational initiatives include Food as Medicine programs, food safety education for at-risk and underserved populations, and wellness programs that empower residents to make informed decisions that improve their overall health and well-being.

FY 25/26 – 4th Quarter Goals (July – September):

Strategic Plan Element Title

Organizational Experience

1. Staff Development
 - a. Strengthen staff knowledge, skills, and effectiveness through continuous professional development, targeted training, cross-training opportunities, and team-building initiatives that enhance collaboration, improve program delivery, and support organizational excellence.
2. Customer Service Excellence
 - a. Foster a culture of exceptional customer service by implementing intentional communication and service strategies that strengthen internal collaboration, improve operational efficiency, and ensure a consistent, welcoming, and responsive experience for all clientele.



EMPOWERING MARION FOR SUCCESS II

Resources and Facilities

1. Highlighting Outdoor Assets
 - a. Expand community edible garden initiatives and enhance the Extension Demonstration Garden as an accessible, year-round educational resource. Offer programs such as Fall Gardening, the Southeast Great Pollinator Census, and Plant to Plate classes, with a focus on reaching audiences most in need of nutrition, gardening, and food security education.
 - b. Continue improving and promoting the Demonstration Garden through educational signage, hands-on learning opportunities, and marketing that highlights edible gardening, pollinator habitats, hydroponics, and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices, encouraging residents to apply these concepts in their own landscapes.

Public Infrastructure

1. Protect Water Resources
 - a. Increase the delivery and reach of water resource education programs to address the growing need for public awareness of issues affecting water quality and water availability. Expand educational opportunities for residents, industry professionals, and local officials that promote shared water stewardship and encourage the adoption of research-based best management practices to protect, conserve, and improve Florida's water resources for future generations.