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Land-grant universities adapt to reach audiences virtually during pandemic

COVID-19 has limited in-person programming, but land-grant universities adapted research and outreach to serve audiences virtually.

Successful examples include:

- Due to face-to-face training restricted by COVID-19, the **Alabama** Cooperative Extension Service through Auburn University conducted Commercial Pesticide Applicator Virtual Trainings. Ten four-hour trainings sessions constituted 9,030 continuing education units (CEUs) issued to 903 attendees. Each event was worth 10 CEUs. The total valued was \$270,900 dollars in workforce training.
- For the first time because of COVID-19 limitations, **Connecticut** Cooperative Extension launched an online Vegetable Production Certificate course with an objective to effectively deliver information to beginner vegetable producers. Vegetable pest management education was delivered through 19 weekly vegetable pest alerts to over 600 vegetable growers from May to September. A survey of participants indicated the course increased their knowledge by 34%.
- COVID-19 forced many agritourism enterprises to go to a virtual format. University of **Vermont** Extension and the International Workshop on Agritourism hosted a series of free webinars called Virtual Agritourism Gatherings. The series reached 1,704 unique registrants representing 66 countries. The virtual respondents were asked about the benefits of attending the agritourism gatherings, and 98% reported they “increased my understanding of topics,” 91% said they “provided ideas on how to access resources related to my work” and 90% said they “met my professional development needs.”
- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the H-2A worker’s visa processing, resulting in deterioration of farm household incomes, according to a University of **Georgia** Research survey. The survey found workers were about four to five weeks late in their arrival. Given these operating constraints, survey respondents

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indicated various coping strategies — greater reliance on family members, reducing off-farm employment time, resigning from off-farm jobs and modifying production methods in favor of less labor-intensive alternatives. Guest worker delays lead to 20% reduction in farm income.

- 4-H leaders collaborated to create the first **Louisiana** 4-H MLK Day of Service and enabled children of all ages and all areas of the state to participate. The program featured a virtual MLK Day ceremony (using Facebook Premier) led by LA 4-H National Conference Delegates, LSU Collegiate 4-H members and alumni. This virtual format allowed youth to learn about the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and provided them with ways they could volunteer safely in their local community. Over 458 youth and adults participated in the first Louisiana 4-H MLK Day of Service program, completing 2,076 volunteer hours and benefiting over 14,296 individuals.