

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As they work to address issues facing today's families and communities, researchers in the UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (FYCS) study human development, family well-being, home-energy efficiency and food safety, among other issues.

Youth development research focuses on children's connections with their families, schools, peers and the media. This research also examines growth and maturity. Evaluation research determines the effectiveness of programs working with youth, adults, families or communities. As they examine family dynamics, FYCS faculty study stress, coping, resiliency and parent-child relationships.

Research in community development and nonprofit leadership includes developing local leaders, strategic planning and sustainable development.

Research at the Food Safety and Quality program examines ways to help stem foodborne pathogens while housing research looks at upgrades that may be needed to keep home energy bills down and to conserve water and electricity.

In nutrition and health, faculty evaluate strategies to promote healthy lifestyles and improve weight management in various high-risk populations. FYCS faculty also examine savings behavior and motives, household consumption patterns and debt management and more.

NATURAL
RESOURCES



HUMAN
SYSTEMS



AGRICULTURE



Ongoing Research



CHANGING BEHAVIOR

Mechanical upgrades to a home can increase utility efficiency by 40 to 50 percent, but the rest comes after all household occupants agree to certain behaviors, such as keeping the thermostat at energy-saving levels. Armed with that knowledge, UF/IFAS' Randall Cantrell, an assistant professor in housing and community development in the family, youth and community sciences department, is leading a nationwide study into how homeowners can change their behaviors to use less water and electricity. As part of the two-year project, he is investigating ways that homeowners and their families can reduce the use of water and electricity and what motivates them to do so.



MANAGING WATER SUPPLIES

Tracy Irani, a professor in consumer perceptions and chair of the family, youth and community sciences department, is part of a team studying the formation and development of the Florida Water and Climate Alliance, a partnership involving scientists, planners and public water utility managers committed to using climate science data and tools to support decision-making in water resources management planning and supply operations. The alliance is studying climate change and how it impacts water use. Utilities need climate and sea level rise information to understand, predict and adapt to potential climate change that affects water demand, availability, quality and infrastructure capacity.



SAFER DINING

Many Americans love to dine out, so Amy Simonne, a professor in food safety and quality from the family, youth and community sciences department, and two other researchers sought to discover consumers' safety perceptions at Chinese and Mexican restaurants. The research came partly after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found foodborne illness outbreaks increased from 3 to 10 percent in Mexican, Italian or Asian foods in the 10-year period from 1990 to 2000. In the UF/IFAS study, consumers scored Mexican restaurants as safer than Chinese. Kitchen and bathroom cleanliness were cited as important factors. The study was published in 2012 in the journal Food Control.

Research with Impact



CHANGING COMMUNITIES

In 2012, UF/IFAS' Randall Cantrell, an assistant professor in housing and community development, led a study of a new concept he calls "community flow," which measures how citizens interact with public officials to make their city and county services better. He found that good neighborhoods and schools, as well as great public service, account for 30 percent of what citizens think makes their communities great places to live. After publishing the paper, Cantrell sent a copy to Sue Weller, former mayor of High Springs, Fla., and the city's manager. The city of High Springs, about 20 miles northwest of Gainesville, recently established a community development committee.



HEALTHIER TEENS

A UF/IFAS 4-H program called "Health Rocks!" works to increase students' awareness of the dangers of drugs. Muthusami Kumaran, an assistant professor in nonprofit management and community organizations, led a team of researchers who looked at how the 4-H Health Rocks! Program expands teens' knowledge of illegal drugs and helps them avoid substance abuse. The study found that, after receiving 10 hours of Health Rocks! education per year, 952 youth reported statistically significant benefits from the program through increased knowledge about drug use and abuse and developed stronger attitudes and beliefs against drug use. They also found that children who participated in the program improved their skills to handle drug-related teen issues.



INSURANCE COVERAGE

Consumers traditionally buy life insurance to ensure the economic well-being of a household once a family member dies. Studies show the average white household has a net worth about three times greater than that of the average African-American household. A study of life insurance coverage, led by Michael Gutter, an associate professor in family financial management, shows African-Americans purchase as many life insurance policies as whites, but insure a lower proportion of their lifetime income with each policy — 18 percent for African-Americans compared to 40 percent for whites. The research helped shape UF/IFAS outreach in the area and created greater efficiency in use of financial services by minority families.

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