



# EXTENSION CONNECTION

HIDALGO COUNTY  
JANUARY - MARCH 2023

Hidalgo County  
Master Gardeners at Educational Garden

## WHAT WE DO

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is a unique education agency that provides research based community education, tools, and resources on a local and statewide level that teach people how to improve agriculture and food production, advance health practices, protect the environment, strengthen the economy, and enrich youth.

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# EXTENSION FACULTY

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### Andrea Torres-Barragan & Karen Cantu

Extension Agents  
Better Living for Texans Program



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Cooperative Extension Program

### Rina Castillo

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Family & Community Health

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension  
Hidalgo County

## Hidalgo County Supported Staff



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(L-R)

Linda Ramirez  
Program Coordinator I



## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT OF THE QUARTER

### Hidalgo County Master Gardener Program

County Extension Agent: Ashley Gregory

The Hidalgo County Master Gardener program has been a staple Extension program in Hidalgo County for many years. There are currently 80 Master Gardeners in Hidalgo County that teach the community on multiple gardening topics such as rainwater harvesting, composting, and vegetable gardening! In 2022, the Master Gardeners volunteered 3,295 hours valued at \$89,624! They have completed 2022 with 32 workshops and events with over 600 participants. Our Master Gardeners work rain or shine to upkeep their Educational Garden in Precinct 2 to provide a peaceful and beautiful experience to all that visit the garden. Ashley Gregory, County Extension Agent-Horticulture, manages and guides the Master Gardeners through their training, internship, and volunteer hours with her expertise and dedication to the program.





Nearly half of adults have hypertension or high blood pressure (CDC.gov). For Heart Health month (February), the McAllen Public Library hosted a Cooking Well for Healthy Blood Pressure. **18 graduates and over 60 people total** enjoyed heart healthy recipes and learned how to manage their blood pressure. This program was featured in *The Monitor*.



## Dr. Andréa A. Valdez, M.P.H. Family & Community Health

@AgrilifeExtensionHidalgoFCH



**Mental Health FIRST AID**

From NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

Dr. Valdez partnered with South Texas Health System and South Texas College to provide a Mental Health First Aid training to **12 STC staff**. Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis. Thank you to all our partners for supporting this much needed training!



## Joanne Ureste-Armijo, M.S. Family & Community Health

@AgrilifeExtensionFamilyResourcesHidalgoCounty

The First Annual Heart Strong Multi-County Conference was held to highlight February as Heart Month. **Over 90 participants** took part in a health fair, a food demonstration, and presentations from DHR health care professionals to help them make meaningful progress toward their cardiovascular goals. **Twenty (20) participants** were walking into Heart health month with the Walk Across Texas program! With their 832- mile goal of walking across Texas, the walkers logged **3,525.83 miles!**



The Master Clothing Volunteers (MCVs) held a Comfort Military Quilt Presentation on March 7, 2023. They partnered with the Rio Grande Valley Quilt Guild and American Legion Post 408. Mr. Samuel Perez, Director of Veteran Services, opened the ceremony. The volunteer group presented **20 handmade quilts** to local veterans. The handmade quilts were meant to provide comfort to our veterans.





## Vidal Saenz, M.S. Agriculture & Natural Resources

### 29th Annual Rio Grande Valley Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference

The Annual Pre-plant conference was held at Rio Farms in Monte Alto. There were **146 program participants** that were educated on TDA laws and regulations, the importance of exports, grain crop market outlook the cotton crop outlook and new developments from industry. Thank you to the **19 sponsors** that aided in this event.

### STAR Livestock Show

The South Texas Agricultural Roundup took place at the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Showgrounds in Mercedes, Texas from February 1st through February 3rd, 2023. The livestock show was a success. Several exhibitors placed with their projects. This was a great opportunity for the exhibitors and their families to hear from the livestock judges to prepare for the upcoming Rio Grande Livestock Show that took place in March 2023.

### 25th Annual RGV BIA Bull Gain Test and Heifer Development Program

The 25th Annual RGV BIA Bull Gain Test and Heifer Development Program ran from October 2022 to February 2023. Bulls and heifers were fed a concentrated feed ration for 112 days. Bulls were measured for average daily gain, scrotal circumference, hip height, and sonogrammed by a technician for a marbling and ribeye area. **We tested 80 bulls and 20 heifers at this event.** There were 27 consigning ranchers that participated in the gain test. Participants were able to identify their top performing bulls that will help them market or keep the best animals that they produce.



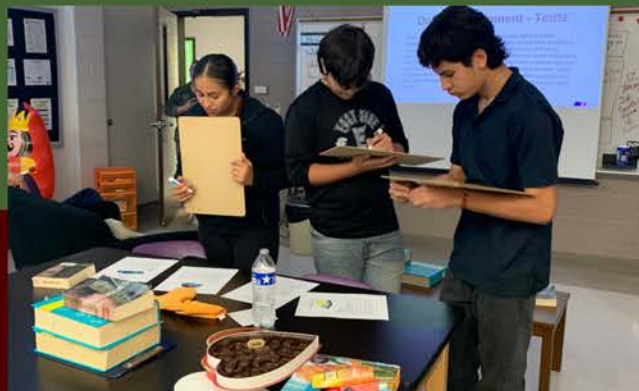
## Kathy Rodriguez, M.S. 4-H & Youth Development

@HidalgoCounty4H



### Hidalgo County Shins at RGVLS!

The Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show was held in March with the Hidalgo County 4-H'ers ready to shine! Our winners included: Calf Scramble Record Book Winners (2), Grand Champion Market Lamb, Beef Skillathon Champions Junior & Intermediate Division (2), Horticulture Grand Champion, Open Boar Goat Division Grand Champion, Open Boar Goat Reserve Grand Champion, Barebow Senior 1st Place, Compound Unaided Junior 1st Place, Hidalgo County 4-H Members on the RGVLS Covergirl Court.



**RGVLS Ag Product  
ID Contest with  
100+ kids from all  
over the state of  
Texas!**







Ashley Gregory, M.S.  
Horticulture

## Spring is Blooming!

The Hidalgo County Master Gardeners hosted **90 students** from Valley View Elementary at the Master Gardener Educational Garden and kicked off their training classes which will run through May. This quarter's workshops included:

- 2 Wine/Vineyard workshops with over **100 participants**
- Healthy Lawns, Healthy Waters workshop with Specialist John Smith with over **65 participants**
- Native Plant workshop with **35 participants**

The Hidalgo County Master Gardeners held Home Garden Tours and participated in the RGV Home and Garden Show. They also held **10 workshops** on a variety of gardening topics educating over **150 participants**.



Melissa De Leon, M.S.  
Expanded Food &  
Nutrition Program (EFNEP)

@HidalgoCountyExpandedFoodandNutritionEducationProgram



The Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Hidalgo County helps families and youths with limited resources – those most at risk who suffer from hunger, food insecurity and the inability to connect with available support systems. EFNEP offers practical lessons in:

- Building a Healthy Plate
- Eating the right number of calories
- Setting Limits
- Keeping Food Safe
- Being Active
- Encouraging Family Mealtime at Home

**348 Adult Enrollment**  
**77 Adult Graduates**

**3,574 Youth Enrollment**  
**2,911 Youth Graduates**

**Nutrition! Food Prep! Food Budget Management! Food Safety!**







## Better Living for Texans Program



Andrea Torres-Barragan, Ph.D.



Karen Cantu, B.S.

Ricardo Carranza & Roy Custodio, Program Assistants



### Gardening

This quarter sprouted **4 new gardens** at ARISE Hargill and Las Milpas, Bowie Educational Center and Sharyland Elementary! A total of **625 youth** participated in the Learn, Grow, Eat, Go (LGEG) program with 124 children participating in the Early Childhood LGEG program. More than 1,200 seedlings were distributed to 12 community gardens and 11 school gardens for the spring season.

### Nutrition & Activity

BLT nutrition programs partnered with IDEA Weslaco Pike, Dr. America Paderes Elementary, UMOS, Alton Community Center, Edinburg CATS Center, Sekula Library and Shary Elementary to teach curricula such as **A Fresh Start to a Healthier You and Healthy Carbohydrates!** All these programs graduated **77 participants!**



Rina Castillo, M.P.A.  
Community &  
Economic Development



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AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Cooperative Extension Program

Tina Munoz, M.S.  
Family &  
Community Health



### BID Academy

In collaboration with the Texas Comptroller's Purchasing division and the Mercedes Economic Development Center, The B.I.D. Academy teaches the essential business skills and effective strategies for working, managing, and doing business with government agencies. This academy is a FREE 7-week curriculum that takes business through the process of not only getting HUB certified but business planning, marketing, and developing a winning bid proposal! This Academy graduated **37 participants!**



### How to Start a Business



The How to Start a Business workshop covered important tools and resources a business owner needs to establish a solid foundation during its early formative years.

### Welcome to Hidalgo County!

Hi, my name is Tina Munoz, the new Prairie View A&M Cooperative Extension Program- FCH agent for Hidalgo County. I have a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies from Texas A&M Kingsville; I have a Master of Science in Human Science from Texas A&M Kingsville. I will be starting my Doctorial Degree in Education Leadership from Texas A&M Kingsville come this fall. Prior to taking this position I had been with Texas AgriLife Extension for 9 years in Webb and Calhoun County, before taking a leave of absence to explore another avenue. I returned to extension February 2022 as the PVAMU CEP-FCH for Nueces County. I look forward to educating the citizens of Hidalgo County!