

PINAL COUNTY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Cooperative Extension, the outreach arm of the University of Arizona, brings the University to the people.

The faculty and staff in the Pinal County Extension office are part of a non-formal education network bringing research-based information into communities to help people improve their lives.

Cooperative Extension is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant educational programs and information to Pinal County citizens and communities.

Okay, it is hot. Really hot. But, given that it is Pinal County in the summertime, that is no surprise! This is the time of year that we see our neighbors very early in the morning or after the sun drops behind the hills and cold water comes out of the refrigerator instead of the faucet.

Some things slow down in the summertime, but not our programming here at Cooperative Extension. Our mission is to take what is happening on the research and academic front and make it available and practical to improve the lives of people in our communities. In this edition of our newsletter you will find practical tips on how to improve financial health, positively impact the growth and development of our children, and updates on how UACE is supporting our local farmers with research on several topics including pest management and crop safety.

If you have specific questions about programming, drop by the office or contact the faculty or program lead listed on the last page. Happy Summer!

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Greeta Mills
Acting County Extension Director



FIRST SMILES ORAL HEALTH



TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD AVOID DENTAL PHOBIAS

Submitted by Greeta Mills, RDH MEd, Oral Health Professional



For many adults, going to the dentist is not on the list of things they really like to do. Whether it is based on experiences they had as a child, fears and phobias their parents had, or something else entirely, the desire for a healthy mouth and overall healthier body, will usually win out over the dislike of the experience. So, how can we start early to ensure that our children are more confident and comfortable when visiting the dentist?

American Academy of Pediatrics and American Academy of Pediatric Dentists recommend that children have their first dental visit around the time of the first birthday. This visit is specifically designed to be fun and relaxing, and seeing the dentist before things go wrong can make dental visits more routine and uneventful.

Pediatric dentists train as general dentists first, then attend two to three additional years of specialized training which focus on the specific needs of infants, children, and teens. This advanced education includes child growth and development, child psychology, and behavior management techniques so they can explain things to children in a way they can easily understand. Pediatric dental offices are designed to be fun, colorful places, with the environment and equipment sized specifically for children. They may have fun toys and cartoons, headphones and reward stickers or prizes.

The first visit around the first birthday is the perfect time for parents to ask questions about tooth brushing, timing of when the teeth will come into the mouth, and optimal snacks for healthy teeth. It is also an opportunity for children to get used to the dental office and seeing the dental team.

Making dental visits for the whole family part of your consistent family routine helps children understand that seeing their dentist is a normal experience instead of something to fear. Stay positive and calm when talking about the upcoming check-ups, reminding your child that their dentist is a helper to keep their smile healthy and bright! Be aware of the words used when talking about dentistry, avoid words like “scary” or “hurt”.

Brushing twice a day at home, avoiding milk, juice, or other beverages other than water between meals, serving snacks that are high in water like fresh fruits and veggies, or cheese, or popcorn will help reduce the risk of cavities for your child, making their dental visits something they (and you) can look forward to!



FOOD INITIATIVE COALITION KICKS OFF

Submitted by Muriel Gutierrez, Community Outreach Assistant III

On June 12, 2025, the inaugural meeting of the Pinal County Food Initiative Coalition was held at the McFarland State Historic Park Courtroom in Florence, AZ with the wonderful hospitality of the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce. Hosted by the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Pinal County AZ Health Zone program, the event brought together a great turnout of equally excited community champions.

This collaborative coalition is dedicated to strengthening local food systems, expanding access to nutritious food, and fostering sustainable, community-driven solutions to food insecurity in Pinal County. Attendees shared insights and built connections, laying the foundation for impactful partnerships and shared action. We are excited for our upcoming July meeting, which will be held in a hybrid format to accommodate those who cannot attend in person. Please see the next page for more information.

Stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to join this vital effort and help ensure healthy food access for all in our community.

For more information, contact Muriel Gutierrez at mgutierrez5@arizona.edu or (520) 374-6254.

Community Champions who attended:

- BC/BS of Arizona
- CAHRA- Santa Cruz Food Bank
- Casa Grande Alliance Food Bank
- Casa Grande Elementary-Student Services
- Central Arizona Aging
- Central Arizona College
- Desert Rock Food Bank
- First Presbyterian Church of Florence
- Florence Lions Food Bank
- Florence News
- Hope Coalition
- Molina Healthcare
- Red Rock Food Bank
- Salvation Army Apache Junction
- Sun Life Health
- Superior Food Bank
- United Food Bank
- University of Arizona-Director of Nutrition Programs
- University of Arizona-EFNEP
- Village Food Bank





PINAL COUNTY FOOD INITIATIVE COALITION

JULY 31, 2025
9:30AM-11:00AM

ARIZONA CITY COMMUNITY LIBRARY
13254 SOUTH SUNLAND GIN ROAD
ARIZONA CITY, ARIZONA 85123

**A HYBRID OPTION WILL BE
AVAILABLE.**

ZOOM LINK:

[HTTPS://ARIZONA.ZOOM.US/J/88485866844](https://arizona.zoom.us/j/88485866844)

You're invited to the second meeting of the Pinal County Food Initiative Coalition. A growing partnership of local food banks, distributors, farmers markets, and community organizations. Together, we're working to address food insecurity impacting families, individuals, and seniors across our region.

Guided by our mission to build an equitable local food system by removing access barriers and empowering all communities through inclusive partnerships and shared action, we envision a thriving local economy rooted, in equitable food access — where communities grow, share, and prosper together.

RSVP to Muriel Gutierrez, Community Outreach Assistant III



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HEALTHY STARTS HERE
azhealthzone.org

FINANCIAL LITERACY



HOW TO GROW YOUR MONEY

Submitted by Carissa Diaz, Community Outreach Assistant II



How to Grow Your Money:

- Save a little each time you get money.
- Think before you spend. Do you really need it?
- Set a goal. What do you want to save for?



Money Mindset Words:

- **Save:** Keep money for later.
- **Spend:** Use money to buy things.
- **Earn:** Get money for work you do.
- **Goal:** Something you want and plan for.

Grow Your Money, Grow Your Mind

A growth mindset means you believe you can get better at something if you work hard.

THIS IS TRUE FOR LEARNING AND FOR MONEY!



Remember:

Small steps lead to big changes. Believe in yourself, and your money will grow too!



Quick Challenge:

Write down one thing you want to save for. Now write how much it costs and how you will earn or save the money.

FIELD CROPS SYSTEMS



AGRONOMY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Submitted by Avik Mukherjee, Assistant Agent, Agriculture

The Agronomy Program at Pinal County Cooperative Extension is a critical resource for Central Arizona farmers, industry professionals, and agricultural stakeholders. We aim to support sustainable crop production through science-based research, education, and outreach.

Program Overview

The Agronomy Program at the Pinal County Cooperative Extension is pivotal in supporting Central Arizona's agricultural community. Integrating applied research, science-based education, and outreach, the program addresses regional agronomic challenges, promotes sustainability, and aims to enhance farm-level decision-making.

Key Research & Field Trials

- **Herbicide Efficacy and Small Grain Trials:** Conducted replicated field trials assessing herbicide performance in cotton and variety evaluation for crops including durum wheat, barley, and triticale.
- **Proposed Lettuce Herbicide Study (2025–2027):** Submitted a two-year proposal to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program to evaluate herbicide efficacy and crop safety in lettuce production systems.
- **Variety Trial Program in Cotton:** Partnered with the University of Arizona's agronomists to test the agronomic performance of multiple new, commercially available, and advanced varieties in multiple locations of Pinal County.
- **Economic Analysis:** Collaborated with an agricultural economist to develop updated crop budgets for cotton, alfalfa, and corn silage, assisting producers in understanding profitability margins.
- **Upcoming Research:** Planning to initiate a new herbicide trial in corn silage starting in July 2025.

Outreach & Extension

- **Educational Events:** Organized major outreach events, including the Annual Central Arizona Farmer Field Day, Early-season Cotton Tent Talk, and Annual New Technology Workshop, with total participation exceeding 160 individuals.
- **Continuing Education Units (CEUs):** Delivered 15 CEUs to stakeholders for maintaining PCA and PUP licenses, and eight additional CEUs focused on smart irrigation practices through workshops.
- **Knowledge Dissemination:** Issued weekly 'Crop Rotator' newsletters containing timely agronomic updates, pest alerts, and best practice recommendations.
- **Professional Engagements:** Presented program updates at national and regional conferences, and actively participated in key stakeholder meetings (e.g., Arizona Crop Improvement Board, Pest Management Center). Serving as the Western Cover Crop Council Facilitator and vice-chair of the poster and education committee (Western US) of the National County Agricultural Agents Association (NACAA).

Stakeholder Engagement & Program Evaluation

- **Needs Assessment:** Conducted surveys to identify local agronomic priorities and shape the program's direction accordingly.
- **Stakeholder Reach:** Served approximately 75 growers, advisors, and industry representatives through field-based learning events.
- **Partnership Development:** Collaboration with university faculty, growers, and ag industry partners to co-design research-based solutions.
- **Impact Tracking:** Launched pilot surveys to evaluate stakeholder adoption of Extension recommendations and new technologies.

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FIELD CROPS SYSTEMS



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2024 Central Arizona Farmer Field Day at Maricopa Ag Center



2025 Annual New Technology Workshop at Maricopa Ag Center



Planting of Cotton for Herbicide Efficacy Trial (2025)



Harvesting of small grains by a combine harvester (2025)



Early-season Cotton Tent Talk at Eloy, AZ

Avik Mukherjee, Ph.D.

Assistant Extension Agent, Agronomy

Pinal County Cooperative Extension
The University of Arizona

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<https://www.arizona.edu/purpose-mission-values>

EXPANDED FOOD NUTRITION EDUCATION



SUMMER FOOD & FUN!

Submitted by Esmeralda Castillo, Community Outreach Professional III

Summer is a great time to enjoy the outdoors with family, friends and neighbors, but with our hot Arizona temperatures you want to make sure you stay cool and hydrated. Here are some tips to help you stay cool and enjoy some healthy summer foods:



Cucumber Water

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash cucumbers with water before cutting.
3. Slice and add to ice cold water for a refreshing drink!

Cucumbers are full of fiber and vitamin K which helps with bone health. They also contain potassium that can help lower blood pressure.

Recipes

For more healthful tips on how to eat healthy, not just during the summer months but all year round, EFNEP can help!

For more information on the FREE classes that EFNEP offers, please contact:

Esmeralda Castillo
Community Outreach Professional III
ecastill@cals.arizona.edu
520-788-6217

Janet Canales
Community Outreach Assistant II
janetcanales@arizona.edu
520-621-1019

Watermelon Juice

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash watermelon with water before cutting into.
3. Remove all the seeds.
4. Remove rind and cut watermelon into cubes.
5. Put 6 cups of cut watermelon into blender.
6. Add 2 tsp. of lemon juice.
7. Blend until smooth.
8. Pour over ice cubes and enjoy!

Makes 4 cups



You can also blend some slices of cucumbers with your watermelon juice for an added health benefit.

Melons are a great way to stay hydrated. They are loaded with antioxidants, vitamin C and are low in calories.

DEVELOPMENTAL & SENSORY

GROWING MINDS & BODIES: DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONE ACTIVITIES FOR PRESCHOOLERS

Submitted by Jennie Treadway, Program Coordinator

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

- **Nature Scavenger Hunt:** Ask your child to find items by color, shape, or texture (e.g., something round, something soft).
- **Sink or Float?:** Use a kiddie pool or bucket to test which objects float and which sink. Build early science thinking!
- **Pattern Play:** Use sidewalk chalk to create repeating patterns (red-blue-red-blue). Let your child finish the pattern.

LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- **Story Walks:** Read a book outside and act it out while walking. Great for language and imagination!
- **"Tell Me About It" Time:** Ask open-ended questions like, "What was your favorite part of today?"
- **Silly Rhyme Games:** Make up rhymes together using summer words like sun, pool, and ice cream.

MOTOR SKILLS (GROSS & FINE)

- **Obstacle Course:** Set up a simple backyard obstacle course to climb, jump, crawl, and balance.
- **Water Painting:** Let them "paint" sidewalks or fences with water and a paintbrush—great for grip and wrist movement.
- **Pick-Up Challenge:** Use tongs or clothespins to pick up small toys or pom-poms—great for fine motor development.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Playdate Picnics:** Plan small outdoor picnics with peers to encourage sharing and social interaction.
- **Feelings Freeze Dance:** Pause music and say a feeling ("happy!"), then have them freeze with that emotion on their face.
- **Kindness Bingo:** Create a bingo card with kind actions like "gave a hug," "helped a friend," or "shared a toy."

CREATIVE PLAY

- **Ice Cube Painting:** Freeze colored water and let kids "paint" as the cubes melt.
- **Dress-Up & Role Play:** Encourage imagination with themed play (e.g., pretend beach day or farmer's market).
- **Nature Art:** Use leaves, sticks, and flowers to make art or collages.

Support Your Child's Growth and Development!

The Pinal County Cooperative Extension's Developmental and Sensory Screening (DSS) Team offers engaging, age-appropriate activities designed for children from 1 month to 5½ years old.

Our team is here to help families track important developmental milestones and ensure children are growing and learning at their best. We provide FREE screenings for vision, hearing, and overall development—all in a fun, child-friendly setting.

If you're interested in scheduling a free screening or learning more about our services, give us a call today at (520) 374-6221.

Early support makes a lasting difference—let's work together to give your child the best start possible!

DEVELOPMENTAL & SENSORY

KINDERGARTEN, HERE WE COME! ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL READINESS

Submitted by Jennie Treadway, Program Coordinator

Help your child grow through play this summer! These simple activities target important **kindergarten readiness skills** in fun and engaging ways:

THINKING & LEARNING SKILLS (COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT)

- **Sort It Out:** Have your child sort items by size, shape, or color (e.g., socks, buttons, toy animals).
- **"What Comes Next?":** Create patterns with toys or snacks (cracker, cheese, cracker...) and ask your child to continue the pattern.
- **Simple Board Games:** Games like "Candy Land" or "Chutes and Ladders" help with taking turns, following rules, and number recognition.

TALKING & LISTENING SKILLS (LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT)

- **Name Practice:** Encourage your child to say and spell their first name. Try writing it with sidewalk chalk or tracing it in sand!
- **"Describe It" Game:** Choose an object and ask your child to describe it using five senses. ("It's red, round, smooth...")
- **Daily Read-Aloud:** Read together every day. Ask questions like "What do you think will happen next?" to build comprehension.

HAND SKILLS FOR WRITING (FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT)

- **Scissor Snipping:** Give your child paper strips to cut and practice staying on the line.
- **Playdough Letters:** Roll dough into lines and curves to form letters—especially the ones in their name.
- **Bead Necklaces:** String beads or pasta to improve finger strength and coordination.

MOVEMENT & COORDINATION (GROSS MOTOR SKILLS)

- **Backyard Obstacle Course:** Include hopping, crawling, balancing, and climbing.
- **Ball Play:** Practice throwing, catching, and kicking different-sized balls to improve coordination.
- **Dance & Freeze:** Turn on music and stop it randomly—can your child freeze and balance?

GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS (SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

- **Practice Routines:** Set up "school morning" routines at home—wake-up, dress, breakfast, and reading time.
- **Emotion Charades:** Act out feelings and guess—helps with self-awareness and empathy.
- **Playdates with Purpose:** Use peer play to practice sharing, using kind words, and resolving small conflicts.

KINDERGARTEN SKILLS TO WORK ON THIS SUMMER:

- Recognize and write first name
- Identify basic shapes and colors
- Count to 10 and recognize numbers 1–5
- Hold a pencil or crayon correctly
- Follow 2-step directions (e.g., "Pick up your shoes and put them by the door")

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



RISE & SHINE 4-H SUMMER CAMP

Submitted by Anaya Bigham, Extension Assistant, 4-H



This year's Pinal County Rise & Shine 4-H Summer Camp was an unforgettable experience filled with learning, laughter, and lifelong memories. From the moment the kids stepped onto the bus to the very last campfire song, the excitement never stopped!

We planned a variety of educational and hands-on activities that sparked curiosity and encouraged growth. Campers explored topics like geology, nutrition, agriculture, fire safety, animal tracking, and career opportunities—all while having an absolute blast.

Beyond learning, campers enjoyed outdoor adventures such as canoeing, hiking, and swimming in the lake. Whether it was a camper's first time or they were seasoned pros, everyone found joy and confidence in trying new things. Of course, no camp would be complete without creative fun:

- Arts and crafts
- Camp Olympics
- Campfire Stories and S'mores Making
- Camp Songs and Line Dances

It was heartwarming to see kids fully immersed in the experience—soaking it all in, building friendships, and growing stronger in spirit and confidence. Their energy was contagious, and we heard one thing over and over again: "I can't wait for next year!" Most importantly, this camp allowed us to instill the core values of 4-H and plant the seeds of growth in each child who attended.

We're so proud of what we've accomplished, and we're excited to build on this success. If your program is interested in getting involved or supporting future camps, please reach out. Together, we can ensure that even more youth have access to knowledge, experiences, and opportunities to thrive.

Thank you for being part of our growing 4-H family.



FIND US. LIKE US. FOLLOW US.

Facebook Pages:

- [Maricopa Master Gardeners](#)
- [Pinal County 4-H](#)
- [Sensory & Developmental Screening](#)

Webpage: [CALS, Pinal County](#)



Greeta Mills, Acting County Extension Director

gmills@arizona.edu

Avik Mukherjee, Assistant Agent—Agriculture

avikm@arizona.edu

Esther Turner, Associate Agent—4-H Youth Development

eturner@cals.arizona.edu

4-H provides educational opportunities for youth to become capable and contributing members of a global community. Children, ages 5-19, learn about healthy lifestyles, animals, plant sciences, and leadership.

Contact: Esther Turner at (520) 340-4815 or eturner@cals.arizona.edu

AZ Health Zone is a program designed to influence healthy eating and active living in a positive way that promotes health and reduces disease among all people living in Arizona.

Contact: Sybil Peters at (520) 340-4564 or sybilpeters@arizona.edu

Child Care Health Consultations (CCHC) develops relationships with childcare facilities to provide training to staff that will improve their knowledge and practice in the childcare setting.

Contact: Ashley Dixon at (928) 978-2911 or adixon@arizona.edu

Choose Health Action Teen (CHAT) is designed to recruit teens to teach younger children the benefits of healthy eating and active living. Teens also participate in community service events.

Contact: Esmeralda Castillo at (520) 788-6217 or ecastill@cals.arizona.edu

Developmental Screening Program reaches out to families with children, ages 0-5, to screen for early developmental milestones such as gross and fine motor skills, communication, personal-social skills, and problem-solving capacities.

Contact: Jennie Treadway at (520) 340-4979 or treadway@cals.arizona.edu

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a nutrition education class designed to assist limited resource families in eating smart and being active and in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and behavioral changes necessary to contribute to their personal development and the improvement of the total family diet, nutritional and physical well-being.

Contact: Esmeralda Castillo at (520) 788-6217 or ecastill@cals.arizona.edu

Field Crops Systems uses research and education efforts to work to improve field crop productivity and global food and fiber supply, farm economic viability, and protecting the environment.

Contact: Avik Mukherjee at (520) 340-4385 or avikm@arizona.edu

Financial Literacy & Positive Discipline Parenting will help individuals gain the knowledge, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness to become in control of their finances, and thus improve their lives controlling their financial health. This program will help with daily stressors such as: worrying about electric bills, putting food on the table and wondering if they have somewhere to sleep tomorrow night, which all influences the way individuals interact with their child(ren), their families and their communities.

Contact: Muriel Gutierrez at (520) 374-6254 or mquiterrez5@arizona.edu

First Smiles is an oral health program that provides preventative oral health education, oral screening, referral to dentists for children birth to age five; and fluoride varnishing for children with emergent teeth up to age five.

Contact: Greeta Mills at (520) 340-4973 or gmills@arizona.edu

Horticulture Program develops and delivers educational information, structured programming, and technical support to the consumer and commercial horticulture sectors, as well as urban agriculture and food systems in Pinal County.

Contact: Greeta Mills at (520) 340-4973 or gmills@arizona.edu

MAC (Maricopa Agricultural Center) Farm Ag-Ventures educational programs include a combination of videos, educational presenters, hands-on learning experiences and tractor-trailer rides around their 2,200 acre farm for a close-up view of what makes a working farm operate.

Contact: Esther Turner at (520) 340-4815 or eturner@cals.arizona.edu

Sensory Screening Program provides free screenings of children, ages 0-5, for vision and hearing impairments that could affect developmental growth.

Contact: Jennie Treadway at (520) 340-4979 or treadway@cals.arizona.edu