

# Stump chosen for public health leadership institute

## BURKE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Jackson Stump, REHS on-site program coordinator for Burke County Environmental Health, has been chosen as a Region IV Public Health Training Center member at Emory University's Public Health and Primary Care Leadership Institute 2024-25 cohort.

Stump competed with 109 applicants to become one of only 36 fellows from state, local and tribal health departments, or FQHCs/FQHIC Look-Alikes, in

the eight states in the southeastern U.S. All fellows manage programs, supervise staff and/or have demonstrated leadership potential within their organization. According to Region IV Public Health Training Center's Director Moose Alperin, "This year's fellows are a remarkable group of leaders who are instrumental in



Stump

leading public health efforts in the eight Southeastern states." The Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University launched the Public Health Leadership Institute in September 2019 in partnership with the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development at the University of Georgia to advance adaptive and strategic leadership skills among public health professionals. In 2022, with a new cycle of funding and increased efforts to integrate public health with pri-

mary care to improve health equity and health outcomes in the communities within Region IV, the leadership institute was expanded to include emerging primary care leaders from FQHCs/FQHC Look-Alikes, along with emerging public health leaders from local, state and tribal governmental health departments or organizations. The institute is an eight-month experience providing 40 contact hours of online and in-person interaction and peer consultation.

Applications for the 2025-26 cohort will be accepted in mid-2025. Funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Region IV Public Health Training Center works to build the capacity of the public health workforce to meet national, state and local needs. The Region IV Public Health Training Center is one of 10 regional HRSA-funded training centers throughout the U.S. and a National Public Health Training Center Network member.

## Farming

From A1

"Now that I've went other places and seen the loss, mine ain't nothing," Houk said.

Houk, president of the Burke County Farm Bureau, said he hasn't been able to make it out to many of the farms in the county to see how widespread damage is.

Mike Causey, NC Insurance Commissioner, said early estimates showed there could be about \$7 billion in crop losses.

In Burke, Caldwell and McDowell counties, damages for the agriculture industry are estimated to be about \$70 million in plant nurseries alone, NC Cooperative Extension Burke Center Director Spring Williams-Byrd said.

At Fitzgerald Nursery, just north of Morganton on N.C. Highway 181, this is usually the busiest time of the year. Owner Mike Fitzgerald said workers are usually loading up three or four tractor trailers full of plants a day.

But since floods from Helene caused waterways like Upper Creek to rise, workers are spending time cleaning up the fields instead.

Flooding destroyed many of the nursery's 1-gallon plants that were ready to be sold. Other plants are littered with trash and debris that was swept downstream with the flooding. Some plants still have roots in the ground, but Fitzgerald said it could take a couple weeks before signs of dam-



CHRISSEY MURPHY, THE NEWS HERALD  
Jeff Houk, left, and his daughter, Hannah Gordon, get the attention of Houk's dog, Bandi, in front of Houk's corn field on Wednesday, Oct. 9. Houk lost about 2 acres of his 7-acre corn crop to flooding from Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.

age show.

The impact of the flooding on the nursery could be seen for years, Fitzgerald said. Most of the plants the nursery grows take four to six years before being harvested and sold.

He estimated property damages and lost revenue to be more than \$1 million. He said at least 50% of the nursery's farms were damaged.

"That's just us, and everybody else is in pretty much the same boat, or worse," Fitzgerald said. "We're lucky to have some farms on higher ground."

Despite the losses here and to the west, Houk said he feels confident farmers will recover. He said he's passed truckloads of farming supplies like hay, gates and fencing materials headed west on Interstate 40 when he's transported supplies to towns that were hit hard by the hurricane.

"The farming community's going to come together and take care of each other," Houk said. "There's outreach all over. The farmers will stick together and help each other out, and the majority of the people will overcome."

At Houk's Green Hill Farm, he's hopeful he can salvage most of his crops and has faith things will be better next season.

"My daddy never got excited," Houk said. "He'd pick up the pieces to what was left and just rebuild and do whatever it takes to move back on. You can't quit. When you farm, you get in it to stay in it."

"If you're a true, dedicated farmer, you gotta get in it to stay. You've just got to take the good with the bad."

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CHRISSEY MURPHY, THE NEWS HERALD  
Jeff Houk shucks an ear of corn that was damaged in flooding from Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.



XAVIER MARTIN  
Javier Lopes, left, and Delmar Perez, right, work together to lift a downed tree into a front-end loader at Fitzgerald Nursery on Oct. 4.

## Tax

From A1

and 9,459 people (27.15%) voting for it, according to county and election officials.

Currently, 47 counties in the state have approved the quarter-percent sales tax, according to information from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. Voters in Alexander, Catawba, Lincoln and Rutherford coun-

ties have approved the tax.

Burke County Commissioner Randy Burns proposed the quarter-percent sales tax referendum to the board of commissioners earlier this year. He and Commission Chairman Jeff Brittain have made the case that Burke residents who shop in Catawba, Lincoln, Rutherford or Alexander counties are already paying the additional sales tax.

Burns called the sales tax the fairest tax there is and

has said if the quarter-percent sales tax is approved in Burke, that money could be used to help alleviate county costs related to inflation and help keep property taxes from increasing.

Burns said he has spoken at local precinct meetings and a chamber of commerce meeting, as well as other groups. He is accepting and seeking any invitation he can to talk about it to voters, he said.

Early voting begins Oct. 17.



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