

**Laminitis**

**“Founder”**

- endocrine
- grass
- road
- grain
- sepsis
- supporting limb

TSU Extension Agent Amy Berger hosts a guest speaker on a Zoom meeting with her 4-H participants in Blount County who are learning about horse health issues. *Photo courtesy of Amy Berger*

## COVID-19 Brings Destruction, Turns Technology Viral

By **THOMAS W BROYLES**

Think back to February 2020. We never imagined an unknown and unexpected virus could cause such sudden great devastation. In March, the United States experienced a rapidly climbing death toll, a spiraling economic downturn, and an immediate educational shut down.

No one could fathom youth wouldn't be returning to the classroom for the next several months.

The crippling effects of COVID-19 have changed the ways people interact and live their daily lives, and it has also changed the education system. The past six months have proven a positive for the 4-H Youth Development program at Tennessee State University (TSU).

Our 37 TSU 4-H Extension Agents experienced a minor setback when public schools physically closed, and in-school club programs who affect more than 100,000 students were unable to meet. However, through dedication and perseverance, TSU 4-H Extension Agents stepped up to the challenge quickly developing online/virtual curriculum and embraced social media to reach their audience of at least 10,000 participants during the difficult times. The 4-H Extension Agents learned

novel technology skills, embraced new technology platforms, and maintained connection with our youth in Tennessee.

In July, I asked the TSU 4-H Extension Agents for COVID-19 impacts and what I read was amazing. TSU 4-H Extension Agents embraced online meeting software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to engage youth in dynamic ways. Since schools were closed and physical meetings were not allowed, 4-H Extension Agents used online meeting software to connect with middle and high school youth each month. In addition, online meeting software was used to demonstrate sewing techniques, host youth cooking classes, conduct livestock judging competitions, teach livestock judging practice, and even take virtual field trips, such as traveling to a dairy barn, and conduct online 4-H exchange programs.

In addition to working with youth, TSU 4-H Extension Agents also used online meeting software to develop technology trainings for other agents. Many agents stepped up, mastered a technique, and then shared with the larger community.

Online meeting platforms were not the only tools in the new cyber toolbox. TSU 4-H Extension Agents took to social media to deliver programs. TSU 4-H posted recruitment videos on social media, agents

posted educational information about child anxiety, and hosted sidewalk chalk contests. Social media has been a part of Extension programming, but COVID-19 prompted the use of social media to take off.

TSU 4-H Extension Agents increased their use of videos for education and activity purposes. Many agents used videos to host horse and livestock shows. Youths created videos of their animal and sent them to the judges for review. Video technology was embraced to demonstrate STEM activities, cake decorating, and youth demonstration contests.

We have learned one thing from the COVID-19 pandemic. Technology is a part of the 4-H delivery model. TSU 4-H Extension Agents have embraced the use of technology during this pandemic. Technology has been a part of the Extension programming model but, in my opinion, COVID-19 has sped up the adoption process by about five years. It is my hope the Agents continue to adopt and embrace technology to reach the youth across the state.

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