I am always asked about my job as an Extension Agent, people don’t really understand what exactly I do and we do as an office. A quick answer is just about everything. From raising children, cooking healthy, to starting a 4-H club, raising livestock, growing corn, or keeping your azaleas alive, we cover it. This column is a great way to market Extension and educate everyone about what’s going on. We are often called the best-kept secret in Robeson County, a title that makes us smile and cringe at the same time. The people that use our services are satisfied, but many citizens don’t know we’re here. If you have a question about something related to our field, please don’t hesitate to call us or register for our mailing lists. North Carolina Cooperative Extension was implemented in 1914 as a route to get researched based information from the Universities to the people. We work hard to make our community a better place to live, work, and play.

It never ceases to amaze me how little people know about agriculture. As someone who was raised in town and later learned about agriculture, married a farmer, and has become an Extension agent, I can easily see how things can become misconstrued when it comes to the food we eat. I think it is important that people know and understand agriculture. Many groups strive to educate consumers about agriculture and lots of information is available. If you are worried about where something comes from, go to the source, purchase vegetables, fruit, and meat from local farmers or stores that have the Goodness Grows in N.C. Seal.

Common myths concerning Agriculture:

**Misconception:** All farms are industrial farms and are owned by companies.

**Truth:** According to the Agriculture Council of America and the 2002 Agricultural Census, individuals or family corporations operate 90 percent of United States (U.S.) farms. There are 1600 farms in Robeson County, most are owned by our neighbors!
**Misconception:** Half of all farm acreage in the United States is used to produce feed for livestock.

**Truth:** According to the North Carolina Cattlemen’s Association 20 percent of the total grain produced in the United States goes to feed livestock.

**Misconception:** Methane produced by cattle is the major reason for the depletion of the ozone layer.

**Truth:** Cattle do produce methane, but according to the Environmental Protection Agency methane from livestock accounts for 2.6 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Other sources of methane include: landfills, swamps, and energy production.

**Misconception:** Farmers don’t care about the land or water. They are just out to make money.

**Truth:** Farms are heavily regulated. There is a zero tolerance for direct discharge of manure from livestock. Modern technology used by today’s farmers better protects the environment than past methods. Clean air, land, and water are crucial to the long-term success of the farming industry. From a business and ethical standpoint, livestock producers and farmers in general have every motivation to conserve and protect our natural resources.

**Myth:** Farm animals are raised in confined, crowded, and unventilated cages and sheds.

**Truth:** Animals are similar to people, if they are stressed they are more likely to become sick and/or die. Animal producers would not be profitable if their animals were always sick, so producers are always looking for ways to reduce stress when raising and transporting animals. Scientific research and studies have led us to many of the methods we currently use. Continued research and study will determine how we raise animals in the future. Housing protects animals from predators, disease, bad weather, and extreme climate. Modern livestock housing is well ventilated, warm, well lit, clean, and designed and engineered for the exact type of animal that lives there. Even slaughter facilities have been designed, as a result of research studies, to reduce stress on the animal.

For more information, please contact Michelle Shooter, Extension Livestock Agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, or E-mail at Michelle_Shooter@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/.