

LSU AgCenter Rapides Parish Profile

Report to Stakeholders January 2026



ABOUT THE LSU AGCENTER

The LSU AgCenter provides innovative research, information and education to improve people's lives. Working in a statewide network of parish extension offices, research stations and academic departments, the LSU AgCenter helps Louisiana citizens make the best use of natural resources, protect the environment, enhance agricultural enterprises, and develop human and community resources.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Nutrition and Community Health

Nutrition and Community Health agents and educators are working to enhance residents' well-being by addressing chronic diseases linked to poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyle areas where Louisiana has historically ranked low. In Rapides Parish, the food and nutrition score is 45 out of 100, underscoring the urgent need for greater access to healthy food options and stronger nutrition education. Through the Flavors of Health initiative, programs such as Smart Portions, Dining with Diabetes, and Let's Eat for the Health of it, plus radio and television segments, and youth culinary classes in partnership with 4-H, promote healthier lifestyles and prevent chronic disease. All programs follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA MyPlate recommendations.

4-H Youth Development

Rapides Parish 4-H prepares students in grades 4-12 to be *Beyond Ready* for future careers through year-round clubs, projects, and camps. Youth practice leadership, service, and teamwork while exploring hands-on opportunities. Over 2,900 participants annually connect classroom learning to real-world applications, building confidence, communication, and problem-solving skills. With a focus on career readiness, students discover pathways in agriculture, STEM, and beyond, gaining transferable skills to thrive in college, work, and life.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Rapides ANR programs support the backbone of the local agriculture and natural resource management. The parish is a major row crop hub, producing corn, cotton, soybeans, sugarcane, rice, and wheat on approximately 75,000 acres. It also sustains a strong livestock industry with over 340 cattle producers managing an estimated 15,000 head of cattle. Home of the largest nursery population in Louisiana, makes Rapides a leader in ornamental horticulture statewide. ANR programs cover forestry, wildlife management, ponds, and home horticulture.



PROGRAMS

4-H and Youth Development

- 4-H & FFA
- Project Clubs (Livestock, Gardening, Culinary, Shooting Sports)

Agriculture and Natural Resources

- Plant Enterprises
- Horticulture/Lawn & Garden
- Forestry
- Animal Enterprises
- Aquaculture & Wildlife

Nutrition and Community Health

- Flavors of Health: Lunch & Learn
- Kid Chef & Teen Chef
- Dining with Diabetes, Smart Portions
- Let's Eat for the Health of It
- EFNEP.
- Flavors of Health.

EXTENSION OFFICE

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WHOM WE REACH:

2,937 youth (including 853 4-H members in 39 organized clubs). Program participation totaled 4,353—through enrichment events, project clubs, and camps.

5,500 adults (3,000 through agriculture and natural resources and 2500 through Nutrition & Community Health with an additional 400,000 through media & news articles.

HOW WE REACH THEM:

4-H Youth Development: organized clubs, enrichment events, workshops/camps, newsletters, website, and social media. ANR & NCH reach clientele through field days, workshops, presentations, class series, publications, news & radio broadcasts, and technical assistance. Producers and residents receive research-based guidance to improve productivity, sustainability, and stewardship of natural resources.

EXPANDING OUR EFFORTS:

357 volunteers from 4-H, Master Gardeners, Master Horseman, Forestry Awareness, family and community.

PARISH FACTS:

LSU AgCenter agents provide research-based information on plants, aquaculture, wildlife and animal enterprises to Rapides Parish residents. The total dollar amount from these commodities were: Plant Enterprises, \$173,807,307 (\$46,989,232 Nursery Crop) ; Forestry, \$32,080,092; Crop Production, \$7,361,773; ; Aquaculture and Wildlife, \$11,482,906. Land area — 1,320 square miles; Population —125,345; Population under 18 years old — 25%; Population 65 years old and over — 17%; Median household income — \$51,301; Persons below poverty — 20.4%

LOCAL ISSUES AND PLANS FOR THIS YEAR:

Increase productivity and profitability of Louisiana agriculture.

- Host cotton, corn, soybean and beef cattle field days, and farm visits.
- Conduct series on Master Gardener, Master Cattleman, and Master Goat.
- Write news columns on webpage content and seminars on agriculture practices.

Promote the wide use of natural resources and protection of the environment.

- Support forestry professionals and public engagement through logger training, educational awareness, and forums on sustainable practices.
- Inspire youth stewardship of the natural world through hands-on education.
- Advance sustainable farming practices by educating growers on soil health, regenerative methods, and efficient agricultural practices.

Build leaders and good citizens through 4-H Youth Development.

- Through hands-on experiences, youth develop practical skills and responsibility, while building on leadership and citizenship. These clubs foster confidence, discipline, and a commitment to healthy living and community service—core values of 4-H youth development.

Strengthen families and communities.

- Conduct nutrition programs that create healthy communities by improving overall nutrition and increasing physical activity levels, in youth and adults, which will produce long-lasting behavior changes
- Provide nutrition education and food demonstrations at community food sites.
- Provide hands-on food safety and cooking skills for youth and adult audiences.



HOW IS EXTENSION FUNDED?

- Federal funding from the USDA/ NIFA.
- State general funds from the Louisiana Legislature.
- Local support from parish government, including police juries and school boards.
- Self-generated funds.



WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY?

Our stakeholders at the parish level are the local supporters and beneficiaries of the LSU AgCenter cooperative extension programs. Their support keeps these critical programs in their communities.



EACH PARISH OFFERS PROGRAMMING IN:

- 4-H and Youth Development.
- Agriculture and Natural Resources.
- Nutrition and Community Health



For the latest research-based information on just about anything, visit our website:

www.LSUAgCenter.com