

Your Money's Worth

RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND EXTENSION RESPONDING TO KEY ISSUES IN MAINE

Empowering Maine Citizens & Communities

Expo galvanizes Washington County businesses

Small businesses are the lifeblood of Maine's rural economy, particularly in Washington County where over 5,000 residents – 30 percent of the county's workforce – are employed in businesses with four or fewer employees. UMaine educators worked with elected officials and local business owners to convene



the first Washington County Business Conference & Expo in 2003. Over 325 people attended, exhibited or presented, with 190 people participating in 27 free workshops on topics such as adding value, pricing for profit, knowing your market, working with media and using technology. Governor John Baldacci addressed attendees, unveiling a state plan to support an entrepreneurship-based Maine economy. Twenty-eight business-assist agencies, financial institutions and local businesses raised funds to underwrite the conference costs, allowing participants free admission. Building upon the success of the 2003 conference, planners have once again raised funds and planned a second Washington County Business Conference & Expo for the spring of 2004, to continue revitalizing the economy of the Sunrise County. ■



Strengthening rural food retailers

The U.S. food retailing industry has experienced unprecedented consolidation in recent years, with independent

supermarkets decreasing by 17 percent and small grocery stores by 36 percent between 1990 and 2000. Although consumers haven't felt an impact on the prices they pay for food, rural communities may feel the results in declining accessibility to food products,

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"I worked so hard and learned so much . . . But I can't wait to do it again the next day."

Inmates acquire work skills and self-respect

The horticulture vocational training program developed by UMaine educators and the Maine State Prison in Warren involves 30 hours of classroom instruction and a work component requiring planning, developing and maintaining outdoor and greenhouse plantings. Eligible participants can move to work-release

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Affordable housing for MDI residents

U Maine educators and collaborators continue to support Mount Desert Island's community planning effort, begun in 1991. The second round of the MDI Tomorrow process (2001-2003) has resulted in a number of community impacts, including designation as one of over 70 Maine "Communities for Children." In September 2003, 75 bankers, realtors,

developers, citizens, employers, planning board members, housing authority staff and others participated in a five-hour housing summit. Speakers from Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket outlined what those communities are doing to counter market forces so that core community members can afford to live, shop and volunteer where they work. The summit was the kick-off for a two-

month housing study commissioned by Mount Desert Community Trust, which produced data about demand for rental and purchased housing and an action plan for trust leadership to address the issue. The resulting *MDI Community Action Housing Plan* maps out the process for bringing 70-100 housing units on line over the next five years. ■

For more information on **Cooperative Extension community development and small and home-based business education programs**, contact Doug Babkirk, Program Administrator, at 581-3106 or 1-800-287-0274. Or visit the UMCE Web site: www.umext.maine.edu

For more information on the **Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station's programs**, contact Stephen Reiling, Associate Director, at (207) 581-3228. Or visit the MAFES Web site: www.umaine.edu/mafes/

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RURAL FOOD *(continued from front)*

declining sales in other retail sectors, and shrinking market accessibility for small agricultural producers. To better understand the attitudes and grocery-shopping behavior of consumers, UMaine researchers surveyed households in eight target retail areas in rural Maine. Results from the surveys identified the major differences in how consumers view small and independent grocers compared to the larger regional and national retailers. These results will be used to develop training programs for small and independent grocery retailers to help them create business plans that will increase their businesses. Detailed survey results are available on the project Web site at www.umaine.edu/fra/. ■

INMATES *(continued from front)*

programs with local garden centers. The horticulture industry is one of the fastest growing segments of agriculture in Maine, with sales of over \$ 24.8 million in 2003. Work skills help former inmates become productive citizens and reduce the likelihood of reincarceration, saving an average annual inmate cost of \$35,000. According to the prison's director of education, "This program has demonstrated positive therapeutic value . . . [It] develops semi-skilled labor for the growing horticulture industry and participants' self esteem and confidence." Since January 2001, 120 inmates have participated in the program, with 80 percent completing it. One program participant said, "It is the first time I have been able to sleep since I came to the facility. I worked so hard and learned so much I am exhausted at night. But I can't wait to do it again the next day." ■