A. **Category:** Volunteer Connection Newsletter

B. **Subject/Issue:** Volunteers are the heartbeat of Extension. They serve as our eyes, hands, ears, and voice in numerous ways. A primary program area for FCS agents is health and nutrition. However, there is a limit to the programming one person can implement. Volunteers can contribute greatly to the FCS program and extend education further into the community. A group of trained volunteers who also serve as advocates for Texas AgriLife Extension Service can substantially increase the scope and impact of the FCS program.

The Master Wellness Volunteer Program provides volunteers with 40 hours of health and nutrition education. Upon passing the certification exam, the volunteers agree to give back 40 hours of service the first year and ten hours each year thereafter. Training topics included:

- History of Extension/overview of Master Wellness Volunteer program
- Better Living for Texans nutrition education overview/ working with diverse audiences
- Nutrition – Portion Distortion; Eat Better to Live Better; Phyte for Good Health; My Pyramid
- Food Safety – Understanding Food Labels; Food Safety Demo; Packing a Safe & Healthy School lunch; Cooking is a Matter of Degrees
- Health – Finding Reliable Resources on the Web; Exercise Basics; Walk Across Texas; Sun Safety: It’s Cool in the Shade
- Child Health – Coloring Our Children’s Plates with Fruits and Vegetables; Child’s Play – Better Health One Step at a Time
• Public Speaking – How to Effectively Convey Your Message; techniques in presenting food demonstrations

In addition to the classes, homework assignments and post-evaluation were given each week. The Master Wellness Volunteer program began in Texas in 2007, and Hopkins County had the privilege of serving as a pilot county.

The Volunteer Connection Newsletter serves as a tool to correspond with volunteers, informing them of service opportunities, recognizing them for their accomplishments, and providing them with timely information. Pictures of volunteers are used to recognize their volunteer contributions. In addition, the format of the newsletter is consistent from one issue to the next, changing border colors and clip art to suit the season.

C. **Target Audience:** Hopkins County has a total of ten volunteers who completed the training and passed the certification exam. Of those ten, all have completed the required 40 hours of service for the title of Master Wellness Volunteer. The Volunteer Connection Newsletter serves as a tool to keep those volunteers informed. In turn, Master Wellness Volunteers can match their skills with service opportunities. The newsletter is prepared and distributed to volunteers six times per year.

D. **Where program has been used:** Volunteers have participated in a variety of programs and events where health and wellness issues were exhibited:

• Do Well, Be Well with Diabetes and Cooking Well with Diabetes (registration, lesson presentation, data entry, evaluation implementation, tray preparation, and other related tasks)
• Health fair implementation for Kids’ Safe Saturday, Early Childhood Learning Center, Grocery Supply, Fidelity Express, Senior Expo, Como-Pickton School, and Hopkins County Memorial Hospital.

• Terrific Tuesdays Alzheimer’s caregiver respite program

• 4-H Foods Projects (county and district)

• Quarterly professional development meetings

• Nutrition program for Cub Scouts

• Farmer’s Market - Kids Cook at the Market

• Hopkins County Dairy Festival Dairy Foods Contest

• Hopkins County Fall Festival Household Arts Contest – baked goods and preserved foods division

• Material acquisition for various programs

• Thanksgiving Food Box project for low-income elderly and single parent homes – food acquisition, delivery of food boxes

• Worksite wellness programs at Farmers’ Electric and Hopkins County Memorial Hospital

E. **Number of people reached:** During 2010, the ten certified volunteers reached 1,480 families through these educational programs and service events.

F. **Evidence of impact:** Based on $20.85 per hour, Master Wellness Volunteers contributed 205 service hours for an equivalency of $4,274.25 in 2010. These volunteers provided support to the agent through assistance in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and events. In return, the volunteers are rewarded, not only by recognition in the newsletter and annual banquet, but with the satisfaction of knowing they made a difference. Following are some actual quotes from the Master Wellness Volunteers:
- “I never knew I could get so attached to the participants. I look forward to seeing what surprises are in store next!” (after volunteering with Terrific Tuesdays Alzheimer’s respite program)

- “I’m not good at speaking in front of a group, but I love working with the 4-H kids! It’s amazing how eager they are to learn.” (after assisting with 4-H foods project meetings and food show)

- “It’s so rewarding to see the appreciation on their faces. I only wish I could do more!” (after delivering Thanksgiving Food Boxes)

- “The Extension exhibit materials were a huge hit! It’s great to have access to such quality materials.” (after leading a work-site wellness program)

G. Resources Used: Quarterly professional development luncheons are held jointly with Master Wellness Volunteers from Hunt County to provide additional training and recognition of volunteers, with each county hosting the luncheon twice per year. Guest speakers from the health care field (dietitian, hospital chef, and personal professional chef) and the FCS agents from Hopkins and Hunt Counties have presented programs for attendees. The MW Volunteers assist in planning the meetings, and in some cases, preparing the meal. The Hopkins County Volunteer Connection Newsletter is funded by the FCS account (postage) and county budget line item (paper and printer cartridge).

H. Percentage written/prepared by applicant: 100% of the newsletter is prepared by the applicant.

I. Information from University: Depending on the season of the year, information on timely topics is included in the newsletter. In those instances, information is drawn from Texas AgriLife Extension publications and other research-based resources. Quotes and snippets are added for interest.
J. Identification of Extension service: Each issue contains our state Extension logo, as well as contact information (name, address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address) for our office. The equal opportunity statement is also included.