

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

September 2026



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Extension has a foundation built on agriculture education

The University of Illinois Extension office in Mason County recently relocated to the new Farm Bureau building on Route 78 in Havana. As the staff packed up to move, they found written records going back to 1919. A century ago, Extension's focus began with agricultural outreach and support. There were also extension programs about home economics and food preservation, designed to help rural families.

Extension has shifted its focus over the last century to meet the needs of a more diverse population and help clientele deal with rapid changes in technology. Since the beginning, Extension and Farm Bureau have worked closely together.

In 1919, farm advisor T.R. Isaacs visited 635 farms and consulted in the office 1,514 times. His programs that year included 45 meetings across the county and 614 articles on a variety of topics aimed to at improving farmers' lives. A major effort was made to increase the use of lime on farms to balance soil pH and improve yields. Adding phosphate fertilizer to farm production was another major focus. Over the years, Extension organized the use of improved seed stock and secured rail cars for cattle delivery to distant markets in major cities.

In the 1930s, Isaacs had to meet the challenges of the economic situation, but remarked how well the farmers cooperated to improve their way of life during the depression. Paying for limestone was a real challenge for farmers. C.S Love was noted as the new ag advisor in 1932 and broadened the focus to include helping farmers prevent insect damage and improve control in both crops and livestock. Later in the 30s and into the 40s, R.V. Watson directed the Extension office in Mason County toward the increased use of modern farm machinery, as Extension's ag efforts kept up with current issues.

In 2022, Kevin Brooks became the Extension commercial ag educator focused on farm business management and marketing, serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. Brooks has emphasized farm drainage, generational farm ownership transfer, the use of field scouting with drones, and the importance of closely monitoring the business side of farming in addition to helping farmers and owners with leasing and agronomy issues. In addition to traditional meetings and news articles, vital ag information is released through podcasts, videos, blogs, and social media to help disseminate the latest research generated by the University of Illinois to the public.

University of Illinois Extension is currently helping local producers navigate topics such as the use of artificial intelligence, how to prevent dust storms, and the efficient use of phosphorus fertilizers to reduce surface water contamination while increasing crop yields.



In 1935, Illinois Extension farm advisors reached 1,000 people at a face-to-face meeting in Mason County. Today, local Extension staff reach their audience via YouTube, blogs, websites, and other modern methods.

Kevin Brooks

Commercial Agriculture Educator
Farm Management
kwbrooks@illinois.edu