Unit 18 – Christian, Jersey, Macoupin and Montgomery Counties
Thursday, December 18, 2025
Montgomery County Extension Office, 1 Industrial Park Drive, Hillsboro, IL

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Tiffany Blasa, Mark Dugger, Anna Fessler, Caiden Freeland, Cyndy Howard, Vicki Joiner, Dennis Rahe, Chad Ruppert, Rebecca Niemeier (staff), Sara Marten (staff)

Call to Order – Vicki called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Approval of Minutes – Minutes from October 16 2025, were presented. With no additions or corrections proposed, a motion was made by Chad Ruppert to approve the minutes and seconded by Cyndy Howard. Motion passed. Minutes approved.

Fiscal Reports – Fiscal reports were presented. Trust account expenditures and revenues for FY26 are aligning with usual amounts. Some line items are showing an overage but no need for concern. Additional revenues are expected to be collected in the spring. Self-supporting account is operating with a negative balance as of the end of November, but this is normal for this time of year as 4-H program fees are expensed out, in bulk, in the fall.

Staff Program Reports – Rebecca Niemeier presented current programming and outreach efforts through the Christian and Montgomery County Ag in the Classroom program. Council members also discussed the importance of reaching youth with agriculture literacy programming and ways to continue to engage both youth and teachers.

Sara gave brief updates on behalf of the educators and their respective program areas.

Unit Updates

OFFICE SIGNAGE – Sara informed council that offices have recently installed additional signage to denote the difference between public and private spaces within our offices. Recently audits in other extension offices across the state have shown the need for better identification of public and private spaces, for staff safety and privacy.

STAFFING UPDATES – Sara shared that the unit is hiring a new position, a Community Outreach Advisor, to facilitate some of the nutrition and youth-based programming that was covered by the SNAP-Ed program in years past. This new position will work with both youth and adult audiences and will focus on health and food-related topics. Funding for this position is being provided locally with the hopes to increase support and/or explore further options for state-wide support as well. There are a total of 5 of these new positions being created around the state. The position closed today with the hope that candidates will be interviewed in January with a start date in early to mid-February.

HOLIDAY CLOSURES – With the upcoming holiday break, all university staff members will be on break (paid leave) from December 24 through January 1. All of our unit offices will be closed on December 24 through January 2, as nearly all of our unit staff members have also requested that Friday off. We are publishing the closure on our social media channels and will have signage posted on our doors for the public.

Old Business

ELECTION OF OFFICERS – Tabled from October meeting. Sara reviewed the needs and expectations of the officers. The chair is responsible for leading the meeting and signs some of the roster and budget documents, as requested by the office. The vice chair fills in for the chair if they are absent. The secretary assists extension staff in taking minutes at each meeting. The following slate of officers were recommended by the members present: Chair – Mindy Ward; Vice Chair – Anna Fessler. The Secretary position will be tabled until the January meeting. Sara will visit with a few members, not present today, to see if they have interested. Chad Ruppert made a motion to nominate the slate, as presented. Cyndy Howard seconded. Motion passed.

2026-2028 PLAN OF WORK – Sara presented an overview of the unit plan of work that has been submitted to campus. Every three years, unit staff work to identify local needs and align them with available programming and resources. For the upcoming three-year plan of work, the unit will focus on the following key priority areas: workforce readiness & development, mental health and emotional well-being, food access, and thriving youth (4-H club experiences.) While there will still be programming topics that are addressed outside of these four areas, the majority of the unit's work will fall under these umbrellas. Council members are encouraged to review and stay in contact with staff if they have ideas for programming, audiences, or partnerships that can help address these local needs.

New Business

COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARDS 2026 – Council members reviewed the application for collecting nominations for 2026. Sara will also make the application into an online form to make it easier for staff. Cyndy Howard made a motion to approve the application, Anna Fessler seconded. Motion passed. Sara will send out to staff after the first of the year.

APPROVE 2026 & 2027 MEETING DATES – Based on feedback from council members and to better align with extension policies, the council meetings are being shifted to be held in January, April, and October. These meetings will be held virtually with all unit council members. Each summer, each county-specific council members will meet with extension board members in their local county offices for an in-person meeting. These dates will be determined in the spring and will be shared out with those needing to attend at that point.

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP – With many members leaving council at the end of the year, Sara thanked everyone for their service over the past years. Those with terms expiring were recognized. Sara reviewed new members that have been invited. Some are still waiting on responses/acceptance. There are still a few spots in Christian and Macoupin that can be filled so anyone that has names to share can continue to do so.

The next council meeting will take place on Thursday, April 16, 2026. The meeting will be hosted online, via Zoom.

With no further business, a motion was made by Tiffany Blasa to adjourn meeting and seconded by Anna Fessler. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM.

APPROVED 4/16/2026