

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

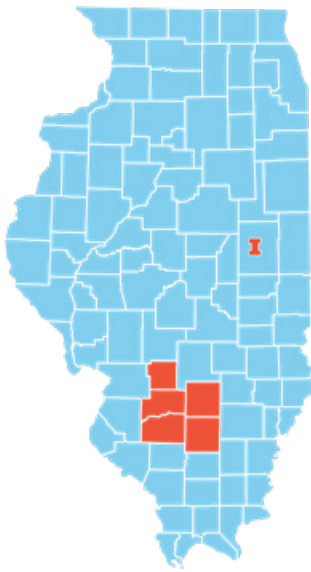


Serving Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Jordée Koehler
County Director



Advancing strategic priorities to fulfill the Extension mission in our communities

It has been both a full and fulfilling year for us at Extension! As a literal extension of University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, research-based knowledge sharing is at our core. It is our responsibility to keep learning, growing, and maintaining relevant certifications that will have the most impact and service within our communities.

Our Extension counterparts across the state and Extension leadership on campus have engaged in analysis and strategic planning to ensure we are best positioned to deliver on our Extension mission, which is to develop educational programs, extend knowledge, and build partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments as part of the state's land grant institution.

University of Illinois Extension has updated and released its Strategic Priorities, which are directly connected to our vision:

- Community: Support strong, resilient youth, families, and communities.
- Economy: Grow a prosperous economy through lifelong learning and development.
- Environment: Sustain and restore natural

resources in home and public spaces.

- Food and Agriculture: Maintain a safe and accessible food, fibers, and biofuel supply.
- Health: Maximize health equity and access and support health promotion.
- Partnerships: Create and nurture strategic partnerships and share statewide resources to advance our mission and vision.
- Technology and Discovery: Integrate research, technology, and engagement to close opportunity gaps and build capacity.
- Workforce Excellence: Develop Illinois Extension staff and teams to advance collaborative impact and strengthen a culture of inclusiveness and belonging.

As county director looking back at our yearly impact and ahead to our strategic priorities, I am re-energized. I hope you feel the same sense of pride for our community's collective efforts to impact lives and will reach out to discuss ways we can expand upon this meaningful work together.

Jordée Koehler
County Extension Director

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to eight strategic priorities:



Community



Health



Economy



Partnerships



Environment



Technology and Discovery



Food and Agriculture



Workforce Excellence

2024 Engagement

Extension leaders, staff, and stakeholders define priorities that create meaningful, mission-centered outcomes throughout the state:

<p>730 Communities Served</p>	<p>805K+ Program Attendees</p>	<p>9.7M+ Webpage Views</p>	<p>22.4M+ Social Media Impressions</p>	<p>2.5M+ YouTube Impressions</p>
<p>547 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)</p>	<p>90 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People</p>	<p>12,484 Local Government Education Webinar Reach</p>	<p>1,840 4-H Clubs</p> <p>20,339 Members</p>	<p>67,917 Fair Exhibits</p> <p>261,012 4-H Experiences</p>

Partnerships

Resource Generation

<p>5,563 Program Volunteers</p>	<p>266 Community Gardens</p>	<p>2,922 School and Community Partners</p>	<p>\$15,735,213 Value of Volunteer Contributions</p>	<p>\$514,316 Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated</p>	<p>\$4.7M+ External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners</p>
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Community

Educational partnerships benefit communities

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Illinois Extension's youth development model focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. A partnership with the local Regional Office of Education enables Illinois Extension educators to take research-based educational programs directly to teachers and students.

For the first time in 2024, Illinois Extension staff collaborated with Marion, Clinton, and Washington counties Career & Technical Education System to provide the Welcome to the Real World simulation at Kaskaskia College eighth grade career day. More than 80 students from 20 schools participated in the series of learning activities culminating in a simulation experience in which youth choose a post-graduation path and make a series of related "real-world" decisions.

The simulation empowers youth to:

- Explore various career paths.
- Understand how education and other factors shape career choices.
- Make informed consumer choices for independent living.
- Develop essential financial management skills.
- Learn to balance monthly income and expenses.
- Explore alternatives to manage and balance budgets effectively.

Career exploration begins during early childhood and extends into adulthood. The earlier an individual can begin this process, the sooner they can establish their sense of identity in the world of work. Having a prepared, skilled, and resilient workforce in place ultimately increases community stability.

Master Naturalist program connects communities with nature

The Illinois Extension Master Naturalist program transforms nature enthusiasts into empowered environmental advocates. By leveraging the expertise of university scientists and environmental partners, this program equips volunteers to put research into action in their communities. Last summer, Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties welcomed



Stacey Ottenschnieder, office support at the Clinton County Extension Office, helping students work their way through the simulation. Staff from all five local offices helped at this event.

15 adult participants in the Master Naturalist training and 14 youth in the Junior Master Naturalist program. For the first time, both training programs ran concurrently, receiving excellent feedback from participants.

By pairing adult training with youth programs, this model removes barriers for parents, such as childcare issues, while fostering curiosity in children about their natural surroundings. This innovative approach offers a unique opportunity for both adults and youth to engage deeply with nature. Trained volunteers make a significant impact by connecting their neighborhoods with the natural world. They contribute to scientific research through the Citizen Scientist program, lead educational programs, and apply their unique skills in conservation and restoration projects. Their volunteer work encompasses a variety of impactful initiatives, which may include:

- Assisting in the management of local natural areas.
- Completing natural resource-related office work with special interest groups or not-for-profit agencies.
- Teaching about natural areas
- Giving demonstrations and presentations to local groups.
- Serving as a liaison between natural resource agencies and the public.
- Providing resources to groups in need of natural resource assistance.

The Illinois Extension Master Naturalist and Junior Master Naturalist programs stand out as invaluable resources for nature enthusiasts looking to make a meaningful impact in their communities.



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw



Show of Champions celebrates 4-H across five counties, inspires Regional 4-H Showcase at DuQuoin State Fair

Three years ago, local 4-H staff launched the Show of Champions to celebrate member achievements at the end of the 4-H show season. This event invites youth who win special awards to compete against one another in a Championship showdown. Each summer, the show rotates to a different county, with participation growing each year. Last summer, Bond County hosted 180 participants from across the five-county area.

The success and positive feedback from the Show of Champions inspired youth staff across Southern Illinois to organize a Regional 4-H Showcase. Held at the DuQuoin State Fair, the Showcase highlighted the various ways that 4-H is represented at the fair. Projects from the General Show remained on display in the exhibit hall throughout the fair, showcasing the talents and creativity of members. The one-day livestock shows provided the intimate atmosphere of a small show while featuring the high-quality animals typically seen at larger events.

Local 4-H staff members partnered with staff from across the region to make this event a reality for local families and youth. Planning for the 2025 Regional Showcase is already underway.

4-H shapes youth development and builds future leaders for local communities

4-H is active in every county in Illinois, with over 102 dedicated staff members working to provide youth with leadership opportunities, networking skills, and a platform for self-expression and discovery. In Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties, more than 1,000 4-H members participate in over 50 clubs.



4-H members from all five counties showed off their winning General Projects at the Show of Champions, hosted in Bond County during the 2024 show season.

Through their involvement in 4-H, youth engage in various projects that are showcased at their local county fairs. Exposure to diverse experiences helps youth identify their passions and interests, allowing them to develop skills that will shape their future career paths.

However, 4-H is not limited to completing projects for shows. The organization's staff and volunteers focus on positive youth development through programs that have measurable impacts on social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development (National 4-H Council, 2023). For example, a popular workshop with Lego Robotics allows youth to work in teams to build a "TACobot" and code it to perform different tasks. Participants build teamwork (social), conflict resolution (emotional), communication (behavioral), critical thinking, and problem-solving (cognitive) skills. There were almost 20 different 4-H workshops offered on a wide range of topics over the past four months in the five-county area.

These skills play a critical role in the success of youth as they enter the workforce and adulthood. According to a decade-long study, 4-H members are five times more likely to graduate from college, twice as likely to pursue careers in science, three times more likely to engage in regular exercise, four times more likely to give back to their communities, twice as likely to achieve academic success, and twice as likely to participate in school activities (Illinois 4-H). These achievements stem from the strong youth model displayed at each 4-H event.



Environment

Pollinator Garden in Clinton County supports conservation and education

Illinois Extension unveiled a new pollinator garden in collaboration with the Clinton County Farm Bureau, Clinton County Extension Education Foundation, and the Clinton County Fair Board. This garden is poised to make a significant impact on local ecosystems and strengthen community engagement. As a certified Monarch Waystation recognized by Monarchwatch.org, it highlights a commitment to supporting vital pollinator species and contributes to broader conservation goals. The garden, featuring a diverse selection of native plants, herbs, and annuals, provides a year-round nectar source for pollinators while serving as an educational resource for visitors.

The garden includes signs equipped with QR codes that link to detailed information about the plants and their roles within the ecosystem to enhance educational outreach. Pollinators play a crucial role in controlling pests and boosting native biodiversity. They are also essential to our food supply — an estimated one-third of the food and beverages we consume depend on their efforts. The economic contribution of pollinators to U.S. agriculture alone is approximately \$29 billion, with global impacts ranging from \$235 billion to \$577 billion. The pollinator garden not only enriches the local environment but also fosters a greater understanding of the essential role pollinators play in our lives.

Workshop promotes prescribed burns for prairie restoration

Illinois Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources staff presented an educational program with Jeff Harris, Southern Illinois Prescribed Fire Coordinator with Pheasants Forever this fall. Harris outlined how controlled burns are crucial for restoring native habitats, particularly prairies.

The session was a catalyst for a proposed restoration project at the Washington County Extension office, where these steps will rejuvenate an overgrown prairie. The process begins with developing a Prescribed Burn Plan and will lay the groundwork for a 2025 restoration effort highlighting fire's vital role in ecosystem health and resilience.

Prescribed fire is an essential management strategy for improving wildlife habitats by clearing old vegetation and promoting the growth of native grasses. The process also helps control invasive species by mimicking the low-intensity fires occurring naturally on prairies. Harris emphasized the importance of careful planning and adherence to safety guidelines, including obtaining the necessary permits, removing trees, and creating a detailed burn plan before a burn.

Participants left the workshop equipped with the knowledge to implement prescribed burns on their properties. Harris's presentation emphasized that restoring fire to the landscape is not just a tool for habitat recovery—it's a powerful way to ensure the sustainability of Illinois' prairies and natural resources.



Food and Agriculture

Hunters help fight food insecurity by donating venison to food pantries

One in ten people in Illinois are food insecure, and one in eight children identify as food insecure. Local hunters are “bucking” up to fill the gap and help the hungry during this hunting season. Hunters Feeding the Hungry is a local project with United Way of South-Central Illinois and Fred’s Meat Processing in Ashley. Deer hunters simply take harvested deer to Fred’s and donate it to the Hunter’s Feeding the Hungry program. All the meat of the donated deer is ground into 1-pound packages, which Illinois Extension staff distribute to local food pantries.

United Way funding and a grant with Feeding Illinois allowed processing for 20 harvested deer. 400 lbs. of ground deer have been donated to three food pantries so far, with processing still in the works from the 2024-25 hunting season. SNAP-Ed staff provide samples and recipes to food pantries receiving donated deer. Also, cookbooks and special printed venison cards are available to participating food pantries.

Illinois Junior Chef boosts cooking skills and healthy eating

Summertime for SNAP-Ed staff means Illinois Junior Chef cooking schools. IJC was developed by researchers and educators from University of Illinois Extension’s SNAP-Education program. The program is implemented statewide by nutrition education staff.

IJC focuses on teaching kitchen skills, using a recipe, and creating healthy food for youth ages 8 to 13. The 10 hours of direct education provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve cooking behaviors associated with healthier eating over time. Youth are encouraged to try new foods and use them in kid-friendly recipes. Cooking schools allow youth to learn new skills like using a knife, cracking an egg, and measuring dry/liquid ingredients. As a result of participating in Illinois Junior Chefs, Illinois children are showing improvement in their fruit and vegetable preferences and attitudes toward cooking. They feel more confident cooking in the kitchen and with choosing and eating healthier food choices.



SNAP-Ed Program	Participation
K-12 Schools Partners	19
Nutrition Education Classes	880
Early Childhood Partners	2
Program Participants	2,176
Emergency Food Site Partners	5
Education sessions	890
Program attendance	14,283



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw



Workforce Excellence

Research-based training on sustainable practices and livestock management supports growers

The future of our food supply relies on the use of practices that boost production and capacity. Growers at all levels benefit from practical, efficient, and sustainable approaches to cultivating produce, crops, and livestock that feed their families, communities, and the world.

Commercial fruit and vegetable growers face a lot of uncertainties. One thing is certain: University of Illinois Extension has the current research to help make those important production decisions. Every year, Southern Illinois Fruit and Vegetable School brings informative, practical, and up-to-date research-based information to address the challenges of growing fruit and vegetables commercially in southern Illinois and Missouri. Each February, industry experts share current trends in insect and disease management and various other production-related topics with roughly 100 producers in Mt. Vernon.

Another winter class, Commercial Livestock Manager Training, is held annually at the Clinton County Extension Office in Breese. The Livestock Management Facilities Act requires facilities designed for 300 or more animal units to have at least one employee certified in environmentally aware manure management techniques.



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw

A range of topics related to the operation, management, and utilization of livestock waste and waste facilities were covered. Additionally, the latest regulations, best management practices, and research for manure-related issues were discussed. Online training and testing are available all year and follow the same format as the in-person workshops. Online training includes nine modules of 10- to 20-minute videos that can be viewed at your own pace.

Local Extension hosts the largest school food service training in the state

To support essential school food service team members, Illinois Extension partners with the Illinois State Board of Education to provide professional development training each year. Local Illinois Extension Educator Kara Boozer hosted the largest ABCs of School Nutrition Learning Institute in the State of Illinois, welcoming nearly 100 participants in Centralia.

Many people may not realize that the USDA mandates annual training for school food service staff, with requirements varying by job title:

- Director - 12 hours
- Manager - 10 hours
- All other full-time staff - 6 hours
- Part-time staff (<20 hours/week) - 4 hours

The annual comprehensive six-hour institute equips school food service managers, cooks, and assistants with the training needed to meet their annual requirements. In addition, Illinois Extension collaborated with the Illinois State Board of Education to prepare school food service staff for upcoming lunchroom changes and assist them in completing production records.



Economy

Shopping for Snacks and Saving Money enhances youth financial literacy

Learning about money at an early age helps improve financial well-being as an adult, according to the Financial Literacy and Education Commission. Shopping for Snacks and Saving Money is an innovative initiative designed to boost financial literacy among youth. Held at Kaskaskia College Trenton Education Center, Illinois Extension Educators Jamie Mahlandt and Kara Boozer engaged participants in valuable lessons about budgeting, savings, and healthy food preparation.

During this hands-on experience, kids learned how to set savings goals and create shopping lists, all while participating in a grocery store simulation. The students expressed their aspirations through personalized savings goals, ranging from video game consoles to bicycles and even college funds. They practiced prioritizing their choices and evaluating different spending options, laying the groundwork for responsible financial habits.

In partnership with the SNAP-Ed program, participants also explored safe food preparation and the importance of hygiene, culminating in the creation of their own custom snack recipes using a budget. This integration of financial education with nutrition offered a memorable, practical experience that students can draw upon in the future.

Gardening and Grocery Planning program helps residents manage rising food costs

According to the Federal Reserve's Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2023, 65% of adults said rising prices worsened their financial situation, with food costs ranking third in expenses. Food costs are currently the third highest consumer expense after housing and transportation, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

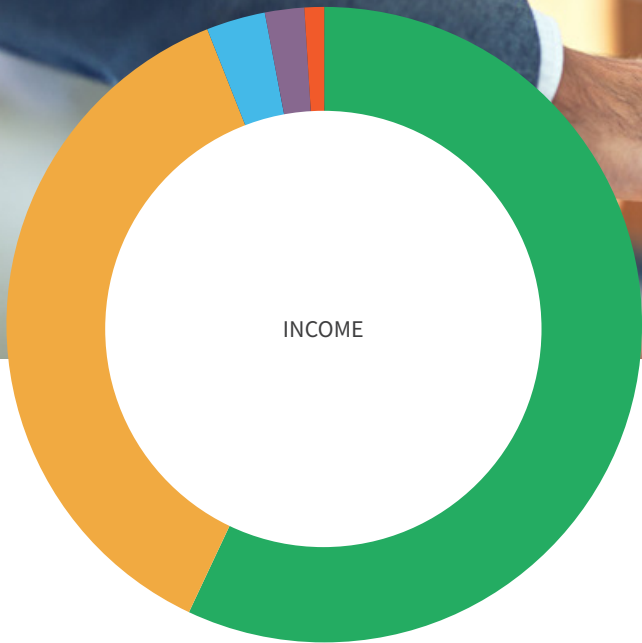
To help area residents make the most of their grocery budget, Illinois Extension Educators created the Gardening and Grocery Planning program. Planning meals and grocery costs helps curb expenses and reduce impulse buying. In addition, starting a container garden supplements grocery lists and is a fruitful hobby.

The program, held at Kaskaskia College Trenton and Greenville Education Centers, combined financial education with gardening and proved to be an engaging experience for the participants. Grocery and Meal Planning booklets were given to participants so they could apply what they had learned at home, and small containers with seeds were used to start their gardens. Participants were so engaged that they stayed afterward for additional discussion and requested more extended programs in the future.



Read more in the Finding Financial Balance Blog go.illinois.edu/FFB





INCOME

Amount	Source
57%	County Government
37%	Federal Funds (Including SNAP)
3%	Ag. Premium Fund
2%	Misc. Agreements, Gifts & Donations
1%	Program Fees & Publications Sales



EXPENSES

Amount	Source
58%	Salaries
7%	Program Expenses
8%	Leases
4%	Benefits
10%	Administrative Costs, and Advertising
7%	Utilities, and Travel
6%	Equipment

Funding Partners

- Bond County Board
- Bond County Home and Community Education
- Clinton County Association for Home and Community Education
- Clinton County Board
- Clinton County Extension Foundation
- Jefferson County Board
- Jefferson County 4-H Foundation
- Marion County Board
- Marion County 4-H Foundation
- Marion County Home and Community Education
- Washington County Board
- Washington County Extension Education Foundation

Extending knowledge. Changing lives.

University of Illinois Extension is the flagship outreach effort of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, offering educational programs to residents in all 102 Illinois counties. Since 1914, Illinois Extension has been an integral part of people’s educational experiences. Communities have come to rely on Extension for its practical, research-based educational offerings. Through learning partnerships that put knowledge to work, Extension’s programs are aimed at making life better, healthier, safer, and more profitable for individuals and their communities.



69

Local leaders received Local Government resources



\$405,181

Volunteer value across all program areas



24,300+

Program attendance for all program areas



1,084

Educational sessions across all program areas

4-H Youth Development Programs	Participation
Club Members	1,155
4-H Clubs	105
4-H Exhibits	2,078
4-H Experiences	4,908
4-H Leaders	96
Volunteer Hours	9,216

Ag. & Natural Resource Programs	Participation
Master Gardeners	19
Master Naturalists	23
Volunteer Hours	2,786
Expert Consultations	383
Educational Sessions	38.81
Educational Program Participants	114

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ONLINE



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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Local Extension Councils Cooperating.
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, please contact the event coordinator. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your needs.

The Illinois Nutrition Education Programs are funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

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