

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

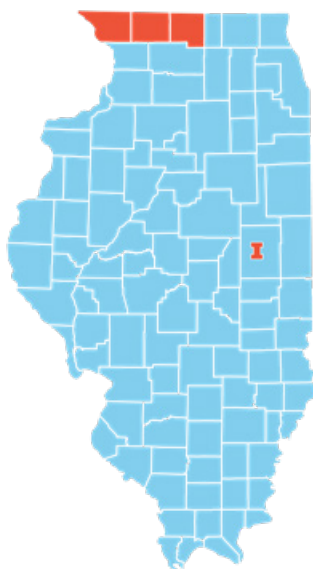


Serving Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Margaret Larson
County Director



“The only constant in life is change.” -Heraclitus

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus was right. Change is inevitable, and it affects us all. The way we handle change can determine whether it leads to growth or stress. In Extension, you see change happening all the time — in the local communities, partnerships, volunteers, youth, and more.

Change is like the cycle of leaves turning color in the fall. At first, the leaves are green, representing the comfort of the familiar. As the seasons shift, the leaves change, sometimes in surprising and beautiful ways. The transition from green to yellow, orange, and red is natural, and though it marks the end of a season, it also signals a new beginning. Just as leaves embrace this transformation, so do we in Extension — responding to change with creativity, resilience, and a readiness to grow.

In Extension, we’re constantly gathering information about local issues, challenges, and emerging trends. When we can, we step in to provide resources, expertise, and educational programming as needed. The excitement of knowing there will always be new opportunities for us to respond to is something that drives most Extension staff.

In many ways, Extension serves the lifelong learner. This includes our 4-H members, whom we encourage to discover a love for learning from a young age. We hope that, whether through continued involvement with us or other avenues, they’ll continue to learn and grow. Over the years, it’s been rewarding to see so many community members, youth included, flourish through learning and engaging with the many areas of focus we offer.

We are fortunate to have so many community members working with us—whether as volunteers, partners, or consumers of our resources and programming. When I start a message with “Dear Extension Family,” I truly mean it. The young “family” members of today will become the dedicated volunteers of tomorrow. That’s the kind of change I can fully get behind.

That said, there are several things that remain unchanged. The commitment and dedication of Extension staff, both locally and beyond, doesn’t waver. Much like the sturdy tree that stands strong even as its leaves change, our core values remain constant, providing a solid foundation through every shift. The strength of our community partnerships and collaborations is steadfast, just as the tree’s roots anchor it firmly in the ground. Our constant drive to address emerging local issues remains unchanged, even as staff, partners, and issues evolve. But through it all, our commitment stays strong, like the tree that continues to grow and thrive with each season.

I embrace change because it brings new opportunities to grow. I find excitement in meeting new people, tackling fresh challenges, watching our communities thrive, and helping our youth learn and succeed. Each change inspires me to continue learning and evolving, just as our Extension Family does. Together, we adapt, grow, and find strength in every season of change.

Margaret Larson
County Extension Director

Cover photo: A variety of fall leaves on the ground.

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



Economy



Environment



Food and Agriculture



Health



Partnerships



Technology and Discovery



Workforce Excellence

2024 Engagement

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

730

Communities Served

805K+

Program Attendees

9.7M+

Webpage Views

22.4M+

Social Media Impressions

2.5M+

YouTube Impressions

547

Educational Sessions/Week
(28K+ Annually)

90

Online Courses Accessed by
12K+ People

12,484

Local Government Education
Webinar Reach

1,840

4-H Clubs

67,917

Fair Exhibits

20,339

Members

261,012

4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,563

Program Volunteers

266

Community Gardens

2,922

School and Community Partners

\$15,735,213

Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$514,316

Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4.7M+

External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners



Empowered program helps people understand weight loss

Nutrition and Wellness Educator Diane Reinhold held a workshop in Stephenson and Jo Daviess in May titled 'Empowered to Make a Change: An Introduction to Weight Management.' During the program, Diane discussed reasons for weight gain, how weight is assessed, the benefits of losing and maintaining a healthy body weight, and helpful tips to promote weight loss. These programs were well attended, and participants left feeling empowered to begin their wellness journey.



Heart & Sole Walking Club makes debut

Physical activity is a cornerstone for wellness, and what better way to do so than to walk? Walking is a great exercise because it is low-impact. Reinhold held sessions in May and June in Stephenson County. The club was a great way for participants to connect with others and learn more about the benefits of physical activity while walking.



Healthy Cooking at Home series helps people save money by making nutritious meals

This new series, created by Reinhold, helps people learn how to prepare meals at home by covering a variety of topics, including air fryers, microwave cooking, herbs, and eggs. Discussion on budget-friendly recipes, the health benefits of cooking at home, food safety tips, and using small kitchen appliances are covered in the classes.



Yes, You Can! series continues to be popular

Food preservation classes offered by Reinhold are a great way to stay informed about how to properly preserve food at home. Sessions were offered both virtually and in person and included everything from freezing and dehydrating to water bath and pressure canning basics. This year, classes were also offered for making jams and jellies, as well as focused sessions on green beans and carrots.



Program on natural disasters sparks interest

With the increase in severe weather, being prepared for a disaster is vital to navigate the many challenges that can happen. Reinhold and Youth Development Educator Kelly Lafferty provided great information to families and helped them create a family disaster action plan.



Food Safety courses available for food service employees and volunteers

Over the course of the year, Reinhold held several classes in the area, offering food handling courses for both restaurant employees, Certified Food Protection Management, and volunteer group members, Serve It Safely. These classes ensure that food safety practices are consistent and meet local and state regulations, create a food safety culture, and, more importantly, reduce the risk of food-borne illness.



School nutrition training — setting up schools for success in the cafeteria

Nutrition and Wellness Educator Diane Reinhold orchestrates the ABC's of School Nutrition, a free continuing education course for area school districts. This program is a partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education and is funded by ISBE and USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.



Helping families lead healthier lives

The SNAP-Ed program in Stephenson and Winnebago counties provides community-based nutrition education for individuals and families eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Community outreach workers provide easy solutions to limited-income households through in-person lessons and online resources. They often set up booths at markets, food pantries, and food banks to reach more individuals within the communities. These programs make the healthy choice an easy choice when considering where families eat, learn, live, shop, and play. Programs are based on current research and engage learners in practical, hands-on classes and activities.



Spanish SNAP-Ed programming available in Rockford

This past year, Community Outreach Worker Maria Perez offered Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programming in Spanish throughout the Rockford Metro area. With Perez on board, the SNAP-Ed team is able to reach more community members in need of assistance.



Barb Curry, Stephenson County SNAP-Ed community worker, baked some fruit and nut granola bar clusters to hand out to patrons at the New Jerusalem Food Pantry in Freeport. This simple recipe from the Eat. Move. Save. program includes pantry staples and is healthy and delicious.



Programming centered on youth

SNAP-Ed in Stephenson and Winnebago counties offers several programs created for youth. Community outreach workers offer programming based on healthy nutrition and lifestyles, including EatFit, Eat Play Grow, and Healthy Kids, as well as beginning kitchen basics like the Illinois Junior Chef and Teen Cuisine programs. They present programs with local schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and more to reach local youth.





Sharing knowledge with students through Earth Day celebrations

Staff visited the Warren Elementary School during their Earth Day celebrations. Staff led three workshops for kindergarten through fifth grade students where they learned about watersheds, pollinators, and more.



Sprouting young gardeners in Winnebago County

Little Roots, a gardening program directed towards Cloverbud youth in Winnebago County, helped produce some green thumbs. In May, youth were given seven different seeds to plant at home. Throughout the summer, there were activities for youth to attend to learn more about gardening and the environment around them, with a tour of a commercial greenhouse, a Wee Naturalist program with Educator Kelly Lafferty, and a blueberry farm tour.



Birding Basics shows youth how to stop, look and listen

Youth in Jo Daviess County participated in a Birdie Basics - Birding 101 workshop at the stunning Schurmeier Teaching Forest. Hillary Holt from the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation and their volunteers spent the day teaching about the importance of birdwatching and how fun it can be. Youth learned about binoculars, birdwatching and identification, and ended the day with a nature hike and bird spotting.



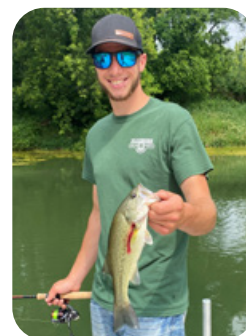
Ambassadors learn important life lessons while helping others

Stephenson County's 4-H Ambassadors went shopping to fill 30 backpacks for 30 families. The youth saw a need in their community for food security for kids over spring break, so they planned, wrote a shopping list, shopped, and assembled the backpacks that would go to households in need. To help fund this project, 4-H Program Coordinator Brenda Heimann secured a Food Advocacy Grant through the Illinois State 4-H Office.



Bass Fishing Club catches some big fun

One of Winnebago's most popular programs is the Bass Fishing Club with Program Coordinator Becky Gocken. This year, Educator Jay Solomon demonstrated the water table as part of the educational portion of this four-day program. Of course, the highlight was the last few days of fishing and competing to catch the biggest largemouth bass at Torstenson Youth Conservation Education Center in Pecatonica.



Jo Daviess Junior Poultry Judging Team earns first at State 4-H Poultry Contest

Three youths from Jo Daviess County, Louis Berning, Heather Bradbury, and Layna Kretschmer traveled to Urbana to compete in the State 4-H Poultry Contest and won first place in the junior division. The team participated in the 4-H Poultry Spin Club led by Jennifer Meyer all spring. Layna placed third high individual, Heather placed fourth high individual, and Louis placed sixth high individual. This was their first contest. Poultry judging teaches standards of poultry and egg production to ensure a safe and nutritious consumer product.





Youth robotic club earns award at state competition

Stephenson County's 4-H Robotics Club had a team of nine youths meet weekly from January through April to build and program robots to perform tasks on an agriculture-themed mission list. Six youths were present at the competition in May. The team earned the Rookie Design Award at the 2024 4-H Robotics Competition held at the McLean County Fairgrounds.

Stephenson County 4-H youth honored for leadership and project mastery achievements

Stephenson County 4-H has two youths who were recognized for their outstanding achievements in leadership and project mastery at the state level.

Alaina Dinderman achieved the Emerald Award in Project Learning with an emphasis on dairy. Jordan Heimann earned her Diamond Clover Award in Leadership. These awards are recognized at the state level for youth who have participated in activities and events at the county, state, and even national level.



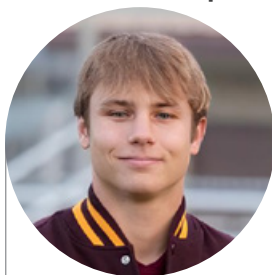
Alaina Dinderman



Jordan Heimann

Jo Daviess youth receives state scholarship

Karl Hubb, Jo Daviess County 4-H youth, was one of five recipients of the Creative Performing Arts & Communications Scholarship Award. This award recognizes youth who have focused their 4-H work on the arts and the art of communicating with others. In 2024, 45 young adults were chosen as scholarship winners of the State 4-H Award. Each winner received a \$1,000 scholarship.



Karl Hubb



4-H Youth help plant oak savannas in Stephenson and Winnebago Counties

Both Stephenson and Winnebago County were selected for the 4-H Green Communities Tree Program. The program focuses on tackling global issues at a local level. This year, 4-H youth in both counties planted 25 oak trees to create an oak savanna at both Founders Park in Winnebago County and the Butterfly Farm owned by the Jane Addamsland Park Foundation in Stephenson County. These events were done in collaboration with the Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Stephenson County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Jane Addamsland Park Foundation.



Jo Daviess youth named to State 4-H Youth Leadership Team

Kyle Hass, a Jo Daviess County 4-H member, was chosen to serve as part of the Illinois State 4-H Youth Leadership Team. The team involves 15-22 4-H members and recent alumni who coordinate, plan, and implement various statewide 4-H activities such as the Illinois 4-H Jr. Leadership Conference; assist behind the scenes with events such as Illini Summer Academies and Illinois State Fair; serve as the training team for the Speaking for Illinois 4-H program; and serving on various statewide 4-H committees and boards.



Kyle Hass

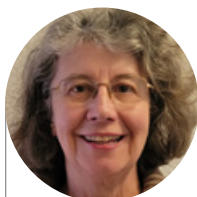




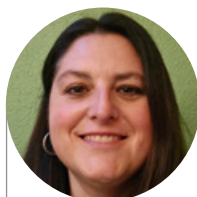
4-H and Youth Development Educator Kelly Lafferty has built a successful Wee Nats program in Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties. This program is catered to youth ages 3 to 7 and introduces nature and environmental stewardship through a monthly theme with a book, activity and a hike.

Volunteers inducted into Hall of Fame

The Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame recognizes 4-H volunteers who have a track record of exemplary service to 4-H and outstanding leadership skills. Three volunteers were honored for their dedication to the 4-H program due to their leadership and mentoring roles within each county.



Janet Swift,
Jo Daviess



Dr. Ann Johnson,
Stephenson



Cindy Anderson,
Winnebago

Clinics held to peak interest about 4-H projects

Throughout the first half of the year, several clinics were held in Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties to help promote various 4-H Projects to youth that might be interested in trying something new but don't know much about a project. This past year clinics have included: pigeon racing, poultry, sheep handling, and sheep and goat care. Superintendents, leaders, and volunteers work together to help youth learn.



Youth Leadership Conference focuses on resiliency

The Youth Leadership Conference was held in Rockford. Speakers at the event shared personal stories of resiliency with youth ages 11 to 18 years old. Topics highlighted included strategies to overcome obstacles and challenges the youth might be facing, as well as panel discussions, skill-building activities, and networking. The conference was sponsored through a memorial honoring Tom Schingoethe, who served a 40-year career as the U of I Extension Winnebago County office's county director while becoming the Associate Director of the Northwest Region.



Programming centers on character building

One of the many areas that Gina Adams, 4-H Youth Development Educator for the Rockford Metro area focuses on is outreach in school districts and community centers. This past year, Adams spent time in the Patriots Gateway Community Center teaching Character Counts, curriculum guided to help improve students' character, social-emotional, and academic skills based on themes such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.



Youth take initiative to learn leadership skills

In the fall, 4-H youth ages 12 to 18 met for the 4-H Youth Leadership Conference in Freeport. Youth learned how to be a better leader, step out of their comfort zone, made new friends, and set a goal for their leadership growth.



Educators speak at Pesticide Safety Education program

Commercial Ag Educator Kathryn Seebruck and Local Foods and Small Farms Educator Grant McCarty were presenters at the private applicator training held in Rockford. These in-person courses are held throughout the state in partnership with Illinois Department of Agriculture to provide Illinois operators and applicators the opportunity to prepare for and take their licensing exams.



Livestock Production and Principles for Beginners series continues with popular topics

The Livestock Production and Principles for Beginners Webinar Series was held in winter 2024. In its second year, this series offered a monthly webinar topic created for those who are just getting started in raising and keeping livestock, a growing need in the area. Each month (January to March), a different Extension educator conducts a one-hour virtual presentation.

For the 2024, series topics included fencing, equine pasture management, selling meat in Illinois, and parasitic management in sheep and goats. All of these were delivered by Extension educators including Jay Solomon, Sarah Farley, Doug Gucker, and Katie Bell. All webinars were recorded and uploaded to the local Extension YouTube channel. There were 61 unique registrations in 2024, with only eight of these attended in the 2023 series. Program registrations came from 29 Illinois counties. Feedback has been positive for this series, reaching audiences in the local area that have a need for introductory topics.



Legal training for small farms empower farmers with business law knowledge

Local Foods and Small Farms Educator Grant McCarty has partnered with Farm Commons, a national nonprofit organization, to offer four webinars based on relevant business law issues for farmers. These webinars were scheduled from October 2024 through June 2025. Topics include business structure basics, forming an LLC, land leasing basics, and farm property insurance.



Organizing a large event like the Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Conference takes a lot of time and energy. Local Foods and Small Farms Educator Grant McCarty organizes this multi-state event. This year, five additional northern Illinois Extension Agriculture educators attended, presented and moderated including Kacie Athy, Extension Entomologist (far right).

Growers conference continues to grow in popularity across the Midwest

The Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference was held in Rockford. Each year, this conference provides educational sessions for commercial growers that sell directly to consumers via orchards, pumpkin patches, farmers market stands, CSA, restaurants, and others. With tracks for 'fruits' and 'vegetables', University of Illinois Extension Educators and Specialists provide timely updates on insect and disease management, relevant research, marketing, and general production. New for 2024 was a 'Beginning Farmer' track that allowed for topics like getting started with pumpkins, blueberries, livestock, and business planning. This year was also the first time that Educators from Michigan State Extension and University of Minnesota Extension were included in the program. With a contribution from University of Wisconsin-Madison, this meant that the program had speakers from 4 different Midwestern universities. Nearly 120 growers attended this day-long program, which will continue in 2025.





Biweekly podcast created to inform row crop producers

Crop Sciences Educator Kathryn Seebruck has recorded 'Talking Crop,' a seasonal row crop production podcast created to provide farmers and agribusiness representatives with topical information and actionable management considerations. During the biweekly podcasts released from May through September, Seebruck discusses current trends and research updates with crop production guest experts.



For info about the Talking Crop podcast, visit go.illinois.edu/TalkingCrop



Driftless Region Beef Conference provides research-based information to beef producers

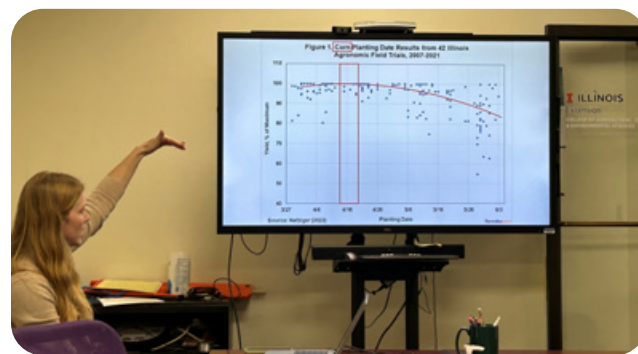
This two-day event held in Dubuque, Iowa, for beef producers focused on production needs and timely topics. Participants had the opportunity to attend several workshops, visit sponsor displays, and meet other beef producers from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Local staff, along with U of I Extension Beef Specialist Travis Meteer, play an important role in helping plan this regional event.

Row crop producers meet for annual Agronomy Summit

The speaker line-up for the Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit in Freeport offered something for everyone, from soil health to herbicide resistance. This event offered timely recommendations for row crop producers as well as unbiased, research-based information.



Giovanni Preza Fontes, U of I Extension field crops agronomist, spoke about practical nitrogen management for corn.



Farm Forward series brings row crop issues to light

Crop Sciences Educator Kathryn Seebruck created a new three-part series, "Farm Forward: Turning Last Season's Challenges Into Next Season's Triumphs." This series aimed to address the needs of row crop producers based on the 2023 growing season, which was relatively dry, resulting in low disease pressure and high weed pressure.

No two growing seasons are the same; however, lessons learned from previous seasons can be applied in those that follow. This series aims to facilitate discussion of last season's challenges, uncertainties, and successes and how those insights can be applied in the upcoming growing season.

Kathryn Seebruck, crop sciences educator



Dairy producers gather for Dairy Summit

Dairy Farmers gathered in Freeport for the Illinois Dairy Summit. This year, the event focused on innovative ways to tackle the forecasted increase in production expenses and the drop in farm income — a concerning outlook.

Speakers for the event included University of Illinois Associate Professor of Animal Sciences Phil Cardoso and University of Illinois Dairy Extension Specialist Derek Nolan. Commercial Agriculture Educator Kathryn Seebruck and Program Coordinator Nikki Keltner were available to help with assistance in local agriculture programming.



Demonstrations with drones and cover crop robots were part of Spring Producer Workshop

Extension partnered with the Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District for the annual Spring Producer Workshop. Extension speakers included Faculty Entomologist Nick Seiter, who presented on pest management and conservation practices, and Digital Ag Specialist Dennis Bowman, who presented on drone use in agriculture. He also provided demonstrations using his drones and cover crop robot. Participants also enjoyed presentations on soil testing and alternative crops.



Tri-State Forest Stewardship Conference brings forestry enthusiasts together

Designed specifically for forestry landowners, professionals and consultants in the Midwest, this conference in Freeport drew over 250 attendees from the tri-state area. Local staff played a large role in organizing and hosting the event, which was co-sponsored by University of Illinois Extension, Iowa State University Extension, and University of Wisconsin Extension. The day-long conference included keynote speakers as well as several sessions on forest management and conservation.



Certified Livestock Management trainings held throughout state

Stanley “Jay” Solomon, Extension natural resources, environment, and energy educator, along with the CLM team, hosted seven in-person workshops throughout the state in early 2024. Between the in-person events and online training, 260 people attended to become certified. This program, which has been in existence since 1996, is financially supported by the Illinois Department of Agriculture.



Forestry Specialist presents two programs

University of Illinois Extension Forestry Specialist Chris Evans presented two forest programs. The first event was a hike and presentation on Trees and Shrubs for Wildlife at the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. The presentation focused on forest management, habitat improvement, and increased wildlife utilization.

Evans also presented a Forest Management Plan Workshop in Jo Daviess County. He talked with forest managers and land owners about setting goals for their forests and the details of a written forest management plan. The session was well-attended, and plans for future workshops are in the works.



New series focuses on pasture management

Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy Educator Jay Solomon created a new series, “Pasture Management: Recovering from 2023,” which featured sessions focusing on recovering from the drought and short forage supply during the 2023 growing season. The sessions covered management practices to make the most of existing resources, consideration of overlooked resources, and ways to build forage resources.



Climate tools workshop offers ag professionals information about the changing climate

The Climate Tools Workshop for Agriculture Professionals featured speakers from Illinois Extension, USDA Midwest Climate Hub, Midwest Regional Climate Center, Illinois State Climate Survey, and the Illinois State Climatologist. After several presentations, participants then worked through several interactive scenarios under the guidance of our experts with many productive discussions.



University of Illinois Extension Local Foods and Small Farms Educator Grant McCarty presented Brambles: From Raspberries to Blackberries to a full house in the Jo Daviess County Extension Office this past spring.



Horticulture programming blooms year-round

There are several well-attended and highly anticipated programs offered yearly throughout Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties that are directed toward horticulture enthusiasts. These include Joys of Gardening, Gardening for Food, Flowers & Fun, Hort for the Holidays, and the Spring Break Series. Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, local Extension Educators and Program Coordinators also offer several educational programs throughout the year. Topics vary from landscape design to pollinators, native shrubs to brambles, herbs to pumpkins, flower arranging to flower drying, and so much more. Participants even enjoyed learning about seed starting, frogs, lilac tree trimming, and how to grow great apples. While most of the programming was lecture style, some opportunities were available for hands-on experiences, and these were a hit with the participants, especially events with the option to take a newly made item home.



Popularity of the Periodical Cicada emergence leads to programming for all ages

2024 was a big year for periodical cicadas in Illinois. Broods XIII and XIX emerged at the same time. The simultaneous emergence was the first time since 1803 and will not happen again until 2245. The popularity of the emergence led to programming about cicadas throughout the area, starting with the Nicholas Conservatory, where retired Extension Educator Russ Higgins shared his knowledge about the insect.

Jay Solomon, natural resources, environment, and energy educator, hosted a presentation on cicadas in Warren. Once again, it was a packed house as participants came to learn more about the local emergence.

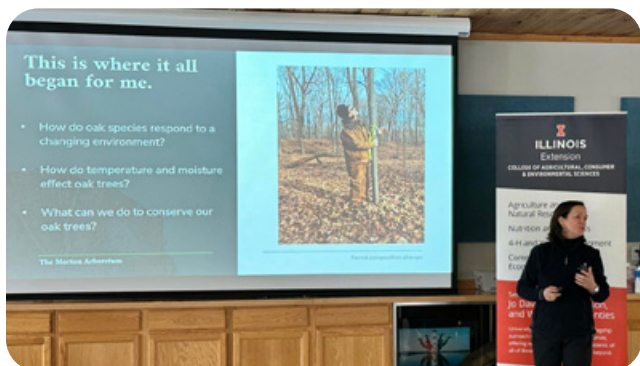
Winnebago County 4-H and Youth Development Program Coordinator Becky Gocken held a program at the Juvenile Detention Center in Winnebago County on the life cycle of the cicada. Gocken put together some activities and videos for youth to learn more about the cicadas.



Program explores ticks in Illinois

Extension Specialist Teresa Steckler presented on the different tick species in Illinois. She discussed where they are located throughout the state and tick-borne diseases of humans, livestock, and pets consequence. She ended the informational presentation with ways to protect yourself and pets from ticks.





Master Naturalist's annual program, Winter Trails, proves to continue to be popular

The annual Winter Trails and Naturalist Tales event was held in rural Pecatonica. Master Naturalist and wildlife photographer Connie McIntosh presented "Common Myths in Nature," and Tricia Bethke of Morton Arboretum addressed the stresses of oak trees due to climate events. After the presentations, attendees had the opportunity to go hiking and bird watching at Torstenson's Education Center in Pecatonica.



Master Gardeners stay active in communities

With a mission to help others learn to grow, Master Gardeners in Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties have been actively committed to their communities growing community gardens, running the Master Gardener Helpline, volunteering at local events, as well as sharing their love for all things related to gardening through presentations and workshops.



Popularity of flower arranging class in Winnebago led to more programming in Fall

Master Gardeners in Winnebago County led a flower arranging class in March. Every participant took home a beautiful flower arrangement created with skills learned from the class. The class went over so well that more hands-on floral arranging programming happened in Stephenson and Winnebago counties.



Master Gardeners tour gardens

The Master Gardeners from Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties toured the community gardens at Wesley Willows Senior Living in Rockford, Valley Orchard in Cherry Valley, the Dubuque Arboretum and Botanical Gardens in Dubuque and Hidden Timber Gardens in Chana this past year. These tours are a great opportunity for Master Gardeners to connect and learn about various horticultural techniques. One example is learning how to incorporate trees, shrubs, and perennials into the landscape.





University of Illinois Extension Natural Resources, Environment and Energy Educator Stanley "Jay" Solomon was recognized with the Forestry Pioneer Award from the Northwest Illinois Forestry Association in March, 2024.



Lafferty receives award for Wee Nats program's approach to nature education

The Wee Nats program, implemented by Kelly Lafferty, University of Illinois Extension 4-H youth development educator, offers an engaging and enriching introduction to nature and environmental stewardship for children ages 4 to 7. The program has received recognition for its impactful approach to youth development. Lafferty was recently awarded the "Excellence in Natural Resources/Environmental Education" award from the Illinois Extension Professionals for Youth Education for her work with Wee Nats.



Kelly Lafferty

The goal of Wee Nats is to help children foster an understanding of their role as environmental stewards. Each month features a new environmental theme and begins with a children's book related to that theme. After reading, the children participate in a STEM-related activity before heading outside to explore in a way that ties back to the day's lesson.

Since its launch in 2022 in Freeport, the program has expanded to Pecatonica and East Dubuque. Through Wee Nats, Lafferty aims to foster a lifelong appreciation for the environment and provide children with the tools to become thoughtful, caring stewards of their natural surroundings.

Solomon earns award for dedication to forestry



The Northwest Illinois Forestry Association (NIFA) presented the Forestry Pioneer Award to Stanley "Jay" Solomon, University of Illinois Extension Natural Resources, Environment and Energy Educator in March 2024. This award recognizes individuals who have been leaders in maintaining the health, growth, and diversity of forests in Northwest Illinois.

NIFA is a non-profit group created to spread awareness, gain interest, and educate about forestry to landowners and the public through meetings, field days and educational sessions. This includes the economic and environmental benefits of sustainable forest management. Situated in the northwest corner of Illinois, NIFA includes Jo Daviess, Stephenson, Carroll, Ogle, Whiteside and Lee counties.

Solomon's educational programming offered through the University of Illinois Extension has played an important role in increasing the awareness of forest topics through collaborations with NIFA and other entities in northwest Illinois. He's presented workshops and field days on topics such as invasive species management, wildlife habitat improvement, and reintroduction of controlled burning strategies help to promote forest health and management.

Reinhold recognized with state and national awards for excellence in nutrition and wellness education



Diane Reinhold, nutrition and wellness educator with the University of Illinois Extension, has recently been honored with multiple awards, both at the state and national levels, recognizing her contributions to nutrition and wellness education. With 11 years of service to Extension serving Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties, Reinhold has proven herself as a respected leader in nutrition education.



Diane Reinhold

At the 2024 Illinois Extension Association for Family and Consumer Sciences State Awards, Reinhold's efforts were celebrated with two first-place awards and a second-place award for three different programs. These selected programs were recognized again at the 2024 National Extension Association for Family and Consumer Sciences National Awards, where she placed first in the central region with her "I MADE That!" publication series; second in the central region for her Food Allergies in Schools program; and third-place nationally, for the Florence Hall Award for the Community Seminar Series.



Winnebago County 4-H Foundation celebrates 50 years

On June 12, 2024, the Winnebago County 4-H and Extension Foundation celebrated their 50th anniversary. That is 50 years of partnership providing financial support for Winnebago County 4-H and other University of Illinois Extension programs.

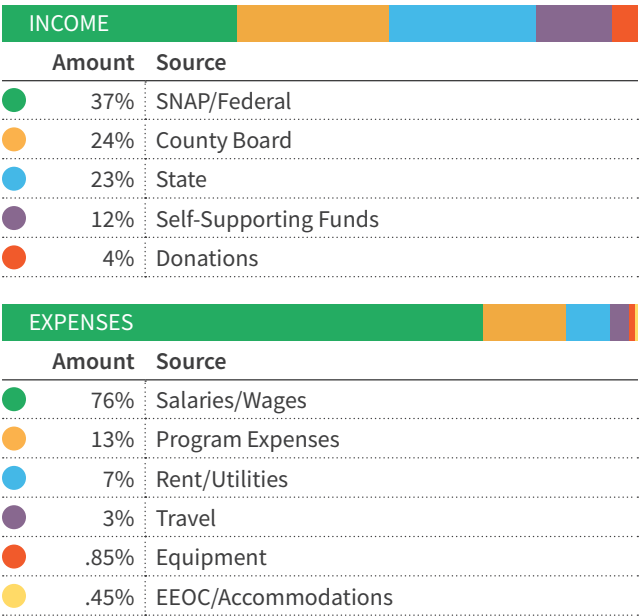
Dedicated community leaders founded the Foundation to meet the needs of the 4-H Program in Winnebago County. The Foundation, whose Board has consistently been comprised throughout the years of 4-H club leaders and 4-H alums, raises, secures, and manages funds, diligently meets its fiduciary duties, and dedicates countless volunteer hours to serve the local community within Winnebago County.

4-H in Winnebago County grows today’s youth and prepares tomorrow’s leaders. For over 100 years, youth have completed hands-on projects in agriculture, health, science, and civic engagement in a positive environment and have been encouraged to take on proactive leadership roles. The values of head, heart, hands, and health are the four “H”s in 4-H.

Finances

We are fortunate to have financial support from five local entities with whom we partner: The Boone-Winnebago Farm Bureau, the Jo Daviess County Extension and 4-H Foundation, the Stephenson County 4-H and Extension Foundation, the Winnebago County 4-H Show Board, and the Winnebago County 4-H and Extension Foundation.

The Show Board and the Foundations are led by volunteers with a commitment to supporting 4-H and Extension activities, and although their role on the boards is focused on fundraising in support of us, they are most often tireless champions of the work of Extension and 4-H in our communities, and many hold additional volunteer roles.



Extension Council

The Extension Council is an advisory group that meets four times a year and provides information and feedback to the Extension Director. Council members are from each county and are invited to serve on multi-year terms. The composition of the Extension Council closely reflects the counties they represent. Our council members may be our biggest champions but, more importantly, serve as representatives of their communities and advocates for Extension success.

Jo Daviess County

Ray Massingill	Robert Heuermann	Amy Hardwicke
Garnet Fee	Cody Koester	Drew Groezinger

Stephenson County

Deborah Lischwe	Sheila Keene	Chris Urish
Ethan Trampel	Tom Scheider	Kevyn-Ann Sutter

Winnebago County

Christopher Scrol	Lori Walsh	Constance
Aaron Booker	Ann Somers	McCarthy
Dan Obert	Sue Gallant	
Jim Webster	Mia Chase	

Staff Directory

Margaret Larson, County Extension Director	Alex Burbach, Program Coordinator, Jo Daviess County
Gina Adams, Educator, 4-H Youth Development	Nikki Keltner, Program Coordinator, Stephenson County
Kelly Lafferty, Educator, 4-H Youth Development	Jen Schultz, Program Coordinator, Unit
Grant McCarty, Educator, Local Foods & Small Farms	Barbara Curry, Community Worker, SNAP-ED, Freeport
Diane Reinhold, Educator, Nutrition & Wellness	Erin Garner, Community Worker, SNAP-ED, Rockford
Kathryn Seebruck, Educator, Crop Sciences	Marcia McMahon, Community Worker, SNAP-ED, Rockford
Stanley (Jay) Solomon, Educator, Natural Resources, Environment & Energy	Maria Perez, Community Worker, SNAP-ED, Rockford
Rebecca Gocken, Program Coordinator, 4-H Winnebago County	Deb Koch, Office Manager, Unit
Brenda Heimann, Program Coordinator, 4-H Stephenson County	Tammy Bené, Office Support Associate, Winnebago County
Angela Miller, Program Coordinator, 4-H Jo Daviess County	Julie Miller, Office Support Assistant, Stephenson County
	Holly Breuer, Office Support Assistant, Jo Daviess County



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SNAP-ED

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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).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.