

University of Illinois Extension Council Minutes

Unit 24 – September 11, 2025 – 5:30pm Saline County Extension
Office

Welcome

The Unit 24 Extension Council meeting on September 11, 2025, was the annual dinner. New members were given an information packet.

Council Members Present

Norman Hill Jr., Jamie Byrd, Connie Gibbs, Debbie McVey, Macey Mackenzie, Dean West, Zoe Zieren, Audera Willis, Sue Harvey, Chris Pyle, Robin Pyle, and Rachel Lands (on Zoom).

Staff Present

Angie Messmer, Bronwyn Aly, Lindsay Adams, and Sheila Stamer.

Extension Council Training

Angie Messmer spoke about the Extension Council Training. She also told those present about the University of Illinois Extension. She said that the University of Illinois is part of the Cooperative Extension that links science and technology to people's daily needs and that the services can only be administered by a land grant university and that Extension is the only organization that can administer the 4-H program. There are twenty-seven different Extension Units in Illinois, and our council is in Unit 24. The Dixon Springs Agricultural Center is also part of Unit 24, so their programs are reported at the Extension Council meetings as well. The funding for Extension comes in different forms such as from local tax assessments, county board support, University funding, and funding from other private sources such as foundations. Different people from each of the counties from different professions are included in the Extension Council to gain different viewpoints on the needs in each of the counties and to get more diverse information to incorporate into program decisions. Extension also partners with other outside organizations, helps other programs write grants, and supports other organizations. The Extension Council meets four times per year, and emails are sent out between meetings to communicate details and information



for the next meeting. Attendance is especially important for Extension Council meetings because a quorum is required to vote on the budget and approve reports.

Approval of Minutes from June 5, 2025

The minutes from the June 5, 2025, meeting was reviewed by those present. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Jamie Byrd and seconded by Audera Willis. The motion carried.

Fiscal Reports – Trust Account – 4th Quarter

The Fiscal Report was provided to those present. Sheila Stamer provided the report. It was noted that the income received from the Gallatin County Board was two cents. There will no longer be any money received from Gallatin County in the future. A motion to approve the Fiscal Reports was made by Dean West and seconded by Jamie Byrd. The motion carried.

Election of Officers

The council members elected as officers for the new council year are as follows: Chair – Norman Hill Jr.; Vice Chair – Debbie McVey; Secretary – Rachel Lands; Financial Representative – Audera Willis. It was noted that the Financial Representative position is not very time-consuming, but that they do help Sheila Stamer with the budget and serve on the In/Out Audit Committee because Hamilton, Saline, and White Counties all have checking accounts that must be audited. A motion to approve the appointment of these officers was made by Jamie Byrd and seconded by Joe Zieren. The motion carried.

Updates from the County Director

- **SNAP Ed Funding:** SNAP Ed was separately funded for at least 30 years and was part of Extension – and not tied to SNAP benefits. SNAP Ed provided supplemental education to schools, summer classes, health departments, coalitions, and senior citizens and other partners in the communities served. Federal funding for SNAP Ed was cut with federal bills that were passed. SNAP Ed staff will remain employed until February 2026. Extension is trying to figure out how they can continue programming in the nutrition area.
- **Sol Systems:** There is a large solar field outside of Eldorado. Sol Systems will give back to the community. On September 25, 2025, there will be a ribbon cutting at the new solar field and a shuttle will transport those in attendance from the Star church parking lot to the site. Sol Systems have provided \$65,000 to Extension in Saline County. This money will pay for the enrollment of 4-H'ers in Saline County (which is \$20 per person) and for the purchase of four virtual welders that cost \$4,000 each. There will be a SPIN club in partnership with Southeastern Illinois College where younger children can learn how to weld at the Carmi and Saline County locations.

The Sol Systems funding is only for Saline County. Bronwyn Aly and Lizz Cooley-Questelle are starting an interdisciplinary program with fourth graders at East Side Elementary School in Harrisburg and third graders at Eldorado Elementary School. Each class will receive a hydroponic tower with curriculum and lesson plans on how to incorporate the towers into each class. Bronwyn and Lizz are supposed to meet with teachers in the next couple of weeks to discuss the new project and curriculum. They are looking to start the tower after Christmas break, but the curriculum will be implemented into the classroom in November 2025.

- **The Issue at the White County Floral Hall:** This summer there was an issue at the Floral Hall at the White County Fair. Angie Messmer said she may reach out to find another place to host the 4-H shows since White County has the biggest 4-H General Show in the unit.
- **The New Extension Director:** The new Director of Extension is Dr. Matthew Vann. He has conducted agricultural and tobacco research. He wants to visit all the Extension Offices in Illinois, and he would like to visit the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center first to meet the staff, Extension Council, and community stakeholders. Dr. Vann is concerned about Gallatin County's lack of funding for Extension and would like to talk to Angie Messmer about this issue. He is also concerned about DSAC and its funding. He would like to restore it to how it should be and get federal funding for the new Event Center. Angie said that she would send out an invitation when she found out the day on which Dr. Vann was coming to DSAC.
- **The New Event Center at DSAC:** Angie Messmer is meeting with individuals about the construction of the new Event Center at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center. She is pursuing this project and collaborating with engineers and architects. They are supposed to break ground for the new facility next summer. The fencing for the cattle will be moved starting this fall. Forty acres between the high tunnels and the old fire house to the south before Airport Road have been allotted for the facility. The University of Illinois owns five hundred acres of land in Pope County and the other 4,100 are leased from the Shawnee National Forest. The new facility will consist of an arena for livestock and horse shows, classrooms, a commercial kitchen, new greenhouses, and an event space. Norman Hill Jr. said that Angie may want to visit the Paducah Expo Center to see how they have their rooms tracked off and divided.
- **Hat Orders:** Angie Messmer discussed ordering hats or shirts for the Extension Council. Sheila will send out an email to ask for members' preference/size.

Civil Rights Discussion

Angie Messmer said that certain trainings will have to be completed to follow the Civil Rights policies and that certain information had to be put on flyers. Extension must also track demographic data from programs.

Needs Assessment

Angie Messmer thanked Bronwyn Aly for putting the letter together in the packet that was passed out to each council member that contained an example of a Needs Assessment. The second sheet was the strategic plan priorities for Extension including community, the environment, health, agriculture, the economy, and technological discovery. The next sheet contained general questions that everyone can answer. The last page discussed the economy and technological discoveries and can be filled out on the website. Extension plans to take the information gained from the Needs Assessments, where they sit down to have 1-on-1 conversations with other community members and develop a plan of work for programs in the counties in Unit 24. A 3-year plan of work will be established, and the plan will be revisited every year. Angie Messmer, Bronwyn Aly, and other Extension staff put together the questions on the Needs Assessment. The survey asks individuals for their name and county to keep track of who has taken it. The questions are created based upon Extension's 6 priority areas. The survey was posted in August of 2025 through the Qualtrix platform, and it can be completed over the phone or in a round table discussion. The Extension Council discussed each of the six questions from the survey as a group while the Zoom call transcribed the discussion. The first question was about the lack of participation in Extension programs and the council members commented on what they thought were some possible causes of this. The second question asked about the council members' familiarity with Extension and how they keep up with the programs that are going on. Some platforms that council members commented on were Facebook, the newspapers, mail, and radio, but each of these came with their own flaws. Internet access in rural areas is a major issue as well as the unreliability of the mail. Passing out fliers were also mentioned, and the discussion shifted back to the lack of participation. The third question asked members about the challenges that they see in their jobs. Most of the challenges were related to technology and the younger workforce. The fourth question asked about barriers that exist in the council members' respective communities. The main barrier mentioned was food insecurity. The discussion of the fifth question centered around the homeless, people in nursing homes, and food insecurity and the sixth question was already answered throughout the other discussions. Angie Messmer thanked the council members for their opinions. She said that the names of those who participate in the Needs Assessment will

not be included in the reports but will be recorded to keep track of who they have reached. It was stated that it is not about the questions, but the quality of information received.

New Members

New members to the Unit 24 Extension Council were Randy Drone from Gallatin County, Macey McKenzie from White County, and Robin Pyle from Gallatin County. Extension is not providing programming to Gallatin County because we are not receiving funding from them, but we will still send distribute information, and allow individuals from Gallatin County to come to other county programs. The Extension Council is keeping members from Gallatin County on the council because we still want the input from Gallatin County, and they will also still be included in the Needs Assessment.

In/Out Account Audit Committees

Those on the Hamilton County committee are Cindy Anselment, Rhonda Millenbine, Nolene Rubenacker, and Sheila Stamer. Those on the Saline County committee are Dean West, Justin Roberts, Kathy Oglesby, and Debbie McVey. Those on the White County committee are Jennifer Carter-James, Lisa Wolff, Larissa Hays, Kathy Oglesby, and Sheila Stamer. A motion was made to accept these members onto the In/Out Account Audit Committees by Audera Willis and seconded by Robin Pyle. The motion carried.

In/Out Accounts for Saline/Hamilton/White – Check Signatories

The following people were approved by the council to be check signatories for their counties. Those for Hamilton County were Angie Messmer, Lindsay Adams, Elaine Miller, and Audera Willis. Those for Saline County were Angie Messmer, Bronwyn Aly, Elizabeth Cooley-Questelle, and Debora McVey. Those for White County were Angie Messmer, Bronwyn Aly, Holly Heath, and Elizabeth Cooley-Questelle. A motion was made to accept these individuals as check signatories was made by Joe Zieren and seconded by Dean West. The motion carried.

Future Meetings for 2025-2026

After some discussion, it was decided that the Extension Council Meetings for the 2025-2026 year would be held on every fourth Thursday at 5:30pm in January, April, and May of 2026. The next meeting of the University of Illinois Unit 24 Extension Council will be on January 22, 2025, at 5:30pm at the Saline County Extension Office.

Comments & Discussion

There were no comments or discussion.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Minutes taken and submitted by Rachel Lands.