

**Illinois Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Sparking Curiosity and Growing Future Leaders Through 4-H Classroom Outreach

Starting the New 4-H Year

Across Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties, Illinois Extension 4-H staff are expanding youth engagement through intentional outreach and growing community partnerships. Each year, coordinators visit 3rd and 4th grade classrooms to introduce students to 4-H, answer questions, and lead hands-on activities. High School 4-H Federation and Teen Leaders join with staff to share how 4-H has shaped their confidence, leadership, and future goals—helping younger students see what is possible within the program.

These classroom visits are among the strongest interactions for new youth to connect with 4-H and directly increase participation in each county's Open House. At these Open Houses, Teen Leaders and volunteers lead interactive STEM, arts, and service-learning stations which encourage youth and their families to explore project areas, meet local volunteers and staff and discover new interests that align with 4-H's diverse opportunities.

Community partnerships are a growing and essential part of this work. 4-H continues to collaborate with schools, libraries, local businesses, and civic organizations to host events, lead workshops, and create spaces where youth can discover their sparks, connect with other youth and learn important life skills. These partnerships help build a stronger, more connected network of support for young people while expanding volunteer engagement and strengthening Extension's role within the community.

By combining school outreach, youth leadership, and strong community partnerships, Illinois 4-H is helping youth across Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties thrive and feel connected to a supportive community that grows with them.

738
Youth Reached

Dear Community,

At Illinois Extension, our mission is simple yet powerful: to bring research-based knowledge from the University of Illinois campus into the communities we serve. Every program, every partnership, and every initiative is rooted in this commitment—helping residents of Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington Counties access trusted information that makes a real difference.

One of our most recognized programs, 4-H Youth Development, is the largest youth organization outside of schools nationwide. Through 4-H, we empower young people ages 5–18 to discover their spark through hands-on learning, leadership opportunities, and real-world experiences. These programs are volunteer-led and community-based, taking place where youth already live and gather—allowing them to see the immediate impact of their efforts. If you'd like to learn more or get involved, please reach out to your local 4-H Program Coordinator listed in this report.

Beyond youth development, Illinois Extension provides education and training in Agriculture, Conservation, and Financial Wellness. This fall, our Agriculture and Natural Resources team led an initiative that truly reflects the essence of Extension—connecting research, innovation, and community partnerships to create lasting impact. Through the “Cover Crops for a Cause” project, we partnered with United Way of South Central Illinois, Jefferson County Farm Bureau, and Zimmermann Farms to address two critical challenges: sustainable agriculture and food insecurity. What made this initiative especially exciting was the integration of cutting-edge drone technology with time-tested seeding practices—demonstrating how innovation and tradition can work hand-in-hand to support productivity and sustainability.

As you explore this report, you'll see Illinois Extension in action—hands in the soil, minds on the future, and hearts in our community. To learn more about our programs and resources, visit extension.illinois.edu/bcjmw.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Jordie Koehler



County
Extension Director
JORDEE KOEHLER

Local Programming With a Larger Reach

Web-Based Services Extend Reach

Illinois Extension continues to develop more accessible digital and web-based content, such as videos, social media, and blog posts, allowing community members to access trusted research-based information anytime and anywhere.

People Reached By Finding Financial Balance Blog Posts

4,623 website views

People Reached By Online Video Library

80,354 views
569.5 hours watched

Hort for the Holidays

Horticulture Skills Help Build Confidence and Community

Illinois Extension believes in providing hands-on educational experiences for community members. This year's “Hort for the Holidays” workshops in Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington Counties brought a fun and educational experience together. Participants learned the techniques and science behind the bonsai technique of Kokedama and drying flowers for use on an ornament. These workshops provide skills that participants can share with others and demonstrate how horticulture has a positive impact on both mental and environmental well-being.

Illinois Extension Impacting Bond County

Volunteers and Youth Create Together

Illinois Extension Volunteers Mentor 4-H

Bond County Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers worked alongside Dreamcatchers 4-H Club youth to explore the art and science of floral design. After 4-H leader Amanda Doll reached out for a hands-on learning opportunity, volunteers stepped in to mentor youth through creating a Christmas flower arrangement. Volunteers explained key design principles, demonstrated each step, and guided youth as they built their own arrangements with natural elements to share with their families. This collaboration helped youth gain confidence, creativity, and knowledge of floriculture. By sharing their expertise, volunteers helped spark new interests and empowered youth with knowledge they can demonstrate at the Bond County 4-H summer general projects show.

Youth Tackling Food Insecurity

Utilizing Resources to Give Back to the Community

4-H is making a difference, and our Teen Leaders are taking charge! Seeing the needs of the community, Teen Leader volunteer Amanda Doll with assistance from Illinois Extension Marketing Coordinator Elaine Craver, applied for the 4-H Food Advocacy Grant. Receiving the \$1,000 grant, teen leaders took the initiative to purchase food and make meal and snack kits that were delivered to local little free food pantries across Bond County. This program will continue throughout January.



Welcome Bond County's New 4-H Coordinator

Introducing Kayla Powers

Illinois Extension is excited to welcome Kayla Powers as the new 4-H Program Coordinator for Bond County! Kayla is originally from Alhambra, IL. She brings a background in agriculture and environmental science, holding a Bachelor of Science from Eureka College and a Master's degree in Geographic Information Systems from Eastern Illinois University.

Kayla's Illinois Extension experience includes serving as the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Coordinator for Livingston, McLean and Woodford Counties, where she worked with Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners, and led programs such as Annie's Project. Her journey with Extension began as a youth in the 4-H Alhambra Morning Glories club, and she is passionate about giving back to the organization that helped shape her.

Kayla looks forward to connecting with families, volunteers, and community partners to support youth development and strengthen local engagement through 4-H.



Illinois Extension Impacting Clinton County

Lego Robotics at Aviston and All-Saints

Programming and Problem Solving Through Lego



4-H is dedicated to partnerships with local schools. Aviston Grade School is entering year three and All Saints Academy is entering year two of their after-school LEGO Robotics club. 4-H staff are bringing their professional training in SPIKE Lego programming to the children and volunteers to prioritize teaching our youth important STEM skills. By partnering together, Illinois Extension and community schools are providing opportunities for students to learn STEM skills such as programming and engineering as well as life skills such as teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving.

4-H Workshops Teaching Heirloom Skills

Teaching Skills That Build Community

4-H Coordinator Allison Crocker worked with community partners and experts to give youth the opportunity to learn heirloom skills such as sewing, designing and painting barn quilts. These workshops connect youth with community members and with community traditions. Youth are able to learn more about sewing and painting and meet other community youth with the same passions. Youth are eligible to show the skills and knowledge they gained from the workshops by entering them into the summer 4-H general projects show.



Native Corridors

Creating Urban Food Forests to Restore Native Food Sovereignty

Illinois Extension and the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District empowered Clinton County residents to restore food production sovereignty by growing native fruit and nut trees in their own backyards. Staff educated participants about how to establish a local food source for future generations and gave away trees and shrubs to help community members get started with native resources.

Partnering with Farm Bureau

Professional Development to Better Serve

Illinois Extension strengthened its partnership with the Illinois Farm Bureau this year as Extension Educator Chris Lueking delivered professional development for Ag in the Classroom coordinators and Farm Bureau office support staff. This partnership allows Extension's trusted research-based subject-matter help Farm Bureau better serve local communities. Together, both organizations are building stronger, more informed agricultural programming across the region.

A Little About our Clinton County 4-H Coordinator

Allison Crocker (formerly Diekemper) is a lifelong resident of Clinton County, bringing a passion and dedication to serving the community and making lasting partnerships. She began in March 2025 and has been busy working with local schools and partners to identify and implement relevant and impactful programming. She brings familiarity with the culture and communities in Clinton County, with a deep respect for what is important to its residents. She also possesses a deep knowledge of agriculture and animal science, gained from her experiences on her family's farm. Allison looks forward to connecting with families, volunteers, and community partners to support youth development and strengthen local engagement through 4-H.



Illinois Extension Impacting Jefferson County

Meeting with the Midwest Herb Club

Supporting Monarch Butterflies

Illinois Extension looks for opportunities to partner with community groups to provide educational services. Chris Lueking partnered with the Midwest Herb Club to train and educate members on supporting local pollinators, including Monarch butterflies. Connecting community members with research-based information she demonstrated how the decline of Monarch numbers shows a pattern of overall declining pollinator health. She demonstrated and explained how the restoration of native plant beds in home gardens and landscaping has a positive benefit on local ecosystems because these patches provide food and shelter for pollinators as they migrate throughout the year.

Providing Education for the Food Pantry

Illinois Extension and SSM Health Partnering to Address Food Insecurity

This fall, University of Illinois Extension partnered with SSM Health Good Samaritan to strengthen community capacity to address food insecurity by providing practical, research-based educational tools to SSM Bread Basket food box recipients.

Extension Educator Jamie Mahlandt developed a Grocery Planner resource to help households take control of their food spending. The planner provides a practical resource to equip community members with tools to help evaluate their grocery habits, set realistic spending goals, and plan meals and shopping trips that support their budget and nutritional needs. By providing this resource, Illinois Extension is expanding community capacity to empower individuals and families to reduce waste, stretch limited resources, and build long-term habits that improve financial stability and overall well-being.

Welcome Jefferson County's New 4-H Coordinator

Introducing Kristen Buttrum



Illinois Extension is excited to welcome Kristen Buttrum as the new 4-H Program Coordinator for Jefferson County! She is a lifelong resident of Jefferson County and is passionate and dedicated to ensuring that local youth thrive. She has 12 years of experience working with Illinois Extension as a SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Worker, collaborating with local schools and organizations to provide youth programming to our community school children. She has also partnered with 4-H numerous times and knows firsthand the impact 4-H has on the lives of Jefferson County youth.

She is ready to work with community partners to empower the youth of Jefferson County through meaningful educational experiences that make a lasting difference in their lives and their communities. Kristen is looking forward to connecting with families and volunteers this next year to support youth development and strengthen local engagement through 4-H.

Illinois Extension Impacting Marion County

Scraps to Soil

Composting Helps Families Cut Costs While Supporting Healthy Soil

Illinois Extension Educator Ken Johnson led the Back to Basics Composting Workshop, giving participants an introduction to home composting. Johnson walked attendees through what materials—such as kitchen scraps, yard waste, and even certain insects—can safely be composted, as well as how to properly monitor, turn, and maintain an active compost pile. Participants learned how composting is both economically beneficial, allowing households to turn everyday waste into a valuable soil amendment, and ecologically important, reducing the amount of compostable material sent to landfills. Through this workshop, participants left with not only the skills to start composting at home but also an appreciation for how a simple daily practice can contribute to a healthier environment and more cost-effective gardening.

Teddy Bear Toss

4-H Youth Helping the Community Celebrate the Holidays

Marion County 4-H demonstrated leadership and community spirit by organizing a Teddy Bear Toss during a Salem High School basketball game. Illinois Extension 4-H Coordinator Courtney Beal and 4-H Federation youth invited fans to donate teddy bears and stuffed animals by tossing them onto the court at halftime. The community responded with overwhelming generosity, donating 354 stuffed animals. After the event, 4-H Federation members collected, sorted, and delivered the donations to five local organizations supporting families during the Christmas season. This youth-led project not only brought joy to children across Marion County but also gave 4-H members valuable experience in event planning and service leadership. Special thanks go to Salem High School, the Wildcats, WJBD Radio, Bettendorf-Standford, R&S Livestock, Borcherding Farms, and Wesley and Rene Gozia for helping make the event a success.

Welcome Marion County's New 4-H Coordinator

Introducing Courtney Beal



Illinois Extension is excited to welcome Courtney Beal as the new Marion County 4-H Program Coordinator! She is a 4-H alumna with a strong passion for both livestock and community engagement. She understands the impact 4-H can have on Marion County youth and is ready to work with youth and volunteers to strengthen the 4-H program. She has several years of experience with Illinois Extension and was a SNAP-Ed Community Outreach worker partnering with local schools and organizations to provide youth programming to our community school children. She is ready to work with community partners to empower the youth of Marion County to develop leadership and community involvement. Courtney is looking forward to connecting with families and volunteers this next year to support youth development and strengthen local engagement through 4-H.

Illinois Extension Impacting Washington County

Animal Science and Agronomy Day

Helping Youth Dig Deeper into Agriculture

4-H Coordinator Amanda Fox-Clark partnered with agricultural experts—including specialists from Gateway FS, The Maschhoffs, Fred's Meat & Processing, and Kaskaskia College—to deliver an immersive agricultural learning experience for Washington County youth. Participants explored modern agriculture through hands-on demonstrations and real-world technology. Youth learned about the use of agricultural drones for aerial application and crop monitoring, gaining insight into technology shaping today's farms. They also learned about the meat production process, participating in activities that connected livestock care to the food systems that supply local communities. A guided anatomy lab allowed youth to examine a pig and two calf specimens, deepening their understanding of animal health, biology, and the differences between healthy and diseased tissue. By engaging with professionals across multiple agricultural fields, youth were introduced to a wide range of career pathways and industry skills. The experience expanded their knowledge, sparked curiosity, and connected them with mentors committed to developing the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Little Free Gallery

Creativity Creating Community

Illinois Extension led efforts to connect with local partners, Gather Coffeehouse and the Okawville Community Garden, to host a Mini-Art and Creative Exchange Workshop at Happily Ever Crafter. The partnership created a space where art, imagination, and community came together. Each participant selected prompts from a "creativity jar," encouraging them to tap into their own ideas while drawing inspiration from others. Participants learned foundational painting techniques and created miniature artworks that are publicly displayed in the studio. When the youth left, they selected one mini-painting to take home, reinforcing positive peer recognition and boosting confidence and self-esteem. By combining artistic skill-building with meaningful social connection, the Mini-Art and Creative Exchange Workshop provided youth with an empowering experience that nurtures creativity, belonging, and personal growth while forging a strong partnership with local businesses.

Floral Arranging and Community Outreach

Providing Opportunities for Youth to Make a Difference

Extension Educator Chris Lueking and 4-H Coordinator Amanda Fox-Clark partnered to deliver a combined floriculture and service-learning workshop. Through step-by-step instruction, participants explored the science behind flower arranging, color selection, preparing the materials, and learned safe use of floral tools. After building their arrangements, youth channeled their creativity into crafting thoughtful cards for local nursing home residents. This project not only strengthened their artistic and practical skills but also connected them to meaningful acts of kindness, reinforcing the impact they can have within their community.



A Little About our Washington County 4-H Coordinator

Amanda Fox-Clark has been the Washington County 4-H Coordinator for over 20 years, bringing passion and experience to her role. As a 4-H alumna and a Washington County resident, she has deep roots and a profound respect for the culture of Washington County and what is important to its residents. She has a drive to work with youth and volunteers to provide educational and developmental opportunities to empower youth in leadership and community engagement. Amanda looks forward to connecting with families, volunteers, and community partners to support youth development and strengthen local engagement through 4-H.

Cover Crops for a Cause

Simple Things Can Improve the Soil and Help the Community

Illinois Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource Educator Chris Lueking collaborated with technical experts and local partners to support farmers in enhancing soil health and cultivating a nutritious turnip crop—rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals—for local food pantries.

In early August, an aerial drone applied turnip seeds on the headlands of the Christopher Zimmerman Farm in Woodlawn to demonstrate drone seed application of edible cover crops. In October, the University of Illinois System Leadership tour stopped at the plot as part of the 2025 Leadership Tour.

Illinois Extension Commercial Agriculture Specialists Dane Hunter and Talon Becker spoke to the Leadership Tour participants about the processes and technicalities involved in drone application and licensure. Specialists also addressed the benefits of cover crops for soil health and productivity. During these presentations, Illinois Extension staff and University of Illinois System Leadership discussed the advancement of sustainable agriculture in our area, improving soil health, and addressing food insecurity.

Illinois Extension Financial Educator Jamie Mahlandt discussed the growing community concern about grocery prices and her new Grocery Planner resource, which helps clients establish spending goals, plan meals, and utilize budget tracking to help with their grocery spending.

SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Worker Kristen Buttrum demonstrated two turnip recipes, which were supplied to community pantries as recipe card resources for the local food pantries that received the donated turnips from the cover crop plot. Extension staff, volunteers, and community partners harvested and donated over 2,500 pounds of turnips to local food banks to help support local community members.

Over 2,500 Pounds of Turnips Donated

Program Partners



Master Gardener Training

Helping Others Learn to Grow

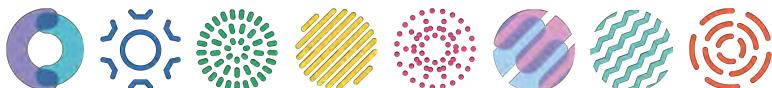


The Master Gardener program fulfills its mission of "Helping Others Learn to Grow" by equipping volunteers to share their passion for gardening throughout their communities. Master Gardeners play a vital role in expanding access to research-based knowledge—they

write educational articles, support Extension events through hands-on learning stations, and provide guidance on a wide range of gardening challenges. Their dedication ensures residents have trusted information to make informed decisions about their natural spaces.



Illinois Extension staff provided a blend of classroom instruction and hands-on learning across key horticultural topics, empowering these volunteers to deliver high-quality educational outreach through strengthening community engagement and supporting local residents. This year, 12 new volunteers from Bond, Clinton, and Washington counties completed Master Gardener training and are now prepared to serve in their local communities.



Hunters Feeding Illinois

Helping Hunters and Partners Give Back

Fred's Meat and Processing, United Way of South Central Illinois, and Illinois Extension are partnering to continue the Deer Donation Program in 2026. This program unites community partners and hunters across the area, who give back to local communities by donating their harvest to be processed and donated to qualifying local pantries.

11 Deer Donated
Over 400 pounds processed

Back to Basics

Teaching Heirloom Skills to the Next Generation

During the 2025 Needs Assessment, Illinois Extension identified community concerns about the rising cost of food and goods. Illinois Extension delivered its annual workshop series, focusing on heirloom skills in homesteading and conservation. The series came to a conclusion this fall where Extension experts taught 2 workshops on seed saving and composting. Educators presented participants with techniques and explained how these skills can benefit home gardening. By saving seeds from the most productive and hearty plants and composting table scraps correctly, home gardens can thrive with healthy soil and flourishing plants while saving money.



Back-to-Basics

Upcoming Events

We believe in the communities we serve and are committed to our mission of developing educational programs, extending knowledge, and building partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments as part of the state's land-grant institution.

Check out upcoming in-person programming and webinars that will impact our communities and help us achieve a prosperous future.

Event Calendar



extension.illinois.edu/bcjmw/events

Extension Everywhere

Illinois Extension provides relevant and research-based programming to address personal and community challenges, but understands that time and distance may be a barrier to attending in-person workshops and programming. Extension experts work to develop online video content and resources so that our communities can access our resources anytime.

Online Video Library



go.illinois.edu/YouTubeBCJMW

Financial Resources



go.illinois.edu/BCJMWFinances

Come Visit Us

Bond County

208 Academy, Pocahontas
Phone: 618-664-3665
Monday - Thursday,
7 a.m. to Noon & 1 - 5 p.m.
Friday by appointment

Clinton County

1163 N. Fourth St, Breese
Phone: 618-526-4551
Monday - Friday,
8 a.m. to Noon & 1 - 4:30 p.m.

Jefferson County

4202 Williamson Pl, Ste 2, Mt. Vernon
Phone: 618-242-0780
Monday - Friday,
8 a.m. to Noon & 1 - 4:30 p.m.

Marion County

1404 E Main, Rt 50 East, Salem
Phone: 618-548-1446
Monday - Friday,
8 a.m. to Noon & 1 - 4:30 p.m.

Washington County

9623 Wall St., Nashville
Phone: 618-327-8881
Monday - Thursday,
7 a.m. to Noon & 1 - 5 p.m.
Friday by appointment



Check Out More Information Online

-  extension.illinois.edu/bcjmw
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-  go.illinois.edu/YouTubeBCJMW



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