



Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



Serving DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt Counties
ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025





Jamie Boas
County Director



Addressing food access for our local communities

As County Director for DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties, I'm proud to present a year of meaningful community impact led by our University of Illinois Extension staff and volunteers. Our team delivered dynamic educational programs across agriculture, horticulture, nutrition, family resilience, and youth development, reaching learners of all ages. Volunteers cultivated flowers and vegetables in community gardens, increasing access to fresh produce and beautifying our communities. 4-H members pursued leadership and career readiness through hands-on experiences, becoming Beyond Ready. Conservation efforts and projects boosted environmental literacy and encouraged further outdoor exploration.

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, partners, and donors whose dedication turned ideas into lasting benefits for our counties. We remain committed to responsive programming, expanded volunteer opportunities, and meaningful learning pathways for youth and adults. Explore this report to see how Illinois Extension connects people, places, and possibilities across DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties.

Jamie Boas
County Extension Director

Cover photo: A Macon County Master Gardener engages with a child at Mercy Market hosted by the Good Samaritan Inn.

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension 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

2025 Engagement

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

738 Communities Served	831K+ Program Attendees	9.4M+ Webpage Views	9.8M+ Social Media Visibility	1.8M+ YouTube Impressions
249 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	83 Online Courses Accessed by 13K+ People	10,846 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,848 4-H Clubs 20,242 4-H Club Members	68,697 Fair Exhibits 295,379 4-H Experiences

Partnerships

Resource Generation

5,129 Program Volunteers	277 Community Gardens	2,830 School and Community Partners	\$15,026,392 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$499,188 Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated	\$960K+ External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners
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On July 4, 2025, the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act eliminated all funding for Illinois Extension's SNAP-Ed nutrition education program. Here's the impact by the numbers:

Up to \$135M Estimated Annual Loss in Future Economic Returns on Investment in Illinois	2 million+ Residents Lost Access to Food and Health Education	1,754 Partners Including Schools, Food Banks, Early Childhood Centers, Public Health Departments, and Local Agencies Impacted	200+ Staff Members Affected by Layoffs	30 Years of Infrastructure and Network Building for the SNAP-Ed Program Lost
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Camp Whitetail: Shaping 4-H Leaders



Hands-on 4-H outdoor education

According to Illinois Department of Natural Resources, youth under 18 harvested a record 4,714 deer during the 2025 youth firearm season. As interest in Illinois 4-H Shooting Sports programs grows, so does the need for safety education. To meet this need for safety and responsibility, Illinois Extension hosted Camp Whitetail, a 4-H hunter safety program at 4-H Memorial Camp.

Camp Whitetail returned this fall under the leadership of Eric Eickmeier, Piatt County 4-H program coordinator. The multi-day event provided families with an opportunity to enjoy a weekend at camp while completing the Illinois Hunter Safety Course, taught by certified instructors and supported by local community members.

Although some families opted for Friday night lodging, classroom instruction began Saturday morning. Grandparents, parents, and children rotated through demonstrations and hands-on activities such as live trap handling, basic hunting skills, tree stand safety, and live fire practice with air rifles, shotguns, and archery equipment. Youth also learned about wildlife conservation, preparation and survival skills, and field care basics for harvested game, ensuring that they understand the responsibilities that come with hunting.

One of the most popular rotations was the tree stand safety station. When asked who wanted to climb the ladder to the



Learn more about 4-H
go.illinois.edu/4Hdmp

top of the stand, hands shot up immediately, accompanied by shouts of “Me! I want to do that!” As each ladder rung was conquered and youth reached the platform, cheers erupted from below. Smiles spread across faces, and proud voices proclaimed, “I made it!” with the confidence and excitement of mastering a new skill. Another highlight of the weekend was the Illinois Conservation Police educational trailer, which featured interactive exhibits and created more opportunities for hands-on discovery.

“Such an amazing and beneficial 4-H program for not only my granddaughter but myself,” said one grandparent. “And I’ve been to at least eight hunter safety courses over the years. Thank you for going a step above the rest.”

While the schedule was packed with educational sessions, participants also enjoyed fishing along the camp’s banks and exploring the woodland trails before gathering for hot meals in the dining hall. By Sunday afternoon, 26 youth had successfully completed the course and earned a Hunter Safety Education Student Card, valid in all 50 states.



545
DeWitt, Macon, Piatt 4-H Members



56
DeWitt, Macon, Piatt 4-H Clubs



63
4-H Adult Volunteers



Cultivating Confident Leaders

Many middle school students lack opportunities to develop and practice essential soft skills such as communication, professionalism, empathy, and conflict resolution. These skills are vital for success in school, the workplace, and community life. To address this need, Illinois Extension offered a nine-week 4-H Leadership Development Program to 19 middle school youth from American Dreamer STEM Academy.

The program included the Amazing Shake Competition, where students rotated through 14 stations staffed by community leaders, volunteers, and Illinois Extension staff. At each station, youth demonstrated skills such as personal introductions, confident handshakes, navigating difficult conversations, and participating in a media interview. Performances were scored with the top three earning awards.

The evaluation of the program showed favorable outcomes, with 95% of the students feeling motivated to positively influence others, and 78% having gained skills they plan to use in daily life. By combining structured lessons with real-world practice, the program built confidence and strengthened interpersonal skills students need to thrive academically, professionally, and socially.



Growing Healthy Minds

Illinois Extension partnered with Blue Ridge Intermediate and Junior High School to deliver Your Feelings Matter, a 12-week program designed to equip students with tools for resilience and emotional well-being. This collaborative effort was in response to challenges with emotional regulation, empathy, and coping skills. The program reached 115 middle school students across six classrooms.

Illinois Extension staff facilitated six sessions focused on emotional awareness and regulation, while the school guidance counselor led six alternating sessions based on dialectical behavior therapy skills. Students practiced strategies such as box breathing and mindfulness and the use of calming jars to manage stress.

Program evaluation showed 81% of the students reported an improved ability to identify their emotions, and 85% learned strategies to remain calm in stressful situations.

Your Feelings Matter addressed critical gaps in youth mental health support, and this collaboration provided a consistent, evidence-based education tailored to local youth and contributed to healthier school environments.



Discovering Historical Connections

School enrichment programs in Piatt County provided students across grade levels with meaningful opportunities to connect history, science, and creativity with meaningful ways that extend beyond classroom learning. Kindergarten students explored topics such as weather, animal needs, arctic animals, insects, and force and motion in Cloverbud 4-H Science sessions. These monthly lessons encouraged creativity and the development of critical thinking skills.

Middle school students engaged in interactive lessons that deepened their understanding of the Westward Expansion. In the Pack Your Wagon activity, students tackled the challenges pioneers faced and made difficult decisions about what to carry on their journey west based on pictures of household items and their respective weights.

In observance of Memorial Day, the Cerro Gordo Cemetery program invited middle school students to research the lives of 104 veterans buried in the cemetery. Students honored their service and sacrifice by visiting the cemetery and creating grave rubbings.

The Eating Through History program expanded its reach with lessons on medieval, colonial, and immigration era foods. By exploring traditions and daily life food, students gained a greater understanding of cultural heritage.

Illinois Extension will continue to partner with educators to deliver engaging enrichment that supplements traditional classroom learning and sparks curiosity in all students.

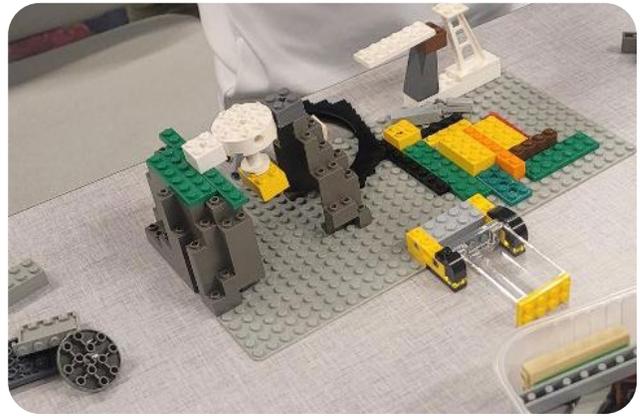


Cerro Gordo middle school students create rubbing of a veteran's grave marker during a visit to a cemetery.



DESIGN.BUILD.INSPIRE.

The 4-H Building Block workshop, designed for ages 8 to 12, encouraged kids from DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties to tap into their creativity as they explored hands-on design and engineering concepts. The young builders and engineers could choose to build their own unique creations or to follow templates focusing on specific building techniques and critical thinking skills. At the end of the workshop, these young innovators proudly presented their individual creations with confidence and enthusiasm. The experience also helped spark interest in the 4-H Building Bricks Project—an exciting opportunity for members to showcase their building talents at the DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties General Projects 4-H Show.



MAKING THE BEST BETTER

The annual DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt 4-H show provided an opportunity for youth to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and personal growth they achieved throughout the year. The four-day event exemplified the 4-H motto, "Make the best better," with a busy show arena and flurry of activity in the general projects building. The show's success was made possible by 75 caring adults who served as judges and mentors. Final reports showed that 240 members exhibited their work, contributing 586 livestock entries and 730 general project entries. In total, an impressive 1,225 ribbons were awarded across all categories reflecting the quality, effort, and diversity of the projects exhibited. The DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt 4-H show continues to highlight the commitment of local youth to excellence, leadership, and learning while also acknowledging the vital role of volunteers and community partners.



4-H COOKING AND CREATING

The Grow, Knead, and Create workshop invited youth and families to roll up their sleeves and get their hands messy for a hands-on bread making experience. Offered in partnership with 4-H and Piatt County Home and Community Education members, participants followed step by step recipes, practiced new cooking and baking skills, and gained an appreciation for food made from scratch. While the bread was rising, families crafted beautiful and unique fall suncatchers. RP Lumber in Monticello donated the wood for the project, and Monticello High School students did the design prep. Once the bread was baked, and samples distributed, the smiles on faces told the story best. The workshop not only addressed the growing gap in food literacy but also provided space for families to connect and make memories.



PARTNERS IN CREATIVITY

Macon County 4-H partnered with Macon County Skills Summer Camp, a special needs respite program, for the third year to provide five sessions of creative programming for youth. One of the most popular activities was glass flower painting — a simple yet engaging project that encouraged participants to express their creativity by painting directly on the glass of the picture frame. The project was such a success that program leaders purchased additional supplies so youth could paint frames outside of the workshop. Gaps in funding have limited access to arts programming for youth with disabilities. This makes partnerships like the one between 4-H and Macon County Skills especially vital. Macon County 4-H will continue expanding arts opportunities for special needs youth in Decatur Public Schools, recognizing that arts education fosters social-emotional growth, academic achievement, and essential life skills.



Connecting people through gardening

Crossing Healthcare Garden is a hidden gem within the city of Decatur. Located on the Crossing Healthcare campus, this sprawling urban garden is managed by a team of Illinois Extension Master Gardener volunteers. What began as a collaboration between SNAP-Education and Macon County Master Gardeners has blossomed into a dynamic program that continues to evolve each season. The Crossing Garden Education series offered monthly workshops on topics such as soil preparation, container gardening, site selection, native pollinators, wildlife management, herb cultivation, and creative strategies for handling an abundance of zucchini, okra, and cucumbers. Later sessions addressed common challenges such as drought, weeds, and pests and concluded with guidance on winterizing gardens and evaluating seasonal outcomes. In addition to educational programming, eight community



3,405

Pounds of Fresh Produce from Crossing



631

Master Gardener Volunteer Hours at Crossing

organizations provided volunteer labor to assist with planting, weeding, and harvesting. Their efforts enabled the garden to exceed its annual production goal of 3,000 pounds of fresh produce for distribution within the community. The Crossing Healthcare garden provides more than produce—it grows connections, expands knowledge, and builds healthier communities, exemplifying the power of collaboration and community engagement.



Learn more about Master Gardeners
go.illinois.edu/dmpmg



Youth from the Salvation Army summer day program visit the community garden to learn about vegetables.

Homegrown Harvest

Homegrown Harvest at Southside Hill Community Garden continued to grow in its second year, expanding the number of sessions, participant attendance, and overall community impact. By providing free, family-friendly workshops, Illinois Extension removed financial and childcare barriers, making gardening education accessible to all.

The series was designed to support new community gardeners in extending the growing season, increasing the variety of crops grown, and neighborhood participation in disadvantaged socioeconomic areas with a high percentage of food insecurity. The garden's location, adjacent to Johns Hill Magnet School, created opportunities for student engagement. In April, first-grade students sowed flower seeds indoors and cared for them until planting in May, connecting classroom learning with hands-on gardening experiences.

The success of Homegrown Harvest reflects Illinois Extension's commitment to delivering community-based programs that address food insecurity and promote healthy living. Each connection is an opportunity to educate, empower, and equip residents with the resources needed to thrive.

Planting seeds is fun. I like getting dirty, [I learned] how to plant a seed, and the seeds grow to be flowers and plants.
 Johns Hill Magnet Student



Growing connections across counties

DeWitt and Piatt Master Gardener volunteers broadened their outreach efforts, hosting 54 educational and community events across schools, libraries, farmers markets, parks, and festivals in White Heath, Cerro Gordo, Mansfield, Bement, and Farmer City. By prioritizing free or low-cost programming, Illinois Extension opened doors for families and individuals who might otherwise experience financial barriers and be unable to participate. This expansion reflects a strong commitment to increasing access to horticultural education and community enrichment to all.

Community programs, such as the Pollinators in the Park series at Weldon Springs, were well-attended and offered participants practical ways to support pollinators. Participants learned about butterfly migration, pollinator identification, and how to plant milkweed and native flowers to create pollinator-friendly habitats in their own home landscapes.

Once I have a home of my own, I will be planting flora to support butterfly life.

Pollinators in the Park participant

A dementia-friendly Memory Garden workshop welcomed Memory Café attendees and caregivers to plant colorful container gardens. The workshop provided therapeutic benefits and the opportunity to learn container gardening skills. Memory Café, coordinated monthly by CCSI Case Coordination and Warner Hospital Wellness Center, provides structured activities for older adults living with dementia and their caregivers to connect with others, helping reduce social isolation and strengthen supportive relationships.

Illinois Extension's partnership with the Piatt County Mental Health Center continued through monthly programs or tours

on topics such as hummingbirds, floriography, aquaponics, tree identification, and succulents. These experiences provided participants, who are often overlooked in the broader community, with welcoming opportunities to build new skills, gain new knowledge, and connect with nature.

The Monticello Community Garden, located on the campus of Kirby Medical Center, had another successful growing season. Illinois Extension Master Gardener volunteers donated 80 pounds of produce to local food pantries and delivered 38 flower bouquets to residential homes. The garden also hosted two open house events: one on herbs and mini containers, and another on cut flowers and bouquet making. The community garden is open to families who may not have the space for a traditional garden, expanding access to gardening and fresh food.

Piatt County Master Gardeners hosted their biennial Garden Walk in July, welcoming more than 300 visitors to six private gardens in the Monticello community. The gardens featured a variety of vegetables, native plants, and creative designs, providing attendees with inspiration and practical ideas to take home. Additionally, a vendor market showcasing local businesses and the Master Gardener help desk provided timely information and individualized guidance to Garden Walk attendees. The event's success was made possible by 26 dedicated volunteers who answered questions, shared information about the featured plants, and engaged visitors in meaningful garden conversations.



5,085

DeWitt, Macon, Piatt Master Gardener total hours



\$174,370

Value of volunteer hours



Master Gardeners inspire gardeners of all ages



The Macon County Master Gardener program welcomed nine new trainees increasing the total number of volunteers in Macon County to 68. These enthusiastic and passionate individuals engaged with the community through hands-on education, youth outreach, and support for a variety of gardening projects. Their contributions reinforced the program's vision of helping others learn to grow.

Willy's Garden, a week-long horticultural program at the Decatur Public Library, encouraged young gardeners to explore the natural world around them. Youth eagerly planted flowers in the raised beds on the first day and watered each day after. As the week continued, youth enjoyed a bug scavenger hunt introducing them to bumblebees, praying mantis, crickets, and scorpions, nest building races, garden themed yoga, and bug bingo. Youth also built seed houses to continue learning at home and gained a better understanding of the parts of a flower and the role of pollinators in the food system.

I learned that spiders aren't scary, they are helpful.

Willy's Garden participant

This interactive youth program continues to grow each year inspiring young learners to become environmental stewards while instilling a love of gardening.

Celebrating 50 years of Master Gardener impact

Illinois Extension Master Gardeners celebrated the 50th anniversary of the program in 2025. Macon County Master Gardeners marked the milestone with a community open house at the Decatur Public Library. Master Gardener volunteers created displays highlighting the many projects that are supported each year. Community members enjoyed three hands-on mini workshops such as Houseplant Propagation, Microgreens, and Winter Seed Sowing. Workshop participants left with a take home kit to keep the learning going at home.

The open house celebrated education, volunteer leadership, and the impact of gardening. In true Master Gardener fashion, volunteers answered gardening questions and shared their expertise. A youth activity was also available which underscored the program's commitment to providing inclusive and welcoming events for families.



9

Macon County Master Gardener trainees



78

DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt County Master Gardeners



Cooking Toward Better Health



Kids cook up confidence

Illinois Extension offered Meal Quest as a summer enrichment program for ABC Preschool's middle school youth. The program was a tremendous success and provided older students with a valuable opportunity to build confidence and essential life skills. Meal Quest was designed to offer support to youth from working families. Students planned, prepped, and cooked complete meals that incorporated all five food groups. These hands-on sessions empowered youth to take an active role in making healthy meals at home.

The impact of Meal Quest extended past the classroom with families sharing positive feedback and opportunities where participants had demonstrated their new skills either preparing meals, assisting younger siblings, or making healthier decisions about what they eat. Parents reported that there was a visible difference in students' confidence and independence after participating in the summer program.

Meal Quest demonstrated that good nutrition begins with knowledge and that youth can play an important role in creating healthier homes. By combining education, practical experience, and family engagement, the program equipped students with skills that extend well beyond summer and can positively influence daily life at home.



Meal Quest participants prepare bacon, eggs, and pancakes to demonstrate cooking skills.

Herbs for healthy cooking

Pre-packaged herbs and seasonings are popular in households because they are easily accessible and elevate the flavors of home cooked foods. Illinois Extension developed two herb-focused programs that worked in partnership with each other: Windowsill Wonders and Where the Flavor's At. Windowsill Wonders introduced participants to growing herbs in small spaces by a make-and-take workshop where all participants left with a small container garden planted with basil, dill, and rosemary seeds. The follow-up program, Where the Flavor's At, dug into the uses of those specific herbs and more, equipping participants with the knowledge of how to use those homegrown herbs in rubs, marinades, and everyday seasoning to liven up recipes.

These hands-on programs offered families an opportunity to take a closer look at their cooking methods and find ways to make dishes more flavorful and healthy by reducing sodium.



Building heart healthy habits

Heart disease remains a leading cause of death for adults in the United States, underscoring the importance of accessible, research-based community education. Illinois Extension recognized this need and delivered Heart-Smart Eating, a one-hour nutrition and heart health class designed for adults with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or heart disease, as well as their families and caregivers.

Heart-Smart Eating focused on providing an understanding of the four key nutrients that impact heart health: sodium, fat, added sugar, and fiber. The program provided practical guidance on shopping, meal planning, and cooking strategies and was offered at 11 community sites across DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties through local partners such as public libraries, hospitals, community colleges, and community organizations. The class was also offered virtually and was considered an overwhelming success.

Illinois Extension is dedicated to strengthening communities by equipping individuals with the tools and confidence to make informed nutrition choices that support heart-healthy lifestyles.

I already watch sodium but I'll look at labels more for fats and added sugar.

Heart-Smart Eating Participant

Building skills in food safety and local food systems

Students at Bement High School engaged with Illinois Extension and Clean Acres Farm for a three-day hands-on food preservation series that explored the connection between local food systems, cottage food opportunities, and safe home canning practices. The series began with an overview of the role of local foods and the growing potential of cottage food operations. The next two days focused on preparing and preserving jars of salsa using safe, research-based canning methods.

Illinois Extension serves as a leader in home food preservation education. This intensive learning experience provided high school students with basic knowledge and real-world skills in food safety, preservation, and local food systems.

Strengthening Illinois' Spanish-speaking workforce

According to the Centers for Disease Control, foodborne illness remains a significant public health concern affecting an estimated one in six Americans each year. The state of Illinois experienced more than 1,300 outbreaks and over 41,000 illnesses between 2018 and 2023. To address this issue, Illinois requires restaurants to have a Certified Food Protection Manager on-site during all hours of operation to supervise food handling. However, many English as a Second Language Learners face barriers to certification when training and exams are not available in their preferred language, which may limit advancement opportunities and potentially compromise food safety.

Illinois Extension responded to this need by delivering a Certified Food Protection Manager course designed specifically for Spanish-speaking adults. The class was taught in English with support from a Spanish-language interpreter, and course materials and the exam were provided in Spanish. By providing equitable access to this training, Illinois Extension is expanding workforce opportunities, strengthening food safety practices, and supporting individuals seeking to advance within the food service industry.



Caitlin Mellendorf introduces students to Spanish Certified Food Protection Manager Training.



TRAINING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

Illinois Extension graduated a diverse group of Master Naturalists in the spring. Fifteen dedicated individuals, all united through their deep appreciation for the natural world, completed the 12-week training and many have already begun logging volunteer hours toward becoming certified Master Naturalists. Although the new trainees entered the program as strangers, the multi-week course encouraged a strong sense of community. Through shared field experiences, hands-on learning, and lively discussion, the group built a collaborative and supportive environment. Participants discovered that their passion for nature was not only welcomed but actively encouraged, reinforcing their commitment to service, conservation, and lifelong learning. These graduates join a growing group of Master Naturalists who play a vital role in strengthening environmental awareness and stewardship across Illinois.



EXPLORING ART AND NATURE

Master Naturalist volunteer Merry Lanker hosted a hands-on workshop focused on creating personalized nature journals that reflect their own artistic style and connection to the outdoors. Under her guidance, the enthusiastic and fun-loving group explored a variety of creative approaches, experimenting with layout ideas, colors, and original designs. Lanker introduced participants to basic watercolor techniques and shared strategies for finding inspiration in everyday natural settings. The workshop brought together individuals of all ages and experience levels, creating an inclusive environment where beginners felt supported and experienced artists found new ways to expand their skills. The afternoon offered a relaxing and engaging space for participants to slow down, connect with nature, and express themselves creatively.



FALL TREE CRAWL CELEBRATES PROJECT EXPANSION

The Tree Identification project, led by a dedicated team of Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners, made significant progress in enhancing the educational experience at the Piatt County Forest Preserve Park. Volunteers installed signage for 14 additional native tree species, bringing the total number of identified species in the park to 35. Each sign includes a QR code that links visitors to reliable, research-based information, making it easy for community members, students, and park visitors to learn about local tree species. To celebrate and promote the expanded signage, Illinois Extension hosted its annual Fall Tree Crawl. During the event, Master Naturalist and Master Gardener volunteers guided participants through the park, offering insights and interesting facts about each species.



THE GREAT PUMPKIN SMASH

The Pumpkin Smash was relocated to a more central site and was an overwhelming success. Families arrived with their pumpkins, loaded them in the wagons and prepared for the much anticipated “smashing.” Participants could choose from several options such as the pumpkin smashing board, the bat smash area, pumpkin tic-tac-toe, or simply toss in the bed of the on-site collection truck. Most attendees opted for the smashing board where excited shouts rang out as the tossed pumpkins hit the board and exploded into a pile of seeds and stringy guts. The few pumpkins that survived the first toss bounced off to the side only to be retrieved by their owners and launched again with the hopes of making a more dramatic impact. The Pumpkin Smash is another example of an Illinois Extension event that blends fun with sustainability and offers families an engaging and responsible way to recycle.



Supporting Illinois growers and communities

Whether presenting on the often-overlooked pawpaw at a rural library or teaching future agricultural producers about specialty crops, Illinois Extension remains committed to delivering research-based knowledge to communities across the state. An example of this commitment was the Illinois Youth Crop Scouting Competition, held at the University of Illinois Crop Sciences Research and Education Center near Savoy. As the only program of its kind in Illinois, the competition provides students with hands-on experience in crop scouting and the principles of Integrated Pest Management for Illinois field crops. Participants gain practical skills and insights that support future careers in agricultural and environmental sciences.

This year, Illinois Extension contributed instruction on pumpkins—an important Illinois specialty crop with significant economic impact. The competition is a collaborative effort among University of Illinois Extension, University of Illinois Crop Sciences Department, University of Illinois Pesticide Safety Education Program, the Illinois Soybean Association, and Illinois Certified Crop Advisers, reflecting a strong statewide partnership dedicated to cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Illinois Extension also supports safe and responsible agricultural practices through its Private Pesticide Applicator License training, a requirement for individuals who apply restricted-use pesticides on land they own or manage for agricultural production. Training sessions offered in January and February drew participants from across the state and equipped more than 180 individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete their certification. The University of Illinois Pesticide Safety Education Program strengthens this effort by delivering up-to-date, research-based information that promotes safe, responsible, and environmentally aware pesticide application.

Community programs remained in high demand during the winter months as homeowners looked for opportunities to build their skills and prepare for the upcoming growing season. The Fruit Tree Pruning breakout session at the Macon County Master Gardeners' Gardening Insights program was a popular choice. The classroom was filled with homeowners eager to learn techniques for maintaining the long-term health and productivity of their fruit trees. Participants explored the basics of pruning, how to identify problem branches, encourage strong



Become a Master Naturalist
go.illinois.edu/DMPmn



structure, and support growth. Homeowners left with increased confidence and a better understanding of how to apply these practices in their own backyards.

Additional community programs included a Pawpaw class, which featured an introduction to the pawpaw tree and its fruit, management practices, and processing methods of the fruit. A sample of homemade pawpaw bread was also part of the class, which allowed participants to experience the unique flavor of the fruit. Improving Your Garden's Soil addressed soil compaction and nutrient deficiencies and discussed how incorporating organic matter can improve overall soil health. Making Gardening Easier offered practical strategies and tools to reduce the physical strain of gardening, helping participants work more efficiently and comfortably with the use of tools and other strategies.

Together these programs demonstrate Illinois Extension's dedication to strengthening agricultural knowledge, supporting home gardeners, and empowering communities through accessible, research-based education.



46

DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt County Master Naturalists



4,234

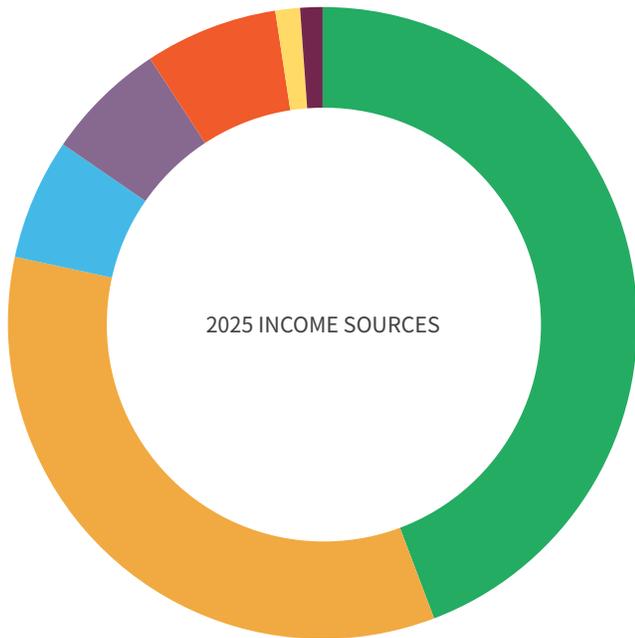
Master Naturalist Volunteer Hours



\$145,196

Value of Volunteer Hours

Funding and Outreach



Amount	Source
\$713,022	County Board
\$550,056	County Board Match
\$100,000	Federal Income
\$100,000	Program Income
\$110,000	State Income
\$20,385	Local Income
\$18,439	4-H Premiums

2025 EXTENSION COUNCIL MEMBERS

Sonya Anthony Macon County	Morgan Crouch Macon County	Jennifer Jamison DeWitt County
Janet Boomer Macon County	Wayne Dunning Macon County	Mike Randall Piatt County
Anthony Cheatham DeWitt County	Jerry Edwards Piatt County	Annilee Rohrscheib DeWitt County
Grace Clark DeWitt County	Todd Hendricks Piatt County	Sydnee Shafer Piatt County
Cassie Crouch Macon County	Merry Lanker Macon County	

Illinois Extension uses a combination of digital and print media to reach both urban and rural audiences and deliver research-based educational opportunities supported by the university.

Wheels and Deals and TV Revue continue to be excellent channels for information dissemination. These free publications are available across all three counties and are distributed weekly to gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurants.

On the digital side, updates to the monthly e-newsletter have increased subscriber engagement, achieving an average open rate of 41.3%. The newsletter features recipes, blogs, media releases, and event information. Additionally, 4-H staff consistently send e-updates to subscribers with important information.



18,309
Website page views



7,715
Total users



6,902
Social media followers



12.8%
Growth in followers for all social media



Camp Whitetail participant takes a moment to celebrate a successful climb.



STAFF

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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.
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