

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



Serving Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson Counties
ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025





Lynn Heins
County Director



Extend Knowledge. Build Partnerships. Support People.

Greetings from University of Illinois Extension, proudly serving Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties. It is my honor to lead a dedicated team of professional staff who deliver high-quality educational programs, inspire youth, and support volunteers across our multi-county unit.

In 2025, our organization faced a significant challenge with the conclusion of the federal SNAP-Ed program after more than 30 years. Our local SNAP-Ed team demonstrated exceptional commitment and impact by partnering with 112 organizations to deliver 895 direct nutrition education programs to 3,643 participants. In addition, the team implemented 128 policy, system, and environmental changes throughout our communities. Their outstanding work was recognized at the state level with an Extension Team Excellence Award. It was truly a privilege to work alongside this team, and I extend special thanks to Toni Kay, Jennifer, Misty, Nick, Abi, and Meagan for a job well done.

Last year, Illinois Extension conducted a comprehensive community needs assessment in collaboration with Extension Council members and community partners. This process identified new opportunities and partnerships—

leading our team to develop a three-year plan of work. Key highlights include expanded efforts in health and food access, enhanced STEM programming within our 4-H program, and continued focus on mental health initiatives, wellness programs for senior populations, and horticulture education. Our commitment to the residents of Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties remains strong through our mission. We look forward to continuing to serve our communities through impactful 4-H, Community Health and Wellness, and Agriculture programming.

Thank you to our county board leaders and other local funders who continue to support Illinois Extension programming in our communities. Every local dollar opens doors for state and federal funding, expanding our reach to those who need it most. It is my pleasure to present this year’s impact report, which highlights some of our team’s most enriching programs of the year.

Lynn Heins
County Extension Director
Serving Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph,
and Williamson counties

Cover photo:
A sunflower facing right.

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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Community shines at the DuQuoin State Fair

The DuQuoin State Fair has been a highlight for locals and a draw for tourists for over a century. This past year, Illinois Extension demonstrated its commitment to community efforts by showcasing a variety of programs and events during the fair. Staff and volunteers could be found interacting with youth, informing the public about the importance of gardening, and assisting with countless fair activities.

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists shared volunteer opportunities and answered gardening and other natural resource questions at their booth. They also presented programs on how to propagate plants, how to grow new vegetables from kitchen scraps, and demonstrated how to create Kokedama balls (a unique Japanese art form).

Each year, the DuQuoin State Fair kicks off with the beloved Twilight Parade. For the past two years, 4-H had the honor of serving as the grand usher. The parade features a variety of local businesses and organizations that share a strong commitment to serving their community. This year, Extension was fortunate to be joined by Kevin Carey, program leader and director of Illinois 4-H, and Jerry Costello, director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

4-H youth, volunteers, and staff members stayed busy throughout the fair. Youth participated in a variety of competitions, managed booths and displays, and volunteered at events such as the horse races and the cowboy shooting contest. One of the most popular activities among local youth was volunteering at the Thank a Farmer Stand, where they enjoyed educating the public about the farming industry's role in everyday life and teaching people where their food comes from.

Before the fair even begins, 4-H clubs and Future Farmers of America chapters are hard at work crafting creative wheelbarrow designs to showcase in the Wheelbarrow Design Contest. The top winners are selected by the newly elected Miss DuQuoin, adding a special touch of local tradition to the event.



Local 4-H youth competed in the Pretzel-in-a-Bag 4-H Food Challenge during the DuQuoin State Fair.

In 2024, the DuQuoin State Fair donated a barn to local FFA chapters and 4-H clubs. This barn has been used to house a petting zoo that consists of a variety of livestock raised by local youth. This gives 4-H and FFA members the opportunity to showcase their responsibility by raising animals.

Local youth also chose to exhibit their high-standing 4-H awards at the DuQuoin State Fair in their home show. After the judging was completed, 4-H members left their projects on display in the exhibition hall for the entirety of the fair.

I enjoy the cooking challenges, because I get to try out the techniques I learned from doing my 4-H cooking projects.

Local 4-H member

This marked the third year of the 4-H Food Challenge at the DuQuoin State Fair. This is an exciting opportunity for youth to showcase their talent, knowledge, and passion for the kitchen. This year, participants were tasked with decorating a six-inch round cake and preparing pretzels in a bag. While basic ingredients were provided, youth were encouraged to bring a unique ingredient to make their dish stand out from the rest. Contestants were given 45 minutes to complete and plate their finished dish. The audience was able to watch every step of the way, thanks to the stage in the Exhibition hall.



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



Youth learn about the impact of substance abuse during summer program

Substance abuse among local youth has reached concerning levels, propelled by stress, peer pressure, and the easy availability of drugs and alcohol. In response to these concerns, Illinois Extension partnered with the Jackson County Health Department to host the “Summer Health Rocks! Bash” in Murphysboro and Marion. The event aimed to educate young people about the dangers and long-term consequences of substance abuse.

During the Bash, participants rotated through three interactive stations, each designed to demonstrate how different substances affect the human body. These hands-on activities gave youth a clear and direct understanding of the physical, emotional, and social downside of drug and alcohol use, enabling them to make healthier choices for their future.

Smoking awareness experience

One of the most important stations focused on the danger of smoking, not just cigarettes, but also vaping and marijuana, and the damage these substances can cause to the lungs and other parts of the body. To begin, participants viewed a “tar jar,” a visual that represents the amount of tar that can build up in the lungs after one year of smoking cigarettes. Next, participants viewed a hands-on demonstration comparing a healthy pink lung with a dark, smoker’s lung. When air was pumped into each, the healthy lung expanded easily, while the smoker’s lung struggled to inflate, showing how smoking limits air flow. To simulate emphysema, participants ran in place while breathing through a straw. This exercise shows how difficult it becomes to breathe after long-term smoking use.

Coping with emotions

Another station focused on helping participants explore healthy ways to cope with their emotions. Youth were asked to share what helps them feel calm and were provided with resources to support emotional well-being. Participants learned that writing



To demonstrate the struggle of emphysema, youth run in place and then attempt to breathe through a straw.

down anxious or frustrating thoughts can help release negative emotions and make them manageable. Participants learned an exciting tip: sour candy can help reduce levels of anxiety, because it temporarily distracts you from having negative emotions. Participants were given a small pencil pouch with a small notebook, pens, pencils, sour candy, and a granola bar to help when they get hungry. The overall goal was to give youth practical tools to reach a more positive state of mind. This station showed that coping with emotions does not have to be complicated. Sometimes it’s simple, everyday actions that can make a big difference in how you feel.

Driving under the influence simulation

The last station focused on one of the most influential topics – alcohol and driving under the influence. Participants were first informed that alcohol was one of the more easily accessible substances, and it impairs one’s ability to make proper decisions, like whether it is safe to drive a vehicle or not. Participants were given “drunk goggles” to wear to simulate the effects alcohol can have on vision and brain functions. While wearing the goggles, participants attempted to ride a tricycle. This activity recreated the difficulty of operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol. This station gave youth a real-world perspective on the dangers of impaired driving and the importance of making responsible choices.



Learn more about Health Rocks!
go.illinois.edu/4-HHealthy



4-H YOUTH TEST THEIR LIVESTOCK KNOWLEDGE AT ANNUAL EVENT

Youth gain a range of life skills from participating in competitions, including discipline, teamwork, resilience, confidence, and emotional intelligence. 4-H members from each county were invited to participate in the annual Livestock Quiz Bowl, a competition where youth can showcase their knowledge of livestock breeds, equipment, feed, and general animal care. 4-H members were separated into three divisions based on age: junior, intermediate, and senior. Stations were established for each test, including an equipment area where members could see and touch each piece before making their identification. The feed identification station was similar, allowing members to see, feel, smell, and even taste each feed before making their final decision. This competition is a great way for members to connect across counties and compete for the top three spots in each division.



CULTURAL EVENT PREPARES YOUTH FOR DIVERSE WORLD

There are almost 1,000 different cultures in our world today, and it is important for youth to learn about them because it builds empathy, broadens perspectives, and prepares them to thrive in a diverse world. For the past decade, Perry County 4-H has partnered with the local Home and Community Education to host a Passport Party. Each year, the Passport Party focuses on a country and a U.S. state. In 2025, the featured country was South Africa and the state was Georgia. Each 4-H and HCE club focused on either the country or state and developed a fun presentation representing that location. HCE prepares and cooks an authentic culinary dish, and this year they made bobotie, chakalaka, and malva pudding. Every 4-H member is required to taste each food item to encourage them to try something new. As part of the program, a citizen from each featured country is invited to share their experiences with local 4-H members, offering insight into cultural traditions and daily life.



SUMMER DAY CAMP HELP YOUTH LEARN AND GROW

4-H clubs, programs, and camps help students explore new things while meeting new friends. The events go beyond just a break from school during the summer months. They offer a realm of benefits that contribute to personal, social, and academic growth. This summer, Jackson County helped youth explore gardening and cooking. This week-long camp helped youth identify what vegetables grow in the garden and how they can prepare those vegetables into culinary dishes. Perry County 4-H and local Master Gardeners partner every year to present the "Kids in the Park" program where the kids learn about native plants, birds, and aquatic life. Youth participated in a field trip to Pyramid State Park, where they received water safety instruction and practiced kayaking.



YOUTH LEARN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AT CONSERVATION FAIR

Nature supports all life on earth, so conservation is essential to protect plants, animals, and humans. Programs and educational activities about conservation can spark an interest in youth to learn more about how to protect the world around them. In September, students from across southern Illinois attended the Conservation Fair at the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds. During the two-day event, Illinois Extension offered hands-on activities for kids to learn about wildlife, pollinators, vermiculture, ornithology, entomology, and meteorology. Some of the highlights from the fair included the opportunity to pet live turtles and examine animal pelts, learn how wind affects boats, create cereal bird feeders, and view the parts of an ant using pipe cleaners. These experiences allowed kids to connect with the material on a deeper level, helping them grow an appreciation for wildlife and conservation.





4-H members display diverse projects at local fair

4-H shows provide an opportunity for youth to showcase the skills and knowledge they have gained through their 4-H experiences. During this year's general show, 4-H members presented projects in categories such as visual arts, photography, robotics, foods, and more. Youth who go above and beyond in their 4-H projects are selected as Illinois State Fair Delegates, earning the opportunity to exhibit their work at the state level during the Illinois State Fair.

During the livestock shows, 4-H members display the animals they have raised and cared for over the past year. In addition to showcasing livestock based on physical appearance, some 4-H members choose to participate in the showmanship competition. Showmanship evaluates an exhibitor's ability to present an animal to its best advantage, highlighting the bond between animal and human. It assesses young people and not just the animal through their presentation, grooming, and handling skills, including how they position the animal.



Rhonda Shubert, Perry County 4-H program coordinator (left), and Lynn Heins, Illinois Extension county director (right), pose during Shubert's last 4-H livestock auction as a University of Illinois Extension employee. Extension thanks Shubert for over 20 years of dedicated work to Perry County 4-H and the community.



4-H member showcasing her sewing project to a judge at the Jackson County 4-H General Projects Show.

Showmanship competitions promote confidence and allow youth to communicate their knowledge and experience directly to the judge, discussing the care and health of the animal.

Youth who raised beef, swine, sheep, goats, poultry, and rabbits for their projects also had the opportunity to participate in the livestock auction. This event is successful every year, thanks to the support of local businesses and community members. All proceeds from the auction go directly back to the youth who sold their animals.

4-H events like local fairs play a crucial role in developing well-rounded individuals, while fostering a diverse set of skills and a strong sense of community.



80
4-H Clubs



2,927
Fair Exhibits



16,744
4-H Affiliations (4-H Experiences)



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



Enhancing mobility with Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention

According to the CDC, one in four older adults experiences a fall each year, resulting in injuries that range from minor to life-threatening and can lead to the loss of independence. Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention, consisting of two classes per week for eight weeks, is an evidence-based program that is highly recommended by the CDC to reduce the risk of falls. The gentle movements were created to support older adults or anyone who wants a practical, easy way to stay active. During class, participants worked through an extensive warm-up before getting instructions on one of the 10 forms that make up the 21 different movements. They then practiced all forms learned up to that point in class and performed a cool-down routine. All or most of the respondents reported better balance and increased focus; more than half reported increased stamina, reduced fear of falling, and improved social engagement. All or most of the respondents reported better balance and increased focus. More than half reported increased stamina, reduced fear of falling, and improved social engagement. All survey respondents plan to continue to use the program for exercise. Illinois Extension plans to offer more Tai Chi classes in 2026.



Perry County Tai Chi class performing warm-up movements.



Local book walks influence literacy and movement for young people

With the rise of handheld technology, fewer youth are choosing to read for fun. This decline is concerning because reading offers a wide range of benefits that go far beyond entertainment. Regular reading helps build academic achievements, improve cognitive function, and develop a sense of empathy. In 2025, Illinois Extension hosted more than 40 book walks throughout Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties. The book walks were held at various libraries, parks, and events throughout the year. The program offered a rotation of one new book every two weeks where families could walk through the site and read each page of the book. Books were selected to encourage kids to get active while reading.

While most locations were only offered in the summer, some locations are open year-round through indoor book walks. The book walks have helped strengthen the partnership with local libraries and park districts, and Extension hopes to continue them in 2026.



Illinois Extension partnered with the DuQuoin Library to host a "Saturday Night at the Dinosaur Stomp" Book Walk.

Summer cooking classes help young chefs sharpen their kitchen skills

Youth often turn to unhealthy food choices when they do not know how to cook. Illinois Junior Chefs is an enjoyable and engaging program that teaches youth about nutrition and cooking techniques while motivating them to try new and healthy recipes. In 2025, Illinois Extension hosted 13 cooking schools in Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties, with a total of 175 participants. SNAP-Education staff taught youth cooking techniques such as knife skills, measuring methods, and most importantly, sanitation. The recipes presented during the week-long classes introduced nutritious food options, and each student went home with a cookbook filled with healthy recipes to try at home.



Youth learn measuring techniques and knife skills during Illinois Junior Chefs.



EWING FIELD DAY CULTIVATES KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY

Ewing Demonstration Center has served the local community since 1910. It is a place where local farmers and agricultural professionals work with researchers from the University of Illinois to develop and apply practices that would benefit local farming communities. The center has implemented no-till research and demonstration plots for over 50 years, providing insight into growing conditions in southern Illinois. Educators and campus faculty visit the center annually for Ewing Agronomy Field Day to present research practices to local farmers and agriculturalists. The topics this year included: cover crops for forage and livestock feed; insect management in corn and soybeans; evaluating best management practices on yield, erosion, and nutrient losses through surface runoff; and an annual update from FarmDoc. Local educators and campus faculty engaged with local growers to provide best management practices.



MOBILE FOOD MARKET BRINGS FRESH FOOD TO THE COMMUNITY

Households that experience low food security often reduce their food intake or skip meals, which can lead to an increase in health risks over time. Acknowledging this need in the community, Franklin County 4-H Hunger Ambassadors started a mobile food market in 2017 with the St. Louis Area Foodbank and the City of Sesser. This program has and will continue to provide fresh food and other household items to local residents and families facing food insecurity. During each market, members organize the food and other items before distributing them to community members. Through their work, local 4-H members have strengthened community bonds and fostered a culture of support and resilience.



31,570
people served
since 2017



891,280
pounds of food
distributed since 2017



LOCAL HOMESTEADERS LEARN THE STEPS TO PROCESS CHICKENS

In today's world, information is just a few clicks away. While it is simple to search for new information, there is a steady decline in knowledge of where food and resources come from. As part of Illinois Extension's Modern Homesteading series, participants took a field trip to Flock Farms, a local farm in Anna that raises heritage-breed chickens, lambs, and hogs, and sells meat at local farmers markets and at their on-farm store. On the first day at the farm, participants learned proper techniques for stunning chickens, plucking their feathers, processing the birds, and placing them in the coolers. The second morning at the farm included a lesson on the regulations required to sell homegrown meat at local markets and how to properly package it. Participants left Flock Farms with two completely processed chickens and valuable knowledge to help them with their own homesteading operations.



CULTIVATING KINDNESS THROUGH FOOD DONATION GARDEN

With grocery prices continuing to rise, many Americans are finding it harder to afford food in their own communities. Limited access to healthy options carries serious consequences, affecting physical and mental health, cognitive growth, and even educational outcomes. Working alongside local partners, Illinois Extension supported the Cultivating Care Garden, a shared space for the community to grow together. Volunteers played a vital role throughout the growing season — tending the garden, harvesting crops, and ensuring fresh produce was delivered to the Salvation Army Food Pantry and other communities.



2,185
pounds of produce
donated



200+
volunteer hours



Master Gardener volunteers celebrate 50 years of impact

The Master Gardener program took root at Washington State University in 1973 and has since expanded across the United States, including Illinois. This year celebrates 50 years of impact for the Illinois Extension Master Gardener program, highlighting the mission of “Helping Others Learn to Grow.”

At the 2025 Master Gardener State Conference, volunteers from across the unit were honored with exemplary awards. This year’s award recipients from Jackson, Perry, and Williamson counties were recognized for their outstanding contributions to projects such as reviving heritage by cultivating native plants, leading by extraordinary example, and growing fresh food for those in need. These projects and volunteer efforts reflect the shared commitment to improving lives through gardening.

Recipients of the 2025 Teamwork Award:

Williamson County Team: Tracy Hosman-Kaytor, Sasha Milburn, and Joe Powers. This team was honored with the award in recognition of their outstanding teamwork and commitment to community service. Their impactful work with the Cultivating Care Garden and Food Pantry Project demonstrates compassion and dedication to making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. During the 2024 garden season, this Master Gardener team helped community members grow 22 different herbs, fruits, and vegetables on site and donated 864 pounds of produce they harvested to the Salvation Army Food Pantry, feeding friends and families in need.

Jackson County Team: Kevin Ahlfield, Norma Allen, Carla Coppi, Kathy Homa, Tracy Hosman-Kaytor, Dorothy McDaniels, and Elizabeth Todd. This team was honored with the Teamwork Award for their collaborative efforts to revive history. Through their influential work on the Flax Project at Harrison Bruce Historical Village and partnership with the Black Sheep Fiber Guild, they brought traditional growing practices to life, showcasing them to the community. Carla Coppi, a Master Naturalist, helped lead the charge.

Karen Glynn of Perry County received the 2025 Sustained Excellence Award. Karen was recognized for showcasing exceptional leadership abilities and dedication to the Master Gardener community in her county, unit, and state. This award is a marker of continued commitment to supporting the Master Gardener volunteer program and is a rare achievement, given to fewer than 2% of Master Gardeners annually.



Karen Glynn,
Master Gardener

Local Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers stayed busy throughout the year, assisting Illinois Extension with various educational and outreach opportunities. The Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs continued to grow, with 28 Master Gardeners and 40 Master Naturalists participating this year. Volunteers dedicated their time at various partner sites — educating the public, engaging in community outreach, and providing natural resource and gardening stewardship across southern Illinois.

These dedicated volunteers have made a notable impact on their communities, and they continue to motivate and sustain the growth of gardening and environmental stewardship throughout southern Illinois.



60
number of volunteers



4,484
hours of volunteer work



153,760
Master Gardener and Master Naturalist
Volunteer Value



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

Community gathers to smash pumpkins for composting



Each year, billions of pounds of pumpkins end up discarded in landfills, where they break down and release methane, a harmful greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. While rotting jack-o'-lanterns often go unnoticed, they represent a pressing environmental concern. Composting offers a simple and powerful alternative. When pumpkins are returned to the soil, they enrich it with organic matter, improve its structure, and stimulate microbial activity that supports healthy plant growth.

In November, Illinois Extension partnered with the Jackson County Health Department and SIU Student Sustainable Farm to host a Pumpkin Smash, turning what might usually look like waste into an opportunity for learning and community fun. The event provided residents from across the region with a hands-on way to explore composting while learning about the environmental, community, and educational resources available through Illinois Extension and the local health department. Participants from 12 different zip codes came together, bringing their leftover pumpkins to be smashed, collected, and prepared for composting.

By the end of the day, more than 3,000 pounds of pumpkins had been rerouted from the landfill into a compost pile at the Jackson County Extension Office. Attendees left the event with a sense of responsibility and encouragement about composting and sustainability.



SNAP-Education hosted a booth at the pumpkin smash with healthy facts about pumpkins, an exercise game, and delicious samples of pumpkin pie in a bag.

Financial Report

Nationwide, Extension is funded through a combination of local, state, and federal dollars, which are returned to the community through educational programming. Extension is a three-way funding partnership that includes the state of Illinois, United States Department of Agriculture, and Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson county boards. SNAP-Education programs are funded by a federal grant from the USDA. These partnerships bring thousands of programming dollars into the five counties in addition to local contributions and state and federal support.

SOURCE OF REVENUE		
Percent	Source	
41%	Federal	
34%	County Board and other Local Sources	
25%	State Match and Ag Premium Funds	

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Illinois Extension

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College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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