



**University of Illinois Extension
8751 S. Greenwood Ave., Suites 112-122
Chicago, IL 60619
Cook County Extension Council Meeting
Thursday, September 18, 2025
Minutes**

Meeting Attendees: Richard Juarez Sr., Mary Harkenrider, Geri Redd, and Dedra Ries.

Staff Attendees: Willene Buffett, Leonard Parker, Dominique Cobbs, Rainah Folk, Laretha Mosby, Alisa Nash, Michael Neil, and Sophia Ottomanelli.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Richard Juarez, called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Minutes from the March 20 and June 5 meetings were reviewed and approved.

County Director's Updates

- **Effect of SNAP-Education Program Funding Changes on all Extension Units.** *Director Buffett and Alisa Nash:* Recent federal legislation has eliminated funding for SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) programs. SNAP-Ed provides nutrition education to individuals who are eligible for food stamps. We were informed that with adjustments, we will continue to provide direct education to food stamp-eligible individuals through mid-February 2026.

In Cook County, there is an opportunity to continue providing direct nutrition education to a different audience: limited-income families with young children, through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

At the university level, the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) is committed to examining how we address nutrition education. Workgroups have been formed and are exploring future funding opportunities and additional ways Extension can provide nutrition education, particularly for limited-income families, youth, teens, adults, seniors, and other vulnerable populations.

Old Business

- **Unit Plan of Work.** *Sophia Ottomanelli and Dominique Cobbs:* Cook County Extension conducted community forums across the county to help identify the primary issues and pressing concerns of residents and how Extension can address these issues. Two members of the council participated in the forum held in the south suburbs.

The information gathered will be used to inform and shape future Extension efforts in Cook County. The final plan of work will be completed by the end of September.

- **Extension Council Meeting Evaluation and Self-Evaluation Forms Update.** *Assistant Director Parker:* Annually, council members are given an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience serving



on the council and the effectiveness of the meetings. The evaluations help us enhance the council's effectiveness, and as a result, our unit's effectiveness.

Council members were reminded of the importance of the forms and encouraged to complete and return them promptly.

- **Unit Financial Audit.** *Laretha Mosby:* The Audit Committee works with the County Director and Unit Operations Manager to complete and submit the annual audit report for the Unit's locally held In-and-Out accounts. This financial committee reviews the accounts and consists of council members and Extension staff.
- **Updates From Meetings With Program Teams.** *Mary Harkenrider:* noted that the Agriculture and Agribusiness team has been very busy and productive, but did not have specific details to report at this time.

The Chair suggested including information about the frequency of program team meetings between council meetings, the number of council members in attendance, and staff participation in future updates.

New Business

- **Extension Council Recruitment Update.** *Assistant Director Parker:* A new member has completed the recruitment process and has been appointed to the council. We are continuing our efforts to identify potential new members.

Announcements

- *Director Buffett:*
 - The Cook County Extension Council was commended by the Associate Director for Region 1 for our functionality and for submitting the required forms to the regional office promptly.
 - The unit is in the process of hiring new staff: two 4-H Educators and two Community and Economic Development Educators.

The next meeting date is December 18, 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

Minutes respectively submitted by Michael Neil.