

# Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

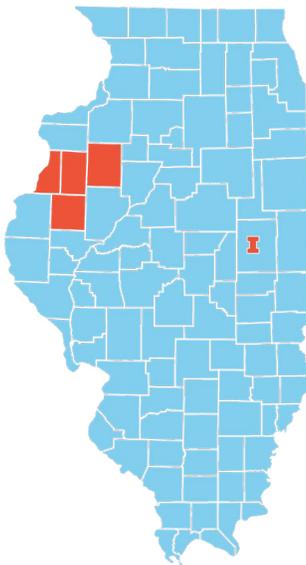


Serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren Counties  
**ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025**





Lisa Torrance  
County Director



# Looking back with gratitude, looking ahead with confidence

As you read this I am probably on my own porch with a lemonade and reading a book, or maybe in Chicago or St. Louis playing with my grandchildren. I had a great career with University of Illinois Extension. Twenty-four years has gone by fast, but most of it has been very rewarding, and I have learned a lot along the way.

I have been able to meet some great people, visit some amazing places, and it rarely felt like a job because it was so much fun. Could the day to day get bogged down in the details? Of course. But if I remembered to look at the big picture there was always some positive impact that your local Extension offices were making.

During my tenure, we grew 4-H programming to include shooting sports, robotics, and now eSports. Community and Economic Development has been involved in helping county boards create hazard mitigation plans and developing COADs (Community Organizations Active in Disaster), which will assist when disasters impact our communities. Family Life is focusing on things such as brain health and helping citizens age safely. Horticulture is more than gardening and landscaping and now focuses on sustainability, conservation efforts, homesteading, and helping diverse communities grow gardens that reflect their culture. Agriculture is helping families with how to manage and leave farms for the next generation. So much is going on.

While some things with Extension we like to keep a bit traditional, Extension programming is always ever changing and evolving. Please take a few minutes to read this and learn more about what is happening at your local Illinois Extension office. Maybe even pour your own glass of lemonade.

Thank you for all your support over the years and your support of Extension. It was greatly appreciated. Don't worry, it's not goodbye. We all know I love a good 4-H fair, or maybe I will see you in a Tai Chi class or at Gardeners Day. Or maybe I am right next to you volunteering at a disaster that we hope will never come.

But before I go, let me introduce your new County Extension Director Tara Heath. Tara joins our team with a strong background in agriculture, holding a bachelor's degree from Western Illinois University and a master's degree from the University of Illinois. A certified crop advisor, she brings extensive leadership experience as superintendent of grounds at WIU. Within Extension, Tara has served as a horticulture program coordinator supporting 150 Master Gardeners and most recently as a commercial agriculture educator. She brings a wealth of knowledge, hands-on experience, and a deep commitment to serving our communities. I know you will welcome her, just like you welcomed me 24 years ago.

Lisa Torrance  
County Director

Cover photo:  
The prairie at sunset.

# 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:

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

### Partnerships

### Resource Generation

<b>5,129</b> Program Volunteers	<b>277</b> Community Gardens	<b>2,830</b> School and Community Partners	<b>\$15,026,392</b> Value of Volunteer Contributions	<b>\$499,188</b> Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated	<b>\$960K+</b> 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:

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



## Tai chi transforms simple movement into greater independence and peace of mind

Falls are one of the leading causes of injury and reduced quality of life, particularly among older adults. Beyond the immediate physical risks, falls can lead to a loss of independence, increased fear of movement, and social isolation. Preventing falls, therefore, is not only about avoiding injury—it is about preserving confidence, mobility, and overall well-being.

Recognizing this need, Illinois Extension offered Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention, a program designed to improve balance, coordination, and body awareness through gentle, mindful movement. Led by Family Life Educator Tessa Hobbs-Curley, the program provided community members with an accessible and welcoming opportunity to support their physical and emotional health.

Each week, participants gathered for a calm, meditative hour focused on slow, intentional movements rooted in tai chi principles. The class environment encouraged individuals of varying abilities to move at their own pace, fostering a sense of safety and inclusion. Rather than emphasizing intensity or performance, the sessions focused on awareness—how the body moves through space, how weight shifts affect balance, and how breath and posture work together to support stability.

Participants reported meaningful benefits that extended well beyond the classroom. Many shared that they became more aware of their movements in everyday activities, such as walking, standing up from a chair, or navigating uneven surfaces. This increased body awareness helped participants feel more confident and in control, reducing fear and hesitation associated with movement.

In addition to physical benefits, participants frequently noted the calming and stress-reducing effects of the practice. The slow pace and intentional focus offered a rare opportunity to pause, breathe, and reset. For many, the class became a weekly anchor—providing not only exercise, but also mental clarity and emotional balance.

Equally important was the sense of connection built through the program. Participants described the camaraderie that developed over time, as individuals encouraged one another and shared their experiences. For some, the class offered a valuable social outlet, strengthening relationships and reducing feelings of isolation. The shared experience of learning together fostered trust, support, and a sense of belonging.

By combining gentle physical activity with mindfulness and social engagement, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention provided participants with practical tools to reduce fall risk while enhancing overall quality of life. The program showed how simple, evidence-based practices can empower individuals to remain active, confident, and connected as they age.



# Strengthening mental health support in the agricultural community



Farming, ranching, and agricultural work require resilience, independence, and long hours—often spent working alone or under intense pressure. While these qualities are essential to sustaining our food systems, they can also make it difficult for agricultural workers to recognize stress, mental health challenges, or substance use concerns in themselves or others. In rural and agricultural communities, stigma and limited access to resources can further prevent individuals from seeking help until a crisis occurs.

Illinois Extension recognized this critical need and responded by offering free, in-person and online mental health and substance use response training tailored specifically for the agricultural community. Designed with the realities of farm life in mind, these trainings provided participants with trusted, familiar spaces to engage openly in conversations that are often overlooked or avoided in agricultural settings. Throughout the training, participants learned about the unique stressors faced by farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers, including financial uncertainty, weather-related pressures, isolation, and the emotional toll of generational responsibility. The program emphasized practical, real-world strategies for recognizing warning signs of mental health and substance use challenges, initiating supportive conversations, and connecting individuals to appropriate local and national resources.

MHFA empowers individuals to recognize mental health and substance use challenges and respond with confidence and care.

Tessa Hobbs-Curley, Family Life Educator

A key focus of the training was reducing stigma surrounding mental health in agriculture. Participants explored how cultural norms of self-reliance can discourage people from asking for help. They also learned how reframing mental health support as a form of strength can encourage earlier intervention. By normalizing these conversations, the training helped participants feel more prepared to support friends, family members, coworkers, and neighbors.

Tractor doing spring cultivation.

By the conclusion of the program, participants reported increased confidence in their ability to respond when someone is struggling—including knowing what to say, how to listen, and where to turn for additional support. The training strengthened local capacity for early intervention, reinforced peer support networks, and helped ensure that agricultural workers understand they are not alone in facing mental health challenges. Family Life Educator Tessa Hobbs-Curley notes, “Mental Health First Aid empowers individuals to recognize mental health and substance use challenges and respond with confidence and care.” This program demonstrates how targeted, culturally relevant education can create safer, healthier agricultural communities—where recognizing stress, offering support, and connecting people to help can truly save lives.



**988 Suicide or Crisis Hotline:**  
Call or Text 988 or 1-800-273-8255  
Crisis Text Line: Text "Home" to 741-741



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# Wits Fitness Program exercises the brain while building connections



The Wits Fitness Program has become a valuable resource for older adults throughout west-central Illinois, supporting cognitive health while fostering meaningful social connections. Designed to promote lifelong learning and mental engagement, the program offers an approachable and enjoyable way for participants to keep their minds active and sharp.

Family Life Educator Tessa Hobbs-Curley describes Wits Fitness as, “an engaging, interactive, and educational brain health program.” Each session blends mental exercises with group interaction, creating an atmosphere that is both stimulating and welcoming. Participants are encouraged to challenge their thinking while enjoying a sense of fun and shared discovery.

Classes were held at multiple community locations, including the Galesburg Public Library, Lafayette Square Apartments, Stronghurst Senior Center, Strom Senior Center, McDonough County YMCA Senior Center, and Whiting Hall Apartments. By offering the program in familiar, accessible settings, Wits Fitness successfully reached a wide range of residents and reduced barriers to participation. Community members came together with a shared interest in strengthening cognitive skills and maintaining mental wellness as they age. Throughout the program, participants engaged in activities designed to stimulate memory, reasoning, attention, and problem-solving. Many reported feeling more mentally alert and confident in their daily lives, noting that the exercises helped them think more clearly and approach everyday tasks with greater assurance. The interactive nature of the sessions allowed participants to learn from one another while reinforcing new skills.

Equally important was the program’s emphasis on socialization. Beyond brain exercises, Wits Fitness created a supportive environment where participants could connect with peers, share laughter, and build friendships. For many, the social aspect of the program was just as impactful as the cognitive benefits. Participants shared that attending the sessions helped reduce feelings of isolation and gave them something to look forward to each week.

Feedback from attendees consistently highlighted appreciation for the balance of challenge and enjoyment offered by the program. Participants valued the opportunity to “exercise the brain” in a positive, encouraging setting and expressed gratitude for a program that supported both mental agility and emotional well-being.

The Wits Fitness Program demonstrates the power of combining cognitive stimulation with social engagement. By promoting brain health, lifelong learning, and community connection, the program enriched the lives of participants across Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren counties, reinforcing the role of Illinois Extension in supporting healthy aging and community well-being.

## Elevating community voices in public health planning

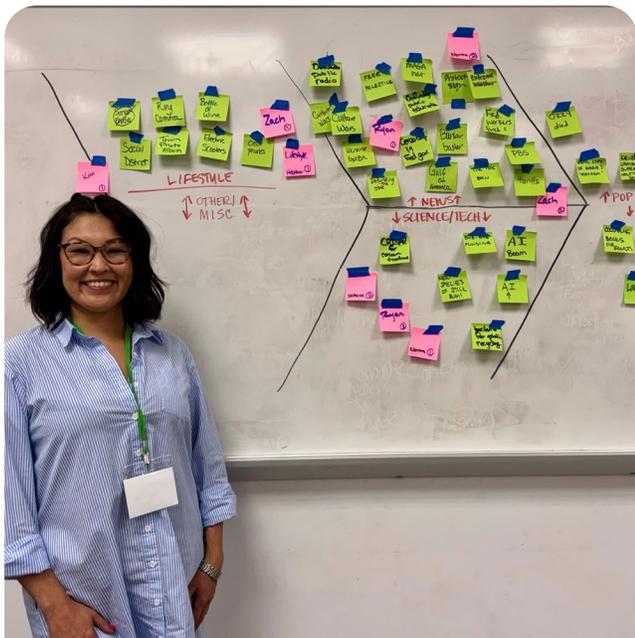
As the Henderson County Public Health Department began its required I-Plan update, community input was essential. The department partnered with Illinois Extension Community Economic Development Educator Michelle Kim to ensure meaningful public engagement.

Kim provided expertise in community engagement and data-driven planning, helping design an accessible, inclusive citizen survey aligned with best practices. The survey captured residents’ experiences and priorities, ensuring their voices guide future public health decisions.

This partnership strengthened the planning process through transparent, community-driven feedback, positioning the department to make informed, equitable decisions that reflect local needs. Illinois Extension continues to support local agencies by providing technical assistance that strengthens planning efforts and elevates community voices.



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Michelle Kim at the Facilitative Leadership workshop with her presentation to attendees.



## Building stronger community conversations through facilitative leadership

In 2025, Community Economic Development Educator Michelle Kim strengthened her ability to support local leaders and organizations by completing a three-day Facilitative Leadership workshop through Michigan State University Extension. The intensive training provided hands-on practice, real-time feedback, and practical tools designed to help facilitators guide focused, inclusive, and goal-oriented conversations.

Through the workshop, Kim deepened her skills in building consensus, managing group dynamics, and leading discussions that move communities from ideas to action. These enhanced facilitation techniques allowed her to create spaces where diverse voices are heard, shared goals are clarified, and collaborative solutions can take shape.

Kim is already putting these skills to work across the region, supporting community partners, coalitions, and local leaders as they navigate planning efforts, strategic conversations, and community-driven economic development initiatives. Her strengthened facilitation approach is helping groups work more effectively together and make meaningful progress on shared priorities.

If your community, organization, or coalition could benefit from skilled facilitation or support in leading productive conversations, Kim welcomes the opportunity to assist. Contact her to explore how she can help strengthen collaboration and guide your group toward actionable outcomes.

## Building digital skills for a connected future

As broadband access continues to expand across rural Illinois, many communities face a critical challenge: access alone does not guarantee connection. In rural areas, limited exposure to technology and digital tools has left many residents without the skills or confidence to fully benefit from broadband technology when it becomes available.

Through a partnership between Illinois Extension, Lead for America, American Connection Corps, and the Illinois Broadband Lab, Kevin Titus, an American Connection Corps volunteer, helped bridge this gap by delivering 60 hands-on technology tutoring sessions in Henderson, Knox, and Warren counties. These sessions were designed to meet people where they are—offering practical, approachable instruction in a supportive, judgment-free environment.



Kevin Titus, American Connection Corp volunteer.

The tech tutoring focused on building foundational digital skills, from navigating devices and the internet to understanding online services and everyday technology applications. For many participants, these sessions marked their first opportunity to ask questions, practice new skills, and build confidence with technology.

The impact extended beyond individual skill-building. Participants reported increased comfort using digital tools to access essential services, communicate with family and service providers, and engage more fully in their communities. By addressing digital literacy alongside infrastructure expansion, the program helped ensure that rural residents are prepared to take advantage of new broadband opportunities as they arrive.

This partnership demonstrated the power of combining service, education, and collaboration to reduce digital inequities. By investing in people, not just infrastructure, Illinois Extension, AmeriCorps, and the Illinois Broadband Association are helping rural communities move toward a more connected, informed, and resilient future.



# Horticulture and Natural Resources



## From community input to lasting impact: Glass recycling comes to McDonough County

What began as a conversation about unmet community needs has culminated in a tangible environmental solution for McDonough County. Five years ago, Illinois Extension partnered with the Macomb Women’s Club to examine local recycling practices and identify gaps in service. Through a community survey facilitated by Extension, residents shared their concerns and priorities—highlighting a clear need for expanded recycling options.

Guided by this community feedback, Extension educators worked alongside local partners to turn insight into action. Over time, the partnership explored viable solutions, built support, and pursued resources to make glass recycling a reality in Macomb. This year, those efforts came to fruition with the launch of a dedicated glass recycling program.

A glass recycling dumpster was secured through Ripple Glass, and grant funding was obtained to support program implementation and sustainability. Extension educators Chris Enroth and Carrie McKillip played key roles throughout the process, providing leadership, coordination, and technical expertise to ensure the program’s success.

The opening of the glass recycling program represents more than a new service—it reflects the power of community-driven planning and long-term collaboration. By listening to residents, leveraging partnerships, and staying committed over time, Extension and its partners helped transform a documented need into a lasting environmental resource for the community.

This project demonstrates how Extension connects community voices with practical solutions, supporting environmental stewardship and strengthening local infrastructure for years to come.



Celebrating the end of collaboration and the beginning of a service for the community. Photo by J. McCoy.



This purple glass recycling bin shows the groups involved. Photo by J. McCoy.



**24,000 lbs.**  
glass collected in first six months



# Master Naturalist Training: Strengthening stewardship in local rural communities



The Master Naturalist Training program continues to grow and flourish, preparing volunteers to become knowledgeable stewards of the land while inspiring others to develop a lasting love of nature. In local rural communities—where farmland, forests, rivers, and prairies shape both the economy and identity—maintaining a healthy ecosystem is essential for the well-being of all who live here.

The training blends classroom learning with immersive, hands-on experiences. Participants build a foundation in ecology and conservation through readings, expert instruction, and educational videos. Most importantly, they apply that knowledge outdoors—exploring local habitats and seeing firsthand how soil, water, plants, wildlife, and people are interconnected.

Field experiences are a highlight of the training. One favorite was the trip to Emiquon Nature Preserve, where trainees collected macroinvertebrate species from the Illinois River. After gathering specimens in the field, participants returned to the lab to identify and study them, gaining firsthand insight into aquatic ecosystems and water quality indicators. This immersive experience brought classroom concepts to life and reinforced the importance of careful observation and scientific inquiry.



**\$67,454**  
Volunteer value of local Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists

Master Naturalists and Master Naturalist Trainees wade in the Illinois River at Emiquon Nature Preserve. Photo by K. Budde.

Through opportunities like these, trainees not only build scientific knowledge but also cultivate a deeper appreciation for the landscapes and waterways that sustain local communities. As the program expands, it continues to develop informed, enthusiastic volunteers who share their skills through service, education, and advocacy—strengthening conservation efforts and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship for generations to come.



Master Naturalists and trainees sort through the water samples collected, looking for macroinvertebrates. Photo by K. Budde.



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# McDonough County Conservation Tours

## Rediscovering nature in our own backyard

In 2025, the McDonough County Conservation Tours invited community members to rediscover the natural beauty and ecological richness that exist right here at home. Often, the best-kept secrets are not far away—they are the restored prairies, woodlands, and wetlands quietly thriving in local backyards.

Through a partnership between Prairie Land Conservancy and Illinois Extension, eight tours were offered across six unique sites throughout the county. Each location showcased properties that have been thoughtfully restored and carefully managed to support diverse habitats. These tours highlighted how intentional stewardship creates spaces that benefit all inhabitants—not just people, but also pollinators, birds, native plants, and wildlife.

Every site featured its own distinct ecosystem, allowing participants to explore a variety of landscapes and restoration approaches. From prairie and woodland management to wetland preservation, attendees gained practical knowledge they can apply to their own property—whether they steward acres of land or a small backyard space.



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Beyond education, the tours fostered a renewed sense of connection and pride in local natural areas. Participants left with a deeper appreciation for the landscapes that sustain our rural communities and a better understanding of how conservation efforts strengthen the environment for everyone.

Highlights from 2025 tours are featured on the following page. Tours were also given at Brent Fowler's farm and prairie, Cecil White's remnant hill prairie and a prairie tour given by IDNR's Angella Morehouse, with an emphasis on pollinators.



Wilderness Walk at Wigwam Hollow. Photo by J. Webb.



### SHAWN MEAGER HOME GARDEN TOUR

Over the past decade, retired Western Illinois University professor Shawn Meager has transformed nearly one-third of his traditional lawn into a thriving native plant landscape, demonstrating how backyard spaces can support biodiversity and conservation goals. During the tour, participants learned how native species contribute to pollinator health and ecosystem balance, while gaining practical tips for starting their own “Homegrown National Park.” Meager shared plant identification guidance, personal management strategies, and resources to help others begin their conservation journey. Attendees even took home native seedlings from Meager’s yard—some of which were later planted at Prairieland Conservancy properties—extending the impact of one backyard’s restoration into the broader community.



Flowers at Shawn Meager Home Garden.  
Photo by J. Webb.



Wilderness Walk at Wigwam Hollow. Photo by J. Webb.

### THE WELLNESS WALK AT WIGWAM BIRD SANCTUARY

The Wellness Walk at Wigwam Hollow Bird Sanctuary highlighted the powerful connection between environmental health and personal well-being. Hosted in partnership with the McDonough County Health Department, this unique conservation tour emphasized how time spent outdoors supports social, emotional, and physical health. Participants learned that regular exposure to nature can reduce stress, improve mood and focus, and even strengthen immune function. Health Department staff also shared practical guidance on staying safe while enjoying the outdoors, including hydration, sun protection, and tick awareness. By combining conservation education with wellness strategies, the tour reinforced the message that caring for our natural spaces also supports healthier, more resilient communities.



### WILLIAMS WOODS AND PRAIRIE TOUR

The Williams Woods and Prairie Tour offered participants an inspiring look at long-term land stewardship in action. Twenty-three years ago, Andrea Williams and her family purchased 50 acres of overgrazed woods, erodible farmland, and shrub-choked pasture. Through decades of dedicated work—improving the timber stand, removing invasive species, reducing erosion, building trails and bridges, and beginning prairie restoration—the property has been transformed into a thriving and accessible landscape. During the tour, Williams shared the history of the land and practical management lessons, joined by retired IDNR District Forester Barrie McVey, who provided additional forestry insight. Participants gained valuable, real-world advice and encouragement to begin conservation efforts of their own, whether on large acreage or small backyard spaces.



Williams Woods and Prairie Tour. Photo by J. Webb.



Owsley Wild Land tour. Photo by J. Webb.

### OWSLEY WILD LAND TOUR

The Owsley Wild Land tour highlighted 38 acres of diverse native habitat thoughtfully restored and managed by certified Master Naturalist Cindy Owsley. Over nearly 20 years, Owsley has transformed former cornfields into a thriving ecosystem by minimizing invasive species and establishing hundreds of native plants that bloom from early spring through hard frost. The vibrant fields now serve as an abundant buffet for native insects, birds, and wildlife. During the tour, participants learned how intentional stewardship and long-term commitment can dramatically improve land health and biodiversity. Owsley shared practical guidance for conservation at every scale—from enrolling land in the Conservation Reserve Program, to converting portions of lawn into pollinator habitat, to planting native species in containers. Her leadership and example inspired attendees to embrace their own role as eco-stewards and caretakers of the land.





# 4-H Youth Development



## 4-H General Shows highlight youth mastery, creativity, and lifelong skills

The 2025 4-H General Shows brought together more than 500 young participants, each showcasing the results of months—sometimes years—of study, practice, and hands-on learning. With 600 projects displayed across disciplines ranging from geology to visual arts, the shows offered a lively snapshot of the diverse interests and talents within the local 4-H community. More than 100 of these exhibits were selected as state fair-worthy, a testament to the exceptional quality and dedication demonstrated by local youth.

Throughout the year, 4-H members dive deeply into their chosen project areas, building knowledge and refining skills that culminate in an exhibit that demonstrates their mastery. Behind every project is a story of perseverance, time management, and hard work—skills that extend far beyond the show floor. One member, who completed a genealogy project, shared that the best part wasn't the final display, but the time spent with his grandmother learning about the generations who came before him. His experience reflects the heart of 4-H: learning that connects, strengthens, and inspires.



**1,292**

Exhibits (General Show and Livestock)



**100+**

State Fair Entries

While many people associate 4-H with livestock, the General Shows reveal the full spectrum of what 4-H has to offer. From science and technology to creative arts and cultural exploration, these projects demonstrate that 4-H is a place where every passion can take root and grow. 2025 exhibits not only celebrated youth achievement, but also highlighted the program's ongoing commitment to developing capable, curious, and confident young people who are prepared to thrive in whatever path they choose.



Warren County Best of Show-Sewing project.

Photo by W. Ferguson.



# 4-H Vet Med Camp sparks interest in critical rural careers

The inaugural 4-H Vet Med Camp offered youth a rare opportunity to step directly into the world of animal medicine. Designed to mirror real veterinary experiences, the workshop allowed participants to practice essential skills such as suturing, administering inoculations, and performing routine animal-care tasks. Throughout the day, youth were encouraged to ask questions, explore the science behind veterinary procedures, and gain a clearer understanding of what it takes to work in this demanding and rewarding field.

The hands-on approach made a powerful impact. According to post-program evaluations, 80% of participants strongly agreed they enjoyed the camp, and 80% reported they now know more about veterinary medicine than before attending. Even more promising, 60% of youth said they are considering a career in veterinary medicine after the experience. These outcomes highlight the workshop’s ability not only to educate, but also to inspire the next generation of animal-care professionals.

The program was offered in partnership with the Recharge Teen Center, aligning with a shared goal of addressing the growing shortage of rural veterinarians—especially large-animal vets who are essential to livestock operations and agricultural communities. By giving young people early exposure to veterinary science, the workshop helps build a pipeline of future professionals who understand both the technical skills and the community importance of this career path.

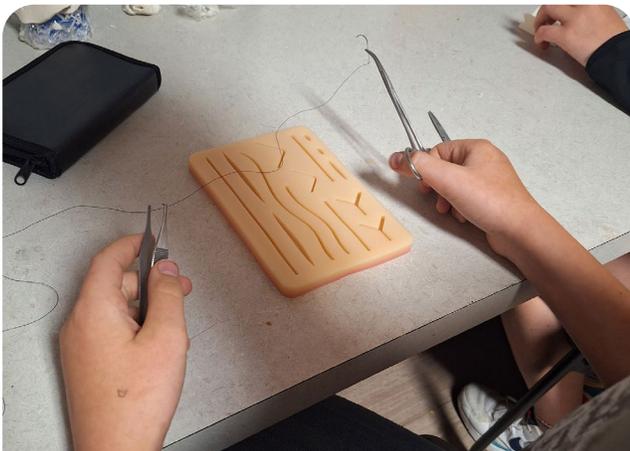
As rural areas continue to face gaps in veterinary services, programs like this play a vital role in preparing youth to step into high-need fields. The 4-H Veterinary Training Workshop not only strengthened participants’ confidence and curiosity, but also planted the seeds for future careers that will support the health of animals, farms, and communities across the region.



A participant curries a horse as part of the vet med camp. Photo by S. Carlson.



Campers practice inoculations. Photo by S. Carlson.



Learning how to suture. Photo by S. Carlson.



Explore more about 4-H  
[extension.illinois.edu/hkmw](https://extension.illinois.edu/hkmw)



### ILLINOIS 4-H VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: BLAKE HENNEFENT

Knox County 4-H proudly celebrated Blake Hennenfent, honored as the Illinois 4-H Volunteer of the Year and the 2025 North Central Region Volunteer of the Year. A fourth-generation 4-H member, Hennenfent represents a family legacy totaling more than 335 combined years in Knox County 4-H. His journey—from exhibiting cattle in the Union 4-H Club to founding and coaching the Knox County 4-H Livestock Judging Team—has transformed opportunities for local youth. Since 2016, Hennenfent’s leadership has helped members build confidence, sharpen evaluation skills, earn scholarships, and compete at prestigious events such as the National Western Stock Show Livestock Judging Contest. His commitment to teaching humility, hard work, and lifelong learning has strengthened the local program and inspired the next generation of 4-H leaders. Extension is grateful for Blake and proud to celebrate this well-deserved recognition.



### YOUTH IN ACTION FINALIST 2025: ELLIS ROGERS

Knox County 4-H proudly recognized Ellis Rogers of Dahinda as a national standout, earning her place as a runner-up for the 2025 National 4-H Youth in Action Award. An accomplished member of the 4-H Horse Team, Rogers has demonstrated exceptional leadership and mentorship while excelling in equine science at local, state, and national competitions. Her 4-H experience has strengthened her confidence, fueled her passion for animal science, and inspired younger members who look to her as a role model. Already a certified veterinary assistant, Rogers is pursuing her dream of becoming a veterinarian—an example of how 4-H opens doors to meaningful futures. The Youth in Action Awards honor young people who create lasting community impact, and Rogers embodies that spirit through her dedication, purpose, and heart.



### ART AMBASSADOR 2025: ELLA MCGINITY

Henderson County 4-H proudly celebrated Ella McGinity’s selection to the inaugural Illinois 4-H Art Ambassador Team. McGinity’s creativity, enthusiasm for the arts, and commitment to strengthening her community made her a standout choice for this new statewide leadership group. As an Art Ambassador, she will help expand creative and cultural arts opportunities while developing her own leadership skills. McGinity’s passion for making a difference through the arts is inspiring, and the positive impact she will bring to her local community and the broader 4-H program is sure to grow.



Shelby Carlson (let) accepts an award.

### NATIONAL AND STATE HONORS FOR SHELBY CARLSON, 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATOR

4-H Youth Development Educator Shelby Carlson earned state and national recognition for her outstanding work across Warren, Henderson, Knox, and McDonough counties. She received three major awards for her leadership in youth programming, including a Communicator Award for a statewide financial literacy video that expanded the reach of Welcome to the Real World. Carlson was also honored for Excellence in Workforce Development Programming after engaging 641 eighth grade students and 100 volunteers in hands-on career and financial education. In addition, she received the Excellence in Teamwork Award for helping create practical fair-season resources that support 4-H professionals across Illinois. Her innovative efforts continue to strengthen youth development opportunities throughout the region.





## 2025 Impact Summary



**28,277**  
Program attendance



**634**  
Educational sessions



**103**  
Volunteers (4-H, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists)



**\$288,307**  
Volunteer value



**2,716**  
Pounds of produce donated from Extension-supported gardens



**30**  
SNAP-Ed partnerships with K-12 schools, early childhood centers, and other organizations



**823**  
4-H club memberships



**72**  
4-H Clubs



Amount	Source
15.3%	Local
49.8%	State
7.4%	Federal
27.5%	Carry over from 2024



Amount	Source
74%	Personnel
9.4%	Facilities
6.1%	Travel
4.4%	Program Supplies
6.1%	Other



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Mon & Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

### Warren County Extension

1000 N Main St. (PO Box 227)  
Monmouth, IL 61462  
(309) 734-5161  
Fax: (309) 734-5532  
Tue - Thurs, 8 am - 4 pm

### Knox County Extension

180 S Soangetaha Rd.  
Suite 108  
Galesburg, IL 61401  
(309) 342-5108  
Fax: (309) 342-1768  
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

### McDonough County Extension

3022 W Jackson  
Macomb, IL 61455  
(309) 837-3939  
Fax: (309) 837-3019  
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

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## ONLINE



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