

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



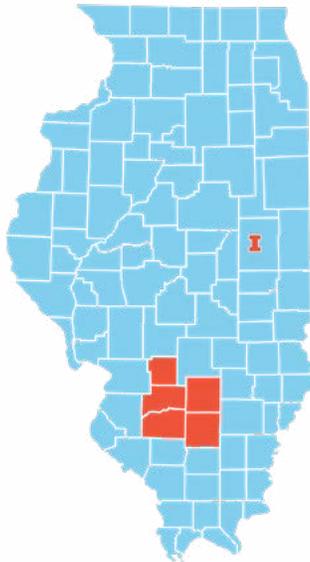
Serving Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington Counties
ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025





Jordee Koehler
County Director

Serving Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties with knowledge, stewardship, and purpose.



University of Illinois Extension exists to turn knowledge into action—linking university research with the everyday decisions that shape families, farms, and communities across Illinois. As the outreach arm of the state’s land grant university, our work is grounded in accessibility, trust, and local relevance.

Throughout this year, Extension educators and staff demonstrated what meaningful engagement looks like in practice. From answering critical questions about soil health, pollinators, ponds, and landscapes to supporting sustainable agriculture through conservation practices like cover crops, our teams responded with science-based solutions informed by listening to community needs. Innovative efforts that combine emerging technologies with time honored practices reflect Extension’s unique ability to honor tradition while embracing progress—strengthening both productivity and stewardship.

Preparing the next generation remains central to our mission. Through 4-H Youth Development, hands-on workshops, and experiential learning, young people build leadership, confidence, and practical skills that carry into adulthood. Welcome to the Real World, our signature financial literacy simulation, gives youth a realistic look at budgeting and decision making, helping them prepare for life beyond the classroom. Programs such as Annie’s Project and Back to Basics further support adults with practical knowledge that promotes resilience and informed choices.

This Impact Report highlights Extension in action—working alongside partners, volunteers, and residents to build stronger, more informed communities. Thank you for your continued support as we serve Illinois with knowledge, stewardship, and purpose.

Jordee Koehler
County Director

Cover photo: Participants in Illinois Junior Chef practice their measuring skills during the Bryan Bennett Library session in Salem.

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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TEDDY BEAR TOSS: YOUTH LEADING WITH HEART

Marion County 4-H organized a Teddy Bear Toss at a Salem High School basketball game to support local families and spread joy during the Christmas season. After the game, 4-H Federation members collected, sorted, and delivered the toys to five local organizations serving families in need. Led by 4-H Coordinator Courtney Beal and the 4-H Federation, fans were invited to toss stuffed animals onto the court at halftime as a fun and meaningful way to give back. The community responded with overwhelming generosity, donating 354 stuffed animals. This youth-driven service project not only brightened the holidays for many children but also gave 4-H members valuable experience in planning, teamwork, and leadership.



SHARING KINDNESS THROUGH FLOWERS

Giving the Gift of Cut Flowers, created by Illinois Extension Educator Chris Lueking, taught 25 participants how to design, plant, and care for cut flower gardens. Participants learned basic flower science and how arranging blooms can support well-being. They ended the series by creating bouquets to share with community members, showing how small gifts can brighten someone's day. Lueking and 4-H Coordinator Amanda Fox-Clark also led a youth floriculture and service-learning workshop. Youth practiced safe tool use, color selection, and flower arranging before making cards and delivering flowers to a local nursing home—building creativity, practical skills, and an understanding of kindness and service.



ANNIE'S PROJECT STRENGTHENS WOMEN'S ROLES IN AGRICULTURE

Illinois Extension continues its commitment to supporting the future of agriculture by offering programs that meet the needs of today's farm families. Annie's Project provided education tailored specifically to farm women, covering key topics such as agribusiness management, farm leases, property titles, estate planning, and insurance. Nineteen participants strengthened their understanding of these essential areas while building a supportive network with others facing similar challenges. Through this program, Illinois Extension empowers women to take active roles in farm decision-making and prepares them to navigate the evolving landscape of modern farming and agribusiness.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: 4-H TEENS SUPPORT LITTLE FREE FOOD PANTRIES

4-H is making a difference, and local Teen Leaders are taking charge! Noticing the needs within their community, Bond County 4-H Teen Leaders applied for the 4-H Food Advocacy Grant through Illinois 4-H. After receiving the \$1,000 grant provided by the Illinois 4-H Foundation, Teen Leaders stepped up to purchase food and assemble meal and snack kits for distribution to local Little Free Food Pantries in Pocahontas and Mulberry Grove. Their leadership and commitment show the powerful impact young people can make when given the opportunity to lead.





4-H & youth participation in 2025

Bond County	210 4-H Members	1,452 Program Contacts
Clinton County	244 4-H Members	1,262 Program Contacts
Jefferson County	108 4-H Members	1,269 Program Contacts
Marion County	253 4-H Members	1,543 Program Contacts
Washington County	271 4-H Members	1,122 Program Contacts



Little Free Art Gallery: inspiring young artists

Washington County 4-H brought together community partners for a mini-art and creative exchange workshop. Collaborating with Gather Coffeehouse, the Okawville Community Garden, and Happily Ever Crafter, 4-H created a welcoming space for youth to explore their creativity. Participants selected prompts from a “creativity jar” to spark ideas, learned basic painting techniques, and created small works of art to share in the Little Free Art Gallery.

At the end of the workshop, each youth chose a tiny painting made by someone else. This helped them feel proud of their own work and encouraged them to support their peers. The project gave youth a place to be creative, make friends, and feel like they belong.

This kicked off a series of Little Free Gallery workshops that continued through December and will pick up again over the summer.



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw

Youth explore skills and creativity through 4-H workshop series



In 2025, 4-H staff across Bond, Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties hosted a Creative Arts workshop series open to all youth ages 8–18. By collaborating across county lines, the Project Road Show series expanded access to resources and learning opportunities that individual counties may not be able to offer on their own.

The goals of the series were twofold:

- Expand hands-on learning within a single project area to help youth strengthen their experience award applications
- Provide equal opportunities for local young people by pooling expertise, supplies, and creative spaces.

Participants built new art skills, connected with creative peers, and gained appreciation for local artistic traditions. They showcased their work in the summer 4-H general show, celebrating their progress and continuing their creative journey.

Lego Robotics: building skills through STEM



STEM education continues to be a priority in 4-H. Clinton County 4-H partnered with Aviston Grade School and All Saints Academy to start an after school LEGO Robotics club. Using the LEGO Spike system, students learned the basics of programming and engineering.

While building their robots, youth also practiced teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These life skills prepare them for future challenges in and out of school. The club wrapped up with a LEGO Robotics camp over the summer, giving youth a chance to explore STEM and robotics even further.

Building on the success of this program, 4-H staff members have completed the LEGO Spike certification to expand robotics clubs in other counties. This ensures more youth can engage with hands-on STEM learning, reinforcing 4-H’s commitment to teaching young people the skills they need for the future.



Welcome to the Real World simulation gives youth a powerful lesson in financial reality

Last year, 49 eighth grade students from 11 area schools participated in Welcome to the Real World, a hands-on financial education program brought to life through a partnership between Illinois Extension and the Kaskaskia Special Education District. The collaboration directly addressed a major priority identified in the 2022 Needs Assessment: providing stronger financial education opportunities for youth.

The simulation invited students to step into the role of independent young adults by selecting an entry-level job and navigating a month’s worth of real-world expenses. Station leaders guided youth through major financial decisions—housing, transportation, utilities, insurance, groceries, clothing, and more—helping them understand how everyday choices impact their overall budget.

Teachers reported that the experience sparked important conversations and meaningful reflection. One teacher shared, “It was a great event for our students. It definitely did spur conversation. The kids loved to pick their jobs and then watch all of their money go to their bills... well, they didn’t love that part, but it is real life. It was an eye-opening experience for them!”

Student feedback confirmed the program’s impact:

- 90% found the simulation interesting
- 100% found it useful
- 96% said it was helpful
- 87% believed what they learned would help them in the future

Through this engaging, reality-based experience, young people not only learned the basics of budgeting—they gained a clearer understanding of the responsibilities they will face as adults. Illinois Extension and KSED look forward to continuing this partnership to build financial confidence and life skills in youth across the region.



Program Coordinator Kaylen Fuhler works with students at one of the Welcome to the Real World sessions. Plans are in the works to continue this collaboration in 2026.

Local hunters strengthen food pantries through deer donation program

Illinois Extension, in partnership with Fred's Meat and Processing, United Way of South Central Illinois, and Feeding Illinois, is proud to continue supporting the Hunters Feeding Illinois program. This collaborative effort brings together community partners and local hunters who generously donate their harvested deer to be processed and distributed to qualifying food pantries.

Community involvement has made a meaningful impact. A total of 80 deer have been donated, resulting in an estimated 2,800 pounds of ground venison to be shared with food pantries in all five participating counties. These donations help ensure that families in need have access to high-quality, locally sourced protein throughout the year.

Illinois Extension is grateful to the hunters, processors, and partner organizations whose continued support strengthens food security and community resilience across South Central Illinois.



80
Deer donated by local hunters



2,800+
Pounds of venison distributed to food pantries



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw



Building household resilience: Extension teaches time-tested skills for modern challenges

In community needs assessments, residents have consistently voiced concerns about the rising cost of food and essential goods. In response, Illinois Extension continued its annual workshop series focused on heirloom homesteading skills and everyday conservation practices—timely tools that help families stretch their budgets while becoming more self-sufficient.

Local Extension staff partnered with educators and specialists from across Illinois to offer hands-on learning throughout the year. Participants explored the science and techniques behind safe food preservation, learning proper canning methods to reduce waste and make the most of seasonal produce. Workshops on meal planning, grocery budgeting, and starting a home garden helped families better manage food costs and improve access to fresh ingredients.



Illinois Extension Educator Mary Liz Wright teaches canning science, techniques, and safety at Back to Basics.

Last fall, the series concluded with two additional workshops on seed saving and composting. Extension experts demonstrated how collecting seeds from a garden’s strongest plants supports healthier crops the following year. Participants also learned how properly composting kitchen scraps creates nutrient-rich soil that boosts plant growth—both practices helping home gardens thrive while lowering household expenses.

Throughout the series, community members gained practical skills and a deeper understanding of how traditional homesteading techniques remain relevant today. By rediscovering these heirloom skills, participants are better equipped to adapt to rising costs, build resilience at home, and support a more sustainable local food system.



Learn more at:
go.illinois.edu/bcjmw



Ellie Hutton and Jesse McCracken from Woodlawn High School were among local volunteers who harvested more than 2,500 pounds of turnips for local food pantries through an edible cover crop program.

Drone-Seeded project supports soil health and local food pantries

Illinois Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator Chris Lueking partnered with technical experts and local farmers to improve soil health while growing a nutrient-rich turnip crop for area food pantries. In August, an aerial drone seeded turnips on the headlands of the Christopher Zimmerman Farm in Woodlawn, demonstrating how drone technology can efficiently apply edible cover crops.

The plot was later featured during the 2025 University of Illinois System Leadership Tour. Extension Commercial Agriculture Specialists Dane Hunter and Talon Becker discussed the drone application process, licensing requirements, and soil-health benefits of cover crops. The visit highlighted ongoing local efforts to advance sustainable agriculture and address food insecurity.

Extension Financial Educator Jamie Mahlandt shared tools for managing rising grocery costs, including her new Grocery Planner resource. SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Worker Kristen Buttrum demonstrated easy turnip recipes, which were provided to food pantries receiving the donated produce.

With the help of Extension staff, volunteers, and community partners, more than 2,500 pounds of turnips were harvested and donated to local food banks—supporting families while showcasing innovative, community-focused agriculture.





Extension responds to rising demand for pond management guidance

Heavy spring rains in 2025 created new challenges for many local farm ponds, leading to a sharp increase in questions from community members seeking management guidance. In response, Illinois Extension saw double the number of pond-related inquiries compared to previous years.

To meet this growing need, Illinois Extension Educator Chris Lueking offered two in-person Pond Management training sessions. Participants learned how to set realistic pond management goals, identify and address excessive plant and algae growth, navigate common wildlife issues, improve pond safety, and prepare drought response plans.

These timely workshops equipped pond owners with practical strategies to improve water quality and maintain healthier pond ecosystems—even amid unpredictable weather conditions.



Agricultural career exploration day engages Washington County youth

4-H Coordinator Amanda Fox-Clark partnered with experts from Gateway FS, The Maschhoffs, Fred's Meat & Processing, and Kaskaskia College to deliver an immersive, hands-on learning experience for Washington County youth. The program introduced participants to modern agriculture through real-world demonstrations and emerging technologies. Youth explored how agricultural drones are used for aerial application and crop monitoring, gaining a firsthand look at the tools shaping today's farms. They also learned about meat production, connecting livestock care to the food systems that support local communities.

A guided anatomy lab allowed participants to examine pig and calf specimens, helping them understand animal health, biology, and the differences between healthy and diseased tissue. By working directly with professionals, youth discovered new career pathways, expanded their technical knowledge, and built connections with mentors dedicated to supporting the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Growing pollinator-friendly communities



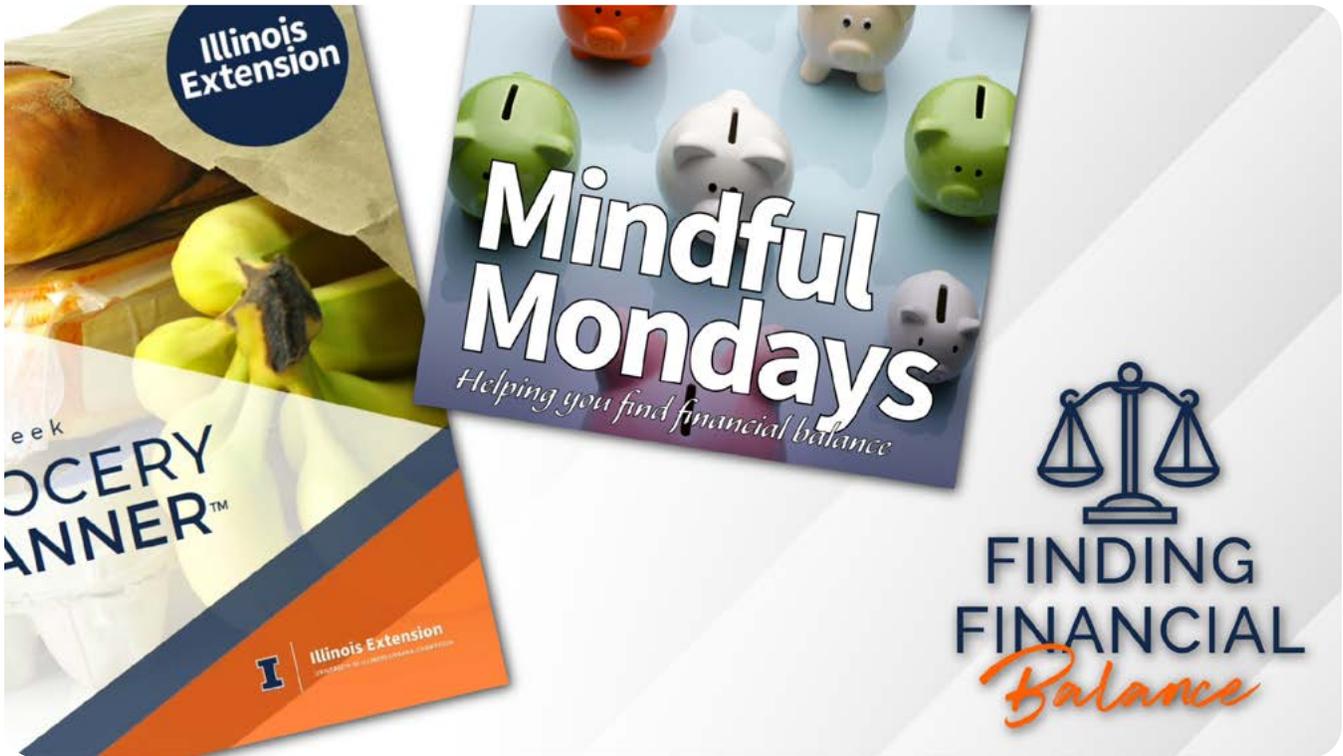
In June, Illinois Extension in Clinton County hosted Getting Started with Native Plants, an educational workshop that brought together 21 local gardeners to learn practical ways to support pollinators and biodiversity at home. Led by Master Naturalists Laurie Henderson, Dian Langenhorst, and Deanna Ratermann, the program introduced participants to the ecological value of native plants and how they contribute to healthy local ecosystems.

Each attendee received a kit of four native plants funded through the Clinton County Pollinator Grant Program, along with guidance on planting, care, and design strategies for incorporating native species into home landscapes. The workshop highlighted the importance of native plants as both nectar sources and host plants, supporting the full lifecycle of butterflies and other pollinators. As presenter Laurie Henderson shared, "Natives are for the caterpillars, as a host plant, not just for the butterflies."

Participants left with new plants, new skills, and a stronger understanding of how individual gardening choices can positively impact pollinators and the broader environment.

Ag & Natural Resources Participation

Master Gardeners	18 Active Volunteers	1,334 Volunteer Hours
Master Naturalists	22 Active Volunteers	1,671 Volunteer Hours
Educational Programs	131 Sessions	7,251 Participants
Expert Consultations	287 Contacts	



New Grocery Planner empowers families to take charge of food spending

Extension Educator Jamie Mahlandt developed a new Grocery Planner workbook to help families gain control of their food budgets and reduce waste. This four-week interactive challenge guides users through tracking weekly food costs, comparing grocery and dining-out spending, planning meals, and identifying savings opportunities.

The workbook features goal-setting tools, budget and waste-tracking templates, cost-effective meal planning tips, and reflection prompts to help participants build long-term, sustainable habits. Designed for families, individuals, educators, and community programs, the Grocery Planner provides an engaging and practical resource for strengthening financial literacy and improving everyday food decisions.

Grocery Planners are available through Pubs Plus pubsplus.illinois.edu/products/grocery-planner-workbook

Extension strengthens community support through food insecurity partnership

Last fall, Illinois Extension partnered with SSM Health Good Samaritan to expand community support for households facing food insecurity. Through this collaboration, Extension delivered practical, research-based educational resources to families receiving SSM Bread Basket food boxes.

As part of the initiative, Extension provided Grocery Planners that help households make the most of the food they have,

improve meal planning, and adopt sustainable habits that support overall well-being. By equipping families with user-friendly materials and guidance, Illinois Extension is helping residents stretch limited resources, reduce waste, and build greater confidence in managing their daily food needs.

This partnership reflects Extension's broader commitment to empowering communities with knowledge that enhances stability, health, and long-term resilience.

Financial education online reach

Illinois Extension's financial education efforts reach a broad audience through accessible online tools. Mindful Mondays, a weekly social media series, shares timely financial tips and trusted resources to help individuals stay informed about money matters. Complementing this, the Finding Financial Balance blog offers monthly guidance aimed at increasing financial awareness and strengthening money-management skills. The blog encourages readers to reflect on their personal tendencies around spending and saving, helping them better understand their financial habits and make meaningful behavior changes to achieve their goals.

Master Gardeners	7,642 Monthly Average Views	91,703 Total Views
Finding Financial Balance	346 Monthly Average Views	4,155 Total Views

 Read the Finding Financial Balance blog: go.illinois.edu/FFB



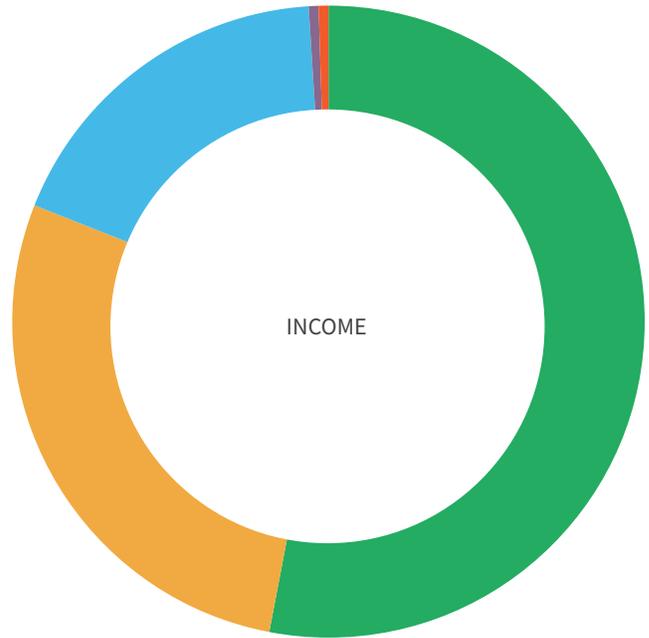
Extending knowledge. Changing lives.

University of Illinois Extension is the flagship outreach effort of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, offering educational programs to residents in all 102 Illinois counties. Since 1914, Illinois Extension has been an integral part of people’s educational experiences. Communities have come to rely on Extension for its practical, research-based educational offerings. Through learning partnerships that put knowledge to work, Extension’s programs are aimed at making life better, healthier, safer, and more profitable for individuals and their communities.

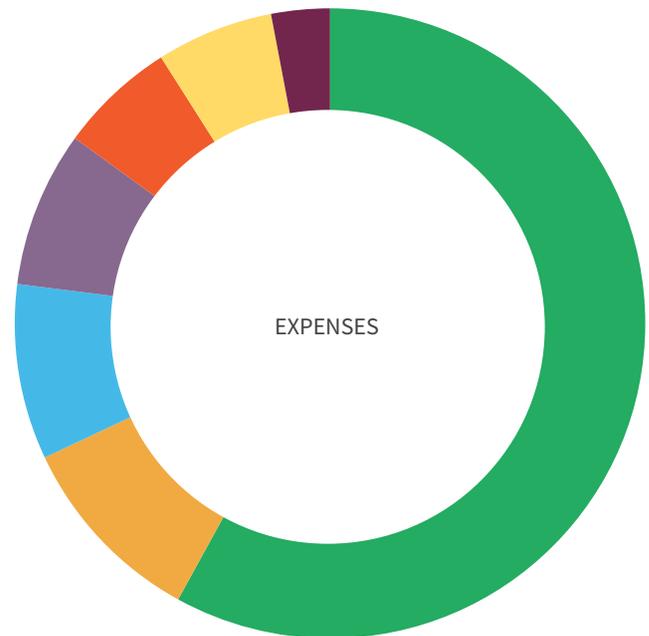
Funding Partners

- Bond County Board
- Bond County Home and Community Education
- Clinton County Assoc. for Home and Community Education
- Clinton County Board
- Clinton County Extension Foundation
- Jefferson County Board
- Jefferson County 4-H Foundation
- Marion County Board
- Marion County 4-H Foundation
- Washington County Board
- Washington County Extension Education Foundation

-  **41**
Local leaders received local government resources
-  **\$356,509**
Volunteer value across all program areas
-  **21,400+**
Program attendance for all program areas
-  **898**
Educational sessions across all program areas



Amount	Source
53%	State Funding
28%	County Funding
18%	Federal Funding (including SNAP-Ed)
.5%	Program Fees & Publication Sales
.5%	Misc. Agreements, Gifts & Donations



Amount	Source
58%	Salaries
10%	Leases
9%	Administrative Costs & Advertising
8%	Utilities & Travel
6%	Program Expenses
6%	Equipment
3%	Benefits



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Illinois Extension

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College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Local Extension Councils Cooperating.
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

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