



Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

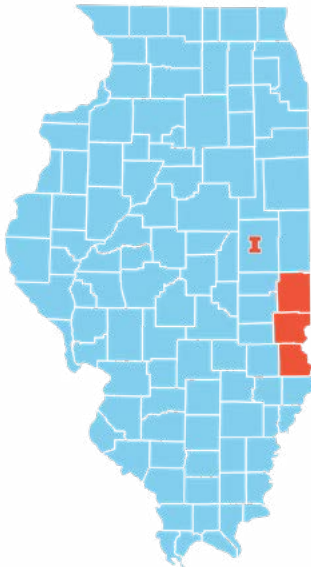


Serving Clark, Crawford, and Edgar Counties
ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025





Susan Sloop
County Director



A year of progress and community impact

It is with great pride and gratitude that I present the annual report for University of Illinois Extension in Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties. Over the past year, our dedicated team has remained steadfast in our mission to deliver impactful educational programs and services that meet the diverse needs of our communities.

Through our efforts, we have reached an impressive total of 22,061 individuals, providing them with valuable knowledge and resources to improve their lives, farms, and local economies. We conducted 519 educational sessions across a wide array of topics, including agriculture, youth development, health and wellness, nutrition, and community sustainability.

These programs are designed to empower residents with practical skills, foster lifelong learning, and promote community resilience.

Our work is made possible through strong partnerships with local organizations, schools, and businesses, as well as the generous support of our stakeholders.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding our reach, enhancing our programs, and addressing the evolving needs of our communities.

Thank you for your continued trust and support in helping us create a brighter, more informed, and healthier future for Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties.

Susan Sloop
County Director

Cover photo: Luna, a kindergarten student, participates in an activity led by 4-H Teen Teachers.

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:



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	68,697 Fair Exhibits
			20,242 4-H Club Members	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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Beyond limits

Tanner Fuller, a spirited and resilient first-year member of Crawford County 4-H, faces every challenge he encounters with an admirable combination of bravery, unwavering determination, and a heart overflowing with love and enthusiasm. Growing up in a world where sports and physical activities were often difficult for him due to certain challenges he faces, Tanner's parents decided to introduce him to 4-H, knowing how much he loved animals and the joy they brought him. From the very beginning, Tanner found himself in his element, especially when working with pigs; he quickly developed a deep bond with them, spending hours at the barn checking on their well-being, ensuring they had plenty of food and water, and simply enjoying quiet moments talking and bonding with his furry friends. His dedication and genuine love for the animals were evident to everyone around him, and it became clear that this was more than just a hobby—it was a passion.

As the big day of the 4-H fair approached, Tanner's family was filled with a mixture of excitement and nervous anticipation. They weren't quite sure what to expect from him or how he would handle the show ring, but they knew he was giving it his all. The anticipation built in the air, and there was an undeniable sense of pride in watching Tanner remain patient and focused despite the nerves. When his moment finally arrived and he stepped into the show ring, his entire face lit up with pure joy. Though Tanner wasn't entirely sure of all the rules

or what the judges expected, his enthusiasm and love for his pig were unmistakable. The crowd watched as Tanner radiated happiness, and it was clear that for him, this was one of the most special moments of his life.

That day, Tanner's genuine enjoyment and carefree spirit reminded everyone present about the true essence of 4-H—learning, growth, friendship, and fun. Throughout this journey, Tanner learned important lessons about patience, perseverance, and the importance of embracing each moment, regardless of the outcome. His infectious enthusiasm and positive attitude served as a powerful reminder that life's struggles are often overshadowed by the joy we find in simple, heartfelt moments. His first year in 4-H was filled with memorable experiences, personal growth, and countless smiles, and his family couldn't be more proud and excited for what's to come next.

Looking ahead, Tanner's little sister will be joining the 4-H family this year, and everyone is eager to see her begin her own journey. Tanner, ever caring and supportive, will undoubtedly be there to guide her, share his experiences, and show her the ropes of 4-H. As the judge at the fair summed up the day so beautifully, "It's not about winning; it's about having fun," and Tanner embodied this sentiment perfectly. Tanner's first year in 4-H has left a lasting impression on everyone who witnessed it, and it's clear that this is just the beginning of many more wonderful adventures ahead, filled with learning, friendship, and endless fun.



A grand farewell

Extension Educator Mary Liz Wright has taught generations how to cook, sharing her expertise with warmth, patience, and a genuine desire to help others succeed—her legacy continues to inspire many even as she enters retirement. From cottage food to jam, and everything in between, she has led countless programs, inspiring countless individuals to discover the joy and satisfaction of making homemade foods.

Over her 22 years of dedicated service as a nutrition and wellness educator with Extension, Mary Liz has touched the lives of many in profound ways, offering workshops, demonstrations, and one-on-one guidance that fostered confidence and skills in the kitchen. Her enthusiasm for healthy living and good food was contagious, and she always prioritized empowering others to take charge of their health and wellness.

An avid reader and classical music enthusiast, she has shared her passions beyond her work, enriching her community with her kindness, mentorship, and love for lifelong learning. A lifelong resident of Edgar County, Mary Liz has been a passionate advocate for community service, actively participating on numerous boards and organizations dedicated to making her community a better place. She is also a proud member of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Paris, where her faith and devotion have been an integral part of her life.

Her wealth of knowledge, compassionate spirit, and unwavering dedication have left a lasting impact on all who have had the pleasure of working with her, and her influence will be felt for generations to come. As she steps into this new chapter of her life, her legacy of nurturing, teaching, and inspiring will continue to motivate others, reminding us all of the importance of sharing our gifts and caring for our communities.



Mary Liz Wright



Empowering communities



Due to the elimination of federal SNAP-Ed funding, Extension is sad to announce the final year of a program that has impacted the food security and health of 1 million residents each year. Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (IL SNAP-Ed), known as Eat.Move.Save., provides community-centered nutrition education for individuals and families across the state, with the goal of preventing obesity and reducing the risk of chronic diseases by promoting healthy eating habits and active lifestyles. Managed by Illinois Extension, the program demonstrates impactful results by encouraging residents to adopt healthier behaviors. SNAP-Ed is especially crucial for eligible SNAP recipients, guiding them on how to make the most of their benefits, shop for nutritious foods, prepare healthy meals, and stay physically active. Its initiatives reach communities throughout Illinois, helping adults learn to cook healthier meals, cut down on unhealthy fats, increase their intake of fruits and vegetables, and incorporate more exercise into their routines. The program also includes school-based efforts that teach children about the importance of fitness and maintaining a healthy body, while simultaneously connecting low-income individuals with food access, nutrition resources, and support for American agriculture.



3
Partnerships with K-12 Schools



9
Partnerships with Emergency Food Sites



14
Partnerships with Other Types of Organizations



132
Nutrition Education Classes



406
Nutrition Education Participants



Growing together

At times, residents of assisted living facilities can feel isolated or bored. Participating in an Extension workshop to learn more about horticulture, especially when the workshop contains the opportunity to be outside, can lift spirits and give the residents a sense of contribution and satisfaction. Being outdoors helps to raise residents' spirits and by working together, it creates a sense of teamwork.

To begin the program, the four participants in this program shared past horticulture experiences, including one resident who shared her experience working as a young adult on her family's truck patch farm. Another resident shared how she didn't know the difference between a tomato and a potato plant. Sharing these experiences helped bring a level of excitement to the planting and growing of plants in the raised-bed garden located at the facility. Peas, tomatoes, peppers and marigolds were planted and cared for all summer by the residents. It was reported that the marigolds thrived and looked beautiful, while the vegetables contributed to meals created in the facility's kitchen.



Guardians of nature

Invasive plant species continue to threaten our local woods and waterways. With the continued spreading of the invasives, native plants are crowded out and wildlife are threatened by habitat degradation.

Clark County is truly fortunate to contain the Rocky Branch Nature Preserve, located in rural Marshall. This unspoiled 130-acre woodland is managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and relies upon dedicated volunteers to help protect its natural beauty.

On a beautiful spring morning, a group of volunteers – including five members of the Embarras Volunteer Stewards, a Master Gardener, a Master Naturalist, and the program coordinator—came together to remove invasive species and trash from the preserve. Over the course of three hours, they pulled garlic mustard and honeysuckle, and collected three large bags of invasive plants and litter. Volunteers not only enjoyed the camaraderie and scenic surroundings but also discovered new connections to their local environment. One participant, who lives nearby, was surprised to learn the preserve even existed.

Thanks to the success and enthusiasm of this effort, plans are underway to make it an annual event with hopes of expanding volunteer participation in the future.



Learn more at
go.illinois.edu/cce



A Master Naturalist and a Master Gardener work to remove invasive species and trash from a local preserve.

Creative living art

Creating inclusive and enriching educational experiences is an ongoing goal at the Lawrence Crawford Association for Exceptional Citizens. Five engaging terrarium workshops were held, offering individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities an opportunity to explore science through hands-on learning.

Led by Rebecca Schiver, ag and natural resources program coordinator, each session welcomed a group of five enthusiastic participants. The workshops introduced the basics of the water cycle and guided participants through building their own terrariums. Curiosity was high as attendees eagerly asked questions about plant care and the maintenance of the miniature ecosystems.

Although initially nervous due to having no prior experience working with adults with disabilities, Schiver found her concerns quickly eased. "The participants were incredibly kind and receptive," she shares. "Their excitement and eagerness to learn made each session rewarding and memorable."

Staff members at the Association expressed heartfelt appreciation for the workshops, praising both the educational value and the joy they brought to the consumers. The success of these sessions has sparked plans for future programming – autumn-themed activities are already in the works.

Reflecting on the experience, Schiver adds, "Not only did I have the chance to teach, but I also learned valuable lessons in patience, kindness, and the power of connections."

This collaboration stands as a meaningful reminder that when education is made accessible and inclusive, everyone benefits.





Walking in their shoes

Marshall Public Library employees participated in a comprehensive and impactful poverty simulation led by Extension and designed to increase awareness, deepen empathy, and foster a more thorough understanding of the daily struggles faced by individuals and families living in poverty. This immersive, hands-on experience provided a unique opportunity for staff to step outside of their usual roles and see firsthand the complex realities of navigating life with limited resources, strict time constraints, and systemic barriers.

Throughout the simulation, participants assumed realistic family scenarios, working through multiple “weeks” of daily life that involved making difficult decisions and managing competing needs. They interacted with a variety of community stations representing essential institutions such as schools, employers, social services, financial institutions, healthcare providers, and housing agencies, which illustrated the interconnectedness of these systems and the challenges in coordinating support. The fast-paced, high-pressure environment highlighted the constant decision-making, stress, and trade-offs that families must face daily—such as choosing between paying rent and affording healthcare, or prioritizing transportation costs over nutritious food.

Many participants reflected that the simulation was eye-opening and emotionally impactful, revealing nuances of poverty that are often overlooked or misunderstood. It challenged preconceived notions, showing that poverty is not simply a matter of lack of income but often involves a complex web of circumstances that require resilience, resourcefulness, and ongoing struggle. Participants shared that their perspectives on community members experiencing hardship would be forever changed, emphasizing the importance of approaching interactions with patience, flexibility, and genuine compassion.

Hosting this poverty simulation provided Marshall Public Library staff with a powerful, experiential learning opportunity that significantly strengthened their empathy and reinforced the importance of trauma-informed, community-centered service. It supported their professional growth by encouraging a deeper understanding of the barriers many patrons face and underscored the vital role libraries play as accessible, supportive community hubs. This experience aligned with the library’s core mission to serve all members of the community with dignity, respect, and understanding, fostering a more inclusive, empathetic, and welcoming environment for everyone. Ultimately, the simulation helped staff recognize the importance of creating a space where patrons feel safe, respected, and supported, regardless of their economic circumstances, and inspired ongoing efforts to promote equity and understanding within the community.

Sharp Sharks

The fifth grade iCREATE program, Sharp Sharks, immerses students in an engaging, experiential, project-based learning environment that introduces them to core concepts of entrepreneurship, problem-solving, and design thinking. Over the course of two dynamic days in each fifth grade classroom, students work collaboratively in teams to tackle a real-world challenge presented through a fictional character scenario, fostering creativity and critical thinking.

Guided by Tiffany Cervantes, college and career readiness coordinator, and Dara Potts, STEM coordinator, students assume the roles of entrepreneurs, engaging in the full design process that includes brainstorming ideas, developing prototypes, testing solutions, and refining their designs through multiple iterations.

As a culminating experience, student teams transform their final designs into tangible prototypes using cutting-edge 3D printing technology, allowing them to see their ideas come to life. These prototypes are then showcased during a Shark Tank-style pitch event held in the school gymnasium, where the entire fifth-grade class gathers to watch and learn. During the event, students confidently present their solutions to a panel of judges comprised of community members, which helps to enhance their communication skills, boost self-confidence, and strengthen their connection to the broader community.

Sharp Sharks not only emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and innovation but also provides students with an authentic, hands-on introduction to entrepreneurial and STEM-based career pathways, inspiring them to think critically about their future possibilities and empowering them to become active problem-solvers and innovators.





Youth explore space at a local elementary school.

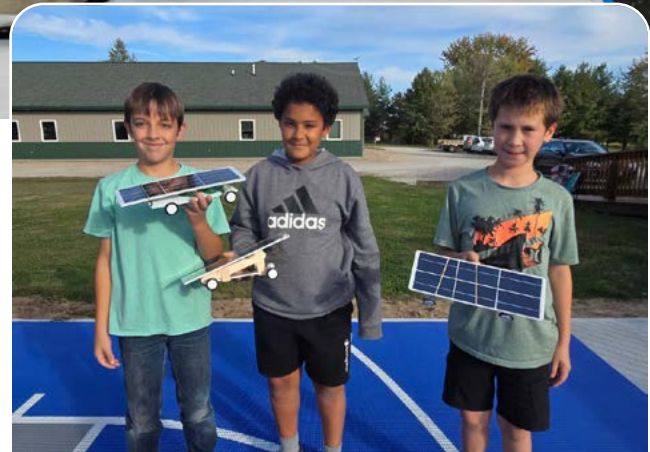


Innovating futures

The 4-H STEM program in Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties has achieved remarkable progress in delivering a wide range of engaging, hands-on learning experiences that focus on science, engineering, and technology, all through strategic collaborations with local community libraries, Harlan Hall, and area schools. These efforts have culminated in the successful launch of new e-sports clubs, which aim to promote teamwork, strategic thinking, and digital literacy among youth, preparing them for a rapidly evolving, technology-driven world.

Extension initiatives directly support the University of Illinois' land-grant mission by creating meaningful societal impacts—bringing high-quality, research-based STEM education to rural communities where access to such resources is often limited. This work also strengthens strategic partnerships with local institutions, ensuring that programming is responsive to the specific needs of these communities and fostering a sense of shared ownership and investment.

The programs include collaborative efforts at Marshall and Robinson libraries, where children explored scientific concepts like surface tension and geometry through fun activities such as "Bubble Galore" and construction challenges in "Passport to Build," engaging young minds and families in inquiry-based learning. At Harlan Hall, a series of workshops introduced youth to engineering and forensic science, including designing roller coasters to understand physics principles and using detective skills to solve mysteries, which fostered curiosity and problem-solving skills. Additionally, in-school programs like solar car projects at Shilo Jr. High and space exploration activities at Oblong and South Elementary schools connected learning to real-world applications, demonstrating renewable energy concepts and physics through creative projects. To

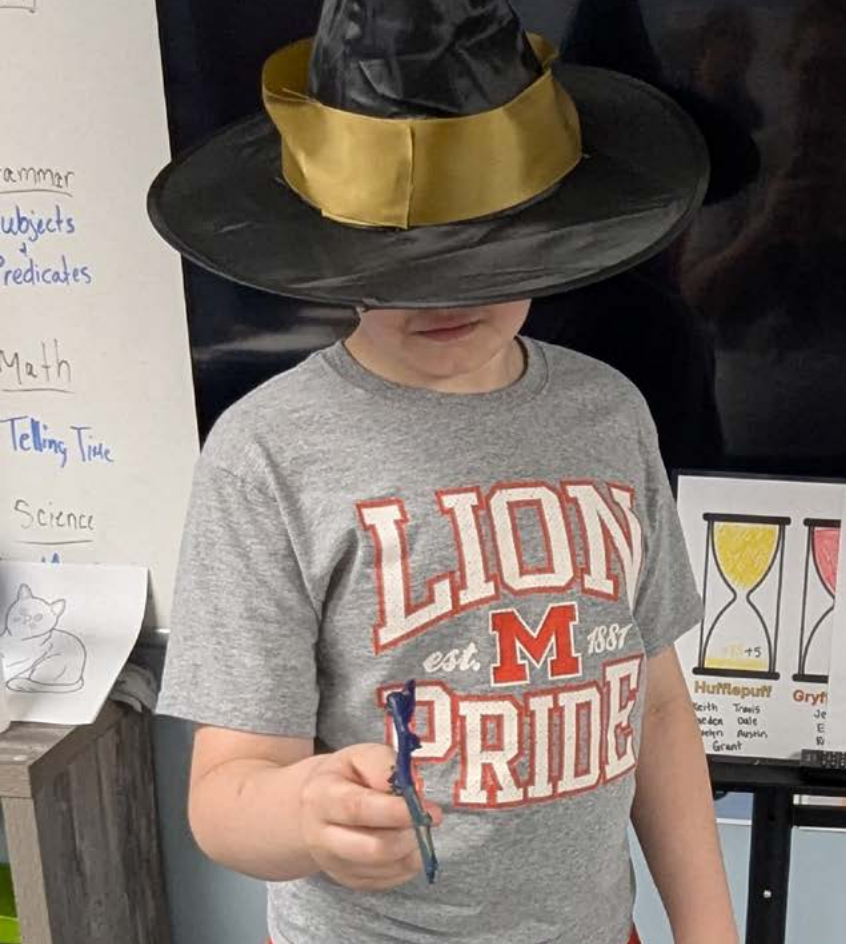


Youth build solar cars and learn about renewable energy concepts.

broaden engagement, Extension also opened traditional fair-prep workshops on topics like electricity, drones, and model rockets to both 4-H members and the general public, thus expanding outreach and opportunities for experiential learning. The launch of the e-sports clubs exemplifies Extension's commitment to innovation by integrating contemporary digital culture into youth development, emphasizing skills such as teamwork, communication, and strategic planning.

These programs are more than just activities; they cultivate essential skills, build confidence, inspire curiosity, and foster a lifelong interest in STEM careers. Participants report increased self-efficacy in science and critical thinking, and the activities instill attitudes of perseverance and inquiry that are vital for future success.

Looking ahead, Extension will continue to strengthen existing partnerships, seek new collaborations, and develop innovative programming, particularly in digital and virtual spaces, to meet the evolving needs of youth in our communities. By building on this momentum, the 4-H STEM program in Clark and Crawford counties will remain a vital and dynamic resource, embodying Illinois Extension's mission to empower youth, support local communities, and prepare the next generation for a prosperous, technology-enabled future.



The magic of 4-H

What do you get when you combine the enchanting curiosity of the wizarding world with the skills, learning, and life lessons fostered through 4-H? You experience the true magic of 4-H itself! Youth Educator Jaylynn Schober took a group of students from Kansas Treatment and Learning Center on a truly fantastical adventure during the fall semester. The students attending TLC are identified as being at-risk youth for a variety of reasons, including mental or behavioral challenges, which can often make traditional learning environments difficult. By blending the imaginative allure of wizardry with the foundational principles of 4-H, Schober created an engaging and supportive space where these young people could explore a more magical side of self-expression and discover their own unique strengths. The “Wizarding World of 4-H” was specifically designed as an emotional health tool, empowering students to build self-confidence, feel valued, and understand that their contributions—no matter how small—are both meaningful and important. Throughout the program, youth participated in a wide range of creative activities, from crafting wizarding school supplies and attending magical classes like herbology and potion-making to racing in Quidditch games that fostered teamwork and physical activity. They even looked to the stars, exploring constellations and their historical significance before creating their own celestial stories, linking imagination with learning about astronomy. These hands-on, playful experiences encouraged students to think outside the box, using ordinary materials in extraordinary ways, and nurturing their problem-solving skills and creativity.

(left to right) 4-H youth educator Jaylynn Schober and youth development program coordinator Brittany Smith.

The magic extended beyond activities; it was rooted in the strong, positive relationships built between youth and caring adults. Schober’s dedication to creating meaningful, lasting connections provided these at-risk youth with a steadfast source of support and inspiration, showing them that they have at least one adult in their corner who believes in their potential. These positive youth-adult partnerships are a foundational element of the 4-H experience, and through this program, Schober exemplified how nurturing relationships can foster resilience and hope. The true enchantment of this program wasn’t just in the wands, spells, or fantastical lessons—it was in the newfound confidence, the sense of belonging, and the connections that the youth discovered along the way. Through intentional support, creative exploration, and a sprinkle of magic, these students learned to see themselves as capable, valued, and full of potential. They were reminded that their voices matter, their dreams are valid, and their abilities are limitless. By blending the core principles of 4-H with a world of wonder, Schober helped each young person uncover their own unique spark of magic—one that will continue to shine brightly long after the semester ended, guiding them toward a future filled with hope, confidence, and possibility.



4-H volunteers work together to improve their skills and knowledge to become better leaders.



Empowering hands

Strengthening youth leadership begins with strengthening the adults who guide them—and that’s exactly what this year’s 4-H Volunteer Training accomplished. Local 4-H volunteers were absolute SWEETHEARTS as they joined Extension on Valentine’s weekend for a day-long training to improve their skills and knowledge to make them better leaders. 4-H’s motto of making the best better is what the leaders embodied as they spent a day learning how they can improve to better mentor the youth in their local community clubs.

Each leader who attended received supplies to bolster the community club experience in the form of a wooden gavel and 4-H pledge poster. Leaders were able to choose from a variety of workshops in the morning to follow what most interested them. Some of the sessions featured how to energize cub meetings, engaging Cloverbuds, and awards available at the state level, amongst other workshops provided by staff. The afternoon sessions brought more hands-on training through three options: exploring Parliamentary Procedure, creating STEM offerings, and competing in a mini food challenge.

100% of attending leaders reported they:

- Gained at least one useful idea to apply in their clubs
- Found the training helpful in building 4-H leadership skills
- Appreciated the opportunity to network with other volunteers

As 4-H youth are the future leaders of our society, having the skills and knowledge to better motivate and mentor them is important. Extension is proud of the volunteers who invest their time in becoming better volunteers through hands-on training like this. They have dedicated their heads to clearer thinking and hearts to greater loyalty for the youth in their clubs.



Crawford County youth come together and participate at the 4-H Livestock Judging Contest.

Sharpening skills

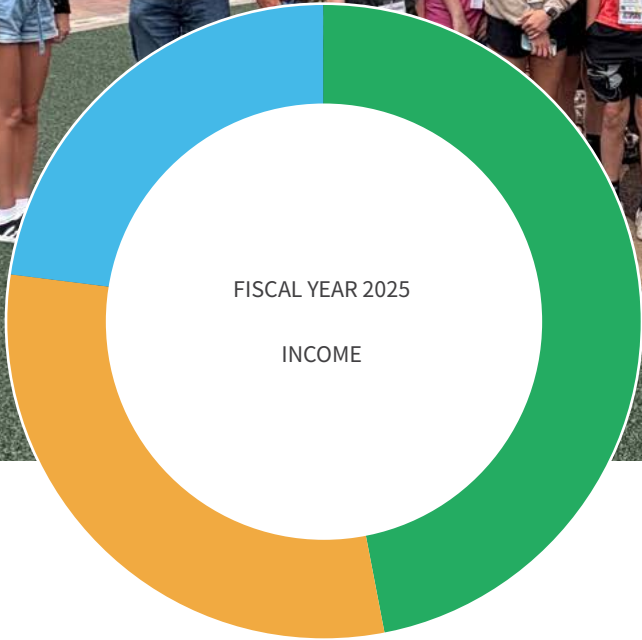
The 4-H Livestock Judging Contest brought together youth from across Illinois and Indiana to test their livestock evaluation skills while fostering teamwork, confidence, and agricultural awareness. Illinois Extension and 4-H serving Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties provided a livestock judging contest for 230 youth from more than 25 schools in Illinois and Indiana. Lendzy Stewart, Crawford County 4-H leader and livestock judging coach, led the charge in bringing this event from dream to reality. She secured eight classes of livestock, including beef, swine, sheep, and goats, all of which were provided by Illinois farm families.

Members of the Lake Land College Livestock Judging Team were officials for the day. These college students were excellent role models of agriculture-based college paths for the junior high and high school students in attendance. While youth waited for the results, they enjoyed locally sourced pork burgers generously sponsored by the Illinois Pork Producers Association and Crawford County Extension Foundation.

At the end of the day, banners were won, bellies were full, but everyone’s hearts were even more full from the smiles of youths ages 8 to 18 who followed their passion. From spirited competition to sizzling pork burgers, the 4-H Livestock Judging Contest proved that learning about livestock can be both educational and fun.



Learn more at
go.illinois.edu/cce



Amount Source

	47%	Local Dollars
	30%	State Dollars
	23%	Federal Dollars

EXPENSES

Amount Source

	74%	Personnel
	13%	Program supplies
	11%	Facilities/utilities
	2%	Travel

Today's Illinois Extension

Illinois Extension serves as a regional network with a presence in every Illinois county. We link communities, businesses, and the general population to the research and development and technical resources of the university and its partners. Illinois Extension is also a provider of 4-H youth development and leadership services, helping to provide the next generation of workers, leaders, and responsible citizens.

Unit Highlights



16,204
Local Website Users



448
Educational Sessions



17,513
Educational Direct Contacts



96
Extension Volunteers



55
4-H Clubs



927
4-H Club Members



15
Master Gardener & Master Naturalist Volunteers



608
Hours donated by Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



\$287,495
Volunteer Valuation (Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, and 4-H Volunteers)

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What's Cooking with Mary Liz Wright
go.illinois.edu/cookingwithmaryliz



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Illinois Extension

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College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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