



# Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

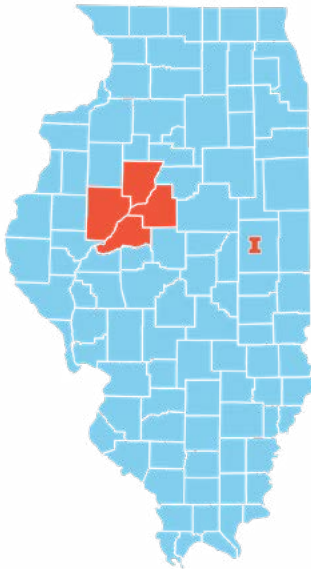


Serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties  
**ILLINOIS EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025**





Earl Allen  
County Director



## Servant leadership skills seen through staff, volunteers, and stakeholders

One of the big reasons I have enjoyed working in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties over the years is that I have had the opportunity to interact with many servant-minded people. Whether I'm talking about local officials, program partners, volunteers, staff, families, or individuals, they almost always seem driven to improve themselves, their neighbors, and their communities through giving of their time and resources to serve others. The servant attitude I see in others is one of the big factors that makes me excited to come to work each day.

One quote I like to use when I talk about servant leadership is from Harry Truman, who said, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit."

As you look through the pages of this condensed report, you will see many names and photos of people who either practice or are developing servant leadership skills. Thank you to all the servant-minded souls out there, and thank you for your support of University of Illinois Extension. To enjoy the full 2025 Year In Review booklet, visit [extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/reports](https://extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/reports).

With your help, our success in serving our local communities multiplies. I am ever grateful,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Earl Allen".

Earl Allen  
County Director

Cover photo:  
Fulton County 4-H Show.

# 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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## Farm business education expanded

Kevin Brooks became the farm business management and marketing educator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties in 2022. Since then he has been providing valuable support to the ag industry through direct education and through media sources.



Kevin Brooks  
Farm Business  
Management Educator  
Farm Coach Blog

Through his educational articles, guest speaking at programs, and consultations Kevin Brooks provides much needed support. "Sometimes having someone else to provide a non-biased opinion on a financial situation can be very helpful. Anything discussed is entirely confidential."

In the past 12 months, Kevin's articles posted on Farm Coach Blog have 6,300 engaged sessions. In addition, those articles are distributed in print media throughout the state.

Kevin has had eight articles published by Farm Week, the Illinois Farm Bureau newspaper and website as one of the main features located on the back page of the publication. Topics included: Cash Rents, Farm Estate Planning, Crop Insurance, Farm Drone Use, and Farm Records Keeping.



10  
Radio Interviews



27  
Educational Articles



Farm Coach Blog  
[go.illinois.edu/FarmCoachBlog](http://go.illinois.edu/FarmCoachBlog)



Manito community leaders and residents were encouraged to participate in one of two community meetings to help shape the future of the village. Over 40 people were involved in the Revive and Thrive meetings and are helping make community improvements.

*Photo by Richard Proffer*

## Manito Revive and Thrive community meetings helped launch improvements

The Manito Revive and Thrive community meetings were a catalyst for the village's new strategic plan. Local leaders worked with Richard Proffer, community and economic development educator, to develop goals, mission and vision statements, and to plan the community meetings.

"We heard feedback from over 40 people during the two community meetings," commented Proffer. "The community members were given the opportunity to share their ideas and concerns, as well as connect with other Manito citizens."

"I loved getting to talk to my community and feeling we all could make a change," wrote one participant on their final program feedback form.

Following the community meetings, three project areas were established: business development, tourism, and infrastructure. Those sub-groups established priorities such as bringing in a grocery store, beautifying the main highway through town, and updating city ordinances and dealing with vacant and abandoned buildings.

"Already this year the town has made improvements to beautification by placing large heavy flowerpots and hanging colorful banners along Manito Road," Proffer explained. "Future work involves beautification of the new lake."

Manito is a village located in Mason County. It has a population of around 1,500 per the 2020 Census. While on the smaller size, the local leaders for the project took on the challenge and are now quietly reinventing the town.



# 4-H workshops build skills and exhibits

## Houseplant Workshop

Mason County 4-H hosted a Houseplant Workshop for 4-H members. The hobby of growing houseplants has become more popular in recent years, bringing about a need to provide 4-H youth with the skills needed to grow and eventually exhibit houseplants as part of the 4-H horticulture project. The workshop provided youth the basics of starting new houseplants by using cuttings and divisions. In the hands-on class youth learned the planting and growing techniques of the Spider Plant, Pilea, Christmas Cactus, and African Violet. Participants got their hands dirty and left with their newly planted starts of four different houseplants and care instructions. They were challenged with keeping the plant alive and growing throughout the 4-H year to eventually exhibit at the 4-H Show in the summer.

After a few months of growing time, one parent sent this comment in an email regarding the progress of the plants her daughter started from cuttings at the workshop, "They are all going great. I just went and got a new batch of soil to get violets transplanted. Callie has been having a blast with all her plants."

The workshop helped increase the number of houseplants exhibited at the county 4-H Show. Class instructors were Julie Hodgson and Cheryl Thomas of Hodgson's Produce and Greenhouse, and 4-H Coordinator Joli Pierson.



Mason 4-H members participated in a houseplants workshop that set them up for success of a finished exhibit for the 4-H Show.

*Photo by Joli Pierson*



Youth and adults worked alongside each other to learn basic sewing skills during a 4-H workshop, designed to encourage continued learning at home and a finished project to exhibit.

*Photo by Joli Pierson*

## Sewing Workshop

It is sometimes difficult for youth select a 4-H project due to circumstances where there may not be anyone who can assist or teach them the skills necessary to complete a project. Sewing is one which is difficult to find mentors. Less sewing is done in the home now due to cost effectiveness and the convenience of purchasing readymade items. Many families possess an old sewing machine but there is no longer anyone who knows how to use it. This workshop was designed for youth to attend with an adult who could learn the skills alongside them, and then practice the skills together at home.

During the workshop, participants learned basic sewing skills while creating a festive holiday stocking. Participants learned about the mechanics of a sewing machine and how to use it, how to cut a pattern and fabric, and then for the final steps, used the sewing machine to put the project together.

The class supported positive youth/adult relationships, where bonds were being formed. The workshop provided the skills and materials needed to create a level one 4-H sewing project exhibition for the county 4-H Show. Many of the youth exhibited the holiday stockings they created in the non-wearable clothing class at the County 4-H Show. The workshop was led by Dinah VanDelinder, a 4-H leader who has witnessed firsthand the struggles of youth who choose 4-H projects which go unfinished due to the need of adult support, supplies and equipment, and someone to teach them the skills to be successful with 4-H project mastery.



Extension Master Gardener and Master Naturalist May Bach was one of several volunteers who assisted Horticulture Educator Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle with the Eco Explorers course as part of the DAPCEP program held at Bradley University.

Photo by Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle

## Horticulture and natural resource focused STEM programs offered

In 2025, Extension staff delivered several different STEM programs for more than 55 youth and families, focused on hands-on science learning related to horticulture and natural resources.

### Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program

In the second year of providing courses in DAPCEP held at Bradley University, students in fourth through sixth grades explored botany, earth science, and ecology. The Green Thumbs course, held in February, and Eco Explorers, held in September, aimed to help students build foundational knowledge and confidence in STEM.

### Girls Excelling in Math and Science

A Biomes in a Bottle activity with the GEMS (Girls Excelling in Math and Science) shared information with girls in fifth through eighth grades about plant, soil, and water interactions.

### ACES Family Academy

During a family-focused session at ACES Family Academy, participants learned about growing herbs and the science of tea preparation. These programs fostered curiosity, interdisciplinary connections, and real-world applications for diverse audiences.



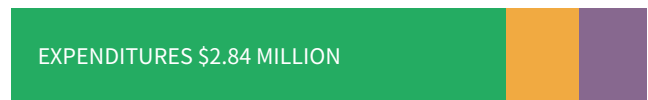
Explore more nature related topics at [go.extension.illinois.edu/ILRiverHortBlog](https://go.extension.illinois.edu/ILRiverHortBlog)

## Financial Report

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



Amount	Source
32.0%	Federal
15.9%	State
24.2%	University
20.1%	Local
7.9%	Other



Amount	Source
77.9%	Personnel
11.4%	Programming
0.1%	Equipment
10.6%	Overhead

## Unit at a Glance



**35**  
Staff



**1,008**  
Volunteers



**216**  
Partners



**109,000**  
Online Followers and Website Hits  
*social media, blogs, and website reach*



**210**  
Media Pieces  
*TV, news releases, newsletters, radio, and blog articles*



**91,000**  
People at Programs  
*37% led by Staff, 63% led by Volunteers*



### ILLINOIS JUNIOR CHEF AT SOUTH SIDE MISSION

South Side Mission's brand new portable kitchens were "christened" by the Illinois Junior Chef program this summer. Students got hands-on experience cooking at their own stations while receiving live instruction from SNAP-Ed staff, with Chris Cungtion, SSM Youth Ministry Supervisor, serving as the lead coordinator. Students practiced important kitchen skills including measuring, knife safety, cutting techniques, cooking safety, food safety, and proper hand washing. They also learned about healthy eating with MyPlate while joining in on fun games, exercise, and nutrition lessons that kept everyone active and engaged. This program inspired confidence, teamwork, and lifelong healthy habits. Tara Agama, Nate Anton, Mari Lopez, Angela Jimenez, Kathy Ellis, and Jo Elyn Smith were SNAP-Ed instructors who taught at IJC programs throughout the county.



### FULTON JUNIOR MASTER NATURALISTS PLANT OAK SAVANNA

Oak savannas once dotted the prairie. Today, these beautiful and unique ecosystems are among the most threatened in the world. But thanks to the 4-H Green Communities Tree Program, a new generation of young people is helping to bring them back to Fulton County. With funding from Illinois Forestry Development this spring, the Fulton County 4-H Junior Master Naturalist Club helped plant 25 oak trees at Wallace Park in Canton. This year is the first time Fulton County has participated in this statewide effort, which has successfully established 118 new oak savannas on public properties across 66 counties in just three years! Club leaders and Extension Master Naturalists Amanda Atchley and Jenny Beal led the project. In February, the team learned they would receive an assortment of young oaks, including black oak, bur oak, white oak, and swamp white oak, all at least three feet tall to give them a strong start.



### DIGITAL NAVIGATOR LEADS ONLINE SAFETY TRAINING

The digital age is full of online spaces in which children increasingly interact. And, as technology develops rapidly, there's a huge learning curve for staying safe and navigating privacy and security concerns. Abi Amstutz-Spencer, ACC AmeriCorps member and Digital Navigator fellow with Extension, presented to the 300 students at Illini Central Grade, Middle and High Schools in Mason City about online safety topics ranging from password management to cyberbullying.

"The goal isn't to ignore technology," Abi remarked, "it's about learning our options to keep ourselves connected safely so we use technology in ways that make our lives better." Abi presented a similar presentation to the Havana TANF group.



### ANNIE'S PROJECT EMPOWERS WOMEN IN AG

According to the latest U.S. Ag Census, nearly 36% of the nation's producers are now female, marking a significant shift in who is shaping the future of food systems. This year's Annie's Project, co-hosted by Tazewell County Farm Bureau, was delivered in a new, hybrid format that combined two days of in-person sessions with six hours of online content. This allowed participants to learn some of the content at home, on their own schedule while the in-person sessions focused on group discussion and activities. Twenty women from seven different Illinois counties attended the program. Local Extension educators presented on estate planning, leasing, record keeping, farm stress, nutrient loss, and the Real Colors personality assessment. COUNTRY Financial Senior Crop Underwriting Trainer Brenda Dozier explained the basics of crop insurance, and Senior Market Advisor Cathy Eckstrand with Total Farm Marketing presented on commodity marketing.



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## STAFF

Earl Allen  
County Director

Julie Dantone  
Health Outreach Associate

Ainsley Olsen  
Horticulture Coordinator

Lynda Sharp-Lower  
4-H Coordinator

Deb Balagna  
Office Support

Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle  
Horticulture Educator

Abbie Phillips  
4-H Coordinator

Kristi Smith  
4-H Coordinator

Kevin Brooks  
Ag Educator

Krista Gray  
4-H Coordinator

Richard Proffer  
Community Economic  
Development Educator

Karen Weigelt  
Natural Resources Coordinator

Brittany Chambers  
Natural Resources Coordinator

Kaytlin Lehman  
4-H Coordinator

Angie Sassine  
Office Support

Anita Wilkinson  
Communications Coordinator

Rebecca Crumrine  
SNAP-Ed Educator

Jill Meints  
Special Projects Assistant

Julann Schierer  
Office Support

Skye Mibbs  
Office Support

Judy Schmidt  
4-H Educator

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

**Tazewell County Extension  
(Main Office)**  
1505 Valle Vista Blvd  
Pekin, IL 61554  
(309) 347-6614

**Fulton County Extension**  
15411 N IL 100-Hwy  
Lewistown, IL 61542  
(309) 547-3711

**Mason County Extension**  
127 S. High St., Ste. 1  
Havana, IL 62644  
(309) 543-3308

**Peoria County Extension**  
4810 N Sheridan Rd  
Peoria, IL 61614  
(309) 685-3140

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## ONLINE



### Email

[uie-fmpt@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-fmpt@illinois.edu)



### Website

[extension.illinois.edu/fmpt](http://extension.illinois.edu/fmpt)



### Facebook

[facebook.com/UniversityofIllinoisExtFultonMasonPeoriaTazewell](https://facebook.com/UniversityofIllinoisExtFultonMasonPeoriaTazewell)



## Illinois Extension

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### College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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