

Approved 5/28/2026

University of Illinois Extension Council Minutes

Unit 24 – January 22, 2026 – 5:30pm Saline County Extension Office

Welcome

The Unit 24 Extension Council meeting on January 22, 2026, was called to order at approximately 5:45pm. There was a meal provided for those in attendance.

Council Members Present

Norman Hill Jr., Amanda Courson, Connie Gibbs, Debbie McVey, Dean West, Joe Zieren, Randy Drone, and Rachel Lands on Microsoft Teams.

Staff Present

Angie Messmer, Lizz Cooley-Questelle, Lindsay Adams, and Sheila Stamer.

Approval of Minutes from September 11, 2025

The minutes from the September 11, 2025, meeting were reviewed by those present. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Dean West and seconded by Joe Zieren. The motion carried.

Fiscal Reports - Trust Account – 2nd Quarter

The Fiscal Report was provided to those present. Sheila Stamer provided the report. A council member asked Sheila about the amount of funds given to Extension in the line item named County Board. Sheila explained that the County Boards who give Extension a set amount of funds each year either do so in several payments or in one lump sum. A motion to accept the Fiscal Report was made by Amanda Courson and seconded by Debbie McVey. The motion carried.

Updates from County Director

- **Saline County Office Support Assistant:** The Saline County Office Support Assistant, Paula Waters has resigned. Terra Russell, a SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Worker, has been hired in her place.



- **Hamilton County Office Support Position:** Kathy Oglesby has been the Hamilton County Office Support Assistant for many years, and she has now retired. Interviews for this position will be conducted next week (January 26-30, 2026).
- **Sol Systems Impact Project and Federal Earmark Grant:** Angie Messmer said that the partnership with Sol Systems is ongoing, but that it is only for Saline County because Eldorado was part of their impact project. She is still amid meetings and planning with architects on the new building at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center (DSAC). She will meet with architects again in mid-February. She wants the building to include a commercial kitchen and is hoping to build a new greenhouse system.
- **Health & Community Wellness Positions:** In light of the halting of funds to the SNAP-Ed program, The University of Illinois has been working in their current budget to create the new position of Health and Community Wellness Educator. Lizz Cooley-Questelle has agreed to take this position and is waiting for the necessary paperwork. She will be working with the same community partners as with SNAP-Ed, but with an expanded scope because this new position is not the same. There will be a Community Health Program Kickoff Training next week (January 26-30, 2026). There will also be an additional new position of Community Health Worker/Advisor which offers a broader scope and is designed to promote literacy in health and wellness. Interviews for this position will be held soon. Once a Community Health Worker/Advisor is hired, they will be trained and sent out to educate the community. These new positions are still in the developmental stages. Lizz will be the only Health and Wellness Educator in the southern part of Illinois.
- **Extension Council Governing Board:** The Extension Council Governing Board is different from the Extension Board. Members on the Governing Board may be requested to attend county board meetings with Angie Messmer and represent Extension. Those on the Governing Board are not required to attend all board meetings but will be called upon when needed. The county board meetings are at night on different days at various times (typically 5:30pm, 6pm, or 6:30pm). Amanda Courson, Norman Hill, and Debbie McVey all volunteered to be on the Governing Board. A motion to approve these members as representatives on the Unit 24 University of Illinois Extension Council Governing Board was made by Dean West and seconded by Joe Zieren. The motion passed unanimously.
- **New Sign at DSAC:** A new sign was purchased for DSAC. More finishing touches are still to come. Angie said that the old sign crumbled when it was taken down.

Updates from Educators

Bronwyn Aly: Angie Messmer gave Bronwyn's report due to her absence. The Summer Twilight Series starts in May. Attendees will visit four local farms on the third Monday night

of each month. Stewardship Week is coming soon. Julie Zakes and her crew have begun planting the seeds for this year's produce crop in the high tunnels. Each summer, the produce is donated to food pantries or sold. Last summer, \$2,545 was made from produce sales. They are looking for one more student to work in the tunnels and are taking suggestions. May 2, 2026, is the annual DSAC Plant Sale. They are also looking to host a DSAC Field Day in partnership with Animal Science, Forestry, and the High Tunnels in July of this year. There will be speakers, and a meal provided for all in attendance.

Lizz Cooley-Questelle: Programing for SNAP-Ed ends on February 13, 2026. SNAP-Ed employees are still staying engaged in the community, finishing strong, and getting supplies to their partners while they still have access to those resources. The fourth donation season of the Hunters Feeding Illinois program wrapped up recently. The program's mission is to connect hunters, meat processors, and food pantries and support access to lean protein for Illinois residents and families. Unit 24 SNAP-Ed team members helped with the coordination of getting 975 pounds of donated venison to five local food pantries and provided nutrition education materials so that pantry visitors know how to prepare and store venison. Hunters Feeding Illinois is a partnership among Feeding Illinois, Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and University of Illinois Extension and covers sixteen counties in east-central Illinois and sixteen counties in southern Illinois. In response to a council member's question, Lizz reemphasized that SNAP-Ed is different from SNAP EBT. SNAP-Ed does not give out food, but instead they educate community members and connect them to resources. Lizz reported on the partnership between SNAP-Ed and Bronwyn and her team on the hydroponics projects in 2 Saline County Schools. The funding for this program was provided by a Sol Systems grant. The teachers were trained on the hydroponics systems and Lizz's and Bronwyn's teams come into the classrooms to educate the students about vegetables and making healthy food choices while encouraging them to try different vegetables and tell their families. They have already covered four lessons in the curriculum. They will plant lettuce in February and hope to have a harvest in March with a celebration in May. This is the piolet year of the program, and at the end of this school year they hope to review, improve, and expand their curriculum for next year. Lizz also reported on some work that the SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Workers have been doing in the community. Terra Russel has given a Healthy Cents Class this past fall for the residents of Evergreen Acres located in Carmi, IL. This program is an adult education curriculum that covers topics such as saving money at the grocery store, container gardening, and making healthy food choices. Nanci Berger has visited the Pope County Golden Circle in Golconda to provide programming. She has

provided recipes and helpful information through a monthly Eat. Move. Save. Booth. Nanci also presented the Healthy Cents program during the second visit of the month.

Lindsay Adams:

- **Hamilton County-** Achievement Night was a success. They recently wrapped up a round of LEGO Clubs, with another session launching in January. Youth created 4,780 pieces of candy to sell for Christmas fundraising efforts. Craft Club has started for youth ages 5–12, and monthly programming continues at Mercy Heights.
- **Pope County** - Pope County Teen Teachers remain engaged. They delivered four lessons in the elementary school and will begin new lessons this semester. They will attend a training at Shawnee Community College in February, where they will discuss programming and present posters highlighting their year of work. Teens are also planning a trip to 4-H Memorial Camp in April, with several members choosing to expand their involvement through events such as Speaking for Illinois. The Clover Crew is now meeting after school in Mrs. Reynolds' classroom, and youth will be participating in the Polar Plunge.
- **Hardin County** - Teen Teachers in Hardin County completed four elementary classes and will continue with new lessons this semester. A new Cougar Club has formed as an after-school club and is already serving about twenty youth. Ready 4 Work programming is scheduled for March. This is a weeklong program that focuses on career readiness and life skills and is for high school juniors and seniors. Lindsay also contacted Carrier Mills and Hamilton County schools.
- **Saline County** – They hosted a successful Achievement Night and received the Food Advocacy Grant, supporting nutrition and food-related programming. The county continues to operate its own LEGO Club and will be hosting an upcoming Charcuterie Board Workshop. Nancy Lambert is in the middle of her character education series for Saline County 1st graders.
- **White County** - White County had a successful Achievement Night. The county's Farm to Table event held in the fall officially donated \$5,000 in support of local efforts. The Gingerbread Workshop was filled, showing strong community interest in workshops. The county will host a Unit wide Skillathon/YQCA training. Cloverbud meetings are beginning, with Teen Teachers stepping into leadership roles.
- Unit wide events include the Maple Syrup Workshop at DSAC on February 7, and a Teen Teacher Training that Abbey Reeves and Lindsay will facilitate at Shawnee Community College in February. The Regional Horse Bowl is scheduled for March. The Ready 4 Work program will take place in Hardin County in March, there are Teen Teacher Outreach presentations planned for March, and the Unit Public Speaking competition is scheduled for March 12.

- Norman Hill asked where the programs were advertised, and Lindsay said that they were advertised on Facebook and on the Unit website.
- Lindsay also said that they are looking into doing a 4-H mural on a wall in each county in the unit. She is looking for businesses to let 4-H have some wall space and for local art clubs or schools who would be willing to paint the mural. Under the mural, 4-H'ers will get to paint their name on a block, after they enroll in 4-H.
- Stewardship Week will be April 22, 23, and 24, 2026. New schools, including Gallatin County Schools, have signed up to attend. Homeschool groups can attend as well. A Kentucky homeschool cohort of two hundred students contacted Angie to see if they could attend. Last year there were 1500 students in attendance. Angie is also thinking about having an evening event for adults during Stewardship Week.

Civil Rights Discussion

Angie Messmer said that each year, the Unit 24 University of Illinois Extension must file a Civil Rights Report that contains data collected about programs and demographics. At the end of the year, they tally up all the information collected and submit the Report. Angie submitted the report on December 22, 2025, but has not received any feedback yet. The Civil Rights Report is conducted to ensure that there is no discrimination among the programs that Extension provides. This is why demographic information is asked about participants at Extension affiliated events.

Next Scheduled Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Saline County Extension Council will be held on April 23, 2026, at the Saline County Extension Office.

Comments and Discussion

- Norman Hill wanted to let the Council know that Golconda is now in a food drought because the grocery store closed.
- Amanda Courson wanted to let the Council know that she joined another board for Martha's Mark that operates out of Norris City. This non-for-profit organization helps struggling families by offering monthly food preparation boxes that contain a recipe, ingredients, and other food items. They hold a monthly food pick up and deliver the boxes to some residents. This resource is not just for Norris City residents.
- The Extension hats and shirts arrived and were distributed to council members.

Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Dean West and seconded by Randy Drone. The motion carried and this meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Minutes Taken and Submitted By:

Rachel Lands