

2019-2020

Addressing Local Needs, Solving Global Challenges



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Willene Buffett
County Director

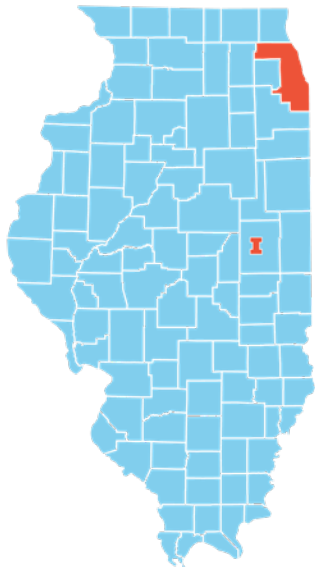
A Message from the County Director

University of Illinois Extension in Chicago and suburban Cook County focused on real and evolving problems in 2019 and 2020. We listened and responded during these two years to address food access, food production, home and community landscape, preserving natural resources, workforce preparedness, health, and social-emotional wellbeing. In addition, we engaged our youth to prepare them for the future. Getting where you want to go in life can be challenging, especially given COVID-19 and its effects on the world.

This has been an obstacle in 2020. Where did you, or where do you turn for answers? Whom do you trust? University of Illinois Extension programs are grounded in evidence-based, research-driven expertise and the fact that you — the public, partnering organizations, institutions, and more — have proven that you trust us for those answers. This impact report will highlight what was accomplished.

Willene Buffett
County Extension Director

Staff Serving Cook County



ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Willene Buffett
County Director

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Sherrri Ambrose EFNEP	Dominique Cobbs SNAP-Ed	Molly Hofer Family Life	Meghan McCleary STEM
Marilu Andon 4-H & Youth Development, Metro	Michele Crawford Community Health	Courtney Jackson Small Animal Health	Leonard Parker 4-H & Youth Development, Metro
Veronica Aranda Community Health	Abigail Garofalo Energy and Environmental Stewardship	Durriyyah Kemp Social & Emotional Learning	Kathryn Pereira Local Food Systems & Small Farms
Gemini Bhalsod Horticulture	Susan Gasper STEM	Nancy Kreith Horticulture	Ron Wolford Horticulture
Aruna Budhram EFNEP	Zachary Grant Local Food Systems & Small Farms	Sonia Lopez Community Health	

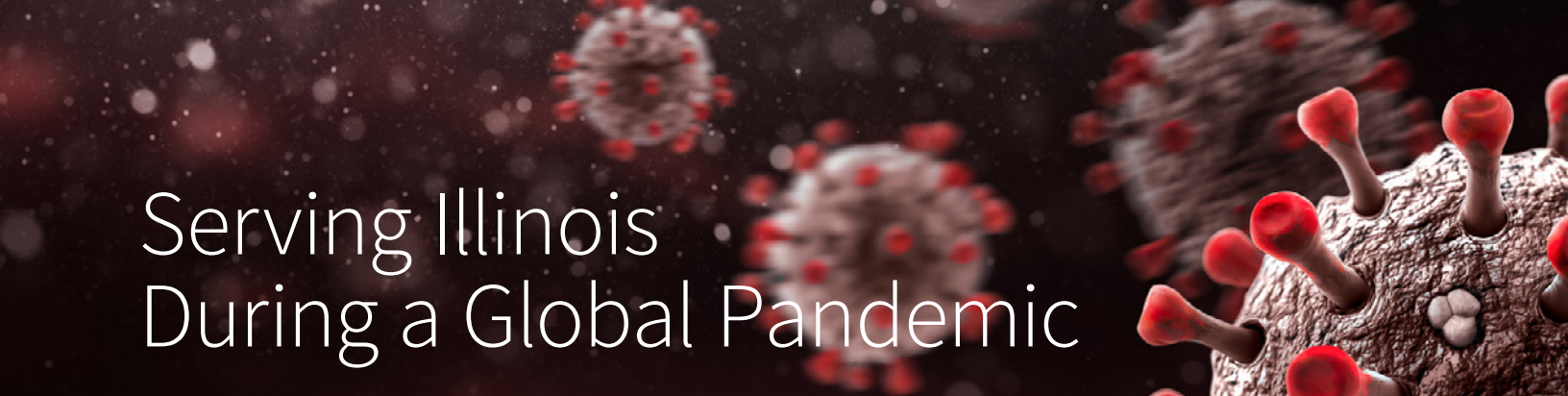
PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Chanita Anderson 4-H & Youth Development	Maria Gutierrez Juntos 4-H	Michael Neil STEM 4H	Margaret Burns Westmeyer Horticulture
Sarah Batka Local Food Systems & Small Farms	Valerie Kehoe Energy and Environ Steward	Amy Osterman 4-H & Youth Development	Constance Willis SNAP-Ed
Geraldine Cox 4-H & Youth Development	James McCombs Community Health	Aida Peralta Family Life	
	Nejra Muminovic Horticulture	Latosha Reggans Horticulture	

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Amy Chow SNAP-Ed	Maria Guzman SNAP-Ed	Mario Puente Rebolgar EFNEP	Alexandria Whitty SNAP-Ed
Angela Crawford SNAP-Ed	Evelyn Hernandez EFNEP	Briana Ringo EFNEP	
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Serving Illinois During a Global Pandemic



When early signs of COVID-19 arrived in Illinois, families and businesses across the state were forced to confront a reality unlike anything they could have imagined. With schools transitioning to virtual learning, parents were hungry for information about managing the physical and emotional health of their at-home learners. Families suddenly found themselves together at home more, where they explored new hobbies, such as gardening and food preservation. Farmers needed to navigate the numerous challenges facing both local and global food supply chains. Almost overnight, restaurants and retail stores had to rethink their business models or risk becoming irrelevant in a suddenly virtual world.

As the challenges mounted, the Illinois Extension network emerged as an effective method for creating and sharing timely, research-backed solutions to many of the most pressing issues we were grappling with. Extension's educators led the way forward during a time of uncertainty for many. We are proud to share some of our highlights from the past year.

Illinois Extension provided applied research and education to address statewide challenges and local issues.

We nurtured local talent. Extension supported 7,207 Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Money Mentor, and 4-H volunteers. They devoted nearly 570,000 hours of community services and support, valued at \$16 million.

We met learners where they lived. During the past 12 months, Extension websites garnered more than 12.8 million visits. Our social media strategy generated more than 200 million impressions, highlighting Illinois news, events, and research.

We partnered to create synergy. Our impact is magnified through more than 2,000 local, state, and national partnerships. Extension helped partner organizations secure more than \$7 million in grant funds, enabling Illinois communities to address local challenges in areas such as food access, rural economic infrastructure, and workforce development.

An independent research firm valued Extension's annual impact on the State of Illinois at \$603 million, about ten times its 2019 budget of \$60.9 million.

Illinois Extension created positive economic benefit for the state of Illinois. The positive economic outcomes of Extension's programs were estimated as at least \$477 million in 2019.

Extension programs stimulated local and state economies through employment and program expenditures. Economic output in Illinois related to Extension expenditures was \$126 million for 2019. Illinois Extension directly employs 655 FTE personnel, and generates an additional 403 FTE jobs through indirect and induced impact effects.

Extension helped residents, businesses, and local governments adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators and faculty specialists dove deeply into unique needs related to the pandemic. Farmdoc's Coronavirus and Ag seminar series attracted more than 7,400 live participants over 20 seminars, covering topics such as retail food prices, livestock markets, trade, and ethanol.

Program partnerships helped Illinois families connect with local food resources. Extension's Illinois Nutrition Education program published Find Food IL, showing the location of free and subsidized meals and food access points in a searchable, mobile-friendly mapping application.

Our staff learned to create rich, meaningful online learning experiences. With in-person meetings restricted, we hosted nearly 25,000 online and in-person educational sessions, benefiting more than 600,000 attendees. Illinois 4-H embraced an online format for summer exhibitions in every county, showcasing the work of 2,200 members at the virtual Illinois State Fair.

Our technology supported connectivity for online learners and remote work employees. Five county Extension offices piloted "drive-up" WiFi sites to make internet accessible to those with needs for schoolwork, online businesses, and social connection.



Applying a Local Lens to Statewide issues

University of Illinois was established as part of the land grant system to provide world-class education, pioneer research, and put learning and discovery into practice to benefit the health and wellbeing of the state's residents and communities.

Extension is built on a local community framework, but our educators and specialists are part of a statewide network of Extension professionals. They work every day to improve the lives of Illinois residents and bring stability and innovation to businesses and communities.

This statewide network of educators, faculty experts, and staff are dedicated to the mission of aligning research to needs and translating that research into action plans. Their work allows Illinois youth, families, businesses, producers, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities. Educators in local units contribute to statewide efforts in their expert content area. In turn, local units benefit from these collaborative efforts and high-quality resources.

Through input from internal and external stakeholders, Extension focuses on statewide priorities in five core areas: community, economy, environment, food, and health. This blend of long-range focus, shared expertise, and local accountability is a powerful strategy that ensures we stay true to our mission while we tailor our programming to meet local community needs.

Illinois Extension's Grand Challenge Framework

Community Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities

- Thriving Youth
- Connectedness and Inclusion
- Involvement and Leadership

Economy Grow a Prosperous Economy

- Economic Vitality
- Financial Wellbeing
- Workforce Preparedness/Advancement

Environment Sustain Natural Resources in Home and Public Spaces

- Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources
- Engagement with Home and Community Landscape

Food Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

- Food Access
- Food Production
- Food Safety

Health Maximize Physical and Emotional Health for All

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Management
- Social and Emotional Health
- Healthy and Safe Environments

Hallmarks of strong, resilient communities include residents who feel connected, have a strong sense of belonging, and appreciate the diversity represented in their neighborhoods. These communities often experience lower rates of violence and offer a higher quality of life. Research has shown that civically engaged youth are more likely to contribute to their communities as adults. Illinois Extension activities play a pivotal role in designing strategies to sustain a leadership pipeline, discovering opportunities for volunteers to actively engage in meeting local needs, and supporting development of robust community networks.



COMMUNITY

1,124
Program
Attendance

51
Educational
Events

322
4-H Club
Member
Affiliates

48
Volunteer
Involvement
*

\$38,612
Volunteer Value
**

* Total 4-H volunteers.

** Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.

Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as the foundation of strong and resilient youth, families, and communities.



Connectedness and Inclusion

A sense of community brings people together to support each other and overcome threats to survival and growth. Accepting and celebrating our differences is essential for creating environments where all voices are important and heard. Thriving families and communities are supported by a diverse and deep pool of community members and organizations.



Involvement and Leadership

Community pride soars when residents who volunteer, advocate, contribute, or lead see themselves as part of the solutions to local issues. Decision-makers can best enhance community vitality and improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas when equipped with the skills and research-based information.



Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Our mentorship-based youth development model applies a holistic development framework. It focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H club experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive, today and tomorrow.



4-H Takes Positive Youth Development Virtual

4-H staff statewide designed and delivered a new suite of online experiences so youth could continue to thrive!

400+ Competitive events, fairs, and shows

200+ Programs

went completely *virtual*

Our 4-H Clubs remained resilient with more than:

-  20,500 Club Members
-  1,900 Clubs
-  3,400 Adult Volunteers
-  2,000 Youth Volunteers



No matter what is happening in the world, 4-H stands ready to innovate to meet the needs of today's youth!





Mission to Mars

Noah and Nathan Munoz-Lo are taking full advantage of the 4-H experience. As members of the Clever Clovers 4-H club, they were already involved in multiple projects and the Teen Teacher program, but they wanted to do more. Specifically, they wanted to help 4-Hers stay engaged and connected during the pandemic.

Their goal was to apply the problem-solving and project management skills they developed working on other projects to adapting an in-person activity for a virtual platform. They selected Mission to Mars, a hands-on activity that simulates landing, exploring, and supporting life on the red planet.

Noah and Nathan developed scripts, created PowerPoints, and modified the activities into a virtual adventure that youth would find interactive, engaging, and entertaining. They developed curbside pick-up kits for participants. Then, they took 4-Hers on a simulated journey that included building a rover and touring Mars’ surface, predicting the possibility of life on the planet, and sending a message back to Earth describing things they discovered.



Converting the activity from hands-on to virtual was challenging, but the brothers felt it was well worth it after hearing all the positive feedback from their fellow 4-Hers. Equally important, it was rewarding to know that they accomplished their goal and helped their peers during a difficult time.

Juntos 4-H

Juntos 4-H brings families together to learn and practice skills needed for academic success in middle and high school. The program improves graduation rates and parental involvement for Latino youth. In Cook County, participants get family engagement sessions, coaching, and mentoring, along with help integrating technology into their correspondence with schools.

In early January, parents and students began to include Google Hangouts as an option for meetings, which proved helpful when the stay-at-home order started in March. During that time, attendance and engagement did not decline, and students were able to stay in touch with their Extension program coordinator. Students also participated in the first Virtual Illini Quarantine Series, where they engaged in virtual games, escape rooms, and do-it-yourself STEM activities. Materials for the activities was mailed, or made available for curbside pick-up. Building relationships and maintaining contact creates a sense of belonging for 4-H students and their families.



Members of the Bremen High School 4-H Juntos Club in Midlothian

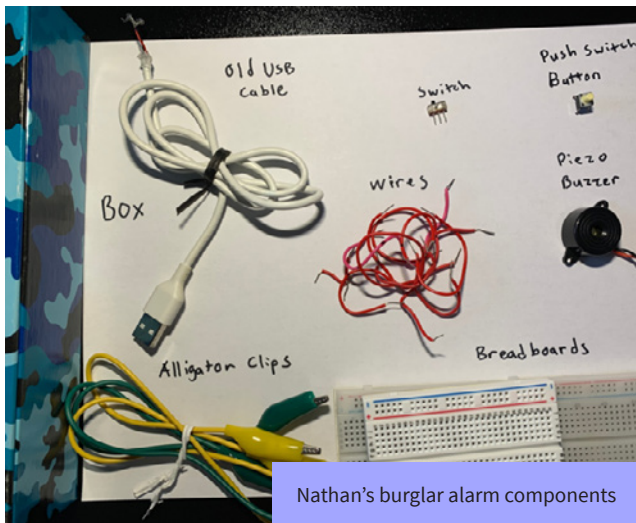
Cook County 4-H Virtual Fair

The 4-H Virtual Fair was a testament to our youth’s resilience and a celebration of the 4-H spirit. Despite the shutdown, Cook County had 296 individual projects exhibited and judged, with 33 exhibitors qualifying for the State Fair. The project area with the most exhibits was visual arts, with 83 individual exhibits. While unable to attend in-person club meetings and events, our members remained focused on an essential aspect of 4-H – project learning. The number of exhibits demonstrated our youth’s dedication and the quality of those exhibits proved their mastery of the subject. Additionally, youth were able to adapt to the new virtual submission and judging process successfully. There were few questions and most problems were related to technology.

The virtual format allowed youth with social anxiety and stage fright to participate more comfortably and gain confidence. The structure also gave more friends and family the opportunity to view and enjoy their 4-Her’s project. All youth were recognized for their efforts during a virtual celebration that included their friends and loved ones.

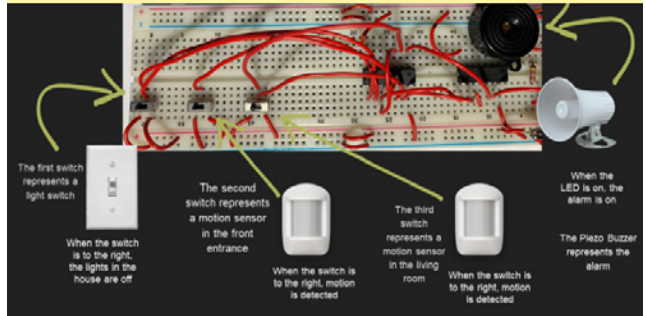


Nathan Munoz-Lo of the Clever Clovers shows the burglar alarm box he designed and constructed to protect his valuables.

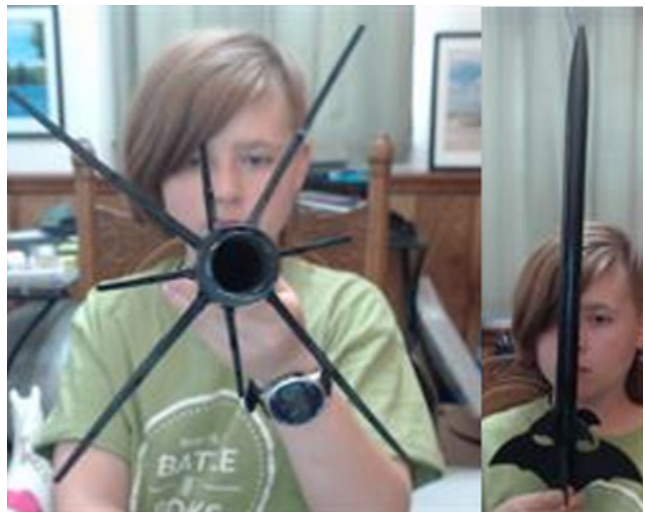


Nathan's burglar alarm components

Breadboard circuit prototype of an alarm system in a house



Having mastered the alarm box, Nathan applied his knowledge of electricity and circuits to a new challenge — a working prototype of a home alarm system. Nathan won State Fair Delegate honors for his efforts on both projects.



Elliott Heckard displays the model rocket he envisioned and created. Elliot was selected as a State Fair Delegate for this project.

This is a very creative choice of rocket type. Building difficulty level—high. Great job on building and painting this rocket. Overall, great job done with great effort; I hope you enjoy the launch.

4-H COUNTY FAIR JUDGE

Local and state economies depend on recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce and sound economic planning and development. Agricultural operations, large and small, make a foundational contribution to local and state economic vitality. Population projections suggest that metro and rural Illinois communities will experience demographic shifts thanks to the exit of younger workers and a growing retiree population. These shifts are expected to produce serious economic issues. To compound the situation, many communities are already grappling with short- and long-term economic implications of COVID-19.

ECONOMY



770
Program
Attendance

52
Educational
Events

Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as effective supports for economic stability and prosperity.



Workforce Preparedness and Advancement

The global pandemic has reinforced the need to develop innovative ways to nurture the Illinois workforce. These include career exploration, formal training and re-training programs for economically vulnerable populations, management training, and opportunities for professionals to meet regulatory and licensure requirements for continuing education. Ultimately, a prepared, skilled workforce increases tax revenues.



Financial Wellbeing

Financial wellbeing can affect physical, mental and social health which can result in poorer job performance, reduced ability to concentrate, and bankruptcy. Preventing bankruptcy and financial insecurity reduces the community need for support services. Extension supports financial wellbeing across ages and stages of life.



Economic Vitality

Rural and urban communities must be built on solid foundations. They must plan for growth, prepare for emergencies, and share responsibility for continually seeking ways to promote economic vitality. Agricultural operations, both large and small, are critically important contributors to the economic vitality of Illinois' local and state economy.



Virtual Extended Teacher Professional Development

According to U.S. News and World Report, Illinois ranks 45th in economic growth. STEM jobs are often cited as drivers of innovation and economic growth and are predicted to increase nationwide. A strong science and engineering education is essential to ensuring that there is a pipeline of workers ready to fill those positions. As home to almost 40% of Illinois' population, with more than 21% of residents under the age of 18 and nearly 14% living in poverty, Cook County is poised to provide and benefit from a skilled STEM workforce.



Professional development participants (2019)

In 2014, Illinois adopted the Next Generation Science Standards to educate the future workforce. Research shows that in order to change their practice, K-12 teachers need upwards of 50 hours of related professional development activities. Extension STEM educators in Cook County provide NGSS professional development to local teachers, as they transition to this new way of teaching science and engineering; thus, indirectly impacting students' STEM education. During the pandemic, educational administrators scrambled to locate and provide opportunities for extended professional development in the virtual space that also modeled how teachers could work with their students in an online learning environment. Lisa Waltmire, the new assistant principal at Instituto Health Science Career Academy in Chicago, was one of those administrators.

To assist Waltmire, STEM Educators Gasper and McCleary drew upon their training as facilitators of a virtual professional development pathway pilot from Next Generation Science

I will be more aware of trying to create a culture of communicating scientific ideas in an equitable way for all.

VIRTUAL EXTENDED NGSS PARTICIPANT

Exemplar. Gasper and McCleary first trained with NGSX in 2015 and were asked to co-facilitate the second national pilot. They worked with NGSX staff to revise and deliver the program and took that opportunity to practice managing virtual tools, including Zoom, Google Docs, Slides, Draw, and Jamboard. The experience proved invaluable and allowed the STEM educators to tailor NGSS workshops to the needs of IHSCA teachers.

At the end of August, 11 science teachers participated in virtual extended NGSS professional development over a period of five days, giving each teacher an opportunity to receive up to 26.25 professional development hours. Pre- and post-professional development surveys were administered to teacher participants using Google Forms. Prior to the virtual extended NGSS professional development, 45.5% of the teachers had participated in some kind of virtual professional development over the last year. Only 27.3% had participated in virtual professional development focused on the NGSS.

At the request of Waltmire, Gasper and McCleary are working with IHSCA teachers during the 2020-21 school year in a professional learning community format. The group meets for one hour per month to focus on different aspects of NGSS learning and instruction.

As a school with a focus on health science careers and a largely Hispanic student body, IHSCA is in a position to provide students with the skills needed to succeed in these increasingly important fields. The need for frontline workers has become all too apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Statement of Condition	Change
Familiarity with the NGSS	+0.54
Familiarity with A Framework for K-12 Science Education (on which NGSS are based)	+1.15
Degree to which they understand what it looks like to teach and learn in NGSS-aligned ways	+1.45
Extent to which they understand how to build classroom culture of reasoning	+0.42
Confidence in implementing NGSS-aligned instruction in classroom	+0.58
Familiarity with virtual teaching strategies	+0.89



Exploring Life and Animal Science

As a part of the Cook County STEM team, Life and Animal Science Educator Courtney Jackson connects communities to various resources through teacher, parent, and student workshops that afford educational opportunities to limited-resource constituents.

Realizing that many of the participants work in low-income schools and one of their main hurdles is finding cost-effective, readily available, and reusable materials to use in practice, Dr. Jackson aims to ensure that the activities presented are feasible and practical for her audience without diminishing quality.

While the coronavirus greatly impacted the Cook County STEM team's ability to connect with communities and present hands-on workshops, two of the life and animal science educators' most successful student-focused workshops were open houses. The first, Project Exploration, reached 27 students, and the VOICES online open house is ongoing, but has reached over 100 participants so far. Both locations' feedback denoted that the expectations were met and students were given critical information pertaining to veterinary medicine and careers.

Though income and science proficiency data were not available for all of the participant schools, the majority had student bodies that are >60% low income, >60% minority, and <50% proficient in science.

Extension Educators Help Create High-Quality Open Source NGSS Units

Innovative K-12 science learning is critical for college and career readiness, as well as citizenship, for all students in today's world. In response to the lack of K-12 science educational materials aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards, the national OpenSciEd curriculum project seeks to create high-quality instructional units for K-12 science classrooms that are Open Educational Resources. Extension STEM Educators Sue Gasper and Meghan McCleary were part of a team that revised and finalized OpenSciEd Unit 7.4: Where Does Food Come From and Where Does it Go Next? (Matter Cycling). Gasper and McCleary served on the team as scientific experts, designing and testing experimental procedures that students would use in class. The unit is coherent from the students' perspective and can be adapted for relevance to the geographic location and culture in which the school or district is situated. The result is that students understand why they are doing the science and how it is relevant to their lives.

As of December 2020, the OpenSciEd website had 17,700 registered users in approximately 40 countries, and the Matter Cycling unit had been downloaded 3,924 times. OpenSciEd

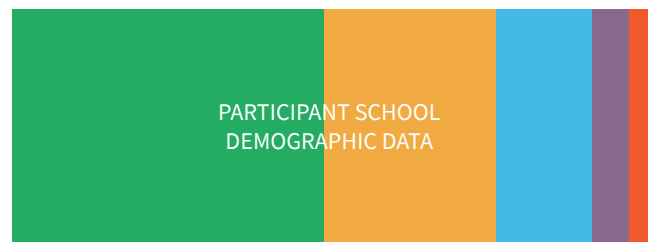
instructional materials are changing the way students learn science. Recent data indicates that more than 90% of students surveyed thought that what they did in their OpenSciEd science class mattered to them.

I think science has become boring through textbooks and OpenSciEd brings it to life again.

OPENSIED FIELD TEST TEACHER

Matter Cycling has been translated for Spanish language audiences and adapted for remote learning. This six-week unit was released to the public in February 2020; it was evaluated by a peer review panel and awarded a High Quality NGSS Design Badge, receiving a score of 9/9 on the EQUiP Rubric for Science.

2019 Teacher Program Statistics



- 49% Hispanic
- 27% Black
- 15% White
- 6% Two or More Races
- 3% Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian



467
Teacher Participants



2,081
Professional Development Hours



73%
Number of Participants' Students Who Are Low Income

Demographic data of participant teachers often does not match that of the schools in which they teach. Presented above are student demographics. Income and demographic data were collected from the Illinois Report Card and GreatSchools.org, which present these demographic categorizations. Some private school data was unavailable.



LGE Local Government Education

Our Local Government Education programs increased outreach in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and developed a critical partnership with the State of Illinois Office of Broadband's initiative to extend high-speed internet access across the state.



go.illinois.edu/communitybroadband

The 2020 Leadership Academy pivoted to a virtual platform, offering county officials online workshops on a variety of topics, including crisis communications, managing economic development initiatives, finding and using data, leadership styles, managing change, ethical considerations, fiscal and economic impacts of COVID-19, and reversing population decline.



go.illinois.edu/leadershipacademy

Statewide Webinar Reach



37
webinars in 2020



1706
reached in Community Involvement
and Leadership webinars



926
reached in Diversity Equity
and Inclusion webinars



5182
reached in Economic and
Financial Stability webinars



1115
reached in Community Resiliency webinars

University of Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development helps communities build capacity for creative and informed decision-making to enhance their quality of life.



<https://go.illinois.edu/LGE>



The natural wonder of Illinois is more than just its beautiful scenery. The land provides recreation for residents and visitors, habitat for pollinators and wildlife, pastures for grazing livestock, fields for growing food, and the safe water that is essential for all living things. Threats to our land, air, and water can be managed with the identification, promotion, and adoption of environmentally sustainable policies and practices. Carefully developed green spaces and natural assets help youth and adults improve learning and enhance physical and mental wellness. Sound environmental and agricultural policies contribute to a sustainable and diverse environment, increase comfort, reduce government costs, and enhance property values.



ENVIRONMENT

5,824
Program
Attendance

152
Educational
Events

211
Trained
Volunteers
*

\$285,004
Volunteer Value
**

* Total Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers.
** Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.

Illinois Extension sustains natural resources in home and public spaces by focusing on these educational priorities.



Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

Water, land, and air quality have significant implications for our survival. These shared resources must be managed through ecological balance and sustainable practices. Our future depends on our ability to effectively steward these resources for generations to come.



Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

There is growing evidence that exposure to plants and green spaces provides many benefits, like improved health, quality of life, concentration, and relationships. Sustainable home landscapes can net economic benefits to communities through increased property value. They also can create environmental benefits for all by supporting pollinators and other important contributors to ecosystems.



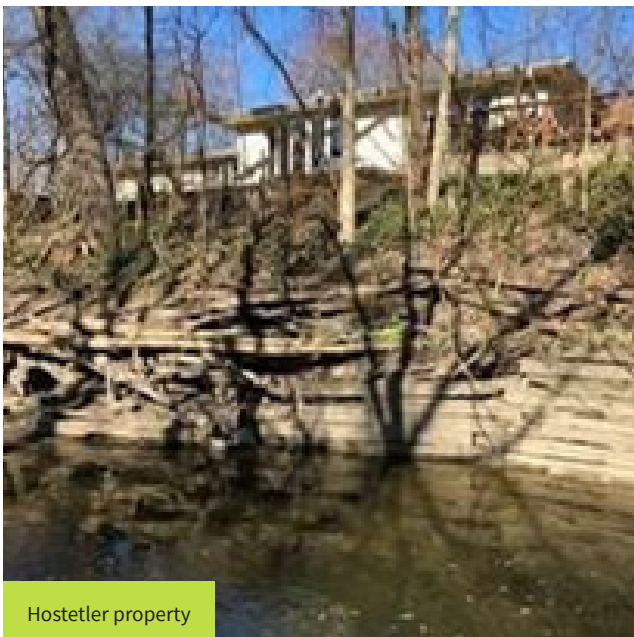
Conservation@Home

One of the many worries of every homeowner is water — having too much in your house, or too much in your yard. Another common homeowner issue is weeds and the biggest, most damaging weed in Cook County is the dreaded Buckthorn. Some Cook County residents have turned to nature for a solution to these troubles.

Dan and Tere Hostetler live on a creek shoreline with over half of their property in a flood zone. They also have an extensive buckthorn thicket, which is over 50 feet in length. Their approach to landscape has always been conservation-focused. “I want the Earth to be better than when I found it,” explained Tere. They had been employing practices like rain barrels, chemical-free buckthorn management, and native plant growth, but they needed help organizing a long-term plan.

Every winter, a team of Cook County Extension staff, led by Horticulture Educator Nancy Kreith, delivers a hands-on interactive native landscape design workshop. Utilizing the expertise of local staff and volunteers, this workshop challenges participants to develop their own landscape plan using basic design principles and conservation-minded elements.

Through this workshop, Dan and Tere found the focus they needed, and with support from Extension staff, they were able to work towards certifying their home as a Conservation@Home property. Now, they want to help spread the word. “I want to introduce a committee to our neighborhood property owner’s association, so that all homeowners can start being aware of hooking up to one another, spreading native plants along that creek that runs down the middle of our properties,” said Dan.



Hostetler property



The Conservation@Home program hopes to raise exactly that type of awareness by educating the public and recognizing properties that demonstrate environmentally-sound landscape practices. To achieve certification, a property must include the following elements in their landscape:

- Minimum 10 native herbaceous plants
- Three native trees/shrubs
- Removal and control of invasives
- Wildlife habitat (wood, thickets, shelter)
- Minimal artificial irrigation
- Minimal use of synthetic fertilizers
- Natural lawn care
- Active management of native landscape beds

Over 164 Cook County residents have participated in the program since it started in 2016. Illinois Extension continued to provide conservation education and support throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Certification Data	Total	2020
Certified Properties (Residential, School Community)	101	33
Total Residents Expressed Interest in C@H	164	45

Public Programming Data	Total	2020
Programs Offered	84	13
Contacts	4,326	942



Smash, Don't Trash Halloween Pumpkins

On Saturday November 7, 2020, in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, more than 150 people turned out to smash 4.8 tons of Halloween pumpkins, including State Representative Sonia Harper. The annual event, hosted by Plant Chicago and sponsored and staffed by Illinois Extension's Cook County Composting Initiative Team, diverts these organic waste materials from landfills, instead recycling them into compost and reducing the amount of methane gas released into the air. Removing organic materials, such as food waste, from household garbage also decreases the cost of municipal waste disposal. With the average Chicago metropolitan landfill tipping fee at more than \$60 per ton, those savings would be considerable if all two million Cook County households smashed, rather than trashed their pumpkins. The event also provided education on compost and how an effort like this helps to create a cleaner, healthier environment for all Cook County residents by returning the compost to our community gardens and urban farms.



Illinois State Representative (6th District) Sonia Harper preparing to smash her pumpkin



2020 Cook County Pumpkin Smash



Advances in agricultural practice driven by research and technology have the dual benefit of improving production efficiency and reducing the environmental impact caused by the food production system. While our production is high, one in every nine Illinois households experience food insecurity, and its rise over the past 10 years significantly impacts the health and wellbeing of Illinois residents. Over 2 million Illinois residents rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food assistance according to May 2020 totals from Illinois Department of Human Services, with a 14% spike in the latter half of the year associated with the effects of COVID-19.



FOOD

1,654
Program
Attendance

55
Educational
Events

47
School/
Community
Gardens
*

2,823
Pounds of
Produce
Donated
**

\$4,065
Value of Donated
Food

* Supported by Extension staff and volunteers.

** Volume of produce donated to local communities.

*** Based on average value of \$1.44 per pound.

Illinois Extension supports a safe and accessible food supply by developing knowledge and educational programs in these areas.



Food Access

Issues with access and affordability of healthy food options can perpetuate chronic illness. Healthy people and communities require safe, nutritious, and abundant food and the education to make every food choice and every food dollar count.



Food Production

COVID-19 presented challenges never before realized: supply shortages from the closure of food and meat processing plants, shifted demand from the closure of restaurants and schools, and consumer fear over uncertain transmission of the virus.



Food Safety

COVID-19 created new areas of concern for consumers on food safety from eating and storing carryout foods and potential transmission on food packages to safely preserving foods grown in home gardens.



Garden at Montessori School of Englewood

Through a collaborative effort between Horticulture Educator Ron Wolford, Master Gardeners, Montessori School of Englewood teachers and staff, and the Trotter Foundation, 30 pre-K students at MSE learned basic vegetable gardening techniques over the summer. Wolford provided leadership and technical assistance for teachers and school volunteers who actually supervised students in the garden, since Master Gardeners were unable to be physically present in schools under COVID-19 restrictions. Tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, cucumbers, cabbages, and herbs were planted.

I never had a garden, so when I heard we could come outside and plant things, that just made me happy. I couldn't believe how different and good the vegetables tasted!

MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF ENGLEWOOD STUDENT

“The garden provides our students the ability to use all of their senses. Students are able to dive in hands first to plant, harvest, and prepare healthy meals. Our students were able to have their lessons come to life in the garden,” said MSE Executive Director Rita Nolan.

In Englewood, the food insecurity rate can be as high as 58%. More than 200 pounds of the harvest was distributed to neighborhood residents. “The garden is able to provide our students with fruits and vegetables in the middle of a food desert. The garden has become a safe space for students to learn and grow,” said MSE Director of Operations Maggie Mikuzis.

The MSE garden is just one example of the horticulture team’s commitment to facilitating food production in Cook County, where one in five children is at risk of hunger.



Check out a story about the Montessori School of Englewood Garden on WGN TV: <http://bit.ly/msegarden>

Master Gardener Program in Cook County

The stay-at-home order created a significant uptick in interest related to home gardens and environmental issues. In 2020, the volume of questions coming into the Cook County Master Gardener help desk nearly tripled, with many first-time growers seeking expertise and guidance. Master Gardeners further educated the public through Illinois Extension horticulture publications and virtual workshops and presentations, which had record attendance numbers. Extension staff provided Master Gardener volunteers with new or expanded resources on popular topics and trending questions like how to test soil to ensure it is safe for planting and to avoid the overuse of chemicals.



Students and volunteers working in the Montessori School of Englewood garden in 2019.

Cook County Master Gardeners

MG Volunteer Hours	6,270
Value of MG Hours	\$170,544
MG Continuing Education Hours	2,865
Questions Answered by MGs	596
MGs Trained in 2020	95

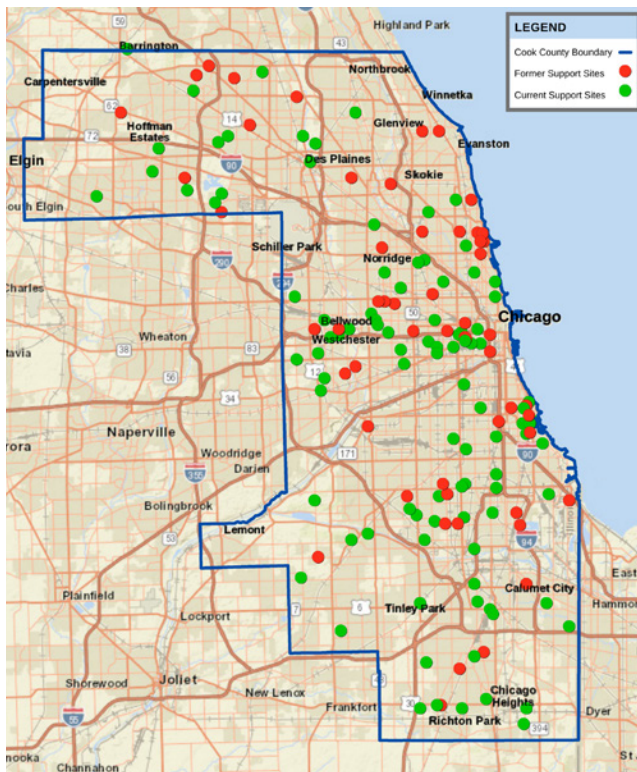


Developing Urban Farm Dreams

Traditionally, the Master Urban Farmer Training Program has been offered in person with experiential learning opportunities at the South Suburban Cook Urban Ag Demonstration site. In 2020, the pandemic required the MUFTP team to quickly determine how to teach urban farming in an online environment.

By carefully and thoughtfully refining the program’s content and learning objectives, Extension staff successfully transitioned it to a seven-week online course with a combination of live Zoom lectures and resources posted to the Learn@Illinois Moodle platform. To engage students and allow them to get to know each other, educators used the class forum to jump start discussions, posing questions and using brief videos, photos, and articles as supplemental material. They added homework, allowing students to learn at their own pace and apply what they learned during lecture. Private office hour consultations and optional assignments for motivated students were also offered.

One of the distinct benefits of the online format was the opportunity to recruit a new and diverse set of guest speakers, who might not have been able to travel to deliver a lecture in person. This held true for participants, as well. One student who had previously been unable to take the in-person course in Matteson said, “This virtual format (even in non-COVID times) made the course more accessible for me.”



Cook County Extension-supported urban farms and gardens

The redesign process also allowed the team to evolve a clearer sense of purpose and a more articulated theme centered on systems to make urban farming operations and projects more manageable and successful.

Due to a surge in interest in growing food during the early stages of the pandemic, the number of applications to the program doubled. The course was offered twice in 2020 (summer and fall) in order to accommodate 60 registrations. Participant feedback made it clear that the new format worked and the team’s efforts were worthwhile.

- “This course was really amazing. You both gave so much of yourselves and your passion for what you do and for passing that knowledge on is so inspiring!”
- “The program helped me truly understand how many layers there are to creating and sustaining an urban farm.”
- “I thought the format was easy to comprehend and well organized, especially for those who are new to online learning.”
- “Even though it is at its craziest of times, we were still able to come together and learn about something that we all love and share in common.”

The online format will become a permanent part of MUFTP moving forward with an experiential learning portion at the demo farm capping off the program.

Garden Sites	Lbs Donated as of 9/30/20
GARDEN/Park Lawn Special Needs Association	5
GARDEN/Restoration Ministries Community Garden	300
GARDEN/Little Red Schoolhouse	40
GARDEN/SoSuCo	347
GARDEN/Oak Lawn Park District	2,089
Home Volunteer Program	42
Total Lbs of Produce Donated	Value of Donated Produce @ \$1.44 per Lb
2,823	\$4,065



Master Gardener Volunteers

Food Safety

In 2019, the local food systems and small farms team conducted three Produce Safety Alliance trainings in Cook County. Participants were primarily urban agriculture stakeholders. Of the 60 farmers who participated, 46 (77%) were Cook County farmers who have worked directly with the LFSSF team.

PSA training evaluations have revealed the following trends:

- One year after training, participants were more prepared to make changes to improve on-farm food safety. On a scale from one to five, where one is very poorly prepared and five is very well prepared, the average response across all training years is 4.3.
- 100% of participants who submitted an evaluation made some changes to improve food safety practices since attending the training. Based on the training, on-farm infrastructure or equipment was added or modified by 47%. Budget allocations for food safety and FSMA compliance increased by 25% post-training.



2019 Food Safety Training

Nationally, about 86% of annual health care spending is related to chronic disease with research suggesting that up to 80% of premature heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes diagnoses could be prevented. There is clear evidence from health, nutrition, and behavioral research demonstrating the positive impact of research-based communication and outreach to promote physical, emotional, and mental health. With health disparities felt unevenly across Illinois communities, education and outreach efforts need to pay special attention toward surfacing and understanding trends impacting limited-resource populations.



HEALTH

19,309
Program Attendance

834
Educational Events

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships

39
K-12
Schools

51
Early Childhood
Centers

42
Agencies or
Community Centers

15
Emergency
Food Sites

Illinois Extension works to maximize physical and emotional health for all Illinois residents by focusing on these priorities.



Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

Chronic diseases prevention has collective benefits to all residents of Illinois, such as lower health care costs, increase employee productivity and morale, and decrease absenteeism.



Social and Emotional Health

COVID elevated a growing mental health crisis in the country. Extension has added resources and staff to address the growing need to provide hope and care for struggling individuals and families in the state.



Health and Safety Environments

From school lunchrooms and home-based settings, to 4-H club meetings and day care facilities, Extension is building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environments.



EFNEP Success During a Pandemic

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program continues to reach out to families with young children to support them in developing a healthier lifestyle. Even with a challenging set of circumstances, the EFNEP team in Cook County shifted its efforts to meeting with families virtually. Staff utilized technological resources to transition nutrition teaching expertise to video and streaming platforms. Through peer-to-peer education, they developed the capacity to teach families about nutrition, food safety, food resource management, and food access. In 2020, EFNEP programs reached 1,187 adults and 46 youth. The new skills developed by educators will continue to help EFNEP reach a broader audience through technology.

In early 2020, Molly Hofer, Cook County Extension family life educator, was part of a group of “education first responders” across the state that worked quickly to implement a digital outreach plan for reaching audiences virtually through webinars, social media campaigns, fact sheets, and blogs. The primary goal was to help consumers learn about wellness topics to better manage their lives while staying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.



EFNEP Community Worker Shanda Felder conducts a virtual program.



Virtual Family Life Programs Expand Reach Across Cook County

From March to December, six webinar series ranging from four to eight sessions each, were delivered to adult audiences. A total of 37 different topic-based programs were presented, reaching 6,804 participants from 42 states and several countries. On average, 12% of each series’ registrants were from Cook County, representing 83 of the 134 cities, towns, and villages that comprise the metropolitan area. A variety of physical and emotional wellness topics were offered, including brain health, positive aging, mindfulness, motivation, resiliency, and life story writing.

Hofer also presented virtually at the Illinois Library Association and TRIAD (law enforcement and community advocates for older adults) conferences.

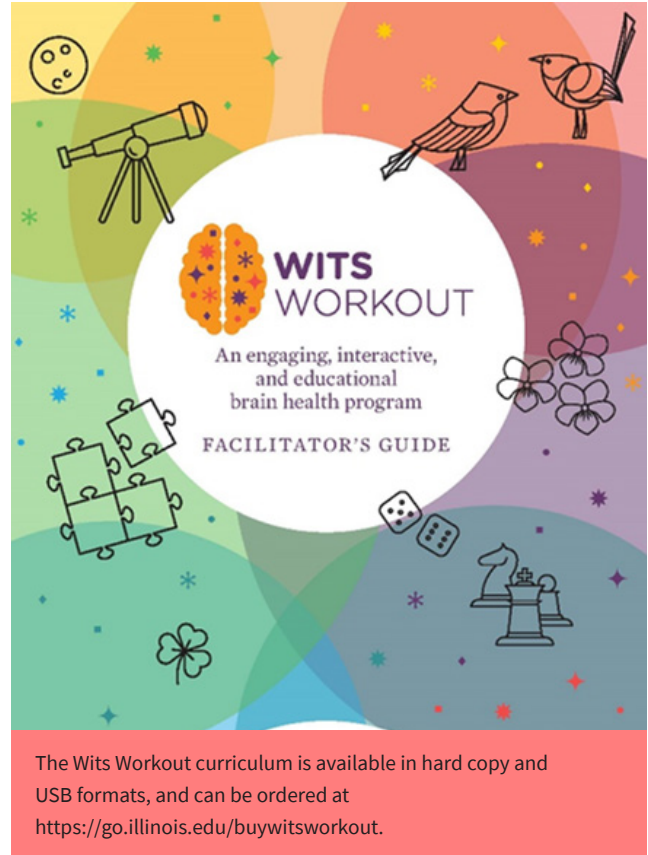
Throughout the year, Hofer contributed to digital education outreach, creating and posting social media infographics on topics related to brain health and aging, caregiving, and staying at home during the holidays. Her blog post, “Keeping in Touch While Keeping Your Distance,” was very well received and further used as a fact sheet infographic distributed to organizations serving older adults in suburban Cook County.



Meditation Mornings

As millions felt the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic, teachers and school support staff faced the additional challenge of conducting remote learning. In a profession with a historically high burnout rate, education professionals were in dire need of resources to care for their own mental health and wellbeing.

Extension Educator Michele Crawford developed and led Meditation Mornings, an ongoing meditation series for this population. As a result of the program, 60% of participants tried meditation for the first time and 67% of those who had meditated previously without consistency developed a consistent (3 times per week) meditation practice.

The Wits Workout curriculum is available in hard copy and USB formats, and can be ordered at <https://go.illinois.edu/buywitsworkout>.

Wits Workout

Knowing that social connectedness and intellectual challenge are two of several lifestyle factors that contribute to one's brain health, Family Life Educators Molly Hofer and Chelsey Byers developed Wits Workout, a peer-reviewed, pilot-tested, 24-session brain health facilitator's guide designed to assist others in leading brain engagement classes with older adults in their communities. The Wits Workout guide is fashioned after a successful Extension brain exercise program for older adults, which Hofer has offered in Cook County for the past 10 years.

Wits Workout has two main goals: to provide purposeful opportunities for older adults to engage intellectually, and to increase their socialization through ongoing participation. Through regular attendance, Wits Workout can assist older adults in adopting long-term brain health promoting behaviors.

Even though Wits Workout is designed to promote socialization through in-person programs, it has also been adapted for use with virtual audiences. Hofer provided facilitator training to several organizations that offer services to older adults, such as libraries, senior centers, and township offices in Cook County. Through adapted delivery, nine of those organizations are now hosting ongoing virtual Wits Workout classes as part of their older adult program schedule. Wits Workout has also expanded nationally and is currently available in 17 states.

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If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, please contact the event coordinator. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your needs.

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