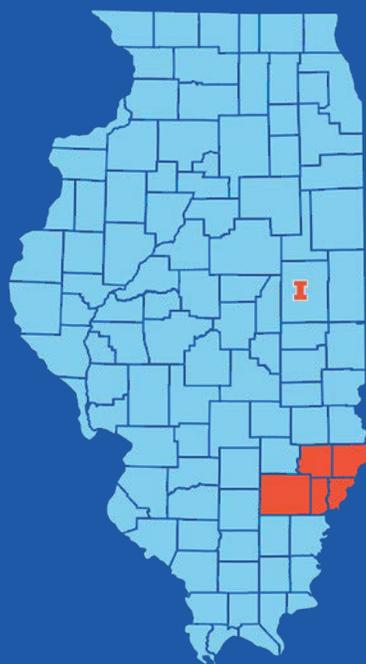




**2020 IMPACT REPORT**

# Illinois Extension

University of Illinois Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future. Based in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Extension is the statewide outreach program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



4-H Youth Development	3
Community & Economic Development	10
SNAP-Ed & INEP	12
Agriculture & Natural Resources	13
Staff Directory	14
Extension Council	16



## A Message from the Chancellor

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is an economic engine and a driver of innovation, deeply rooted in the Illinois prairie and engaged statewide, from Cook County to Cairo. Illinois Extension brings the university to your doorstep. Extension educators live and work alongside you in every county, allowing the university to support local leaders, businesses, farmers, and residents to address grand challenges and everyday problems with practical, research-based solutions. As a youth, my own 4-H experience inspired a rewarding career in agricultural research and higher education. Today, it's an honor to lead this great public university and deepen its commitment to serve the people of Illinois.

Robert J. Jones  
Chancellor, University of Illinois



## A Note from the County Director

On behalf of University of Illinois Extension, the staff and volunteers serving Edwards, Richland, Lawrence, Wabash, and Wayne counties, I want to thank you, the public, for your continued support this past year. COVID-19 brought several new challenges and opportunities for Extension and the communities we serve. We remain committed to bringing educational programming to improve lives and economies throughout the communities in which we live and work.

We are thankful for support from county boards, local farm bureaus, and 4-H foundations, as well as individual and business contributions this past year. We look forward to 2021 and the educational programs Extension will deliver throughout Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne counties. I encourage you to visit our website ([www.extension.illinois.edu/elrww](http://www.extension.illinois.edu/elrww)) often for upcoming programs, events, news releases, and research-based information.

We are humbled by the opportunity to provide positive change within our community and we thank you for the support you have provided our organization, so that we can continue to do so.

Tara Buerster  
County Extension Director  
[buerste2@illinois.edu](mailto:buerste2@illinois.edu)



### New County Director Tara Buerster

Tara Buerster joined University of Illinois Extension in April 2020 as county Extension director serving Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne counties. She has a master's degree in human resource development from University of Illinois and a bachelor's degree in health services from University of Southern Indiana. Buerster comes to Extension after 20 years in the local community college system. She started her career as a district student recruiter and moved to human resources, serving as the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges director of human resources for 18 years.

Locally, Buerster serves as an adjunct instructor for Olney Central College, teaching courses in their human resources degree program. Regionally, she is a peer reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission and currently works on assurance and comprehensive reviews of colleges and universities.

Buerster resides north of Albion with her husband Jayare and daughters Hayley and Jaycey. Their oldest daughter, Sydney, is a pediatric ICU nurse in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Buerster has enjoyed getting to know the Extension staff and meeting community members. She looks forward to bringing more Extension opportunities and programs to the five-county area.



### Welcome Megan Pierson

Megan Pierson is the new 4-H youth development program coordinator working in Wabash County. Born and raised on a small grain and livestock farm, agriculture has always been a big part of her life; but, it was the 4-H program that really sparked her interest in joining the agriculture industry. During her time as a 4-H member, Pierson served on the Illinois State 4-H livestock ambassador team and was elected to be a 4-H chair on the Youth Education in Agriculture Committee. Through 4-H, Pierson also started her own purebred Hereford operation. She credits the amazing opportunities she had in 4-H with helping to shape her into the person she is today.

Megan graduated from Illinois State University with a bachelor's degree in animal industry management. She loves being part of the Wabash County 4-H program and can't wait to help youth find their passion here, just as she did.

She is so grateful to everyone who has welcomed her into this new position with open arms. She knows there are still many people in the community that she hasn't had the opportunity to meet yet, and looks forward to doing so.



# 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!





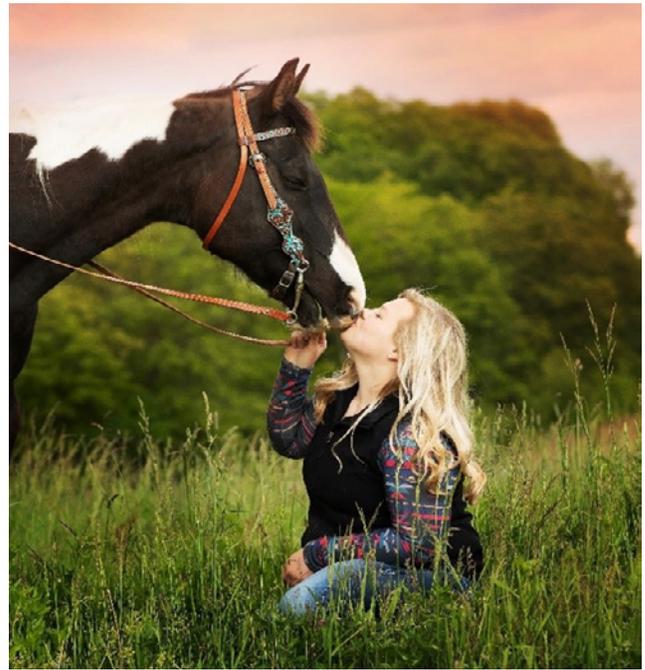
## 4-H Provides Food & Hope to Southern Illinois

Edwards County 4-H members answered the call to help their neighbors, just when it was needed most.

Prior to the stay-at-home order in March, 22 4-H members and 15 volunteers met at the Country Financial Hall in Albion and packed meals for area food banks. Before the pandemic, one in four Illinois children experienced hunger; with several families facing unexpected layoffs and job losses, that number increased. The 10,152 meals that these 4-H members provided truly made a difference, according to Mark Becker, University of Illinois Extension 4-H food system specialist. “Thanks to the foresight and commitment to their communities, these 4-H members helped make a positive impact on their hometown and brought light into these dark times,” Becker said.

Though no one could have predicted how the need for food would become even more important in the days following the meal-packaging event, these 4-Hers worked hard to make a difference. “It made me feel like I was giving back to the community and helping those in need,” said one Ellery Panthers 4-H member. “It also showed me how fortunate I am to have food in my house.”

Financial assistance and volunteer support was provided by the local Farm Bureau Young Leaders Committee.



Kaylie Vallette is a 10-year member of the Blue Ribbon 4-H club in Edwards County. Her projects have included horses, goats, chickens, peacocks, geese, turkeys, ducks, rabbits, food, welding, fiber arts, paper arts, and dogs. She has taken all of these projects to the county fair and has competed at the state level for welding, fiber arts, paper arts, dogs, food, and goats for the past several years. Due to COVID-19, county fairs were held virtually in 2020. While virtual shows presented some unique challenges, Vallette fully embraced the opportunity to learn something new, showing 51 projects.

For Vallette, it’s not about the color of the ribbon; the memories that she’s made with her family and friends along the way are the biggest reward. Recognizing the value of the guidance she received from others during her own 4-H journey, she’s eager to provide that support to young members following in her footsteps. She has involved her brother Kylar, 8, and her niece Kalesi, 5, in her 4-H projects since they were able to walk, instilling a love for 4-H in both of them. 2020 was Kylar’s first year in 4-H and Kalesi’s first year as a Cloverbud. Vallette has also been a mentor to other 4-Hers. One year, Vallette gave another member a rabbit and taught her how to care for it. When that member beat her at the next fair, Vallette was bursting with pride and joy.

Now in her last year of 4-H, Vallette is enjoying every moment. She is in her second semester of the agriculture program at Wabash Valley College and completing an internship at Stumpy Hills Farms. She intends to complete this year by serving as a mentor to other 4-H members and completing her projects to her highest potential.



## Two O’Clock Talks

Lawrence County 4-H believes that maintaining a connection with youth members is at the heart and soul of a positive youth development program. 4-H club leaders strive not only to interact with youth, but to listen and help them explore their ideas in a safe and supportive environment. Of course, all of those normal interactions were interrupted in March 2020.

4-H program leaders in Lawrence County implemented Two O’Clock Talks to keep communication with youth open during the new normal. 4-H Program Coordinator for Youth and Development Samantha Gaither went live on Facebook every weekday at 2 p.m. She kept the content varied, doing project demonstrations, professional interviews, or just updating youth on what was happening in the program. These short segments kept youth informed and connected to the program, while also providing learning opportunities.

While participant numbers started out low, over time the number of views grew, as did the number of posts from youth who were following along and completing the projects at home. A local parent group on Facebook started regularly sharing the videos, as did a local nursing home. In a year when we couldn’t rely on in-person gatherings or club meetings, this was one way 4-H leaders kept youth connected and learning through technology.



One of the projects completed during Two O’Clock Talks.

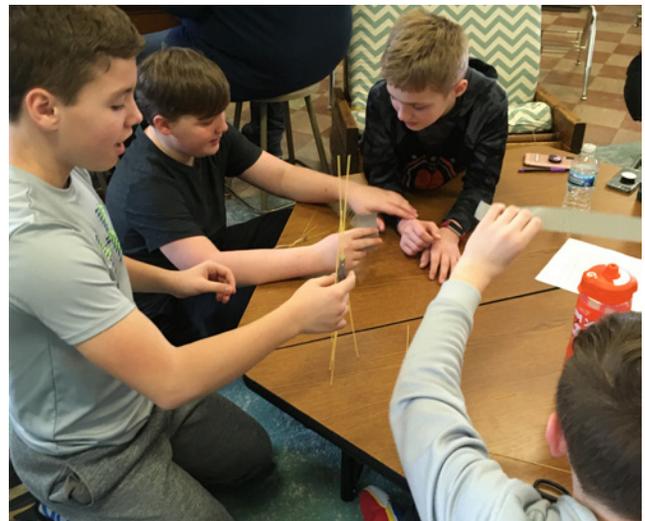


## First Fridays in STEM

Most youth would say that Friday is the best day of the school week and not only because it starts the weekend. Fridays are often a day for special activities — movies, field trips, or a guest speaker with lots of hands-on STEM activities.

For the sixth graders in Mrs. Franklin’s science class at Sumner Attendance Center, every first Friday was a hands-on STEM day with University of Illinois Extension. Youth were guided through fun and engaging activities like building a rollercoaster with pool noodles and marbles, a spaghetti noodle tower challenge, and a gumdrop bridge challenge. Each of these activities taught youth how to engineer, problem-solve, work as a team, and communicate effectively.

Unfortunately, these classroom visits were cut short due to COVID-19; but, Extension provided a lot of fun Fridays in the time available.





## New Member Workshop

Each year, the Richland County Extension office and the Hilltoppers 4-H club host a New Member Workshop. The participants, usually between 10 and 30 youth who are new to 4-H, learn about goal sheets, livestock records, project books, and fair books for the upcoming year. Existing members of the Hilltoppers 4-H club teach new members how to give a talk and a demonstration, how to put a project together for the fair, and what to expect in a typical club meeting. New member workshops are an effective opportunity for families who are just joining 4-H to learn about the expectations for new club members.



## Junior Leadership Conferences

The Junior Leadership Conference provides seventh and eighth-graders with knowledge, tools, and resources that they can take back to their own 4-H clubs and communities. In 2020, so many youth were interested in attending the conference, that Extension decided to host two! The first conference, held in February, was in person. One hundred youth from across the state came together in Effingham to learn and grow. The second conference, held in November, was virtual, allowing an additional 250 youth to participate. During both of the conferences, youth selected workshops focusing on specific topics of interest. Three Richland County 4-H members attended the February conference and five members participated virtually in November.

I had lots of fun! My favorite part was the workshops. I learned to speak up and how to become a good leader.

NATALIE ZWILLING, COUNTRY CLOVERS 4-H CLUB



I attended the Virtual Leadership Conference this fall. I really enjoyed it and the breakout sessions were awesome! I learned about being more confident in myself and different ways to help in our community. I have big ideas on how to help in the future!

KARLEE PIERCEFIELD, HILLTOPPERS 4-H CLUB





## Wabash County Holiday Ornament Event

Wabash County 4-Hers are always looking for ways to brighten someone's day. Although members couldn't be together for the club's annual holiday ornament event in 2020, many youth still participated in the event virtually. Extension staff created kits with all of the supplies needed to create the ornaments. Youth really showed their creativity in this activity. Finished ornaments were dropped off at the Extension office, so they could be packed up together and delivered to a local nursing home.

Since many of the nursing home residents were unable to be with their families during the holiday season, 4-H members wanted to do something extra to bring a smile to their faces. Along with the beautiful ornaments that they created, many 4-Hers included homemade Christmas cards for the residents and the nursing home was very grateful to receive them. 2020 was a year that reminded us that even small kindnesses can make a big difference.



Ashlin and Willow Trail are new members of the Town & Country 4-H Club. They really enjoyed this community service project.



## Christmas in Mt. Carmel

It was a busy holiday season for Wabash County 4-H. Mt. Carmel hosted two outdoor events in which members and clubs were able to safely participate. On December 5, 4-H presented a display in the Mt. Carmel Christmas parade. It was definitely a cold night on Main Street, but worth bundling up to see many local residents come out in support of the town's hard work to make this a safe event.

During the holiday season, 4-H also decorated a themed tree in Millennium Park. The tree displayed 4-H clovers and ornaments with the "Head, Heart, Health, and Hands" motto.





## New Wayne County 4-H Club

The Wayne County 4-H program was fortunate to have a volunteer step up and start a new club. On October 8, 2019, Jennifer Harvey, a long-time 4-H volunteer, conducted the inaugural meeting of the New Hope Lucky Clovers 4-H Club. For their first big project, the new club plans to collaborate with the Wayne County Farm Bureau to plant a pollinator plot.



## Wayne County Federation

The 4-H Federation set up a display at the Annual Farm Bureau meeting in March 2020, where they displayed several of their general projects to more than 150 Wayne County Farm Bureau members. The Federation team wanted to show farm bureau members what youth are doing today in 4-H. They were able to tell stories about their individual 4-H careers and heard several stories from the adults, who reminisced about their own time in 4-H.



(Left to right) Levi Bass, Colton Bass, Casey Opell, Zack Paul, Sara McGehee, and Meghan Anderson display their many projects at the Wayne County Farm Bureau meeting.

# Wayne City LCP Award Winners

Meghan Anderson, a 10-year member of the Wayne City 4-H club, and Zackary Paul, a 10-year member of the Enterprisers 4-H club, were both selected as 4-H Premier Leadership, Citizenship, Professionalism Award winners. LCP Awards recognize the top 10 4-H members in the state for exhibiting outstanding leadership, citizenship, cooperation, and professionalism.



**MEGHAN ANDERSON**  
 WAYNE COUNTY  
 Leadership, Citizenship, Professionalism Award

"The impact I have on the lives of youth in my county is something that makes me proud. Knowing I am one of the 'big kids' that youth can look up to is an accomplishment I have achieved without knowing I wanted to achieve it in the first place."

**ILLINOIS** Extension  **Illinois 4-H FOUNDATION**  
 COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Premier LCP Awards are sponsored and provide recipients with the opportunity to attend the Illinois Farm Bureau & Affiliates Premier Leadership Conference in Bloomington, all expenses paid.

Meghan plans to attend Murray State University as an animal science major, focusing on veterinary medicine. Zack plans to attend Moody Bible Institute, where he will major in biblical studies.

Congratulations to these two outstanding Wayne City youth.



**ZACHARY PAUL**  
 WAYNE COUNTY  
 Leadership, Citizenship, Professionalism Award

"4-H teaches is where I have made many friends. It has given me a positive image in the community. 4-H is a place to build leadership, friendships, and create memories that will last a lifetime."

**ILLINOIS** Extension  **Illinois 4-H FOUNDATION**  
 COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES



## 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 Illinois Office of Broadband's initiative to extend high-speed internet access across the state.



[go.illinois.edu/communitybroadband](https://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](https://go.illinois.edu/leadershipacademy)

## Statewide Webinar Reach



37  
Webinars in 2020



1,706  
Reached In Community Involvement  
and Leadership Webinars



926  
Reached in Diversity, Equity,  
and Inclusion Webinars



5,182  
Reached in Economic and  
Financial Stability Webinars



1,115  
Reached in Community Resiliency Webinars

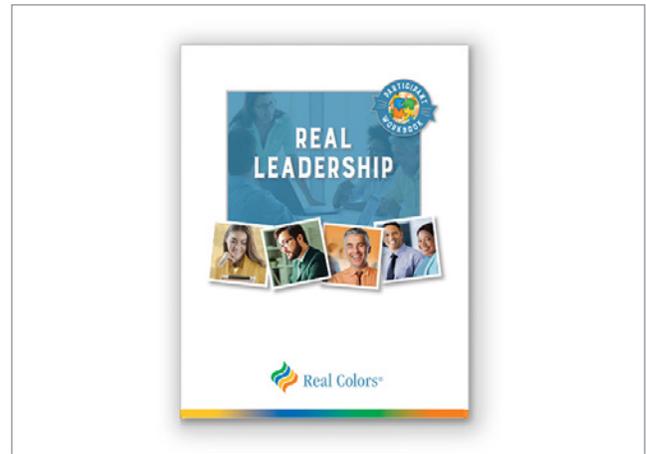
*The University of Illinois Extension's community and economic development team helps communities build capacity for creative and informed decision-making to enhance their quality of life.*



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

## CED Highlights

A Real Colors workshop, held in conjunction with Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, brought over 100 youth together on a cold Saturday in Richland County. The workshop focused on workforce preparedness and appreciating all facets of diversity.



In a year when face-to-face communications were limited, article writing proved to be an effective communication method. The community and economic development team blog attracted readership across Illinois. One article, "Banding Together for Your Local Economy," received more than 20,000 views.



The Wabash River Valley is prone to floods, earthquakes, and tornados. All businesses are vulnerable to fires, burst pipes, cyber-attacks, and other catastrophes. Since recovery improves dramatically when plans are in place, disaster preparedness is an urgent need in our business community. In 2020, Extension provided planning tools to a regional, multi-location manufacturing company, helping to ensure a faster recovery in the event of a disaster.





## Hope for Slowing Commercial Vacancy Rates in Rural Communities

Small communities and local economies are shrinking as businesses close, consolidate, and relocate. Commercial space vacancy rates have doubled in the past 25 years. In the past, it was common for 5-10% of commercial properties to be vacant at any given time. Now, a growing number of business districts face vacancy rates of 20%, or higher. This depresses property values, negatively impacts local tax revenues, and erodes many quality of life measures.

Increases in commercial vacancies have been precipitated by many changes:

- An increasing number of owners (Baby Boomers) are retiring, but are unable to sell their businesses.
- Property owners are unable, or unwilling to sell assets at depressed price levels.
- Populations are declining in most rural areas.
- There have been lengthy and sustained effects from the last recession.
- Small markets are being forced to compete globally with large firms reaching into their territories.
- There has been huge growth in online shopping, putting goods and services at our fingertips, 24/7.

University of Illinois Extension's community and economic development team disseminates best practice strategies to local stakeholders through quarterly newsletters, with a particular emphasis on county board members. Recognizing that neither the escalating rate of vacancies, nor the resulting community impacts are new to local leaders, Extension educators and researchers looked for potential solutions and information that might offer new insights into these challenges.

The first newsletter in 2020 highlighted three potential strategies for countering the mounting commercial vacancy struggle: rural innovation, community-supported enterprises, and modern cooperatives. These concepts are tangible suggestions with known points of contact, providing local leaders with concrete steps to follow.

Situational analysis indicated that commercial vacancy rates are an issue well beyond the five-county area, so the community and economic development team disseminated this message statewide through their blog. The article was picked up by FarmWeek Now, a publication of the Illinois Farm Bureau, eventually reaching more than 20,000 rural-living citizens.

Extension educators make a difference by contributing best practices and new ideas to local thinking, creating forward momentum, and offering a positive outlook on the future of our communities.



### SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EDUCATION

SNAP-Ed works with Illinois families in need to make the healthier choice an easier choice. Through classes, workshops and collaboration with community partners to adopt research-based solutions encouraging healthier nutrition and activity choices, SNAP-Ed positively affects families and communities.

In 2020, SNAP-Ed virtual education and resources:



Addressed community partner needs by providing resources and collaboration opportunities



Provided live, virtual classes families could join from their own phone, tablet, or computer



Distributed print materials to families on topics such as recipes made with common pantry ingredients



Increased reach via social media, text, and e-news with relevant nutrition and activity information



Created a new community food resource map, Find Food Illinois, on the Eat. Move. Save. website

*Earlier this year, at Wabash Area Development, Inc. in Mt. Carmel, a man stopped by our booth to share that his wife visits our website “all the time” and that they both really enjoyed the recipes they had tried. Giving our participants a resource for ideas and recipes at home helps them make the healthy choice an easy choice!*

Carol Van Matre, SNAP-Ed community worker

### SNAP-Ed Community Partnerships



5 K-12 Schools



3 Stores or Markets



16 Agencies or Community Centers



12 Emergency Food Sites



11 Early Childhood

As I was teaching It’s Fun To Be Healthy, a child announced proudly, “Miss Savannah, I ate all my carrots yesterday. They were okay. I did not really like them, but they are Go Foods and they make me really strong, so I ate them ALL!” Through the education that we provide, this child was able to understand that vegetables are a healthy choice and we need to eat them, even if we do not care for them.  
SAVANAH SUMMERFIELD,  
SNAP-ED COMMUNITY WORKER



Mt. Carmel held its first Mobile Food Market in 2020. Due to COVID-19, fresh produce was made available for free at this drive-through / pick-up event. Participants were instructed to pop their trunk, so volunteers could place the package inside with minimal contact. All volunteers wore gloves and face masks. The event was very well organized with two double lanes, making it quick and easy for people to get their box of produce.



This 18-month-old was very excited when his mother showed him some of the produce they received. “Oooh, pineapple!” he exclaimed.



# Agriculture and Natural Resources

**The healing power of plants. The healing power of food.**

In 2020, many people turned to cultivating plants and enjoying nature as they spent more time closer to home. Home gardeners expanded their food production, and farmers – large and small – worked tirelessly to ensure a steady food supply during a time of uncertainty. Extension was there to help residents and agricultural producers surround themselves with thriving plants, get more out of their time in natural areas, and maximize their food production.



44  
ANR Program Attendance

## Access to Statewide Programs



285  
Webinar Sessions Accessible Anywhere



182  
New Videos and Podcast Episodes





Tara Buerster  
County Extension  
Director



Lisa Simpson  
Office Support  
Associate, Fiscal



Debra Collier  
4-H Youth Development  
Edwards County



Samantha Gaither  
4-H Youth Development  
Lawrence County



Jessica Ochs  
4-H Youth Development  
Richland County



Megan Pierson  
4-H Youth Development  
Wabash County



Yvette Anderson  
4-H Youth Development  
Wayne County



Savannah Summerfield  
SNAP-Ed  
Community Worker



Carol Van Matre  
SNAP-Ed  
Community Worker



Theresa Reid  
Office Support Assistant  
Edwards County



Debra Buchanan  
Office Support Assistant  
Lawrence County



Sheri Pitts  
Office Support Assistant  
Richland County



Lauren Russell  
Office Support Assistant  
Wabash County



Jessica Simpson  
Office Support Assistant  
Wayne County



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## EXTENSION COUNCIL

Justine Basnett  
Kelley Biggs  
Terry Bruce  
Paul Bruinsma

Katrina Glick  
John Roy Hodges  
Deb Mitchell  
Rebecca Perry

Tonya Potts  
Jan Ridgley  
Kathy St. Ledger

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Edwards County Extension

350 N. 7th. St.  
Albion, IL 62806  
(618) 445-2934  
Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Closed noon – 1 p.m.

### Lawrence County Extension

10722 Cherry Blvd.  
Lawrenceville, IL 62439  
(618) 943-5018  
Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Closed noon – 1 p.m.

### Richland County Extension

306 S. Fair St.  
Olney, IL 62450  
(618) 395-2191  
Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Closed noon – 1 p.m.

### Wabash County Extension

738 N. Market  
Mt. Carmel, IL 62863  
(618) 262-5725  
Tues. - Thurs., 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Closed noon – 1 p.m.

### Wayne County Extension

2B Frontier Dr.  
Fairfield, IL 62837  
(618) 842-3702  
Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Closed noon – 1 p.m.

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## ONLINE



Edwards County 4-H  
4-H Lawrence County Illinois  
Richland County Illinois 4-H  
4-H Wabash County, Illinois  
University of Illinois Extension – Wayne County 4-H  
Illinois Extension– Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne Counties

**Illinois  
Extension**

### College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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



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.

The Illinois Nutrition Education Programs are funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

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