



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

2021 Addressing Local Needs,
Solving Global Challenges
Cook County



Willene Buffett
County Extension Director

Serving Cook County

A Note from the County Director

In the second year of the pandemic, we continue to adapt and adjust to what is becoming our new normal. How we work, shop, and interact with others have all changed. It appears that everything in our life is different, but some things remain the same.

We want: safe, healthy, and encouraging environments where our children can thrive; to make healthier nutrition and lifestyle choices; to manage our finances.

We need: information on making the most of our food budget or ways to help our aging parents.

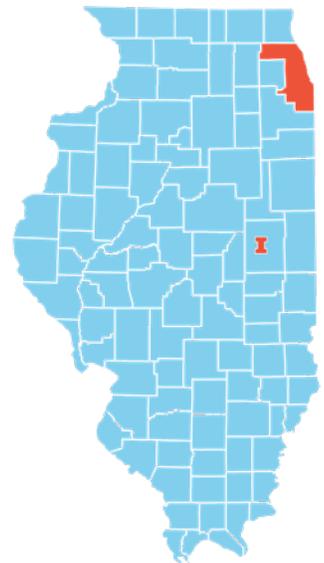
We strive to be better. Learn about: reducing food waste and overcrowded landfills, food insecurity, starting an urban farm.

We are constantly searching for ways to improve our lives and lifestyles, even if it is something as simple as making the most of our garden. The world has changed, but University of Illinois Extension continues to be your trusted source for reliable, unbiased information.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Extension educators, coordinators, community outreach workers, and support staff remained dedicated to providing Chicago and suburban Cook County residents with access to educational resources via face-to-face sessions, virtual webinars, self-paced online trainings, podcasts, blogs, social media posts, and our website.

I am pleased to share this Impact Report. You and your constituents can get firsthand benefits from our programs. We offer research-based solutions to help individuals solve problems and adapt to change. Contact us for assistance.

Willene Buffett
County Extension Director



Think Global, Act Local

Illinois Extension embodies the land grant mission of University of Illinois, providing applied research and education to address societal grand challenges and local issues.

Community Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities

 Connectedness and Inclusion

 Involvement and Leadership

 Thriving Youth

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

Look for these icons throughout this report to see how Illinois Extension is meeting these grand challenges at a local level.

Illinois Extension 2021 Statewide Highlights

Outreach Provided

565	335	84
Illinois Communities Served	Educational Sessions Per Week	Online Courses

Partnerships Supported

6,445	278	1,000
Adult Volunteers	Community Gardens	School Partnerships

Learners Engaged

8,000,000	14,450	500,000
Website Users	Online Course Users	Educational Program Attendees

Resources Generated

\$14,000,000	\$242,000
Value of Volunteer Contributions	Value of Donated Garden Produce

Extension leaders meet with local stakeholders to define annual priorities that allow us to respond to evolving and emerging needs and make meaningful progress toward important long-term outcomes. This blend of long-range focus and local accountability is a powerful strategy that ensures we stay true to our mission as we serve communities across the state.

Environment

Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

The survival of our planet depends on the quality of our water, land, and air. These shared resources must be managed through sustainable practices that support ecological balance. We must take steps now to effectively steward these resources for generations to come

Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

There is growing evidence that time spent around plants and in green spaces has many benefits including improved health, better interpersonal relationships, and a higher quality of life. Sustainable home landscapes also increase property values and build stronger ecosystems for plants and wildlife.



9,158
Attendees in all programs last year



156
Educational Sessions offered last year



761
Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers



\$1,233,709
Value of services performed by volunteers



Map reveals widespread lead pollution in Chicago backyards, parkways

Written by Emily Steele



Backyards and community gardens across Chicago are as diverse as the city they live in. Most have one thing in common – lead lurking in the soil.

Legacy lead leftover from paint, gasoline, and other sources, lingers in the environment. Lead poisoning is a health concern for children and may cause delayed brain development. In high-risk areas, running through dusty yards and helping in the family garden can expose children to lead in the soil.

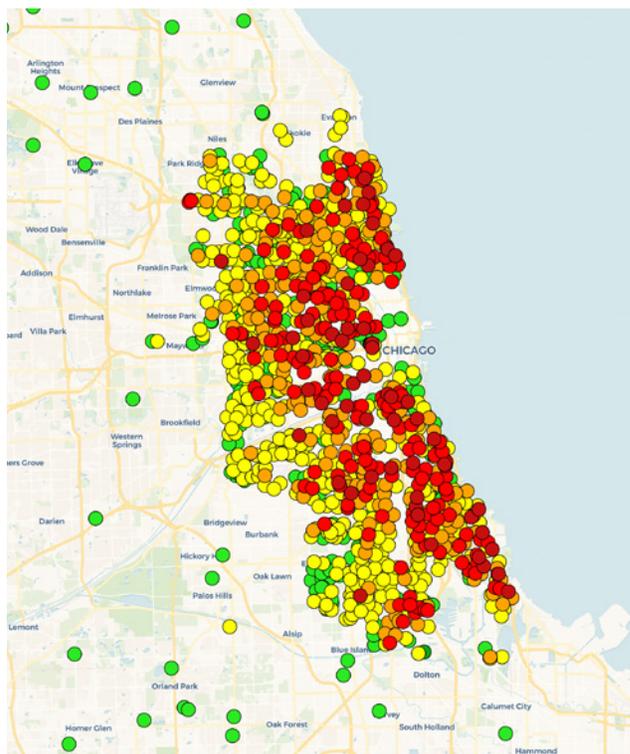
Now, for the first time, communities have access to a city-wide map showing how much lead is in the soil where they live. Andrew Margenot from the Department of Crop Sciences at University of Illinois partnered with Zack Grant from University of Illinois Extension Cook County and Chicago-based Advocates for Urban Agriculture to gather soil samples as part of the Chicago Safe Soils Initiative. By offering free soil tests, they were able to map thousands of samples from parkways and yards across the city.

The results show widespread lead contamination across Chicago.

The average amount of lead in the soil was 220 parts per million (ppm) which is 11 times higher than the natural level of 20 ppm. According to the study, 20% of the city's soils are higher than 400 ppm.

Environmental agencies have different standards for what soil lead levels are a risk to human health. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency follows the federal EPA rate of 400 ppm, while the California EPA has a more cautious rate of 80 ppm.

The map also shows how soil contamination is an environmental justice issue.



For the first time, Chicago area communities have access to a city-wide map showing how much lead is in the soil where they live.

Some southside neighborhoods had soil lead levels of more than 1,000 ppm. "This is the ugly story of industrialization in this county. A lot of Black Americans were forced to live in highly industrialized areas of the city which typically had high levels of contaminants in soil, water, and air," Margenot says.

Margenot suggests people use the lead map, available at www.mapmyenvironment.com, as a starting point. "If you're in a hot spot, you're probably going to want to invest in a \$60 soil test for your yard, especially if you have a garden or any bare spots that could be kicking up dust which is an inhalation risk," he says.



www.mapmyenvironment.com



Building a culture of composting in Cook County

Illinois Extension is committed to helping Cook County government achieve its target of decreasing carbon emissions due to waste 50% by 2035.

Food accounts for 21% of Cook County's landfill waste. We know that it is a major source of methane gas and a significant contributor to climate change. What is harder to see is the economic drain food waste disposal creates on local economies.

The average disposal costs in the Chicago Metropolitan region are greater than the state and national average. To make matters worse, projections have us exceeding our landfills' capacity in less than 12 years. Add the economic and environmental costs of trucks traveling to and from landfills, and the costs to local governments are staggering.

Composting decreases the amount of food waste in the system, as well as:

- Lowers waste disposal costs
- Reduces the strain on landfill capacity
- Slows the release of methane gas into the atmosphere

According to the Cook County Solid Waste Management Plan 2018 Update, "Composting food scraps and using finished compost as a soil amendment offers several environmental and economic benefits."

Our team implemented 10 community compost collection events, diverting more than 32 tons of organic material from area landfills and 8 metric tons of methane gas from the atmosphere.

Spring and summer events focused on yard waste and food scrap collection. The events also provided finished compost to attendees to use in their gardens. Participants told us, "I'm trying to do my part to help the planet," and that they wanted to learn more. For these events, Extension partnered with municipalities and community organizations.

Five Pumpkin Smash events were held in November. These events are designed to be a fun way to introduce composting to the public. Events were held at three Chicago Public High Schools: Lake View, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, and Chicago Vocational Career Academy; and two at community organizations: Gary Comer Youth Center and Plant Chicago. Chicago Public School students served as volunteers at all locations.

Over 1,500 people attended these events, and Illinois Extension Master Gardeners contributed 25 hours of volunteer time.

Community



Connectedness and Inclusion

A strong sense of community brings people together to support each other in times of need and growth. Accepting and celebrating differences creates an environment where all voices are important and heard. When strong networks of peers and organizations support youth and families, even the most vulnerable community members feel they belong and are valued.

Involvement and Leadership

When people volunteer or advocate for a local issue, they see themselves as part of the solution and their community pride soars. Providing decision-makers with practical, timely, and research-based information gives leaders the tools they need to strengthen their communities and improve the quality of life in rural and urban areas throughout Illinois.

Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Illinois Extension's mentorship-based youth development model focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive now and in the future.



361

Attendees in Community programs last year



18

Educational Sessions offered last year



223

Youth enrolled in 4-H clubs



792

Volunteers Involved



\$1,321,114

Value of services performed by volunteers*

*Based on rate of \$27.98 per hour





State grant helps Extension promote racial healing

Racial inequality and discourse have been long-standing societal ills. Recent news and events have intensified the need to address these issues and advance racial healing and equity. Illinois Extension, in partnership with the University of Illinois School of Social Work, was awarded a Healing Illinois Grant from the Illinois Department of Human Services and Chicago Community Trust to promote dialogue and facilitate learning on racial healing.

Using a variety of conversational methods, participants engaged in authentic dialogue to explore and understand change—creating a roadmap to racial healing. Participants engaged in three ways:

- Focus Groups
- Parent Seminars
- Racial Healing Circles



Across 17 focus groups teens, parents, and educators gave voice to how social unrest, police brutality, the political climate, and the pandemic may have affected young peoples' sense of identity, agency, and belonging. This allowed us to better understand the social and emotional inputs that may be needed to support young people.

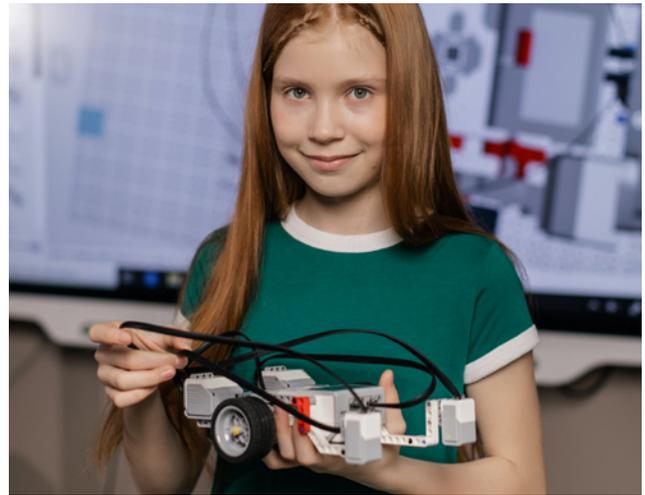
Four parent seminars were held to facilitate conversation on how race may impact youth's social and emotional development. This project equipped those with the most influence on young people to be poised for sustained action through dialogue, sharing parenting experiences and resources, and discussing how common terms are understood. Parents engaged on the following topics:

- Racial identity and your child
- Addressing microaggressions and implicit bias
- Understanding privilege and power
- What's the antidote: SEL and matters of the heart

Five racial healing circles were conducted with members of the general public, school social workers, and University of Illinois students. These sessions created opportunities to listen and understand perspectives and experiences.

These efforts have led to:

- More county residents in anti-racism efforts
- Expansion of racial healing work in Cook County
- Rich dataset to develop a best practice model and protocol for racial healing
- 25 hours of recorded audio to help us understand individual and group experiences
- Parents indicating a greater capacity to have conversations about race with their children



4-H is Growing True Leaders

4-H youth programs are empowering and preparing Illinois youth for success both now and in the future.



131,628
Youth Affiliations



6,192
Adult Volunteers



1,597
Clubs



47,556
Fair Exhibits



2,159
Programs



2,257
Youth in Leadership Projects & Programs

Opportunity4All

Advancing the mission for all youth in Illinois to be empowered and prepared for success.



24%
Minority Members



12%
Hispanic Members



788
Virtual Programs



142
New Program Sites





4-Hers install farm robot on planting bed



4-H Juntos member continues his e-learning during the pandemic.



Autonomous urban farming through technology

Cook County 4-H and partnering agency Urban Transformation Network (UTN) learned about a robot that performs farming/gardening duties. 4-H Extension specialist Mark Becker introduced this technology which allows a novice farmer to be a successful grower. Students command the robot via cell phone to begin the seeding, watering, and harvesting process without being directly on-site. This technology has been a great way to introduce urban youth to the agricultural sciences.

Because UTN has land for an outside farm and a couple of greenhouses, this technology allows for dual-farming opportunities; young people learn traditional hands-on farming while simultaneously learning how to program the robot to carry out the same tasks.

The importance and significance of this technology are groundbreaking; UTN's food production levels have increased, which helps westside Austin residents and neighboring communities. Also, this technology has reduced production costs relative to water, fertilizer, and labor.

The equipment is environmentally friendly, and the robot's efficiency in performing its duties is a marvel. More importantly, young people now realize how vital the food chain is and their role in it. Additionally, the 4-Hers have gained a greater awareness and appreciation for the potential career opportunities this technology presents. The skills they are learning are changing their outlook on career choices while offering a better sense of the kind of educational opportunities they can pursue.

"Agriculture is the one industry that drives the world, and urban young people should be learning everything possible about this industry," says UTN Founder, Don Patterson, Sr.

The young people working with this technology learn valuable skills, such as programming, urban planning, designing, landscaping, project management, business, accounting, budgeting, and architecture.

The story of the farm robot's impact on this westside community is still being told. However, this has been an excellent start for 4-H youth and partners at Urban Transformation Network.

Juntos 4-H members continue to embark on remote learning.

With the rise of e-learning, Juntos 4-H members continue to embark on remote learning plans. Packages were assembled and mailed to students who completed hands-on projects in areas including health, science, leadership, technology, public speaking, and civic engagement. In a positive environment, they receive guidance from adult mentors and are encouraged to take on leadership roles. With a bit of creativity, students participated in science projects, such as extracting DNA from a strawberry, conducting an egg drop, and exploring how sugary drinks affect teeth.

Despite the pandemic, the need for volunteers increased nationwide, and students were ready to go out and explore different avenues. Some students required volunteer hours for their national honor society applications, advanced placement classes, and college applications. Therefore, coordinator Maria Gutiérrez expanded these opportunities with well-known organizations such as the Forest Preserve of Cook County, Red Cross, and Bank of America. This created an additional opportunity for some parents to join in and support their kids. Parents learned this was not only a rewarding activity, but it helped by strengthening family ties, improving self-esteem, teaching them leadership skills, and building strong communication skills.

Research shows family engagement is critical to student achievement. To build authentic partnerships with families, we must build trust and transparency. The pandemic has transformed education, creating an opportunity to integrate technology. Family engagement strategies will continue to assist by helping families become more engaged. These approaches will help strengthen communication channels, build relationships, and ultimately build a stronger foundation for student achievement.

Of the students who participated in the program:

- 86% reported that Juntos helped them feel confident that they would graduate from high school
- 71.6% reported Juntos encouraged them to plan for their future
- 75% of students said Juntos is a place where they feel safe
- 60% of students reported Juntos helped them feel like a leader





Economy

Workforce Preparedness and Advancement

The global pandemic has reinforced the ongoing need for Illinois to develop innovative ways to nurture its workforce through career exploration, training and re-training programs, and other opportunities for refining skills of the current workforce and the workforce of the future. Having a prepared, skilled, and resilient workforce in place ultimately increases tax revenue for the state.

Financial Wellbeing

Financial instability can negatively affect physical, mental, and social health and can ultimately lead to bankruptcy. Illinois Extension supports financial wellbeing tools for all ages and stages which helps improve self-sufficiency, reduces the need for communities to provide support services, and creates opportunities for individuals to protect and build wealth.

Economic Vitality

Economically resilient communities are built on a solid foundation with plans for growth, plans for responding to emergencies and disasters, and innovative approaches to promote economic vitality. With 75% of the state devoted to farmland, agricultural operations, both large and small, represent a critically important contributor to the economic vitality of Illinois' local and state economy.



14,621

Attendance in all workforce programs last year



316

Educational sessions offered last year



55

Self-directed sessions offered last year



SEL Snapshots Series make the grade with Cook County teachers



For decades multiple disciplines have been used to teach students critical life skills to aid in their development. The pandemic placed the spotlight on social and emotional learning (SEL) and its implications for helping young people to better understand and identify their emotions and experiences. During remote or in-person learning, SEL could be used as a framework to establish greater connections, engagement, and to inspire student success in a variety of contexts. In 2021, a new slate of webinars for teachers in Cook County was offered through the SEL Snapshots Series. The series allowed teachers to explore how integral SEL is to school, family, and the community. It also created space to discuss how to help students cope, maximize student engagement in any setting, and increase their capacity to teach new skills. Teachers were introduced to seven guidelines for disrupting poverty in the classroom, five essential principles to lead with equity, three must-have conditions for resilient schools, and much more.

I have never participated in more relevant PD. This is what matters to [teachers], you know the things we're talking about.
SEL SNAPSHOTS, LEARNING AND THE IMPACT OF POVERTY PARTICIPANT

Topics covered in the series included:

- Understanding the foundations of SEL
- How to build equitable learning communities
- Why educators' emotional resiliency is critical
- Implications of poverty on learning during a pandemic
- What it means to lead with authenticity during times of crisis
- Using classroom conversations to teach across difference

Outcomes:

- 100% of the teachers indicated the series aligned with their district's and/or school's improvement plan
- 96% of teachers agreed the sessions impacted their professional growth, knowledge gains, and skills
- 92% of teachers indicated their participation in the series will impact their students' social and emotional growth
- Participants know how to apply a social and emotional lens to understand a variety of complex student concerns



STEM educators contribute to OpenSciEd, national open-source science curricula project

Since the fall of 2019, Cook County STEM educators Sue Gasper and Meghan McCleary have served as writers for OpenSciEd, a non-profit aiming to transform science education by developing high quality, open access instructional materials based on a design framework grounded in research. They have worked on pilot and public release units and, most recently, the final unit in the sixth grade sequence focused on cells and systems. As part of teams of writers from across the country, they developed and revised teacher guides and student-facing materials, such as slides, readings, and handouts, with an eye on equity and access. The curricula includes high quality images and videos, as well as rigorously tested student investigations.



OpenSciEd units were evaluated by the EQUiP Rubric for Science Peer Review Panel for NGSS alignment and design after initial pilot development and after revision for public release. Each of the units Gasper and McCleary worked on has received an NGSS Design Badge from the Peer Review panel as an example of high-quality NGSS design. OpenSciEd units are openly available for download on the OpenSciEd website; all materials are CCBY4.0 and can be adapted to fit any classroom's needs. The full middle school sequence, consisting of 18 units across three grades, will be available in March 2022. Spanish translations are currently available for some units and will be available for the entire sequence soon.

Recent research findings from the OpenSciEd Middle School program indicate the majority of students, regardless of gender or background, find that the instruction is relevant, they can participate in high level discussions, and their ideas were valued by their classmates. Nationally, teachers indicate that these materials meet the Next Generation Science Standards and other state science standards better than previous materials. (Information included appeared in the *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 32:7)

STEM educators are Certified Professional Learning Providers for the OpenSciEd Middle School Sequence and are available to provide teacher professional development on any of the open-access units, as well as the professional development on best practices for using this type of storyline curricula for all K-12 teachers.



As COVID-19 continued to impact governments, businesses, and communities, Illinois Extension's Local Government Education program increased its outreach aimed at economic investment and community vitality, workforce development, leadership, policy, equity, and resiliency. By partnering with state leadership and organizations in Illinois, the Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development team has provided outreach aimed to help local governments and residents build capacity to strengthen their communities and organizations and improve public services.



Access past and future programs
<https://go.illinois.edu/LGE>

Statewide Webinar Reach



60
Webinars in 2021



2,003
Individuals Learned about Leadership, Public Service, and Community Involvement



1,094
Individuals Learned about Meeting Needs of Diverse or Vulnerable Populations



3,955
Individuals Reached in Economic and Financial Stability Webinars



1,043
Reached in Economic Vitality and Community Resiliency Webinars

Community-Driven Broadband Reach



1,228
Community Leaders Educated on Broadband Expansion Opportunities



714
Participants Educated on Obtaining Funding and Needs Assessment



416
Individuals Reached on Broadband Project Management

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.

Food

Food Access

Research shows a strong link between food insecurity, poor health, and even poor academic outcomes for children. Food insecurity is not just about hunger. It's about not having access to food options that meet nutritional needs, which is particularly important for individuals and families with limited resources. Extension's network of volunteers and partners work together to address food insecurity in locally relevant ways.

Food Production

Whether large commercial agriculture operations, small farms, or community and backyard gardens, the future of our food supply relies on use of practices that boost production and capacity. Growers at all levels benefit from effective, efficient, and sustainable approaches to cultivating produce, crops, and livestock that feed their families, communities, and the world.

Food Safety

Foodborne illnesses cost society an estimated \$36 billion annually, with an average cost of \$3,630 per illness. Food safety is challenged everywhere from the field to the kitchen. Safe growing, handling, and preservation practices can help reduce the social and economic impact of foodborne illness.



2,117
Attendees in all local food programs last year



68
Educational sessions offered last year



64
School/Community Gardens supported by Extension staff and volunteers



15,900 lbs.
Volume of produce donated to local communities



\$22,896
Value of donated food*

* Based on average value of \$1.44 per pound



Master Urban Farmer Training Program graduates grow food, leaders, community

The El Paseo Community Garden is in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. In 2015, Paula Acevedo took on the responsibility of the small community garden. She completed the Master Urban Farmer Training Program (MUFTP) in 2016



and used what she learned in class to refine the garden's master plan. The site now encompasses 1.5 acres and has been awarded numerous grants.

Paula talks quickly and passionately as she walks through the garden. "This is a work of love," she exclaims. She passes the senior and family-raised bed area, the collective, free, and ADA accessible raised beds, a native prairie strip, and the permaculture garden. Where's the farm? Acevedo smiles and points it out. "We have ten 50-ft. rows with irrigation, a shipping container for storage, a small seedling greenhouse, and plans for a hoop house. The farm also has several rows for commercial food businesses to use. Did you know Lo Rez Brewing makes El Paseo Pale Ale beer using our hops and donates proceeds to the garden?"



Paula credits project-based leadership and their use of community-based design workshops involving Pilsen area residents for much of the garden's growth.

In 2017, farm lead Matthias Lampe took a deep interest and leadership role in the apiary. He enrolled in MUFTP to learn how to build and run an efficient and productive urban farm. Ali Day, MUFTP 2020 and garden lead, explains, "Matthias and I love the planning aspect of growing! I created my production and rotation plan for the raised beds as a MUFTP homework assignment. I now have a system in place that can be used year after year by future garden leaders."

Matthias agrees on the impact MUFTP made on his ability to manage the farm. "My trellis, irrigation, and production plans went from paper to reality. It's mind-blowing what we have here now. I also used the spreadsheets to figure out how many seeds or plants were needed to fill a 50-ft. row."

Ali speaks to MUFTP's impact: "We doubled production. By implementing more rigorous spacing and having a succession plan for the collective beds, we grew so much more than we thought possible."

Paula credits MUFTP, in part, for making them look to the future and open their eyes to new possibilities.



Produce safety training held online

A major shift in the food safety training format was the theme in 2021. The Produce Safety Alliance training offered by Cook County Extension was delivered exclusively in a remote format. This included three separate trainings with 55 individuals participating. In partnership with the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Land Connection, these trainings were offered at no or heavily subsidized minimal cost. If these trainings were held privately, it would cost between \$4,675 to \$8,250 per participant. The format change included the standard food safety module delivery and interactive learning check questions which allowed participants to respond via the program's annotate tool.

Wonderful speakers and participants! The task of creating/implementing a food safety plan is a lot less daunting now! It was very helpful to have the training booklet in hand.

TRAINING PARTICIPANT

According to the North Central Region Center for FSMA Training, Extension, and Technical Assistance impact report, the remote delivery training received high ratings from participants, scoring 4.13/5 in terms of engaging delivery.

So many real-world examples from people who had implemented the practices made the course much more valuable than just the printed materials.

PRODUCE SAFETY TRAINING PARTICIPANT



55
Individuals trained via online access



79%
Growers were training employees about food safety within one year of taking the training



\$4,675 - \$8,250
Cost savings to participants because of Illinois Farm Bureau and The Land Connection subsidies



North Central Region Center for FSMA Training, Extension, and Technical Assistance data
<https://www.ncrfsma.org/impacts>

Health



Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

More than half of Illinois adults have a known chronic health condition, in part due to risky health behaviors, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health. People of all ages need trusted and reliable research-based information to make health decisions that improve their quality of life. Creative solutions are needed to assure that these supports are available when and where people need them.

Social and Emotional Health

Even before the global pandemic's new social, economic, and life challenges, mental health was a growing concern. Illinois residents of all ages and walks of life need to know where to turn for resources to help cope with the daily stressors that threaten mental health and wellbeing.

Healthy and Safe Community Environments

Personal health decisions are not made in a vacuum. We must create environments where healthy choices are not only possible but are also encouraged. Classrooms, school cafeterias, food pantries, workplaces, and other built environments play an important role in promoting health and safety.



18,831
Attendees in all health programs last year



981
Educational health sessions offered last year

INEP Community Partnerships



39
K-12 Schools



12
Early Childhood Centers



24
Agencies, Community Centers, or Emergency Food Sites





SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EDUCATION

SNAP-Education works with Illinois families in need to make the healthier choice an easier choice. Through classes, workshops and collaboration with community partners, SNAP-Education positively affect families and communities by using research-based solutions to encourage healthier nutrition and physical activity choices.

Reach and Impact of SNAP-Education



43,116
Total Estimated Reach



593
Number of Nutrition Education Classes Provided

TYPE OF CLASSES

- 26% Face-to-face
- 74% Virtual or online

SNAP-Ed brought together Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois and the Family Christian Health Center to create a fresh produce mobile market between May and August 2021. Each month, 75 to 120 families visited the market and received two to three bags of fresh produce. SNAP-Ed also provided nutrition education materials and recipes to assist families in using less familiar fresh produce at home.

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships



37
K-12 Schools



11
Early Childhood



9
Other Agencies or Community Centers



4
Food Banks and Food Pantries



EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

Since 1969, EFNEP has provided nutrition education that works to families, improving their diet quality, food safety, and food purchasing habits. In Cook County, EFNEP staff members serve limited-resource families to make the healthy choice the easy choice, even on a budget.

EFNEP provides a deeper experience for those that participate in our nutrition education programming, with regular support and connection with the local EFNEP team. EFNEP helps limited-resource families gain knowledge and skills needed to make behavior changes for healthy diets and active lifestyles. Programs are based on evidence that engages learners in practical, hands-on classes and activities. In addition, EFNEP classes are taught by peer educators who are members of the communities where they work. These team members are trained, passionate, and dedicated to affecting a diverse population through nutrition education.

Our Community Partners



2
K-12 Schools



9
Agencies or Community Centers



2
Food Pantries and Food Banks



1
Early Childhood

EFNEP partnered with WIC and Catholic Charities to provide an interactive virtual cooking class for families. WIC provided food boxes to participants and EFNEP helped prepare the ingredients and live streamed the program to participants from WIC Grocery sites. During July and August, 48 families participated in the weeklong class. Classes featured healthy, tasty recipes. Families were able to share finished dishes and ideas on modifications to fit their family's needs.



Wits Workout benefits are far reaching

Wits Workout, Illinois Extension’s interactive brain health program, was delivered in eight locations throughout the state, including two sites in suburban Cook County. Two additional series were offered to those who preferred to attend virtually. Specifically, each location offered 12 one-hour weekly *Wits Workout* sessions to adults 50 and older with the aim to increase socialization, reduce isolation, and promote intellectual engagement, all of which complement current aging brain health research. A different themed module was introduced each week that featured educational health topics on eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, engaging the brain with intellectually stimulating challenges, participating in social activities, getting enough restful sleep, and reducing stress levels. Through interactive dialog, embedded health messages, and experiential activities, participants were encouraged to adopt or expand engagement in behavior practices that contributed to their overall health.

Post series surveys were conducted in each location. Two thirds of the participants indicated they learned or tried new things or challenged themselves intellectually in new ways because of their experience in *Wits Workout*. Fifty-six percent of participants said their socialization increased through ongoing attendance. Eighty-four percent identified they learned new skills and tips to help them with everyday memory. Because intellectual engagement and social connectedness are two of the main goals of *Wits Workout*, it is especially noteworthy that participants acknowledged socialization as a self-identified impact at a time when so many people were feeling isolated because of the ongoing pandemic. Covid-19 safety guidelines were strictly followed throughout the series.

With the support of grant funding from the Midwest Roybal Center for Health Promotion and Translation, *Wits Workout* is currently being evaluated to assess its efficacy to facilitate changes in health behaviors and subjective well-being. The long-term goal is to establish *Wits Workout* as an evidence-based behavioral intervention. *Wits Workout* is now available in 19 states.

Extension partnership brings yoga and mindfulness outdoors



Cook County Extension and the Forest Preserve District partner to increase opportunities to enjoy nature, physical activity, and social connection by providing yoga classes at Whistler Woods in Riverdale. Props were supplied to all participants to ensure accessibility for all. Once a week, participants gathered at the forest preserve to engage in breathing techniques, yoga

I found that I am able to do things I did not think I was able to do.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

poses, and meditation. During a time when opportunities to gather in person were limited, the series provided a safe space for residents to be physically active, practice mindfulness, and engage with others in their community. Scheduled to resume in late spring, this program continues to be the only opportunity to attend an in-person yoga class in Riverdale.

Due to demand from participants, the series initially scheduled for six weeks continued for a total of 14 weeks. Twenty-seven individuals attended at least one session; a core group of 12 students attended most sessions.

Program evaluation results were favorable, with 100% expressing interest in attending again if offered next summer.

It’s definitely been the most accepted and desired event thus far. I think a great community built around it.

FRIENDS OF THE FOREST PRESERVE ORGANIZER





Wellness begins with you

In response to Covid-19, Extension's community health team reimagined the in-person workshop and modeled it after worksite wellness programs to provide participants with an interactive and supportive experience. Engaging in self-care strategies might not feel comfortable for many, but it is essential in enhancing overall health and wellbeing.

Through the 6-session *Wellness Wednesdays: Begin with You* series, participants are encouraged to focus on their own wellness and obtain tools and self-care strategies to address mental and physical health. Each session helps participants understand how their environment and their choices influence their wellbeing. The series addresses mental health, seasonal affective disorder, stress, mindful eating, self-compassion, and sleep.

Wellness Wednesdays was offered twice in 2021. In the first year, the series reached 91 participants and appealed to a demographically and geographically diverse audience. Reflective of a strong need for self-care, the series reached local community residents and organizations and was well received among Extension staff in 18 states.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents strongly agreed and 29% agreed that they increased their understanding of self-care strategies. Additionally, a majority felt they would be able to apply the self-care strategies presented. In response to the question to what extent participants will be able to apply strategies for self-care based on the information they learned, 56% responded a great deal, 32% responded quite a bit, and 10% responded somewhat.

As a result of the series, participants reported using the following self-care strategies:

- Being mindful of my mental health, getting enough sleep, and being aware what causes me stress and making changes.
- Reflecting on work/life balance, taking more breaks
- Take care of self- first
- The small act of eating slower (more mindfully) and taking two to three minutes to let my stomach rest before immediately getting a second helping at dinner has helped tremendously. Now, I eat salad as a second course and to aid in digestion instead of two helpings.



- 39% Self-care/personal health goals
- 31% Interesting topic
- 14% Presented by Illinois Extension
- 14% Convenient day and time
- 2% Other

Financial Report



- 77% Wages
- 12% Operating Expenses
- 11% Leases

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



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**Illinois
Extension**

College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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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.

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