



EXTENSION IN ACTION

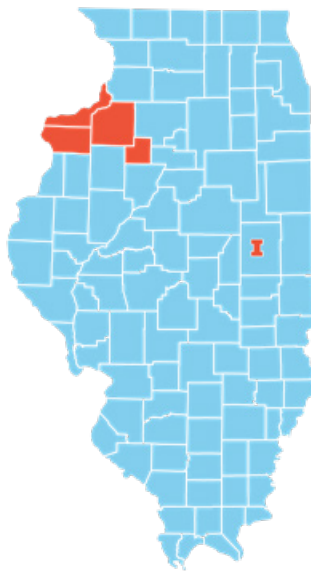
Serving Henry, Mercer,
Rock Island & Stark Counties





Jenny Garner
County Director

Growing together: A year of achievements and gratitude



Greetings from University of Illinois Extension!

In 2023, we brought new programming to Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties, featuring innovations like digital agriculture technologies, a community garden in Moline’s Floreiente neighborhood, and a regional housing study. Our initiatives also included an urban tree care program and a 12-week evidence-based exercise for seniors while empowering youth with citizenship, leadership, and life skills.

Extension is about reaching out, and we’re grateful for our dedicated volunteers, community partners, and financial supporters who make it possible. Their support allows us to extend resources through teaching and research, addressing public needs for individual and community empowerment.

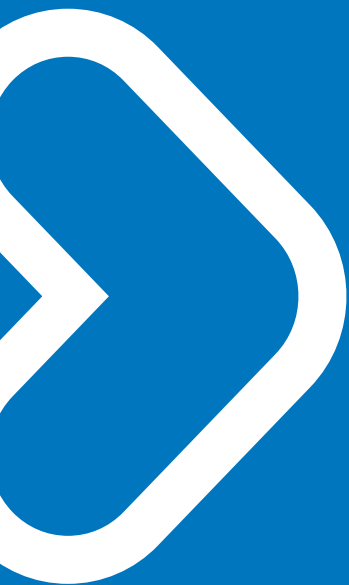
Our 195 trained Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and 4-H adult leaders enhance our outreach, collaborating with youth, adults, agencies, and community partners. We appreciate the 355 partner agencies working with us to identify critical issues in our service region.

We owe our success to the support from county boards, foundations, home and community education members, businesses, and individual donors. Your contributions ensure we provide practical education to individuals and families. Each one of you has played a crucial role in our mission, and we extend our gratitude — for every pie baked, garden tended, horticulture question answered, meeting attended, 4-H fair event held, and for every youth learning a new skill.

Whether you’re a newcomer or a longtime participant, we’re committed to offering relevant and engaging programming that helps people learn, grow, and improve their lives. We’re here for you!

Jenny Garner
County Director

Cover photo: An aerial drone and robot cover crop seeding demonstration by Dennis Bowman, Illinois Extension digital agriculture specialist, held in Galva.



Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to five grand challenge themes:



Community:
Support Strong and Resilient Residents



Economy:
Grow a Prosperous Economy



Environment:
Sustain Natural Resources at Home and in Public Spaces



Food:
Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply



Health:
Maximize Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health

2023 Engagement

Extension leaders, staff, and stakeholders define priorities that create meaningful, mission-centered outcomes throughout the state:

657 Communities Served	745K+ Program Attendees	12.7M+ Webpage Views	58.5M+ Social Media Impressions	1.8M+ YouTube Views
555 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	90 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	10,158 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,799 4-H Clubs	199,400 4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,682
Program Volunteers

274
Community Gardens

2,634
School and Community Partners

Resource Generation

\$15,259,785
Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$463,368
Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4M+
External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners



Illinois Extension is here for you

Through dedicated service and a commitment to community well-being, Illinois Extension has played a vital role in enriching the lives of residents within our service area. Explore in this report the impactful contributions made that define our collective mission. Through our research-based educational programs and resources, we remain committed to:

- Providing youth with opportunities through 4-H to gain experiences and foster citizenship, leadership, and life skills. We are proud of the 4,550 youth served by our stellar 4-H programs. These efforts are made possible with the help of 79 dedicated adult volunteers, including those who lead our 759 4-H community club members in 48 different clubs. Our tremendous 4-H volunteers have given over 7,584 hours of service valued at \$247,845.
- Cultivating healthy environments and sustainable gardening practices through education, outreach, and the efforts of our highly trained volunteers. We take pride in managing 72 active Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers who care for 11 community and education gardens, including five active food donation gardens. These gardens provided 2,802 pounds of produce valued at \$4,819 to help fight food insecurity. Their collective volunteer service hours are valued at \$151,836. In addition, we served 4,281 participants at 61 horticulture and environmental education sessions and 10 webinars.
- Encouraging positive behaviors in health and wellness, food safety, and providing valuable tools for chronic disease management. We assisted 9,038 participants in building their skills in these areas through 442 different programs.

Illinois Extension Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas presenting “Building Your Emergency Food & Water Supply” program for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources statewide event “Becoming an Outdoorswoman”.

- Equipping farmers and producers with the resources, training, and information needed for sustainable and profitable agricultural practices. From Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) testing to soil health and digital agriculture to watershed management, we connected with 192 local farmers at local in-person programs. Our educators provided 1,792 expert consultations and engaged with 2,751 participants at 55 additional agriculture education sessions.
- Expanding food security and resources through our Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP-Ed) with 2,341 participants taking 383 nutrition education sessions. Our SNAP-Ed program partnered with 23 K-12 Schools, five Early Childhood Centers, eight emergency food sites, and 34 other agencies to help people improve diet quality, physical activity, and food access.
- Developing thriving and safe communities, as well as informed and connected leaders through our Community and Economic Development programs. We impacted economic vitality, community leadership, and disaster preparedness for 3,880 attendees at 59 different programs.

Behind each of these numbers are real people whose lives are positively impacted by Illinois Extension in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark Counties.



BLOOMING KNOWLEDGE FOR 24 YEARS: NURSERY SCHOOL - LESSONS IN GARDENING

For over two decades, the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners' flagship annual event has been a beacon of our mission to empower individuals in their journey of learning and growth. Year after year, attendees enhance their gardening skills and knowledge by choosing from a diverse array of tailored workshops. Each workshop is enriched by the expertise of seasoned professionals such as renowned prairie ecologist and landscape designer Neil Diboll, pictured here delivering his keynote address during the 2023 event held at the Vibrant Arena in Moline. This signature event showcases our ongoing efforts to guide individuals on their journey of horticultural discovery and mastery.



MERCER COUNTY 4-H HONORS VETERANS

Mercer County 4-H members actively supported the Veterans Ball at the VFW facility in Aledo on November 4th. The event honored military sacrifices, and 4-H's involvement added a meaningful dimension. The primary goal was to extend support and show gratitude to veterans. It also served as a great opportunity for 4-H members to learn civic engagement by helping to serve the meal and assist the veterans. The keynote speaker shared poignant stories, and the lessons profoundly impacted 4-H members in attendance, fostering a meaningful connection and respect for the service of our veterans. The event served as a platform for intergenerational understanding. Special thanks to the organizers, VFW in Aledo, and all participants for giving our 4-H members a chance to serve, learn, and grow.



WINTER WELLNESS EVENT: EXPLORATIONS INTO HEALTHY HABITS AND NATURE

Last year's Winter Wellness Family Event at Watch Tower Lodge, Black Hawk State Park, Rock Island, provided a comprehensive well-being experience for mind, body, and spirit. Participants explored interactive stations covering environmental awareness, food waste reduction, and DIY green cleaning for a mindful approach. Illinois Extension provided insights into nutrition and heart health, complemented by Community Health Care blood pressure and glucose checks. Youth enjoyed interactive stations and an indoor obstacle course from 4-H, SNAP-Ed, Master Gardeners, All Our Kids Early Childhood Network, and the Rock Island Public Library. Everyone enjoyed soup and hot cocoa, doing nature crafts, and visiting the Hauberg Museum to learn about Sauk and Meskwaki (Fox) Indians. This holistic event aimed to enrich lives by fostering healthy habits and connecting with nature, leaving a lasting impact on participants of all ages.



Rachel Curry, (fourth from left), and Emily Swihart, in green dress center, at the NACAA awards.

AWARDS RECOGNITIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND STAFF:

- Emily Swihart, horticulture educator, received a National Communications, Website/Online Content Award as part of the "Good Growing" team and was a National Finalist for "The Outsider Newsletter" from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA)
- Rachel Curry, agriculture/agribusiness educator, was an NACAA Regional Award Winner: Communications for her Mississippi North Central Watershed Factsheet.
- Rachel and Nicole Haverback, watershed outreach associate, were Illinois Award Winners: Audio Recording for the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction podcast.
- Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator, received an Interdisciplinary State Team award from Illinois Extension for the food preservation series.
- Becky Buckrop, marketing and development program coordinator, received an Illinois Extension Individual Excellence award.



Harmonizing efforts for food access and equity

In the context of promoting food access and equity, Illinois Extension worked across program areas to collectively tackle issues such as food insecurity, food waste, nutrition education, and the promotion of sustainable practices, contributing to a healthier and more equitable society.

Combating food waste

Acknowledging that a significant 33% of all U.S. food ends up as waste, Illinois Extension is leading the charge in combating this issue with in-person workshops, such as those Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator, led for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Thru the Stones conference, covering strategies to reduce food waste both at home and in schools. Her programs reinforce the importance of mindful consumption, efficient storage, and preservation methods. As the Vice-Chair of the QC Food Rescue Partnership, Bogdonas actively promotes food rescue for its best possible use. Food waste audits conducted throughout the 2023-24 school year contribute to these efforts.

Empathy-driven poverty simulations

Understanding the intricacies of poverty and its correlation with food insecurity, Illinois Extension facilitated two poverty simulation trainings led by Russell Medley, community and economic development educator. By immersing participants in an interactive experience, these simulations provide insight into the daily challenges faced by those in poverty. These sessions stimulate community-driven conversations about poverty, fostering understanding and encouraging action. Collaboration with Muscatine Community College and Heritage Church, among others, exemplifies the Extension's commitment to bridging gaps in awareness.

Educating consumers

Illinois Extension's SNAP-Ed program significantly contributes to the broader mission of creating a healthier and more equitable society by delivering evidence-based nutrition education programs that empower individuals with knowledge to take charge of their health. Working with food pantries and agencies on policy, systems, and environment changes, they are able to enhance and magnify their impact.

Members of the Buccaneers 4-H Club showcase their donations for the Hunger Helpers Food Drive.

4-H's holistic health approach

4-H engages youth in a creative exploration of culinary skills with its Food Challenge program, designed to impart cooking skills, safe food handling, and knowledge about the health benefits of various food groups to its members. It culminates with a 'chopped' style competition like the one 4-H Educators Jennifer Peterson and Elaine Kaple, along with Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas, led for students at Black Hawk College's High School Completion Course. Youth can prepare their own meals and have the tools to make healthier choices when armed with cooking and nutrition skills.

Extension initiatives navigate the complex landscape of food access and equity, leaving an indelible impact on our local communities.

Beyond individual development, 4-H also provides opportunities for community service. In the fall, when the need for food assistance surged by an alarming 35% in our local communities and local food banks were grappling with a decline in donations, 4-H Clubs in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties joined forces to hold a Hunger Heroes Food Drive. With the support of SNAP-Ed resources to encourage healthy donations, they netted 5,000 food items distributed to local pantries across the area.

Community gardens and horticulture impact

Master Gardeners and staff also made significant strides in addressing hunger by donating almost 3,000 pounds of produce from their community demonstration gardens to local food pantries and individuals in need. This synergy of horticulture expertise and community service showcases how sustainable gardening practices can benefit both education and community well-being.



2,802 lbs

Produce donated from Illinois Extension gardens across our four-county service area.



5,000 food items

Collected by 4-H clubs for local food pantries through their Hunger Helpers Food Drive.

Championing community safety and growth

In the field of Community and Economic Development, Russell Medley has been at the forefront, driving impactful initiatives that exemplify Illinois Extension's dedication to disaster preparedness, recovery, and community well-being.

Illinois natural hazards mitigation plans

Medley led a team of CED educators, Illinois State Water Survey staff, and student workers on a two-year effort to update the IEMA-OHS Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan's approval by FEMA and subsequent endorsement by Governor Pritzker marked a crucial milestone, rendering Illinois eligible for essential hazard mitigation funding, ensuring comprehensive coverage for all 13 million Illinois residents.

IEMA-OHS and Illinois Extension learning sessions

In collaboration with IEMA-OHS, Illinois Extension initiated a monthly webinar series. Covering diverse disaster preparedness and mitigation topics, the series aimed to inspire the establishment of more COADs (Community Organizations Active in Disaster) across the state.

COAD manual update

Medley, in collaboration with Extension educators from various states, participated in a grant-funded initiative by the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). This effort successfully updated materials supporting the establishment of COADs, culminating in an enhanced manual. Presented at EDEN's 2023 National Conference, the updated manual improves volunteer management and support for disaster response.



Illinois Extension's Poverty Simulations, like this one led by Russell Medley at Heritage Church in Rock Island, promote empathy and awareness about the complex issues surrounding poverty.



Illinois Extension educators Russell Medley, CED, and Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness share disaster preparation resources at the Be Ready QC Emergency Resource Fair held at the QC Waterfront Convention Center.

DRQC activations

As the chair of Disaster Ready Quad Cities (DRQC), Medley led responses to three disasters in 2023, concentrating on coordinating resources, financial assistance, and long-term recovery needs. DRQC, Quad Cities Community Foundation, and Quad Cities Open Network played a vital role in providing crucial support to affected residents.

Be Ready QC Emergency Resource Fair

Participating in the inaugural local disaster preparedness fair, DRQC and Illinois Extension, under Medley's guidance, engaged with over 100 residents. Held in collaboration with Scott County Emergency Management Agency, the fair featured workshops and information booths, emphasizing active shooter awareness and response.

Emerging Cities of the Quad Cities (ECQC)

In the Emerging Cities of the Quad Cities network, Medley facilitated discussions on critical topics such as broadband expansion, economic development, workforce training, renewable energy, tourism, education, and housing issues, promoting idea exchange and problem-solving among rural communities. He also played a key role in orchestrating a two-day conference for Rebuilding Together for Henry County. The focus was on fostering networking and sharing success stories among rural affiliates.

Henry, Mercer, and Stark counties regional housing study

ECQC initiated a regional housing study targeting Henry, Mercer, and Stark counties in response to housing challenges. With an expected completion date of August 2024, this comprehensive study, in collaboration with the University of Illinois and community stakeholders, aims to identify housing issues and provide recommendations for economic growth.



Emphasizing wellness across communities

To promote healthier living, Illinois Extension remains dedicated to enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities. Led by Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas, our programs span a variety of topics, extending from arthritis management to comprehensive nutrition education.



Illinois Extension teamed up with Augustana College and the Moline Activity Center for the Fit & Strong program.

Fit & Strong! program success

One notable accomplishment was the successful launch of the “Fit & Strong!” program, a group activity and behavior change initiative designed for individuals with arthritis. Through securing grant funds and partnering with Augustana’s Center for the Advancement of Community Health and Wellness, Bogdonas orchestrated the program’s debut at the Moline Activity Center. Impressively, 73% of registered participants completed the 12-week program, citing not only physical improvements but also the positive and energetic environment provided by the student instructors.

Expanding the Eight Dimensions of Wellness series

Bogdonas’ commitment to holistic health extended to the popular Eight Dimensions of Wellness series, now offered bi-monthly in collaboration with Rosecrance. This workshop series reached diverse audiences, including addiction treatment centers, wellness events, workshops for educators, and the broader public, engaging a total of 315 participants.



Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator, shares a lesson on steam canning at the Geneseo-Atkinson Food Pantry.

Local food preservation workshops

Throughout the year, Bogdonas conducted local food preservation workshops, including sessions on fermentation and steam canning. These hands-on events, such as the steam canning workshop at the Milan office and the fermentation workshop for Nursery School, provided practical skills to participants.

Canning with Confidence series recognition

As part of a state team, Bogdonas played a key role in creating the “Canning with Confidence” series. This initiative, consisting of webinars and food preservation videos, not only aimed to build confidence in home food preservation but also emphasized the science, technology, and safety aspects of the process. The team received the prestigious 2023 Interdisciplinary State Team Excellence Award in Extension for their outstanding contribution.

Innovative digital outreach

Bogdonas continued her impactful contributions to the QC Times/Dispatch column, “Start the Week Off Right,” reaching nearly 60,000 readers. Her articles covered diverse topics, from winter wellness tips to cancer prevention, showcasing her expertise in nutrition and wellness. Additionally, as the host of the “Wellness Wake Up Call” podcast on WVIK, Quad Cities NPR, Bogdonas ensured that valuable health insights were accessible to an even broader audience.

Illinois Extension’s unwavering commitment to health and wellness touched the lives of 9,083 individuals in our service area with 442 health-related programs and 12 online learning sessions.



The Floreciente Community Garden took root in the spring with help from Illinois Extension and volunteers.



SNAP-Ed: Nourishing communities for sustainable well-being

In the dynamic landscape of community nutrition and well-being, the SNAP-Ed team navigated a busy and fruitful year marked by the creation and expansion of meaningful partnerships. Led by SNAP-Ed Educator Tayler Louscher and Program Coordinator Mitchell Walker, they nurtured the flourishing Floreciente Community Garden into a vibrant space offering not just healthy food access but also fostering community and educational opportunities. Securing funding from Illinois SNAP-Ed and collaborating with Extension program areas, including horticulture staff and Master Gardeners who offered expertise in garden design, plant selection, and growing vegetables, the garden became a vital resource.

The team engaged Floreciente residents through a comprehensive survey, gauging their aspirations for the garden, including preferences for produce and programming. Surveys were made available online and in print, in Spanish and English, to ensure equitable community input. Community responses were thoughtfully integrated into the garden's operations. Horticulture staff and Master Gardeners assisted with designing, building, and sharing knowledge throughout the growing season.

Collaboration with key entities like the Palomares Social Justice Center and the Floreciente Neighborhood Association played a pivotal role in identifying a distribution site for produce pop-ups. Held bi-monthly at the Salón Floreciente, these pop-ups gained popularity, prompting collaboration with local growers. With generous contributions from the Floreciente Community Garden, Tapestry Farms, Asbury Gardens, and other local growers, over 1,500 pounds of fresh, locally grown produce reached more than 150 families in Floreciente and the surrounding area. Each pop-up included nutrition education by SNAP-Ed staff, offering healthy eating resources and recipes.



The Floreciente Community Garden provided 1,500 pounds of fresh, locally grown produce to 150 families.

Growing towards sustainability

Looking ahead, the SNAP-Ed team acknowledges the critical importance of sustainability for long-term success. The primary focus in the upcoming year will revolve around continuing to build community buy-in, nurturing relationships, and actively seeking external funding to sustain and expand the positive impact on community well-being.



Araceli Garcia, SNAP-Ed community worker, leads an Illinois Jr. Chef cooking lesson during a summer camp.

SNAP-Ed's impactful engagement

The dynamic team behind SNAP-Ed's community outreach, Darcy Eggmann, Melissa Fudge, Araceli Garcia, Emily Hoskins, and Kyle Goldsmith, are actively improving health outcomes by delivering evidence-based nutrition education. Their efforts extend to diverse settings such as early childhood centers, public schools, food pantries, and non-profit agencies. Through initiatives like the Illinois Junior Chef summer cooking camps and classroom visits throughout the school year, they empower youth to make informed, healthy choices as they transition into adulthood. The team also extends its educational reach to adults through engagements at public housing sites, food pantries, farmer's markets, and various community events.



Rock Island Horse Bowl teams



Mercer County's Junior Horse Bowl team



Empowering futures: 4-H triumphs in 2023

Continuing our commitment to empowering and supporting the youth of Illinois, the 4-H program, under the guidance of Jennifer Peterson, 4-H educator, witnessed significant accomplishments. Joining the team in September, Elaine Kaple, Rock Island County 4-H urban educator, added valuable expertise to our efforts. Working alongside program coordinators Tracy Fowler-Pestle, Kristen VanDeVelde-Parchert, and McCala Crawford, the team demonstrated dedication and passion throughout the year.

Livestock Judging and Horse Bowl teams excel

The Livestock Judging and Horse Bowl teams had a remarkable year. In April, youth from ten counties participated in the Regional Horse Bowl Contest at Black Hawk East, engaging in a quiz competition covering various aspects of horses. The Rock Island/Henry team secured victory in the junior level of the regional competition, while Mercer County, in their inaugural year, advanced to the state level. At the state contest in Champaign, Rock Island/Henry emerged victorious for the second consecutive year in the junior division, with Mercer County securing the second position. This achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of both the youth and their coaches, Danielle Gorbach for Rock Island and Melanie Neulib-Zimmerman for Mercer County.



Kudos to the Henry/Stark Counties 4-H Livestock Judging team members Sam Nightingale, Slone Windish, Kylie Gillespie, and Kashen Ellerbrock and their coaches, Jeff and Kelly Ellerbrock, for their outstanding performance.

The Henry/Stark Livestock Judging team also excelled, placing first and third overall in the state contest. The winning team went on to represent Illinois at the national competition during the American Royal in Kansas, securing second place overall. This accomplishment qualified them to judge internationally in Ireland and Scotland in 2024.



Members of the Edison Civic Engagement class present their needs assessment findings to the school administration.

Civic engagement and community involvement

The Civic Engagement program at Edison Junior High continued to empower students, with 12 participants in the 2022-2023 school year. During their weekly meetings, the students learned about different leadership styles, the qualities of a successful leader, and how they could become leaders in their school. They heard from several guest speakers from local government. The group elected officers, conducted business meetings, and carried out various community service projects, including initiatives for the animal shelter, nursing homes, and Friendship Manor. They conducted an informal needs assessment of the school, and followed it up with a survey sent to the student body. The results found the biggest need was an upgrade to student lockers. The group then did research on lockers and came up with recommendations for improvement. They presented their findings to the superintendent, principal, and vice principal at the end of the year. A grant from the Rock Island Community Foundation supported the civic leadership program.



4-H Juntos program guides Latino youth and families through higher education decision-making

The Juntos 4-H program, conducted weekly in March and April at the Boys and Girls Club of Mississippi Valley, empowered Latino youth and their families to navigate higher education options. Sessions covered topics such as high school activities, college applications, financial aid, and trade schools/apprenticeships. Representatives from educational institutions provided valuable insights, ensuring participants felt well-informed and supported. The positive impact on both youth and parents in the Juntos program underscores Illinois Extension’s commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.



Juntos members participate in group activities on college readiness at the Boys and Girls Club of the Mississippi Valley.

4-H’s mission

At its core, 4-H is about equipping young people with the skills and opportunities they need for future success. In 2023, approximately 1,000 youth discovered their passions through community and special interest clubs. Popular activities such as archery, shotgun, pistol, and rifle disciplines continued to engage youth in shooting sports. SPIN clubs and workshops explored diverse projects, including eSports, LEGOs, clay, cooking, goats, and fishing. Youth showcased their projects at county fairs, with many advancing to the state fair. Notably, our contingent boasted 4 of the top 5 steers in the Champion Drive at the state fair, including Kashen Ellerbrock’s Grand Champion Steer from the Atkinson Boosters 4-H Club.

Through these endeavors, 4-H continued to fulfill its mission of helping youth find their ‘spark,’ develop their voice, engage in their community, and set a course for a bright future.



4-H’ers enjoyed learning about e-Sports at WIU Moline

Celebrating 4-H milestones

This year’s Mercer County Fair was filled with excitement as we celebrated the Hamlet Handy Helpers 100 years as a 4-H club, bringing together a vibrant mix of current members and proud alumni for the celebration (see picture). We also honored Joyce Smith for her remarkable 50 years of service as a 4-H leader.



Joyce Smith with Tracy Fowler-Pestle, 4-H program coordinator

Building agriculture literacy

Hundreds of youth across Mercer County are growing in their knowledge of agriculture through hands-on lessons Illinois Extension and our partners share through the Mercer County Ag Education program. Coordinator Teresa Kirwan brings agriculture lessons to schools, and organizes community events like Farm in the Park, safety day camps, and the Summer Ag Institute for teachers. Many local business support the program which helps bring these programs to students and community-members throughout the year.



Farm in the Park events help us engage the community in exploring the important role agriculture plays in our lives. Dean of the College of ACES Germán Bolero, led one of the agriculture education stations at Farm in the Park in Galva.



Advancing agricultural sustainability

Illinois Extension is dedicated to supporting farmers in optimizing plant yields while minimizing nutrient loss to the environment, impacting greenhouse gas emissions, and enhancing air and water quality. Rachel Curry, agriculture and agribusiness educator played a crucial role in providing educational programs on best management practices for soil health and water quality aligned with the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. Curry covered two nitrogen-priority watersheds, the Lower Rock River and Flint-Henderson (Mississippi North Central) Watersheds in northwestern Illinois. In August 2023, Curry transitioned to a statewide role, and Nicole Haverback is now serves the two nitrogen-priority watersheds. Haverback is located at the Henry/Stark Counties Extension office in Galva.

An overview of the initiatives undertaken by Illinois Extension to reduce nutrient loss and promote agricultural and stormwater conservation practices include:



Rachel Curry, agriculture and agribusiness educator, presents to farmers attending the Soil Health program.

Farm Series digs into soil health

The Farm Series continued by focusing on soil health's pivotal role in farmers' success. Attendees in Geneseo learned from experts like Stacy Zuber, state soil health specialist and a local farmer. Lou Liva from Precision Conservation Management discussed cost-share program opportunities, while Curry shared nutrient loss reduction strategies.

Farmer panel discusses cover crops

Curry led a farmer panel discussion, bringing together local farmers to share experiences with cover crops and providing valuable peer-to-peer learning. This collaborative platform allowed attendees to ask questions and gain insights into integrating cover crops into their operations.



Revolutionizing agriculture

At Brian Corkill's farm in Galva, 47 producers and conservation professionals explored the future of agriculture. Led by Dennis Bowman, Illinois Extension digital agriculture specialist, pictured above with Curry, the event showcased a small autonomous robot and a high-performance drone, addressing cover crop challenges. Insights into drone licensing and the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, led by Curry, were presented. Collaborative nutrient loss efforts, cost-sharing opportunities, and the significance of self-reporting cover crop cultivation were emphasized. Programs like this are vital in preparing the farming community for advanced environmental sustainability. Additional information is available through digitalag.illinois.edu.

Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction podcast, blog, webinar

Curry and Haverback co-produce the Nutrient Loss Reduction Podcast, featuring interviews with experts and farmers on conservation practices. To date, 58 episodes have been produced, covering topics such as cover crop considerations, navigating extreme weather impacts on agriculture, and more. The accompanying blog has 19 supporting posts. In a September webinar, Curry and Haverback explored three recently incorporated best management practices within the NLR's recommended agricultural conservation practices. The focus was on water and sediment control basins, saturated buffers, and terraces, illustrating how implementing these strategies positively impacts both financial outcomes and the environment. Find them at these links:



Podcast: go.illinois.edu/NLRSPodcast
Blog: go.illinois.edu/NLRS_blog
Webinar: go.illinois.edu/HealthyWaterways

NLRS 2023 Biennial Report update

The NLRS framework guides nutrient loss reduction in the state. The 2023 Biennial Report, released in December, highlights progress in agriculture, point source, and urban stormwater sectors. Access the report at go.illinois.edu/NLRS. A podcast and two blog posts summarize each sector's key points, along with a farmer's perspective on nutrient loss.



Podcast: go.illinois.edu/NLRS_episode58
Blog Part 1: go.illinois.edu/BiennialReportUpdate1
Blog Part 2: go.illinois.edu/BiennialReportUpdate2

Cultivating knowledge and growth



The horticulture team, led by Emily Swihart, horticulture educator, and Tracy Jo Mulliken, program coordinator, collaborated with generous partners to offer a diverse range of educational opportunities to the public.



Illinois Extension leads community clean-up

Illinois Extension demonstrated its commitment to community well-being by organizing a clean-up day at Chippiannock Cemetery, a local historic cemetery and arboretum impacted by a tornado. In partnership with the cemetery, disaster recovery efforts were facilitated using local media for promotion. Volunteers made significant strides in tree clean-up and restoration during the event, followed by an educational walk-and-talk led by Swihart on tree species, management practices, and the benefits of a vibrant urban forest.

Innovative rain garden project

Collaborating with the City of Moline, Purdue University, Master Gardeners, and local Extension-trained volunteers, Illinois Extension spearheaded a transformative initiative at Riverside Park. It involved converting an overgrown public garden into an essential rain garden. Following a comprehensive training led by Swihart and Curry, volunteers cleared the site and installed a variety of specially selected plants. The addition of educational signage enhances the garden and serves as a valuable resource for visitors. This rain garden stands as an asset in our community's efforts to mitigate stormwater runoff. Ongoing maintenance is conducted in partnership with the City of Moline, emphasizing our commitment to the sustained success and environmental impact of this vital project.



Publications and outreach

Ongoing partnerships with local media outlets, such as Paula Sands Live, Living Local, iHeartRadio, and WRMJ help to expand the reach of Illinois Extension. Regular appearances by Swihart and Mulliken covered various topics, including seed starting, vegetable gardening tips, tree and shrub care, invasive species threats, and program promotion.

Swihart also pens a monthly newsletter, The Outsider, which continues to inspire community engagement with natural resources. It received recognition and awards at the National Association of County Agricultural Agents national conference.

Swihart is a member of the Good Growing blog team, offering weekly columns on a wide variety of horticulture topics, earning the team the highest award for communication at the same conference. These publications extend the reach and accessibility of Extension, providing a diverse mixture of information to Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties.



Read Good Growing
go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing



Illinois Extension volunteers install the rain garden at Riverside Park, Moline.



Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners enhance outreach through educational stations at events like Bald Eagle Days and Winter Wellness. Pictured: Cathy White, Joann Whitmore, and Judy Hartley.



Master Gardeners Liz Gray, Joan Keele, and Deb Corso are part of the Illinois Extension team that heads up our Flower and Garden Show efforts at the QCCA Expo Center each year.



Helping others learn to grow

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists play an integral role in enriching the communities through their invaluable expertise and commitment to continuous learning. Their volunteer efforts significantly amplify Illinois Extension's outreach capabilities, contributing to the overall well-being of the region.

Annually, Master Gardeners devote themselves to accessible education through public gardens. These gardens not only beautify urban and home spaces but also serve as practical showcases of sound management practices for gardening. By promoting well-being through people-plant interactions, horticulture therapy, and contributing to a safe, abundant food supply, these spaces uphold the mission of the Master Gardener program – “Helping Others Learn to Grow.”

Utilizing the Speakers Bureau program, Master Gardeners fulfilled requests for speakers, delivering regular programming to various communities, including residents of Woodridge Supportive Living, ARC of the Quad Cities, and Intouch Adult Day Care.

Master Gardeners continued to offer diverse educational opportunities throughout the year. The re-imagined Nursery School experienced great success during the winter learning season, while the revamped Spring Series engaged participants with dual sessions per evening, maximizing educational and social interactions while minimizing environmental impact.



Explore gardening in Illinois with the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture YouTube Channel. It's your go-to source for the Four Seasons Gardening Series, Good Growing, instructional gardening videos, and more!

youtube.com/@IllinoisExtensionHorticulture

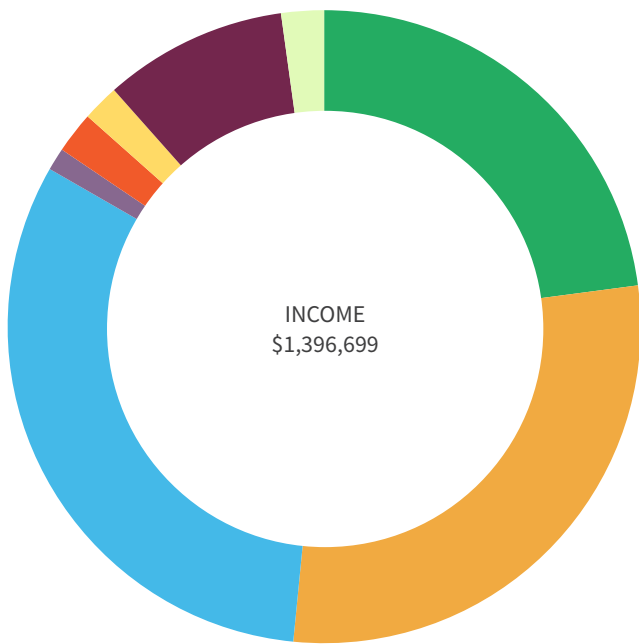
Volunteers showcased their dedication at the QCCA's annual Flower and Garden Show in Rock Island. They designed and built an educational garden, hosted horticultural education presentations, provided expertise at the information booth, and assisted in filling flower beds throughout the event space. The annual event attracts over 10,000 visitors who come for inspiration and knowledge of all things gardening.

Mercer County Master Gardeners successfully revived the Fall Harvest of Horticulture in Aledo, adjusting the timing to better suit the community's needs. Collaborating with the Aledo Fire Department expanded the program's reach, attracting over thirty eager participants keen on learning from local experts.

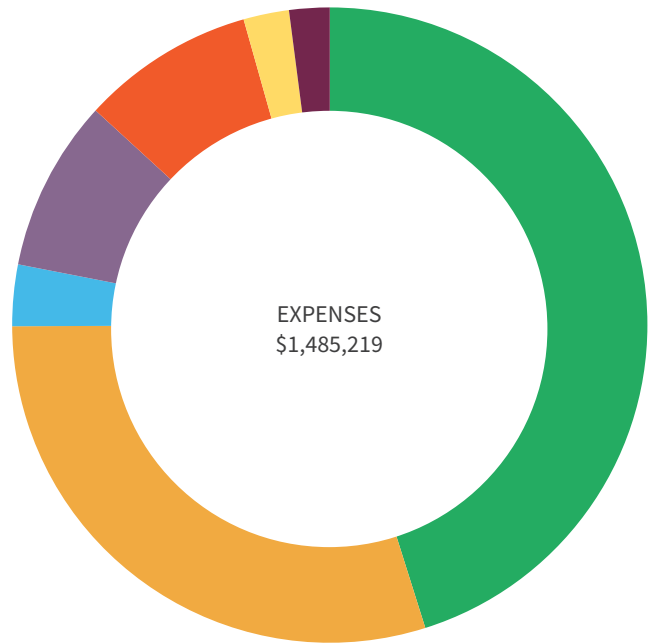
Henry and Stark County Master Gardeners revitalized Horticulture Outreach, delivering engaging lessons to students in kindergarten through fifth grades in local classrooms.



Bob Ward, Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, is part of the volunteer team spearheading horticulture outreach to Henry County schools.



- \$320,275 State Funds/Match
- \$400,344 County Board
- \$443,642 Federal SNAP Grant
- \$16,091 Grants
- \$29,549 Program Fees
- \$26,277 Foundations, Donations & Farm Bureau
- \$131,000 Smith Lever
- \$30,518 4-H Premiums



- \$670,379 Program Expenses and Salaries
- \$442,642 Federal SNAP Program
- \$46,391 Materials/Supplies
- \$129,831 Utilities/Rent
- \$131,000 Smith Lever
- \$34,456 Transportation
- \$30,518 4-H Awards

Financial report

University of Illinois Extension is a three-way funding partnership between the State of Illinois, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the county boards in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark. Our SNAP-Ed programs are funded by a federal grant from the United States Department of Agriculture.

These partnerships bring hundreds of thousands of programming dollars into our four counties, matching local contributions with state, national, and federal support. Many local business, foundations, and individuals provide additional support by donating through our local foundations, including to the Henry County 4-H Foundation, the Mercer County Extension & 4-H Foundation, the Rock Island County Extension & 4-H Education Foundation, and the Stark County 4-H Foundation. Support also comes from our local Extension Council and the Illinois 4-H Foundation. These resources are part of the local donation income that helps to sustain our programs.

2023 Grants and sponsorships

Illinois Extension educators collaborate on state team grants as well as on local programming grants. All of these sources are vital in helping fulfill our educational mission.

Grants & Sponsorships for projects specific to our unit:

- \$8,000: Ag in the Classroom Grant for Mercer County
- \$5,500: Mel McKay Charitable Trust for horticulture programs
- \$5,000: Bayer's America's Farmers Grow Communities for Henry County 4-H
- \$5,000: Bayer's America's Farmers Grow Communities for Rock Island County 4-H
- \$4,000: Growing Together Illinois Floreciente Garden
- \$4,000: Constellation – Quad Cities for Tree Care program
- \$2,600 Mercer County Agriculture Education Program
- \$1,500 Mark Schweibert Foundation for Tree Care program
- \$1,000 Rock Island Community Foundation for 4-H program
- \$500: Big River Resources for agriculture
- In-kind: NRA grant for ammunition for 4-H Shooting Sports

Grants for projects by Russell Medley, community and economic development educator

- \$100,000 State of Illinois for the IEMA-OHS Mitigation Plan

STAFF

County Director

Jenny Garner

Educators

Kristin Bogdonas
Nutrition & Wellness

Rachel Curry
Agriculture and Agribusiness 1

Elaine Kaple
Metro 4-H

Russell Medley
Community and Economic
Development

Taylor Louscher
SNAP-Ed

Jennifer Peterson
4-H

Emily Swihart
Horticulture

Associates

Nicole Haverback
Watershed Outreach

PROGRAM COORDINATORS:
Becky Buckrop
Marketing & Development

McCala Crawford
Rock Island County 4-H

Tracy Fowler-Pestle
Mercer County 4-H

Teresa Kirwan
Mercer County Ag Literacy

Tracy Jo Mulliken
Horticulture & Agriculture

Kristen VanDeVelde-Parchert
Henry & Stark 4-H

Mitchell Walker
SNAP-Ed

Community Workers

Darcy Eggimann
SNAP-Ed

Melissa Fudge
SNAP-Ed

Araceli Garcia
SNAP-Ed

Kyle Goldsmith
SNAP-Ed

Emily Hoskins
SNAP-Ed

Office Support

Amy Spence
Specialist

Teresa Frakes
Assistant

Barbara Jackson
Assistant

Paula West
Assistant

OFFICE INFORMATION

Henry & Stark Counties Extension

358 Front Street
Galva, IL 61434
Phone: 309-932-3447
Fax: 309-932-3454
Tues, Wed, Thur., 8 am - 4 pm
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

Mercer County Extension

910 13th Street
Viola IL 61486
Phone: 309-513-3100
FAX: 309-513-3101
Tues, Wed, Thur., 8 am - 4 pm
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

Rock Island County Extension

321 W 2nd Avenue
Milan, IL 61264
Phone: 309-756-9978
FAX: 309-756-9987
Mon- Fri., 8 am - 4 pm
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

ONLINE



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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.