



EXTENSION IN ACTION

Serving Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin,
Pope, Saline and White Counties



Angela Messmer
County Director



A note from the County Director

2023 was a busy and fulfilling year for our Extension Unit. We are thrilled to have had the opportunity to participate in several events and programs designed to benefit our communities. This report provides a snapshot of the past year, highlighting our successes in cooking schools, ag programs, 4-H shows, nutrition education, community gardens, and more. We encourage you to take a moment to reflect on the programs and events of the past year.

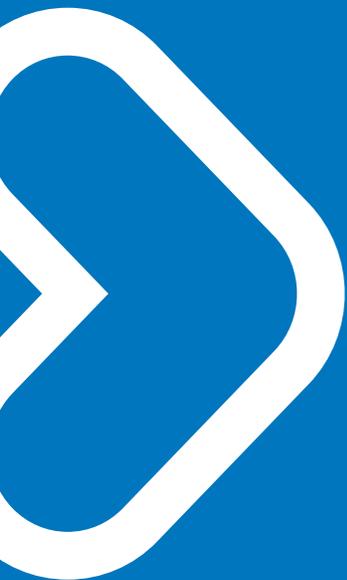
I am proud to work with this outstanding and dedicated team and am impressed every day with how they “give it their all.” Our team is dedicated to providing the best possible service to our communities through 4-H youth development, SNAP-Ed nutrition education, agriculture, natural resources, small farms and local foods systems, and community

and economic development. We take pride in continuing traditions, making memories, and providing quality programming. Looking forward, we are excited about 2024, and we remain committed to serving our communities to the best of our abilities.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the 4-H volunteers, Master Gardner and Master Naturalist volunteers, county boards, 4-H families, SNAP partners, and our communities for your continued support of Extension and Dixon Springs Ag Center. It’s your unwavering support that makes everything we do possible. We look forward to collaborating with everyone in the coming year.

Angela Messmer
County Extension Director
Director of Dixon Springs Ag Center

Cover photo: Local Foods and Small Farms Educator, Bronwyn Aly instructing at a high tunnel workshop at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center.



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



Moving forward with food access solutions in Gallatin County with Food on the Move

2023 saw significant movement and success with the Health Equity Achieved Together project and the goal of implementing a mobile food pantry to serve rural, food desert communities like many in Gallatin County. The HEAT team provided technical assistance for funding proposals as well as consultation and planning support with the implementing program partner, Tri-State Food Bank. With over \$200,000 in successful awards, Tri-State started work on outfitting the 28-foot trailer needed to create the Food On The Move mobile pantry pilot program.

The planning committee compiled data and conducted environmental scans to help determine the initial pilot locations. The First Baptist Church in Ullin in Pulaski County and the New Haven Community Building in New Haven in Gallatin County were selected. Community champions were identified to launch the program in the fall, and volunteers were recruited and trained.

SNAP-Education worked with Tri-State to draft and adopt a nutrition policy for Food on the Move used to guide procurement and distribution of foods of high nutritional quality, demonstrating Tri-State Food Bank's commitment to its mission of improving the quality of life for families facing food insecurity.

On October 18, Tri-State Food Bank, Illinois Extension, and community volunteers successfully implemented the first mobile pantry event, serving nearly 40 households and distributing more than 1,300 pounds of food. Guests were able to shop the client choice mobile pantry, choosing a variety of nutritious foods for themselves and their families, including dairy, proteins, grains, canned and fresh fruits and vegetables. SNAP-Ed nutrition education is provided at each event with "Eat.Move.Save." booths showcasing complimentary healthy recipes and health education.

Feedback from the community and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive, and they are excited and grateful to have this service offered in their community. During this pilot period, the FOTM pantry will stop at the New Haven Community Building every third Wednesday from 10-11:30 a.m. The team will continue to collect feedback, including a guest survey and other data, for continuous improvement and to support the project's sustainability moving forward.

Food on The Move totals for 2023 (October - December)



360
Individuals Served



55
Households Served Each Distribution



9,109
Pounds of Food Distributed



SNAP-Ed partners with community

We Love White County

We Love White County is a non-profit whose mission is to transform White County into a thriving and healthy community. They do this through several avenues, such as food distributions, a free sack lunch program, a Summer and after-school program, and various others. They rely on community organizations, and Extension has been helping them meet this vision in more ways than one.



SNAP-Ed team brings mobile teaching kitchen cart to We Love White County sack lunch giveaway along with fresh produce from community gardens. Using the cart, the team demonstrated a recipe using produce available that day.

Our local SNAP-Ed Community Worker, Terra Russell, hosted Illinois Junior Chef with their after-school program. There, children were introduced to basic cooking skills and made fun, healthy recipes. During the final session, participants were awarded a certificate of completion and a variety of kitchen-related incentives to encourage creativity in their own homes.

SNAP-Ed staff used the sack lunch giveaway as another avenue for produce donations from the White County 4-H GIFT garden and the Dixon Springs Ag Center. Adults and children were present with as many as 180 participants. During one distribution, SNAP-Ed staff brought the new mobile teaching kitchen on site. The mobile teaching kitchen was made possible through a collaboration between Southern Illinois Healthcare, the Region 5 Regional Hospital Coordinating Center, and the Illinois Department of Public Health. Illinois Extension currently provides all programming for the mobile kitchen project. Our SNAP-Ed staff demonstrated a healthy recipe from our website using produce patrons would receive during the taste tests that day. SNAP-Ed staff also conducted an “Eat. Move. Save.” booth providing education on the types of fresh produce they would receive. As well as inviting them to regularly scheduled nutrition education classes and signing them up for the “Eat.Move.Save.” healthy newsletter and text messaging service.

Patrons could select their choice of produce and recipes, receive information on Find Food Illinois — our “Eat.Move.Save.” website, and access our healthy recipe demo library.

An Individual Level of Effectiveness tool was created, and it showed that almost everyone who completed it would not have had access to fresh produce had it not been for the produce from the White County GIFT garden and Ag Center. The reasons were that it was too expensive at the store and they didn’t have access to a garden. Many stated their vegetable intake increased, and they took and used the recipes given and felt confident in preparing them.

Partnering with Extension created an opportunity for the community to get more involved and to build relationships. Families also had another choice for a healthy selection of foods.

Ashley Elliot, sack lunch coordinator,
We Love White County



SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator Lacey Barnhill assists participants with produce selection at a sack lunch event. The White County 4-H GIFT Garden grew the produce provided at the event.



Learn more about SNAP-Ed
extension.illinois.edu/global/snap-education-impact



Pope County food advocacy

Two Pope County 4-H youths applied for the 4-H Food Advocacy Grant and were awarded \$1,000 to fund their idea of expanding the backpack food program at their school. The Golconda Presbyterian Church runs the program now and is completely self-funded. The youth's first plan of action was to start a share table at the grade school. The share table allows students to get extras, cut down on waste, and leftover items can be used for the backpack program. They worked with Extension SNAP-Ed staff to learn the basics of the share table, receive signage, and complete a student orientation. The staff and youth both say it has been a success.

The next step was to use the grant money to purchase food items to help the church combat higher food costs. With guidance from SNAP-Ed staff, a host of healthier options were purchased such as whole grain cheese crackers, fruit cups in 100% juice, and tuna salad kits for a main meal component as opposed to higher sodium options. The grant funds allowed them to purchase shelf-stable milk cartons as well. With no refrigeration, a substantial dairy component is hard for the church to offer.

The third part of the grant included a healthy food drive to keep items stocked for the backpack program. The 4-H youth and their club hosted the food drive during the River to River relay race. It is a longstanding tradition for the church to ring the bell as runners cross the finish line, so the club set up on the church lawn to accept donations. The local SNAP-Ed team helped them create a healthy donation list that was shared on social media and in the local newspaper. The food drive brought in 72 items and \$181 cash donations.

The 4-H Food Advocacy Grant helped meet an immediate need of food for the backpack program. More importantly, it created sustainability of the program by donation and food recovery avenues, as well as creating awareness in the community.



Pope County 4-H'ers Remington and Fox Barnhill with items collected from a healthy donation drive to benefit the backpack program at their school.



Community Outreach Worker Terra Russell demonstrates proper measuring techniques to participants at the Saline County Illinois Junior Chef cooking school.

Illinois Junior Chef summer programs

One of SNAP-Ed's most popular summer programs is a hands-on cooking experience for youth called Illinois Junior Chef. In 2023, our community outreach workers presented Illinois Junior Chefs in Gallatin, Pope, Saline, and White counties.

This program was created for youth ages 8-13 to teach cooking basics such as how to read a recipe, proper measuring of ingredients, and knife skills, to name a few. Youths use the skills they learn to make healthy and fun recipes during the classes. IJC cooking school is typically taught over five days. Youth are then awarded a certificate of completion and kitchen-related incentives to help propel creativity in their own kitchens and implement their newly learned skills.

Students who participated reported using the skills and recipes they learned at home with their families. They also said that they were excited to participate again in the future.



44

Illinois Junior Chef Participants



Community Outreach Worker Nanci Berger demonstrates knife safety techniques for participants at the Gallatin County Illinois Junior Chef cooking school.



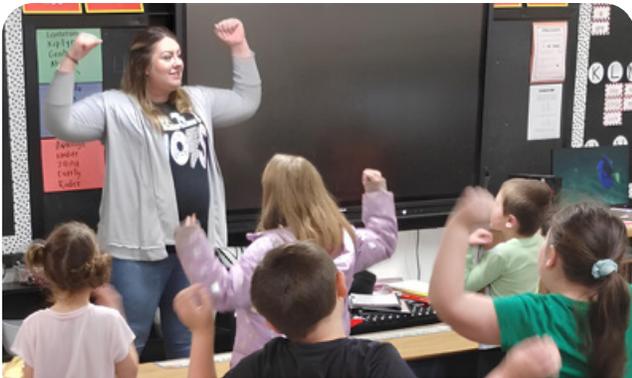
Learn more about Illinois Nutrition Programs
extension.illinois.edu/inep



Nutrition education fuels curiosity in youth throughout the region

SNAP-Ed community outreach workers provide nutrition education to the communities' youth with programming delivered in area schools, libraries, community events, and summer programs in partnership with several area agencies.

OrganWise Guys was a popular program for youth in elementary school. Community Outreach Workers Terra Russell and Nanci Berger presented several lessons focusing on nutrition, physical activity, and emotional health. Students looked forward to these sessions and were eager to learn, ask questions, and take part in fun activities like Wisercise, which incorporates exercise for the brain and body. Each visit focused on a different aspect of health and encouraged students to eat healthy and stay active.



Community Outreach Worker Terra Russell leads students in 'Wisercise' an activity that incorporates exercise for the brain and body.

Healthy Kids Out of School sparked curiosity for youth during the summer as they learned the importance of making smart choices for food and drinks. Participants expanded their palates as they tried unfamiliar fruits and vegetables in a taste test, learned about infusing water to make it more exciting, and participated in new activities to meet their activity goals. This was a wonderful partnership opportunity with local libraries.



Community Outreach Worker Nanci Berger presents Healthy Kids Out of School program at Shawneetown Public Library.



Adult education program focuses on eating healthy and staying active

Create Better Health was a new adult curriculum in 2023. The program is comprised of eight lessons designed to teach participants how to eat healthy and stay active on a budget. During the lessons, participants learn new recipes using ingredients they have on hand and ways to stay active at home.

Lessons included a cooking demonstration where participants got hands-on learning, creating a dish they could recreate at home. Recipe ingredients are flexible, making it easy to prepare for individual preferences. The curriculum also builds on physical activity goals in each lesson with examples of different types of exercise that can be done at home, such as aerobic activities and resistance training.

Participants reported that after attending these lessons, they are more mindful of the nutritional value of the groceries they buy. Some even made changes to their eating habits with healthy swaps and reported that they felt better and even realized cost savings on their grocery bill.



Community Outreach Worker Terra Russell presents Create Better Health in White County.



10 Partnerships with K-12 Schools



6 Partnerships with Emergency Food Sites



19 Partnerships with Other Types of Organizations



450 Nutrition Education Classes



1,334 Total Estimated SNAP-Ed Reach



Providing education and feeding our communities



Donation gardens provide a space for learning and nourishing our communities

Through the 2023 growing season, our counties were fortunate to support six gardens, five of which were food donation gardens. The donations provided area food pantries with fresh produce options for their participants. In addition to the donations, our SNAP-Ed team provided recipe cards and demonstrations at pantry locations using the produce that was provided. This collaboration encouraged participants to try new recipes and find new ways to use the produce available.

One of the beneficiaries of the produce was the White County Senior Citizens Center. The director noted that all their patrons enjoyed receiving the produce because they couldn't put out their own gardens like they did when they were younger due to being either physically unable or living in an apartment. The cooks were really excited to use the produce in the meals they served. They also reported that it helped with their expenses.

Several gardens were also part of youth education classes that were ongoing throughout the summer. Participants in these classes learned how to plant, care for, and harvest produce in the gardens. In addition, youth were able to learn from Master Gardeners, 4-H and Local Food Systems and Small Farms educators and coordinators with hands-on activities and specialized topics.

Extension food donation Gardens in 2023



5
Active Food Donation Gardens



6,626
Pounds of Produce Donated



\$23,777
Value of Produce Donated



Hamilton County 4-H'ers work together spreading compost in the raised beds in preparation for planting.



4-H empowering youth



As we reflect on the past year, it's with great pride and enthusiasm that we share the remarkable achievements and impactful contributions of our 4-H community. Our service area encompasses six counties, each hosting 4-H programs and clubs tailored to the unique needs of their communities. Moreover, these counties have the capacity to unite and organize area-wide events and workshops for youth, fostering collaboration and enriching experiences across our region.

With 2,013 exhibits showcasing the talents and skills of our youth, our fairs were celebrations of creativity, resilience, and teamwork. From livestock shows to crafts, from STEM projects to leadership demonstrations, the diversity of our exhibits reflects the rich tapestry of interests within our 4-H community.

Central to our success are our 39 clubs, each a beacon of camaraderie and learning in their communities. These clubs serve as nurturing grounds where young minds explore, experiment, and evolve, guided by mentors who are not just leaders but also friends and role models. From gardening to robotics, our clubs offer a kaleidoscope of opportunities for personal and collective growth.

In a world where connectivity is often measured in megabytes and pixels, 4-H remains a steadfast anchor of community engagement and rural vitality. Through our programs and initiatives, we equip our youth with essential life skills and instill

in them a profound sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and every member, volunteer, parent, and supporter who has contributed to the success of 4-H. Your passion, dedication, and support are the driving forces behind our journey towards a brighter tomorrow. Together, let us continue to sow the seeds of excellence, nurture the bonds of friendship, and harvest the fruits of our collective efforts. With unity, purpose, and resilience, there's no limit to what we can achieve.

4-H in 2023 at a glance



582
4-H Members



91
Adult Volunteers



6,033
4-H affiliations (4-H Experiences)



\$285,492
4-H Adult Club Volunteer Valuation



Learn more about 4-H
4h.extension.illinois.edu





Gallatin County 4-H: A year of achievements, leadership, and community service

Throughout the year, these spirited young individuals engaged in a myriad of activities aimed at fostering personal growth and community development. From the successful Clover Busters Summer Foods program to the growing Clever Cricuts special interest club, Gallatin County 4-H members and leaders continued to excel in 2023, teaching youth new skills and encouraging entrepreneurship.

The Gallatin County 4-H Saddle Club, under the exceptional leadership of Raegan Smith, had a phenomenal year marked by extraordinary achievements. As the Horse Bowl and Hippology coach, Smith guided her team to success at the Illinois 4-H Horse Contests, with club members excelling in intermediate hippology and senior hippology, earning a spot at the nationals. Horse public speaking participants placed second in Senior Extemporaneous Speech and third in Interpretive Speech. In the Junior Horse Bowl, members joined a composite team to place 3rd. Impressively, the senior Horse Bowl team, coached by Smith, formed a composite team, securing first place and qualifying for nationals, ultimately finishing fourth at the Eastern National 4-H Roundup.

As part of their yearly activities, these 4-H youth not only cultivate their understanding of agriculture but also actively contribute to community projects, embodying the organization's core values of Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. The dedication of club members to various projects extended beyond county borders, with Molly Kitchens receiving the Inspire Award at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, showcasing the multifaceted talents of youth within the Gallatin County 4-H community.

In addition to their remarkable achievements, all clubs had members who actively participated in community events, embodying the spirit of service and community engagement. They attended 4-H Day with the Cardinals, helped decorate the Ridgway Community Park for the season, hosted an International Night, collected donations for local food pantries, and took part in the Junior Leadership Conference.

My favorite part about being in 4-H is being around your community and helping animals.
Benjamin Dyhrkopp, Gallatin County 4-H Member



Gallatin County 4-H'ers Mollie Kitchens, Murphie Horton and Jaci Heath attended the 4-H Junior Leadership Conference. Here they learned skills they can use to help their club and community.

Gallatin County Farm-to-Table

A solid foundation in leadership prepared 4-H'ers in Gallatin County well for the fall Farm-to-Table event, where their commitment to community service shone brightly. Volunteering with enthusiasm, they took charge of serving beverages, ensuring the guests' dining experience was both enjoyable and refreshing.

The Farm-to-Table event became a canvas for the Gallatin County 4-H club to paint a vivid picture of community collaboration. Youth assumed responsibility for maintaining a tidy and welcoming environment, cleaning tables, and promptly refilling glasses. Through their actions, these 4-H members demonstrated that community goes beyond geographical boundaries; it is a shared commitment to supporting and uplifting one another. As we reflect on this memorable evening, we recognize the Gallatin County 4-H club not only for their contributions to the event but for their year-round dedication to nurturing responsible, community-minded leaders and their achievements.



Gallatin County 4-H'ers took on the responsibility of keeping drinks refreshed and clearing tables at the Gallatin County Farm-to-Table event held in Shawneetown. Photo courtesy of Kimber Gross Photography.



Hamilton County 4-H: Nurturing community bonds through sweet endeavors

In the heart of Hamilton County, the local 4-H program stands as a testament to the power of youth engagement. Boasting multiple clubs, the Hamilton County 4-H community actively participates in a range of yearly activities that extend beyond the conventional boundaries of learning. From animal husbandry and agricultural projects to leadership seminars and community service initiatives, these young individuals exemplify the 4-H motto of “Making the Best Better.”

Throughout the year, the various clubs within the county create experiences that not only contribute to personal growth but also foster a sense of collective responsibility toward building a vibrant and interconnected community. Among the myriad of successful activities, the 4-H community excelled in hosting the fair, a haunted trail, and an international night, showcasing their diverse talents and interests. Additionally, they actively participated in a Livestock Skill-a-thon, honing their knowledge and skills in animal husbandry. The dedication to public speaking was evident as members showcased their articulate communication skills at various events. Notably, two members received a blue ribbon at the local public speaking event, and both were selected for the state competition in public speaking projects.

I think 4-H is a great way to learn better social skills and to be able to work on hands-on activities. And you can learn lots of new things about animals and agriculture, but not just that: sewing, cake decorating, and a ton more, even games and Legos.

Shiloh Willis, Hamilton Co. 4-H member



Hamilton Co. 4-H'ers Marcie Cunico, Brody Bilderbeck, Gracie Walker and Blu Barrow with their awards at the Livestock Skill-a-thon.

The pinnacle of their achievements was marked at the Illinois State Fair, where Hamilton County 4-H'ers stood out as exemplary participants. Grand Champion accolades were bestowed upon Aydan Hood and Emma Hood, while Reserve Champions Corbyn Hood, Gracie Walker, and Shiloh Willis showcased the depth of talent within the community. Further adding to the pride, Nola Launius received the prestigious Inspire Award, a testament to the character and commitment of Hamilton County 4-H members.



Hamilton County 4-H'er Shaina Brown prepares chocolate in a candy making workshop. Participants in this workshop learned to follow recipes and the importance of teamwork to achieve a goal.

As the winter chill settled in, the Hamilton County 4-H community geared up for a sweet celebration, one of their many yearly workshops. The Hamilton County 4-H office transformed into a confectionery wonderland, hosting a candy-making workshop that brought together 4-H'ers from multiple clubs. This event provided a hands-on learning experience for the young participants who dove into the world of sweets with enthusiasm and creativity. Under the guidance of experienced instructors, the 4-H'ers delved into the art of candy making, acquiring not only the skills to create delicious treats but also valuable lessons in measurement, hygiene, and teamwork.

In 4-H, one of the main things that they try to teach you is teamwork. And so a thing like this, like a candy workshop, everybody's working with each other." She adds, "It teaches the little kids how to do things and how to follow instructions. And it teaches the bigger kids when they come to instruct the little kids. So it's really educational for both ages.

Gracie Walker, Hamilton County 4-H member



Pope-Hardin County 4-H'er s Merrick Aly and Coy Wilson listen to instructor Joe Devera during an area-wide geology exploration at Millstone Bluff.

♥ Pope-Hardin County 4-H: Showcasing skill and exploring geological wonders

As the year unfolded for the 4-H communities in Pope and Hardin Counties, it was marked by a diverse range of activities that showcased the enthusiasm, growth, and collaborative spirit of its members. From agricultural projects to leadership seminars and community service initiatives, the 4-H'ers embodied the organization's slogan, "Learn by Doing."

The Pope-Hardin 4-H members showcased culinary excellence throughout the year, participating in diverse activities such as crafting new recipes, engaging in community service through initiatives like the salt and pepper food drive, and generously donating to local food pantries. Their culinary skills were further refined in a creative cupcake decorating workshop, emphasizing both skill development and presentation.

The club's commitment to cultural diversity was showcased through an engaging International Day, fostering awareness and appreciation. Additionally, their active participation in the Pope County homecoming parade underscored the 4-H community's dedication to unity and camaraderie in Pope and Hardin County.



Pope-Hardin County 4-H'er Remington Barnhill with a tenth place finish at the 2023 State 4-H Shotgun Shoot.

The dedication of the young individuals was evident in their participation in county fairs, where they showcased their skills and knowledge in various projects. One highlight was the exceptional success of Remington Barnhill, who secured the 10th position at the 2023 State 4-H Shotgun Shoot, sponsored by Illinois Ducks Unlimited.

A standout event that encapsulated the spirit of exploration and learning was the Geology Exploration at Millstone Bluff and Millstone Lake. Led by Joe Devera, a paleontologist associated with the Illinois State Geological Survey, this unique opportunity allowed 4-H'ers to delve into the geological wonders of their region.

The event commenced with an educational presentation by Devera, providing valuable insights into the geological formations and history of Millstone Bluff and Millstone Lake. Attendees gained an appreciation for the significance of these sites in the context of geological research, fostering a deeper connection to the land beneath their feet. Following the enlightening presentation, participants eagerly embarked on an exploration around Millstone Bluff and Millstone Lake. The mission: to unearth the secrets held within the geological layers and discover fossils that tell tales of the area's ancient past. This hands-on experience not only encouraged active engagement but also allowed the 4-H'ers to apply their newfound knowledge in identifying and understanding these ancient remnants. The enthusiasm and curiosity of the 4-H participants were palpable as they scoured the landscapes, bringing forth rock specimens for identification and lively discussions. This event wasn't just a geological expedition; it was a journey of discovery, collaboration, and a testament to the 4-H commitment to hands-on learning.

As we reflect on the past year for Pope and Hardin County 4-H, the Geology Exploration event stands out as a shining example of how these young individuals embraced the opportunity to learn, explore, and connect with the geological wonders of their community. It is through such experiences that the 4-H spirit of curiosity and lifelong learning continues to thrive, shaping the leaders and community builders of tomorrow.



Saline County 4-H

Saline County 4-H Federation officers and delegates chose the theme of “Making History with 4-H!” for National 4-H Week and the 2023-2024 4-H Year. We continue to make history every day as our youth learn to become leaders in their families, in their schools, and in their communities, as they learn to inspire their friends to be better and to do better, and as they leave their mark as those early-1900’s 4-H members and leaders did.

4-H members in Saline County spent the year developing their skills and serving their communities. Youth leaders conducted weekly summer library lessons for youth of all ages, bringing activities or assisting with programs such as Worm Composting, Visual Arts - Chalk/Carbon/Pigment, CSI: Come Study Insects, and Tortoises.

After a very successful Saline County 4-H Show season, 25 youth took projects to the Illinois State Fair, where we had 3 Champions, 1 Reserve Champion, and 1 Inspire Medallion winner. Saline County youth also earned Reserve Champion Junior Showmanship titles with their Meat Goats in both the Breeding and Market divisions and the Superior Young Dairy Producers Scholarship.



Emma Carlile was chosen as Champion Overall Showman and received the Superintendent’s Award at the DuQuoin State Fair.

We had a great showing at our Mayor Proclamation signings in the county and recorded 17 National 4-H Week public service announcements at WEBQ Radio station. We had 19 pumpkin decorating entries, doubling our last year’s numbers. Twenty-eight youth and adults volunteered their time to serve a meal at Heaven’s Kitchen, an annual service project during National 4-H Week. We topped our attendance record at Achievement Night with 184, where we collected enough non-perishable food items to fill the Blessing Box in Carrier Mills twice. Thirty-two 4-H youth and adult family members enjoyed a holiday pizza party and walked with our float in the Harrisburg Christmas Lights Parade.



Saline County 4-H’ers Jaylee Evans, Hannah Wenzel and Lily Siler record National 4-H Week public service announcements at WEBQ radio station in Harrisburg.

Saline County 4-H is proud to welcome a brand new 4-H Club, the Rowdy Rockers, serving youth in Carrier Mills. It has long been a goal for the program coordinator to get a club started in this undeserved community.

We have no doubt that Saline County 4-H and its 4-H members will continue to make history and make their families, their communities, and their program coordinator proud.

Hard work and determination has made my years in 4-H a success.

Emma Carlile, Saline County 4-H member



Saline County 4-H youth and volunteers served dinner at Heaven’s Kitchen in Harrisburg during National 4-H week, one of many community service projects during the year.



White County 4-H

Over 102 years ago, in 1921, 4-H came into existence in White County, with projects such as cooking, sewing, and livestock interested county youth. We are proud to say that today, those projects are still relevant to our county, but we are reaching beyond the traditional with the ever-growing interests of our youth.

White County 4-H enjoyed high enrollment numbers in 2023. Our clubs are active in community service and continue to enrich their communities. Whether cleaning out flowerbeds at the local nursing home, placing flags at veteran's graves in honor of our fallen soldiers on Memorial Day, planting trees at local parks, or writing cards and letters to soldiers overseas, our members are making a positive impact in our communities. 2023 saw five active clubs in our county with the hopes of growth in 2024. The Grayville Go-Getters, Centerville Ripsnorters, the Mad Hatters, Enfield Blue Ribbon, and the 76 Clovers of Norris City represented the county well with participation and leadership. White County 4-H also had very active Shooting Sports SPIN Club, Leather making SPIN Club, and 4-H GIFT Garden SPIN Clubs.

One of the highlights of the 4-H year is the 4-H fair, where members showcase their talents in a myriad of project areas. The 2023 4-H Show had 130 4-H members enrolled in over 1,000 exhibits at the White County 4-H shows. White County 4-H members worked throughout the year on projects varying from film making, cooking, livestock, and everywhere in between. All exhibits were judged in conference-style judging, a method that is becoming foreign to some 4-H programs. 4-H members display their projects, are interviewed by a judge, and receive a rating based on the overall quality of the project and interview. The goal for every 4-H member is to be selected as a best of show winner, state fair delegate, or grand champion.



White County 4-H'er Katelyn Davis discusses her Geology, Rock Hounds 2 project with a judge during the 2023 4-H Fair. Youth present their projects and answer questions from the judges to display their knowledge on the project area.



White County 4-H'er Nate Garner during the Livestock Beef show with his Reserve Grand Champion Junior Yearling Heifer.

4-H Helped me carry out my love for agriculture through showing livestock. It helped me develop leadership skills.

Nate Garner, White County 4-H member

White County 4-H gift garden classes

In the summer, 4-H'ers in White County were invited to participate in summer gardening classes. During the classes, participants learned how to plant, care for, and harvest produce from the garden. Master Gardeners, 4-H, and local food systems and small farms educators presented lessons on Pollinators, Sun Safety, and Soil layers. Not only did students get hands-on learning in the garden, but they also learned the importance of giving back to the community as their harvest is donated to local food pantries and senior centers throughout the county.



Master Gardener Deanna Dyer teaches the 4-H Summer Gardening class. During the class, students learned how to care for a garden and participated in fun summer lessons.



Extension engaging the community for positive youth development

As part of an initiative called “Re-investing in Southern Illinois Youth,” John Shadowens, community and economic development educator, is working with a group of school, mental health, church, businesses, medical and community leaders to grow a broader community safety net for young people in Harrisburg and the Greater Saline County area.

The work is built upon Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets Framework. This is a community-driven model that advances the idea that young people need a strong foundation of traits, experiences, and opportunities called developmental assets. These assets are built through strong relationships between children and the positive, caring adults around them.

Harrisburg School District was among the first partners to the table in this project. They conducted a Developmental Asset Profile survey of almost 800 students in grades 4-12. The results were highlighted in a four-part strategic planning session that the new superintendent, Amy Dixon, held with community stakeholders in the spring of 2023. The data showed that while

students were experiencing good support both at home and at school, the students didn’t feel the same support in their community. This is not unusual. However, like Harrisburg, communities all over the US have been using this model to improve that community safety net.

Through Re-Investing in SI Youth, a steering committee has been developed that will tackle several projects:

- Engage and train various groups churches, businesses, not-for-profits, civic clubs, etc. on the Developmental Asset model and share data on local youth assets to build awareness.
- Conduct a mapping exercise to examine the existing resources for children, youth or families in the community and identify opportunities, gaps and needs.
- Identify and celebrate “Asset Champions” – the adults who devote themselves to supporting young people.
- Create new opportunities and programs for young people to engage with caring, supportive adults including service learning and volunteerism, after-school programs, arts, athletics, and arenas in which to showcase youth hobbies, strengths and skills.

Participants of the Youth Gardening class with their harvest to be placed in the Community Blessing Box at Dixon Springs Ag Center





Local food production

Local Foods Educator Bronwyn Aly, Ag Gardner Julie Zakes, and Jennifer Warren, ANR EPC, continued research and demonstration projects for the 2023 season in the high tunnels at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center. Research and demonstration trials for the growing season included tomato, pepper, and cut flower plots; insect sampling and collection; and hydroponic production of cucumbers, herbs, specialty melons, and strawberries. Weekly harvest data was collected from tomato, bell pepper, cucumber, and strawberry trial plots from April through the end of September. This information will be shared at state and regional specialty crops conferences and schools during the winter meetings in 2023 and 2024.



16,207

Pounds of Cucumbers, Tomatoes, Peppers, and Strawberries, etc. Produced On-site at DSAC.



Tomatoes harvested at DSAC are weighed, sorted, and placed in trays before distributing to food pantries.



Strategies for improving biological control of insect pests for vegetable growers utilizing high tunnels

Year one of the Illinois HR 133 Stimulus Grant project, with \$61,739 awarded, has been completed. With a focus on biological insect control within high tunnels on tomato and pepper crops, this project is designed to look at different strategies for attracting and retaining natural predator insects. Biological control of insect pests in greenhouses has shown to be quite successful. This should translate to high tunnel production, but the research-backed recommendations on the use of natural enemies in these environments are limited. In addition to pinpointing the identity of the effective natural enemies, researchers lack evidence for the proper habitat and environmental conditions that could enhance biological control in high tunnels. In the search for more sustainable pest control options, high tunnel growers are seeking recommendations for how to utilize natural enemies. The goal of this project is to



Bell peppers grown in the high tunnel at DSAC produce many high-quality, extra-large fruits.

investigate additional seasonal plantings that could be added to high tunnels to enhance pest control by natural enemies in tomato and pepper production. The University of Illinois will utilize research high tunnels to examine strategies for improving the effectiveness of biological control measures against insect pests with two objectives:

- 1) Establish whether cut flower plots grown in high tunnels with tomatoes and peppers maximize the retention of both commercial and native beneficial insects.
- 2) Determine if planting cover crops over winter can create an environment to retain beneficial insect populations to benefit spring-planted crops within a high tunnel.

These trials will build upon the findings from ongoing research addressing the viability of natural enemy release and biological control of insect pests within high tunnel production. Results will be shared with stakeholders during on-site grower field days, newsletter articles, webinars, and state and regional conferences.



Crimson clover cover crop just before termination being grown in a high tunnel at DSAC as part of a biological insect control research project.



During the twilight meeting at Burnt Hill Cattle Company, Logan Karcher discussed his strategies on adaptive management and regenerative practices.



Southern Illinois Twilight Series

The Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series completed its ninth year of on-farm meetings with four locations across southern Illinois, including Bass Farms, Cobden, Burnt Hill Cattle Co., Dalhgren, Riverside Merchantile, Elizabethtown, and The Patch, Marion. Crops, production systems, and marketing techniques highlighted during these meetings included hydroponic greenhouse tomato production, strawberry plasticulture production, roadside stand and farmers market sales, regenerative grazing practices for beef, chicken, and pork production, retail sales of local meat and value-added products, no-till pumpkin production, and fall agritourism.

During the 2023 twilight meetings, a total of 118 participants attended, bringing the total attendance for all nine years up to 900, which averages out to 25.7 participants per meeting. These meetings create an opportunity for participants to see firsthand various on-farm production and marketing practices from local fruit, vegetable, and livestock farms across the southern Illinois region, as well as set up a networking environment for farmers, Extension educators, and agriculture professionals to interact.

To capture medium to long-term impacts created by the Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series over the past nine years, a survey was emailed to past participants. Survey questions asked participants if they had implemented any changes to their production or marketing practices from

information shared during a twilight meeting, to indicate a change in revenue, to select which meetings they found most beneficial, and to provide suggestions for future meeting topics. Responses were received from nearly 30% of the total participants surveyed and will provide insights into the applied practices and economic impacts of the Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series.



Participants of the Twilight meeting at Bass Farms in Cobden listen as Bill Bass presents on hydroponic greenhouse tomato production and strawberry plasticulture and his ability to market those at the same time of year.



Dixon Springs Agricultural Center partners with Pope County High School on multiple projects

Student Workers

The local foods team at DSAC has participated in the cooperative vocational education program at Pope County the past four years as an employer for one student worker each year. The student arrives after lunch and works in the afternoons at the high tunnels. Money generated from produce sales during the summer is used to pay the student worker's salaries, allowing the community to invest in the local youth.

I have spent a lot of time this year at DSAC being a student worker and an FFA member. I have created some really great memories. As a student worker, I have been able to get out of the classroom everyday, get some hands on experience in the high tunnels and learn so much about horticulture. As an FFA member, we have participated in many events here which has allowed me to interact with the community and build connections.

Daisy Winders, Pope County High School Senior

Stewardship Week

The Pope County FFA club also supports the annual Stewardship Week Event held in April at DSAC by providing labor for both setup and tear down of seating and signage needed for this large-scale program. Having attended Stewardship Week as elementary students, club members hold fond memories of the unique field trip opportunity and are eager to lend a helping hand.



A Pope County FFA member prepares to set up signage at DSAC for Stewardship Week.



Little Tractor & Equipment Company was one of the many local businesses that set up a table at Trunk or Treat to pass out goodies to community members.

Trunk or Treat

The Dixon Springs Agricultural Center staff, along with Pope County's FFA and eighth grade class, worked hard to prepare for the third annual Trunk or Treat. This year, FFA decorated a haunted house as a fundraiser for their organization, and the eighth grade held a chili dinner to raise funds for their class. Local businesses, groups, churches, school clubs, 4-H members, and individuals were invited to decorate a trunk and hand out candy and treats to the youngsters. We enjoyed this community event and appreciate those who helped make it happen.

FFA Horticulture Judging

The local foods staff at DSAC and the Pope County FFA have hosted the FFA Section 25 Horticulture Judging contest for the past several years. Plants used in the contest are grown in the greenhouse facility at DSAC. On contest day, Pope County FFA members set up the judging areas within the high tunnel in preparation for the arrival of surrounding teams. Students from multiple high schools learn about high tunnel production and other research activities conducted at DSAC while attending the contest.



An FFA Section 25 member observes plants in the greenhouse facility at DSAC at the annual Horticulture Judging Contest.



DSAC youth gardening class has a second year of success

Since the installation of the youth high tunnel at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center in 2018, the area has expanded to include raised beds, a pollinator plot, cut flowers, and trellises for gourds. Community outreach has also increased over the last few years. In 2022, a donation box was built by a 4-H family to make produce readily available to those in need. A refrigerator was also purchased and used in conjunction with the donation box to help keep produce fresh. In 2023, a separate box was purchased to store more dry goods and canned items. The community donation box is available to all community members and remains filled when seasonal produce is available.

During the summer of 2023, our youth summer gardening classes were offered for the second consecutive year. The classes met once a week during June and July. The children and their families enjoyed harvesting and weighing the different vegetables each week. The children learned the value of teamwork and worked very well together. Some had a favorite vegetable they liked to pick, and others enjoyed weighing and recording the data. They also learned the importance of giving back to the community and were actively involved in restocking the community donation box each week. Every week, a lesson was taught by Extension staff or Master Gardener volunteers. The topics of these lessons varied greatly and included monarchs, turtles and tortoises, and sun safety.



31
Children and families participated



826
Pounds of produce donated from the youth high tunnel area



Youth spent the summer at DSAC getting hands on experience growing and harvesting vegetables to restock the community donation box.



Master Gardener volunteers Debbie McVey, Deanna Dyer, Nancy Drone, and Amy Daugherty, along with Jennifer Warren, ANR program coordinator, helped prepare garden beds at the Golden Circle in Ridgway.

Volunteers find ways to give back to local communities



Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers dedicate their time and knowledge to local community projects and programs. In 2023, local volunteers contributed to a variety of projects, including delivering lessons at Extension supported gardens, library programs, and Stewardship Week. They also started and maintained seed libraries at several local libraries. Volunteers worked with local businesses to get seed donations and then separated the seed packets into smaller packages. The smaller packages were labeled, organized, and taken to the library for patrons to take home and grow their own vegetables and flowers.

In the spring, several Master Gardeners volunteered to help with a garden project at the Golden Circle in Ridgway. Their facility was interested in growing food to help feed their patrons and needed some help starting the garden. Our volunteers met with the Golden Circle staff several times over a few months to plan and decide what materials they would need. Master Gardener Deanna Dyer presented relevant lessons to those who would plant and maintain the garden. Finally, several volunteers were involved in setting up the garden and helped fill the beds in early spring.

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists in Gallatin, Hamilon, Hardin, Pope, Saline and White Counties reported:



917
Volunteer Hours



\$29,160
Value of Volunteer Time put back into Local Communities



Become a Volunteer:
extension.illinois.edu/global/volunteer



Forestry

The University of Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences held 22 events or programs at DSAC, with 548 people in attendance. These included the Backyard Maple Syrup Production Workshop with 72 participants, the Southern Illinois Conservation Workshop with 24 participants, and two prescribed fire trainings with 84 combined participants. An additional 15 events with a total of 395 participants were also held in southern Illinois.

Southern Illinois Beginning Forest Landowner Program

The Southern Illinois Beginning Forest Landowner Program welcomed its second cohort of 22 participants into the program. Participants are landowners new to owning forests or have not yet actively engaged in active forest management. This year-long program utilizes classroom learning, hands-on field experience, field tours, and mentorship to assist landowners in gaining the knowledge and experience needed to manage their forests, keeping them healthy and productive. Participants learn about forest ecology, tree identification, management planning, invasive species, timber harvest, managing for wildlife, forest soils, safe use of herbicides and chainsaws, tree planting, and many other skills related to forest management.



Forestry Extension and Research Specialist Chris Evans prepares Beginning Forest Landowner Program participants for a prescribed fire.



Karen Magan, with the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, leads a tree planting workshop for the Beginning Forest Landowner Program.



Volunteers planting white oak seedlings at DSAC.



Volunteers installing a deer fence around the white oak study.

White Oak Planting at DSAC

Partnering with the University of Kentucky and the US Forest Service, a three-acre white oak research planting was installed at the Ag Center. This planting includes over 1,100 seedlings from 45 locations, encompassing much of the range of white oak, from northern Illinois to Florida and Texas. Due to the high deer population in the area, an 8-foot fence was installed around the entire perimeter of the study. Over 20 volunteers and staff from The Nature Conservancy, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Shawnee National Forest joined the Extension Forestry staff to install the entire fence in one day. Everyone met up again to plant all of the seedlings later that spring. This project is part of a larger study to evaluate white oak genetics and determine superior-performing seed sources to use to develop seedlings for future reforestation plantings. In the spring of 2024, approximately 500-600 seedlings will be added to the study from 18 new locations.



Colton Ethridge and Gabe Duncan, DSAC summer workers, watering the white oak seedlings.



White County 4-H'ers Braden Tomm and Walker Hamburg explore Millstone Bluff in the Shawnee National Forest.



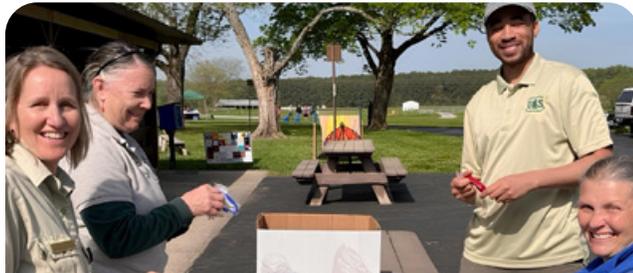
Students from southern Illinois schools gather around to learn about turtles and tortoises. This was the first year for this station at Stewardship Week.



Stewardship week at the Dixon Springs Ag Center

This year marks the 34th anniversary of our annual Stewardship Week event. Since the event is scheduled to coincide with Earth Day during the third week of April each year, you never know what the weather might be. We were happy to be able to get in two beautiful days of programming before inclement weather forced us to cancel on the final day. However, an opportunity presented itself, and we were able to pack up stations from the activity tent, travel to the Pope County school, and provide the K-5 classes with a small sample of natural resource education. We decided to include an additional day of programming into what has typically been a two-day event over the past several years. This worked well, and we were able to accommodate all the schools that registered for the event, including several home schools.

Emails were sent to elementary teachers in 16 southern Illinois counties, providing instructions on registering their classes online through our local Extension website. This registration format continues to be well received, with great teacher feedback. Natural resource professionals were also contacted at the beginning of January and asked to participate in the program at the various stations. As Extension is now in the leadership role for this long-running event, having and maintaining a strong working relationship with the many natural resource agencies and professionals will continue to make this a successful event.



Members of the United States Forest Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and soil and water conservation department members all work together at Stewardship Week.

Stewardship Week has successfully exposed grade school kids in the southern Illinois region to a wide variety of outdoor careers and opportunities for over 30 years. Several past students now present at Stewardship Week as natural resource professionals, demonstrating the long-term impact this program can have on those who can attend. The presentations involving general outdoor topics were quite diverse, ranging from the US Forest Service stations demonstrating Fire Prevention, Leave No Trace, and Going Green to the nature hikes and the Illinois State Geological Survey station on Earth Science. Two popular stations provided every year are the Maple Syrup Production station and the Reptile/Amphibian station. We were very excited to continue to offer some of the traditional stations, including Conservation Police Officer, Wetlands, Watershed, Pollinators, and Mining Natural Resources in Southern Illinois. A few new stations were added this year, including Moths of the Forest, Turtles and Tortoises, Migration Headache, and Introduction to Beef Cattle. Those who participated in the classes were very pleased, especially commenting on how much interaction and hands-on activities each station offered.

In 2023, Stewardship week had an attendance of:

- 
823
 K-6th grade students in attendance
- 
15
 Southern Illinois schools attended

Being able to bring students out of the traditional classroom and into this outdoor setting really creates an enhanced learning environment that many of these students have never had the opportunity to experience. It is our hope that the positive impact that this event and the natural resource professionals have on today's students will be reflected in the actions of these students for years to come.

Since 1990, Stewardship Week has had an attendance of:

- 
74,553
 Students



University of Illinois student Nate Brookshire assisting with a cow in the chute at DSAC.



Beef cattle research

In the 2023 calving season, Dixon Springs Agricultural Center sent 450 calves to the University of Illinois campus to support research and animal science projects within the College of Agriculture and Consumer Environmental Sciences.

Dixon Springs Agricultural Center provides hands-on teaching and experiences for students within the University of Illinois Department of Animal Sciences. DSAC is a great place for undergraduate students to come and spend time working, getting firsthand experience in beef production, research, and producer outreach.

Recent beef cattle research at Dixon Springs Agricultural Center has focused on evaluating the relationship of post weaning dry matter intake classification on performance variables while also collaborating with the American Hereford Association to determine long-term sire breed effects on subsequent progeny. Other studies have included elucidating the interactions

between heifer age and body weight at breeding, as well as evaluating a two-stockpile grazing management system in conjunction with rotational grazing.

This off-campus location is an incredibly valuable asset to the university, particularly for beef cattle research, as well as to the local community. The farm and support staff at DSAC are all amazing people, who have acted to assist myself and countless other students in each of our endeavors. Many of the staff contributed to the development of both my research and extension expertise, and they had a personal impact on my life. They have been an amazing part of my time at the U. of I., and I am incredibly grateful to each and every one.

Kylie Ewing, University of Illinois doctoral student



Extension Vision

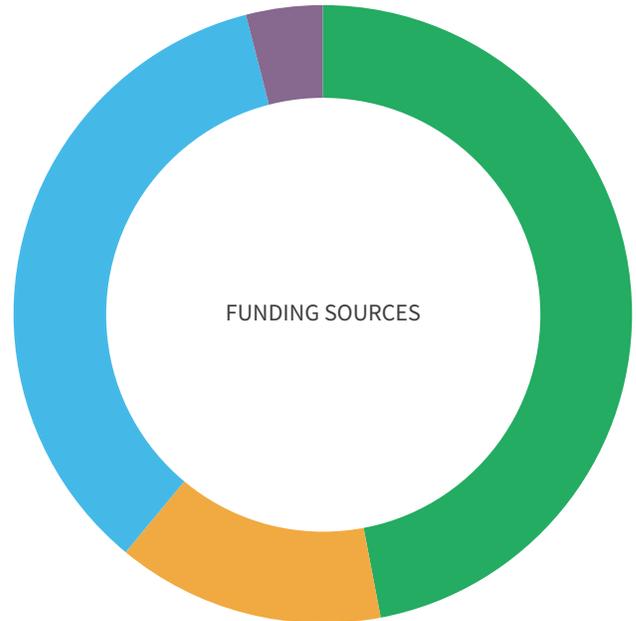
University of Illinois Extension will be a leading force in fostering a legacy of sustainable development, lifelong learning, and community resilience regarding environment, food and agriculture, health, community, and economy via technology and discovery, partnerships, and workforce excellence.

Community Sponsors

- Gallatin County Board
- Hamilton County Board
- Hamilton County 4-H Foundation
- Hamilton County 4-H Federation
- Hamilton County Home and Community Education
- Hamilton County Executive Extension Council
- Hardin County Board
- SGHP 4-H Extension Foundation
- Pope County Board
- Pope-Hardin County HEA
- Rotary Club of Golconda
- Saline County Board
- Shawnee RC&D
- White County Board
- White County Extension Council
- White County 4-H Support Committee
- White County 4-H Federation
- White County Association for Home and Community Education
- White County Support Committee

We will leverage innovative research, cutting-edge technology, and collaborative partnerships to build a future where every community member is equipped to thrive in an evolving world.

Our commitment to excellence, inclusivity, and transformative education will be the catalyst for positive societal change.



- 47% Local Including County Governments
- 14% Federal Funds Including SNAP
- 35% State Match and Ag Premium Fund
- 4% Gifts and Donations

Community Partners/Organizations

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Arrowleaf DSP Workshop
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City of Carmi
Cherry St Baptist Church - Carmi
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Hamilton County Senior Center
Hawks Lunch Bunch
Honeysuckle Vine Events
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Herald Enterprise
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Illinois Forestry Association
Illinois State Geological Survey
Illinois State Water Survey
Illinois State Vegetable Grower's Association
Little Tractor & Equipment
Local Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Meridian Health Plan of Illinois
Mt. Zion Church

National Wild Turkey Federation
New Haven Community Center
People's National Bank
Pope County Schools
Pope County EMS
Pope County FFA
Rivers Edge Veterinary Hospital
Riverside Mercantile
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Saline Co Stockman's Association/Saline Co Fairgrounds
Salvation Army Family Store - Marion
San Damiano Retreat Center
Shawnee Community College
Shawnee Development
Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development Area
Shawneetown Public Library
Shotgun Eddys
Sigma Mu Sorority
Southeastern Illinois College
Southern Illinois Healthcare
Southern Illinois University
Southern Seven Health Department
The Help Center Inc.
The Roads Church
TNT Fun Bounce
Tractor Supply Company
TriState Food Bank
US Forest Service
USDA - FSA
USDA - NRCS
Wabash Christian Village
Wabash Valley Service Company
Walmart
We Love White County
Grayville Schools
WEBQ Radio Station
Western Illinois University - Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
White County Senior Citizens Center
WRUL Radio Station
WSIL TV 3

We value every partnership we have established within our communities, and if we inadvertently missed anyone, we apologize. Please understand that we acknowledge and appreciate every contribution. By working together, we can accomplish more and create a stronger impact in the communities we both reside in and serve.

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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.

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