

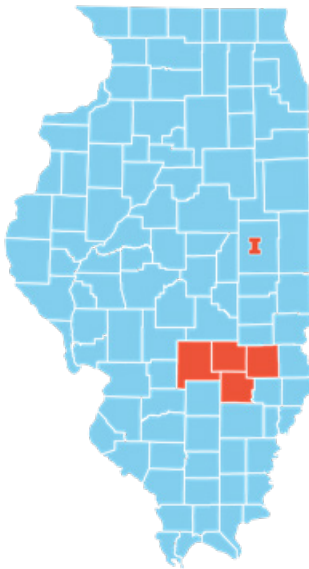


EXTENSION
IN ACTION 

Serving Clay, Effingham,
Fayette, and Jasper Counties



Jessica Wells
County Director



A Message from the County Director

University of Illinois Extension and the staff serving Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper counties thank you for your support throughout each year.

University of Illinois Extension continues to provide valuable resources such as community education, involvement, and connectedness throughout communities that we all call home. I became the county director on Sept. 5, and with the guidance and wisdom of our staff, I am learning all the important details throughout our area, including various key stakeholders, integral programming, and our opportunities for growth. It is my hope that with the continuous efforts of our team, Illinois Extension continues to serve our communities and one another through the work we do and the relationships we build with the community and one another. My philosophy is to “lead with vulnerability and truth,” and I am proud to be a part of a group of professionals who embody those principles.

Our SNAP-Ed and 4-H educators continue to create programming that is of great value to our communities. Through our Deer Donation program, spearheaded by SNAP-Ed Educator Michelle Fombelle, multiple food pantries in the unit are receiving donated venison, providing a source of lean animal protein to families in need of quality food access. Kasey Kemme, our 4-H educator, has worked tirelessly to provide quality programming targeting thriving youth and community efforts. Workforce readiness, emotional awareness, and agricultural initiatives are key focus areas.

University of Illinois Extension is in awe of the local support from our county board members, 4-H and Extension Foundations, small businesses, local corporations, Farm Bureaus, and individual community support. We thank you for your continued support and look forward to an exciting and robust 2024. You can discover more information about our programs and resources at extension.illinois.edu/cefj.

Jessica Wells
County Director

Cover photo: by Pam Yates, Fayette County Master Gardener and Master Naturalist. Purple Butterfly Bush with Tiger Swallowtail butterfly in the Educational/ Butterfly Garden at Vandalia’s Little Community Garden.



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

Resource Generation

5,682 Program Volunteers	274 Community Gardens	2,634 School and Community Partners	\$15,259,785 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$463,368 Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated	\$4M+ External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners
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New staff join Extension

Jessica Wells joins University of Illinois Extension as the County Director serving Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper counties. These counties have deep hometown roots and proud, committed community members who truly care about community outreach and education.



Wells works with each county at an administrative level and finds opportunities to be involved in various programs to support team and community members participating in local programming. Wells finds the most exciting and rewarding

experience in Extension to be the relationships built with Extension team members and community members and watching the wonder on youth participants' faces when they learn a new skill or achieve a goal in one of the various program offerings.

Wells earned her master's degree in higher education leadership from Liberty University in 2021 and her bachelor's degree in music business from Millikin University in 2008.



Michelle Hoffman began her employment with University of Illinois Extension in February 2023, serving Clay County as an office support assistant. Michelle worked in accounting and purchasing for a distributor of security products,

in the Chicagoland area for several years. She is new to Clay County and has been enjoying learning about the county and interacting with the community.



Natty Aumiller began her employment with University of Illinois Extension in October 2023, serving Jasper County as an office support assistant. Natty graduated in 2022 with a bachelor's degree in agribusiness economics from Southern Illinois University

Carbondale. She has spent the last four years of her career in the financial industry. She grew up in Richland County and loves to be active in her community through various organizations. Some of her hobbies and interests include traveling, spending time with my friends and family, as well as crafting.



Chrissy Caudle joined University of Illinois Extension in April 2023 as an office support assistant in Fayette County. She grew up in the small community of Alma, where she was a member of 4-H. She moved to Vandalia over 10 years ago. Chrissy

has always enjoyed helping others and meeting new people. Extension provides those opportunities every day. She likes helping with programs like Master Gardening, HCE, and 4-H. She says that you can learn something new every day here at Extension.



Patty Edwards joined University of Illinois Extension in March 2023, serving Fayette County as a SNAP-Education Community Worker. Her primary responsibility is to provide nutrition education by means of youth programming such as;

OrganWise Guys, Serving Up MyPlate, and Eat Fit. As well as adult programming such as; Create Better Health and Healthy Cents. She will also be at various places in the community setting up Eat Move Save Booths which will provide nutrition/health information, recipes and possibly a food sample. In the summer, she will be providing additional programs which will include Illinois Junior Chefs and Catch Kids Club Program. She came to us from CEFS. Patty was the RSVP Specialist in Fayette County which helped seniors in our community find volunteer opportunities that suited their schedules and skill levels. Patty loves helping her community and meeting new people.





Debbie Durbin and Gail DePaolo at the State Master Gardener Conference accepting the University of Illinois Extension State Master Gardener Teamwork Award for Fayette County.

Local Master Gardeners win state teamwork award

Illinois Extension would like to formally congratulate the Fayette County Masters Gardeners and volunteers for winning the Illinois Extension Master Gardener Teamwork Award for the Vandalia Little Community Garden Project.

At the State Master Gardener Conference held in East Peoria, the Fayette County Master Gardener and volunteers: Sid File, Jennie Grimsley, Gail Depaolo, Pam Yates, Terri Braun, Debbie Durbin, Max Durbin, Randy Harrison, Jill Perry, Genny Matzker, Thais Ledbetter, Carrie Hill, Yvonne Schmidt, Fran Collier, Vickie Tinker, Ann Davis and Linda Otto were recognized for their hard work and dedication by receiving the University of Illinois Extension State Master Gardener Teamwork Award. This award is given for exemplary Master Gardener volunteer efforts. The purpose of the State Master Gardener Teamwork Award is to recognize Master Gardener projects that are impactful, innovative, and replicable statewide.

The Fayette Master Gardeners and the Vandalia Little Community Garden have existed for over 20 years. The garden, which started as a hobby garden, has grown into a 2.5-acre production garden that provides fresh produce to the local food pantries throughout Fayette County. In addition to a produce garden, the Master Gardeners and volunteers have added an herb garden, pollinator garden, flower garden, a memorial garden, and most recently, wheelchair-accessible raised garden beds.

Their efforts have resulted in thousands of pounds of fresh produce donated to the local community throughout the years. They have donated 2,826 pounds of fresh produce in the year. Extension Educator Michelle Fombelle shared, “The Vandalia Little Community Garden is not so little any longer and something the volunteers should truly be proud of. The impact they have had on our community is remarkable and an example for Master Gardeners across the state of Illinois.”

Two original Master Gardeners are still active in the garden, Sid File and Jennie Grimsley. In 2022, the Vandalia Little Community Garden celebrated its 20th Anniversary.



Randy Harrison, Master Gardener, assists members of the Gardening Spin Club with raised beds.

Gardening SPIN Club

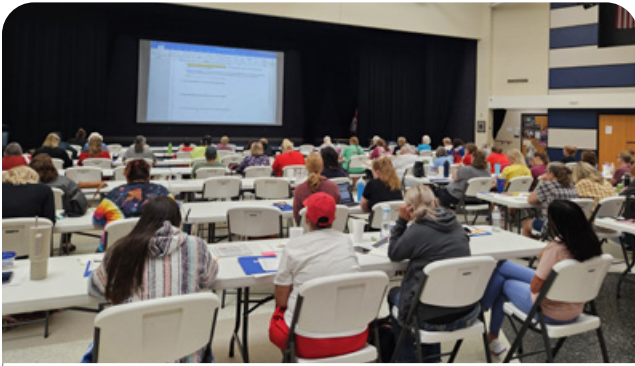
This past summer was dry and hot, but that didn't stop the new Future Fayette Farmers SPIN Club from getting out into the garden! Club members met regularly at Vandalia's Little Community Garden from May through July to learn from Fayette County Master Gardeners what it takes to grow and maintain a garden.

The Vandalia Little Community Garden is not so little any longer and something the volunteers should truly be proud of!

Fayette County Master Gardeners joined the meetings to teach club members how to prepare the ground for planting, choose their plants, prune, and harvest. The meetings started with an examination of soil composition. Youth participated in a microscopic view of the soil in the garden and all the life that exists within.

On the last meeting of the summer, Master Gardener Sid File shared her expertise in floriculture and taught club members how to design and make flower arrangements.





Sixty school food service staff attended the ABCs of School Nutrition Regional Training hosted by Centralia High School.



Extension provides school food service trainings through ABCs of School Nutrition

ABCs of School Nutrition is a partnership between Illinois Extension and the Illinois State Board of Education. Extension educators throughout the state improve their communities by sharing research-based education.

University of Illinois Extension SNAP-Education Educator Michelle Fombelle works diligently to fulfill professional development needs for local school food service staff in rural communities with limited funding. Professional standards for school nutrition professionals are key to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The act requires a minimum amount of annual training hours for all state directors of school nutrition programs, state directors of distributing agencies, school nutrition program directors, managers, and staff. To meet the required standards, local food service staff typically have to travel more than two hours to earn their required hours. Due to budgetary constraints, attendance is usually limited to one or two staff members.

I am a new head cook and I have a new assistant head cook. This information helps us greatly in our new roles within our school district.
Program Participant

Recognizing the need within the area, Fombelle partnered with local Regional Offices of Education in Vandalia, Charleston, Robinson, and Centralia to offer regional training. Regional training provides food service staff the opportunity to attend a one-day training to obtain all of their required continuing education credit. School food service staff appreciate the opportunity to network with other schools, sharing advice, recipes, and solutions to common issues. Illinois State Board of Education representatives also presented at the training and were available for questions. In total, 167 school food service staff from 44 rural school districts attended one of four sessions.



Michelle Fombelle and team member Meredith Probst receive Innovative Field Staff Award.



Michelle Fombelle and her team win Innovative Field Staff Award

Michelle Fombelle and her team were recognized with the Innovative Field Staff Award for their part in the Illinois Deer Donation Program. This innovative program connected hunters, meat processors, and food pantries in 12 east-central Illinois counties. The Illinois Deer Donation Program uniquely combines deer donation with nutrition education for low-resource and food-insecure individuals. The impact of the program includes significant venison donations, educational booths at food pantries, and a growing online presence. The team collaboratively handled various aspects of the program to ensure its success. The program plans to expand in the coming season to serve more residents in additional counties.





Addressing food insecurity in rural communities through Illinois Deer Donation Program

The Illinois Deer Donation Program provides venison, a lean source of protein, to low-income and food-insecure families in east-central Illinois. It was the second year of the program. With community support, the Illinois Deer Donation Program's 2022 season yielded 8,414 pounds of ground venison donated to 37 food pantries within twelve counties. The program, delivered through University of Illinois Extension, connects hunters, meat processors, and food pantries to support food security in east-central Illinois.



Illinois Deer Donation Program Extra Help Staff, Matt Ruholl, delivers ground venison to Sherry Anderson and The Master's Hands Food Pantry in Newton.

For the 2023 hunting season, which began on October 1, the Illinois Deer Donation Program continued its efforts in Clay, Coles, Cumberland, DeWitt, Douglas, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Macon, Moultrie, Piatt, and Shelby counties and expanded to serve Champaign, Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties. The program also expanded from six to eleven meat processors to keep up with demand. The program provided four part-time delivery drivers to remove the burden from meat processors and food pantry staff.

“Venison is a source of protein, which is often in limited supply at food pantries. We’re excited to continue the partnerships we established last hunting season and expand to serve additional areas of east-central Illinois to support food security for individuals and families,” says Extension Educator Michelle Fombelle.

As the Illinois Deer Donation Program kicked off its second hunting season, donations have been a huge success. As of mid-December, the program generated over 8,000 pounds with the intention to surpass last year’s total within the following week, one month ahead of last year.

The Illinois deer season is from Oct. 1 through Jan 14, 2024. Monetary donations fund the meat processing for the program. Hunters do not have to pay the processing fees. External fundraising brought in approximately \$44,000 from local grants and monetary donations. External fundraising was used to reimburse meat processors \$100 per deer for their time and effort. Hershey, United Way, Whitetails Unlimited, National Rifle Association, The Equity, Wal-Mart, and Birkey’s Equipment all contributed to the program. Small monetary donations from local businesses also contributed towards the total amount. The project has received abundant support from key partners across Illinois, including Feeding Illinois, Eastern Illinois Food Bank, Whitetails Unlimited, and the Illinois Association of Meat Processors.

This was a wonderful training. We look forward to sharing new resources, using new skills to connect with our clients, and sharing the deer program details with hunters.

A distinct feature of the Illinois Deer Donation Program that is not consistently seen in donation programs is the use of nutrition education to support pantry guests in cooking and storing ground venison in their home kitchens. With tools like recipe cards, food safety handouts, and recipe videos, the Illinois Deer Donation Program is a model for existing and future donation programs, showing ways to incorporate nutrition education into donation programs, with local Extensions and SNAP-Ed as partners.

In September, the Illinois Deer Donation Program provided a Food Pantry Summit for partnering food pantries, offering topics such as food dignity, bundling, trauma and food, food handling, and sharing plans for the upcoming deer donation program. Over 22 food pantries from a 16-county area attended. One attendee shared, “This was a wonderful training. We look forward to sharing new resources, using new skills to connect with our clients, and sharing the deer program details with hunters.”

The State of Illinois food insecurity rate is 9.5%, while three of our four-unit counties have food insecurity rates above that, including Clay at 12.1%, Effingham at 8.6%, Fayette at 12.1%, and Jasper at 9.8%. While the need is increasing, so are food prices. Beef prices alone increased over 14% between April 2021 and April 2022, and food pantries are unable to pay the additional cost. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, “in 2023, all food prices are predicted to increase 5.8 percent.” Beef prices have increased remarkably throughout the years, including 9.6% in 2020, 9.3% in 2021, 5.3% in 2022, and 4% in 2023. The Illinois Deer Donation Program hopes to assist pantries in fulfilling the need.



Patty Edwards presenting OrganWise Guys at Brownstown Elementary School.



SNAP-Ed programming teaches healthy choices

Patty Edwards held an “Eat. Move. Save.” booth at the CEFS Food Pantry in Vandalia. Patty had Venison Slower Cooker Chili for the clients to taste and was able to talk about the Venison they would receive in their food boxes.

Patty Edwards taught OrganWise Guys to the Brownstown Kindergarten class. OrganWise Guys teaches the students about eating healthy and exercising to keep their bodies healthy. The students get to participate in Wisercise which gets them up and moving in fun and exciting ways.



The Importance of Nutrition

SNAP-Ed had an impact on grade school and junior high school students using the curriculum OrganWise Guys, BEPA2.0, Healthy Kids out of School and Serving Up MyPlate. With hands-on activities students learn why we should eat healthy and get plenty of physical activity. Students have been spotted helping their families make healthier choices while grocery shopping. “Eat. Move. Save.” booths are used to promote different nutrition topics and recipes to participants of the Clay County Ministerial Alliance Food Pantry to utilize their food boxes.

SNAP-Ed visits local food pantries



The 2023 programming year for SNAP-Ed staff covering Effingham and Jasper Counties was dedicated to reestablishing relationships with local food pantries. Extension staff set up “Eat. Move. Save.” booths biweekly at The Master’s Hands food pantry in Newton and have become a consistent presence at the Enduring Freedom Ministries food pantry and the St. John’s Lutheran Church food pantry, which both serve Effingham County residents. The booths feature valuable nutrition education material, an interactive lesson, and easy, cheap recipes. Extension staff also worked with Catholic Charities of Effingham, Altamont Ministerial Food Pantry, Calvery Baptist Church, and Jasper County ERBA to provide nutrition education resources such as recipes and handouts, especially resources for venison in coordination with the Deer Donation Program, when the booths were not a possibility.



9 Partnerships with K-12 Schools



1 Partnerships with Early Childhood Centers



15 Partnerships with Emergency Food Sites



25 Partnerships with other types of Organizations



327 Nutrition Education Classes



7,841 Program attendance



Students participating in Clown Relay Health Jam.



Health is fun

Most kids moan and groan when told to eat their fruits and vegetables, but not the fourth graders of Clay County and the fifth graders of Jasper County. Over 125 students took a chance each week to try a snack that was new to them. Throughout their Health Jam program, students learned about the MyPlate curriculum, what it takes to walk across Illinois, how to make healthy decisions, and how to try new things.

Making sure students are working to meet movement goals outside of PE each day or week, those who participated in Health Jam were challenged to “Walk Across Illinois” with a team of three others. Their challenge was to increase their physical activity to meet the goal of moving 210 miles throughout the weeks they met. With pedometers in tow, students counted their steps and movements throughout the school day to help their team reach their goal. All teams met their goal easily, and most even moved enough to move through the state of Illinois from north to south.

With some prior knowledge of MyPlate and healthy eating, students were given the opportunity to share what they knew and how they used it in their everyday lives. They then translated that knowledge into the new foods they were willing to try that week. Students tried everything from avocados to dragon fruit to snap peas and rounded out their tasty treats by creating their very own smoothies.

Physical activities were included in each of the lessons. Some included applying knowledge of MyPlate, while others were a bit more fun. When talking to each student who participated, they would easily tell you that their favorite physical activity was the Clown Relay. Teamwork and leadership skills were put to the test to complete the relay, but the giggles, laughs, and memories made were what tied the activities all together.



Students enjoying making smoothies.

Celebrations took place in each county to round out the time together. Clay County students had a celebratory day of creating their smoothies, making their own butter, and a few more intense rounds of Clown Relay. Jasper County classrooms spent the day learning about careers that are part of healthy living. They heard from pharmacists, paramedics, occupational therapists, dentists, chiropractors, and more. They also got to enjoy their smoothies and create personal first-aid kits to keep handy in case of an emergency.

While talking about healthy living can sometimes be boring, be sure to check in with the Clay and Jasper County students who experienced the program for their opinions.



1,035
4-H Club Membership



84
4-H Clubs



3,686
Fair Exhibits



6,374
4-H Affiliations (4-H experiences)



3.50%
Minority Youth engaged in 4-H



1.38%
Hispanic Youth engaged in 4-H



2023 CAMP CLOVERBUD

Twenty-five Camp Cloverbud participants unplugged for the day by spending a fun educational day at Camp Wassatoga. Youth explored individual interests, formed new friendships, and participated in plenty of physical activity. They were also given the opportunity to learn about healthy living, mental stimulation, confidence building, teamwork, creating new experiences, and feeling a sense of greater purpose. As parents arrived to pick up their children, several Camp Cloverbud participants stated this was the “best day of their lives.”



Youth enjoyed activities at Camp Cloverbud.



Master Naturalist, Randy Harrison prepares to show participants the night sky.

FAYETTE COUNTY 4-H ASTRONOMY NIGHT

The night could not have been more perfect for Randy Harrison, Fayette County Master Naturalist and owner of Lookin’ Up Optics, as he shared his stellar expertise with youth on how to view planets and constellations in the sky. Youth learned how to find Saturn on the horizon and were able to view Saturn and its rings through a telescope. Randy also pointed out several constellations visible in the fall with a high-powered laser. Their favorite part was seeing all the craters on the moon. Youth and adults alike marveled over the crystal-clear image of the moon. Much to the youth’s amazement, a Starlink satellite even passed overhead during the workshop, . “Space is our future,” Randy said.



TECH FEST 2023

Sixth graders from all four Clay County Schools joined Illinois Extension for hands-on science learning. They learned about Elastec, a local company that designs equipment to help clean up disasters. Attendees became roller coaster engineers and were tasked with different rules to create a functioning roller coaster. They were required to keep a marble on the track to represent their roller coaster cart while building roller coasters with hills, loops, and jumps. They built ECO Bots, which are little robots designed to help clean up an oil spill they encountered. This session allowed them to see how to build robots from simple supplies you can find around your house. They built one with a toothbrush head, double-sided tape, a watch battery, and a small motor. They put on their engineering hats again as they explored the difference between a barge boat and a speed boat, then were tasked to build one that was put to the test. They were able to see what designs were successful and identify what was important to incorporate into their design. Lastly, they received some hands-on experience with programming and building EV3 robots, which showed them that sometimes simple is better. Adding blocks to the robots sometimes prevented them from completing the task. By exploring the robot’s programming, they could see how a simple mistake would mess up their course. By the end of the program, youth could see many different avenues they could take in the STEM field, and they could take science to build things that could someday lead to a career for them. Giving the youth this hands-on learning opportunity allowed them to see science differently.



Attendees test their boats in the water.

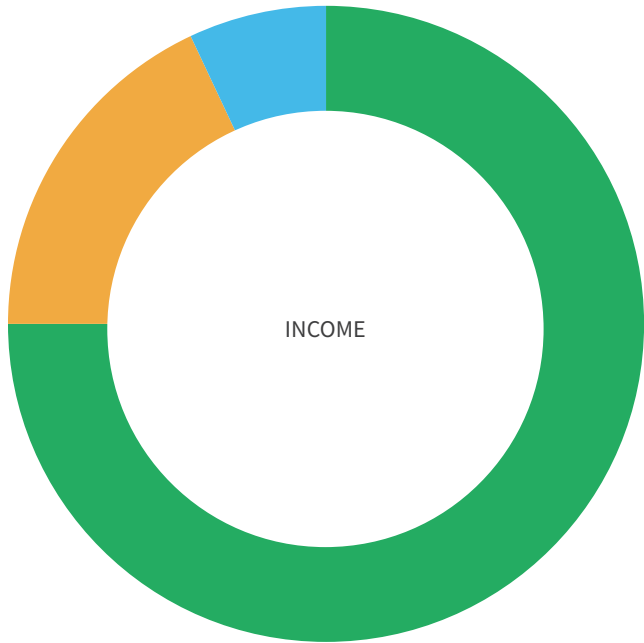


Third grade student creates his 4-H project during Spark Your Imagination.

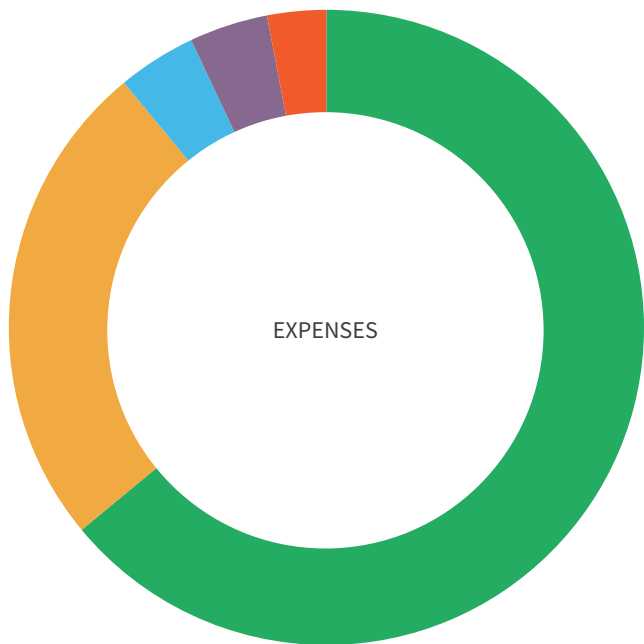
SPARK YOUR IMAGINATION

The third grade students at Newton Community Elementary and St. Thomas schools participated in the Illinois Extension program Spark Your Imagination. This year, students participated in hands-on activities that gave them insight into several projects offered by Illinois 4-H. Students made trail mix, decorated cookies, created marshmallow catapults, cracked open geodes, planted underwear, and more. Allowing students to get a glimpse into 4-H projects creates curiosity and encourages 4-H members to try new projects and non-4-H members to possibly join 4-H. Jasper County 4-H Ambassadors and 4-H Federation members assist with the program, which helps build their leadership and communication skills.





- 75% State
- 18% Local
- 7% Federal



- 64% Personnel
- 25% Programming Expenses
- 4% Facilities/Utilities
- 4% Travel
- 3% Other



22,830
Local Website Views



13,891
Page Views searched from Google



665
Educational Sessions



19,667
Educational Direct Contacts



153
Extension Volunteers



1,035
4-H Club Membership



1,102
Nutrition Education Participants SNAP-Education



17
Master Gardeners and Master Naturalist Volunteers



1,202
Hours Donated by Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



Jackie Hahn shown with her Award at Annual Conference.

Jackie Hahn honored with Individual Extension Excellence Award

Jackie Hahn, Office Support, a devoted employee of the Effingham County office for 30 years, stands out for her unwavering commitment and work ethic. Her organizational leadership is characterized by integrity, respect, and the ability to inspire respect in others. She is a team player who balances her workload and offers valuable suggestions for improvement. Jackie embraces change and fosters a positive image of University of Illinois Extension, making her an outstanding candidate for recognition as she consistently embodies Extension excellence.

STAFF

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County Extension Director

Michelle Fombelle,
SNAP-Ed Educator

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4-H Youth Development
Educator

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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.