

# Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



Serving Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan, and Scott Counties

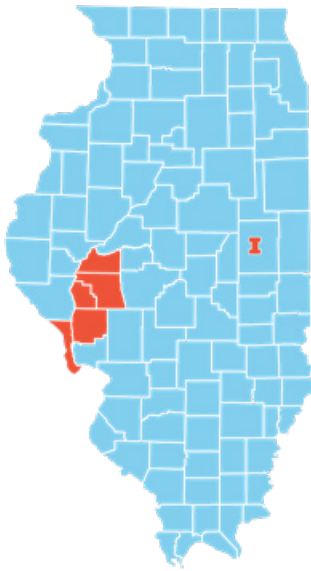
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024







Aaron Dufelmeier  
County Director



# Strengthening our communities through lifelong learning

It is truly a privilege for me to serve as the County Director for Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan, and Scott counties. Our goal is to provide lifelong learning opportunities to the people throughout all five of our counties. We are an integral part of the University of Illinois while also deeply connected to our local communities by building partnerships, developing programs, and extending knowledge gained through research.

Each year, I enjoy taking the time to rewind and review and then anticipate what's to come. As I reflect upon our stories and the impacts we have had over the course of the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the work we do each day. I, too, am encouraged and excited about future ways in which we can positively impact the lives of youth and adults throughout our communities.

Education is a lifelong journey. Our programmatic focus is specific to the eight strategic priority areas of community, economy, environment, food and agriculture, health,

partnerships, technology and discovery, and workforce excellence. As you take time to read and review our highlights in this report, I hope you are both encouraged and inspired.

As we look to the future, our goal is to continue working with our local Extension Council members to provide the best educational programs that will enable our community members to improve their quality of life. These local volunteers assist our Extension staff by stimulating their minds around each community's needs.

I am proud to serve as your county director, and it is my objective to challenge and motivate our staff to create and deliver programs that are significant and impactful for you, your family, or your business. Please take a moment to read and enjoy the stories we've included in this year's impact report.

Aaron Dufelmeier  
County Extension Director

Cover photo: Longtime volunteer, local Extension Council Chairman, and Extension State Advisory Council member Bob Schafer holds a goat for a student to pet during the annual Where Your Food Comes From event.

# 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 eight strategic priorities:



Community



Health



Economy



Partnerships



Environment



Technology and Discovery



Food and Agriculture



Workforce Excellence

## 2024 Engagement

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

730 Communities Served	805K+ Program Attendees	9.7M+ Webpage Views	22.4M+ Social Media Impressions	2.5M+ YouTube Impressions
547 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	90 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	12,484 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,840 4-H Clubs 20,339 Members	67,917 Fair Exhibits 261,012 4-H Experiences

### Partnerships

### Resource Generation

5,563 Program Volunteers	266 Community Gardens	2,922 School and Community Partners	\$15,735,213 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$514,316 Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated	\$4.7M+ External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners
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## Extension roles in Broadband Development

- Digital Access
- Digital Inclusion
- Digital Skills Literacy Training

# Community and Economic Development



## High-speed broadband internet coming to Greene County after three years of collaborative work

Access to high-speed internet is no longer a luxury. It is a vital utility that expands access to medical services, supports economic growth and entrepreneurship, enhances educational services and resources available to students and teachers, and keeps citizens connected and informed in our digital world.

After three years of work, Greene County will soon be receiving a \$40-plus million investment, including \$24.7 million in grants, to bring broadband internet access to the county. Following a two-year installation period, homes and businesses will be able to access the internet at speeds up to 5 GBS at competitive rates starting under \$30.

To bring this important project to fruition, local Community and Economic Development Educator Jennifer Russell worked with the Greene County Economic Development Group, Better Internet for Greene County Committee, Illinois Office of Broadband, and countless local citizens and businesses who contributed to the project.

Russell is also part of a statewide team of Illinois Extension professionals who began working together in 2017 to advance broadband equity for rural Illinois. The group implemented a Developing Broadband Leadership webinar series, which has



Learn more about Greene County broadband internet [gcedg.org/broadband](https://gcedg.org/broadband)

helped educate and equip local leaders across the state with the skills needed for this infrastructure planning. As a result of these efforts, numerous communities have secured over \$168 million in grants for vital broadband access projects.

Everyone recognizes and anticipates the dramatic impact that fast, reliable fiber broadband will have for families, businesses, and citizens across the county. This quantum leap in connectivity will catapult Greene County into the digital forefront, fostering economic development and innovation.

Pat Pinkston, Greene County economic development advisor



Greene County Economic Development Advisor Pat Pinkston holds a pipe to demonstrate the increased capacity for broadband.



## CEO class brings new learning opportunities to high school students in Cass County

After previous attempts to bring a Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities class to Cass County were unsuccessful, the program is now ready to launch in 2025 and show local high school students that there are thriving businesses, opportunities for growth, and people who want to support them in their own communities.

A CEO class provides high school juniors and seniors with an immersive business experience outside the classroom and teaches them about various aspects of the businesses located in their own communities. By making site visits, hearing from speakers in a variety of fields, and learning to create their own businesses, the class gives students a leg up in today's economy and creates a stronger bond with their own local community.

Community and Economic Development Program Coordinator Dustin Fritsche served on the CEO Steering Committee and currently serves on the CEO Board of Directors, helping to establish the goals of the program, assisting in creating the guiding documents, and recruiting investors to support the class. The CEO program will be offered to all high schools in Cass County, including Beardstown, Beardstown Christian Academy, Virginia, and AC Central.



Learn more about the CEO program  
[WhyCEO.com](http://WhyCEO.com)



## Local Government Education webinar series shares valuable information with officials and community leaders

Local government officials, especially in smaller rural communities, may not have the same support available to their counterparts in other communities. Illinois Extension helps to fill that gap through the Local Government Education series.

Community leaders in Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan, and Scott counties received useful information on many important and timely topics, including water infrastructure funding, rural tourism, housing, broadband, and state and federal legislative updates, helping them tackle the complicated challenges of building resilient communities.



Find local government education resources  
[extension.illinois.edu/LGE](http://extension.illinois.edu/LGE)



## Illinois Extension staff share customer service expertise with state agency employees

Strong customer service can help an organization better achieve its mission and connect with the people it hopes to serve. Through focused customer service training, staff can improve their skills in listening, empathy, respect, patience, and understanding and learn the impact of their vocal tone and body language on how messages will be perceived by their customers or clients.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity invited the Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development team to deliver two specialized 4-hour training sessions for DCEO grants managers who support communities throughout Illinois. The training, designed to enhance customer service skills, was attended by 57 participants who regularly interact with clients online.

Local Extension staff member Jennifer Russell conducted the sessions alongside fellow educators Carrie McKillip and Michelle Kim. The training received excellent evaluations, with participants sharing positive feedback. The training has also been tailored for Illinois Extension office support staff and new University of Illinois employees.



**89.6%**

Rated the usefulness of the information presented as Moderately Useful or Extremely Useful



**65.5%**

Rated the amount of knowledge gained as A Good Deal or Very Much



**94.8%**

Rated the quality of the presentation as Very Good or Excellent

I enjoyed the training presentation, and it was very informative and useful in my daily job.  
evaluation comment

The activities were extremely impactful. Thank you. Best training I've been to in years.  
evaluation comment

I have participated in many state trainings, and this is by far the best/most informative.  
evaluation comment

The customer service training was facilitated in an amazing, effective manner. You have a great team. The activities were extremely impactful.  
evaluation comment





# 4-H Youth Development



## 4-H'ers gain skills through hands-on learning experiences

Youth thrive when they can learn new skills through hands-on experiences. Local youth had several opportunities to “learn by doing” through special workshops planned by 4-H Educator April Littig and 4-H Program Coordinator Emily Sidwell.

### Outdoor Adventures at McCully Heritage Project

Youth learned valuable outdoor skills during a workshop held at the beautiful McCully Heritage Project. Participants prepared for their adventure by learning how to read a map, identify native plants and trees, distinguish signs of wildlife, and use and make their own compass. Then, these new skills were put into practice during a hike through the woodlands, followed by building a portable first aid kit, creating a birdfeeder with natural materials, and going on a scavenger hunt.

### Leather 101

Learning a new skill is more fun and more fulfilling when an expert takes the time to pass along their skills to the next generation. The owner of Leather by Bill shared his knowledge during a beginner leather workshop. Participants prepared their workspace, used specialized tools, created a stamping design, and applied proper finish. Along with learning about the history and sources of leather, attendees practiced their new skills by making a coaster and a key chain.

### Sewing Basics

Participants learned simple sewing techniques and how to use a sewing machine, and then they put their new knowledge into

practice by making a pillowcase. Each attendee selected their own fabric and learned about how materials made of different types of fiber are used for different types of projects.

### Cloverbud Fun Shop

4-H Federation members planned and implemented this event with special activities for youth ages 5 to 7. The sessions covered a wide range of 4-H project areas and included activities on animal science, first aid, gardening, cookie decorating, and visual arts. Participants explored their interests, developed new skills, and gained knowledge across diverse fields, fostering a well-rounded educational experience while connecting with other youth.



4-H Federation members Eli Walker and Camden Hays help Cloverbud Fun Shop attendees put together their feed ration trail mix.





## Local actions support global changes through a new oak tree savanna

The Lukeman Garden and Education Center in Morgan County is now home to an oak tree savanna, which is a temperate grassland area with scattered trees. This project was accomplished through collaborative work by local 4-H clubs, 4-H Federation, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists. This group of 25 oak trees is part of a statewide effort to bring new life to oak-hickory forests, which are threatened in Illinois by invasive and shade-tolerant species. Over 1,000 new oak trees have been planted in 43 counties across Illinois as part of the 4-H Green Communities Tree Program.



4-H members prepare to plant a new oak tree.

## Retiring 4-H members share the value of their 4-H experience

4-H has definitely taught me a sense of determination, hard work, and responsibility. Being a part of 4-H has also given me friends that I consider family and a home at my local fairgrounds.

Bell Brown, Winchester Winners 4-H Club

Throughout my 11 years in 4-H, I feel I have learned the importance of commitment and responsibility. 4-H has been a fundamental part of my life, and I believe it has shaped and prepared me for the future.

Alex Dufelmeier, East Side Juniors 4-H Club

Being in 4-H has taught me responsibility, hard work, to always do your best, to never give up on your goals, and to help others.

Tyler Fernandes, MJW 4-H Club

## 2023-2024 4-H Participation

Calhoun County 10 4-H Members 13 Project Exhibits

Cass County 104 4-H Members 630 Project Exhibits

Greene County 99 4-H Members 219 Project Exhibits

Morgan County 240 4-H Members 1150 Project Exhibits

Scott County 131 4-H Members 955 Project Exhibits

66 Illinois State Fair General Project Exhibits by Local 4-H Members



9 Champions 5 Reserve Champions 4 Inspire Awards

2,057 After-School and School Enrichment Participants



4-H member Lydia Bell proudly displays her awards from the Cat Show held during the Greene County Fair.



# Horticulture and Natural Resources



## Extension shared facts about periodical cicadas in preparation for double emergence

2024 was a big year for periodical cicadas in Illinois, where Broods XIII and XIX both emerged at the same time. This was the first time since 1803 that both broods emerged in the same year, and it won't happen again until 2245. The mass emergence of periodical cicadas can pose a risk to young woody plants. Their egg-laying can cause significant damage and even death to young trees and shrubs. Because of this, it was important to educate people on where periodical cicadas had the potential to emerge, as well as steps individuals could take to protect susceptible plant material.

Due to the potential for significant damage, Horticulture Educators Chris Enroth and Ken Johnson began educating the public through the Good Growing podcast in 2023. They focused on where periodical cicadas would emerge, the risks they posed to newly planted trees and shrubs, steps to mitigate damage, and the benefits these insects might bring. This educational effort continued into 2024 through podcasts, blog posts, news releases, interviews, a cicada website, an info sheet, and in-person presentations.

Along with sharing important facts about this historic emergency, Enroth and Johnson also explored other angles of this unique experience. They recruited entomologist Kacie Athey, assistant professor and Extension specialist in the College



One of the dishes prepared and sampled during the cicada cooking class was pizza topped with roasted cicadas.

of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, and Kristin Bogdonas, Extension nutrition and wellness educator, to explore the dietary side of cicadas. This collaboration resulted in a once-in-a-lifetime lunch menu of cicada pesto pizza, cicada tempura bites with lime aioli, and, for dessert, cicada ice cream sundaes, sampled and reviewed by some adventurous Extension staff, volunteers, and community members. "Outside of Western culture, eating insects is less of a novelty, part of a regular diet, and often found as a popular street food choice," says Johnson.

For the main ingredient, Johnson collected and froze newly emerged Brood XIX cicadas from maple trees in his backyard, where he knew the tree care practices and soil type. At this life stage, the cicadas were white and soft-bodied with soft wings. After thawing and blanching the cicadas, the kitchen smelled like cooked asparagus. Cicadas could be a potential allergen for those with shrimp or shellfish allergies, but like other edible insects, they are low in fat, a good source of protein, and contain a variety of vitamins and minerals.





## Good Growing Grow Along program enhances the learning experience for home gardeners

Home gardeners were able to try new plant varieties and share their experiences through the Good Growing Grow Along program. This new program is an interactive expansion of the popular Good Growing suite of resources, which are created by local Horticulture Educator Ken Johnson, alongside fellow educators Chris Enroth and Emily Swihart. Their expansive resources reach gardeners across the state.

Through the Grow Along program, the Good Growing team selected several species that had unique aesthetic characteristics, fun names, or had never been grown by the team members. Selected plants included Black Knight runner beans, Candle Fire okra, Japanese Pink mizuna, Honey Bun acorn squash, Lemon Cuke cucumber, and Hog Brain southern peas.

Home gardeners registered to receive their own seeds so they could also grow these fun new plants and share their experiences. The Good Growing team documented their own successes and failures throughout the growing season and shared their experiences during three check-in podcast/ videocast episodes. Sixty people participated in this new program, fostering a sense of community as they shared this learning experience. The vast majority wish to continue their learning and participate in a Grow-Along again in 2025.

Along with the new Grow Along program, Good Growing continues to expand its vast collection of reliable educational resources to help homeowners and communities create sustainable gardens and landscapes that provide beauty, food, and property enhancement. Information is available through a newsletter, blogs, podcasts, and educational videos.



**69,900**

Views of 52 new blog articles



**496,000+**

Lifetime views of all blog articles



**47,000+**

Plays of 54 new podcasts and 51 new videocasts



**74,700+**

Lifetime plays of all podcasts and videocasts



**1,824**

Subscribers to the weekly email newsletter



Find Good Growing resources  
[go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing](https://go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing)



## McCully Heritage Project supports learning about nature by being in nature

The best way to learn about nature is to be in it, and people in and around Calhoun County are able to experience nature at the McCully Heritage Project. Local Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Coordinator Michelle Berg spearheads Illinois Extension's activities held in conjunction with the McCully Heritage Project.

### Earth Day

Illinois Extension staff provided four interactive educational stations during the third annual Earth Day event at the McCully Heritage Project, hosted by the Calhoun County Health Department. Local students learned about appreciating the natural world through presentations from a dozen local organizations, including Extension presentations on water pollution, insects, and wild turkeys.



Master Naturalist volunteers explore the McCully Heritage Project.

### Master Naturalist Field Day

As part of the Illinois Master Naturalist State Conference, volunteers from across the state were invited to a special field day to learn about forest management at the McCully Heritage Project. During a walk through the woods with forester Mary Grapperhaus and Illinois Extension Forestry and Research Specialist Chris Evans, attendees learned about basic tree identification, forest health, management, and invasive species control.

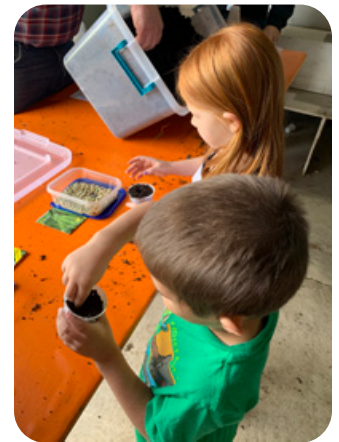
### 4-H Project Work

Greene County 4-H member Lane Oden received a Champion award at the Illinois State Fair for a project he did on making syrup, building on skills and knowledge he gained through a special lesson with Michelle Berg at the McCully Heritage Project two years ago. Since then, he has continued tapping trees at his grandfather's land and making syrup, expanding on the skills he first learned through Extension.





The annual Where Your Food Comes From program is an interdisciplinary project for Extension staff and partner organizations to teach kindergarten students about food access and production. This year's program reached over 290 students.







A Master Gardener volunteer plants vegetables alongside a YMCA youth at the Lukeman Garden and Education Center.

## 2024 Impact Summary



**17,926**  
Program Attendance



**262**  
Educational Sessions



**74**  
Volunteers

## Financial Report



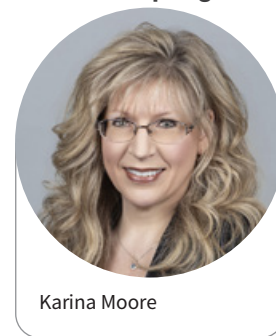
Amount	Source
49%	Local
37%	State
6%	Federal
8%	Other



Amount	Source
71%	Personnel
29%	Non-Personnel

## New SNAP-Ed staff member establishing community connections for nutrition programs

Karina Moore has joined the local Extension team as the new SNAP-Ed educator. Drawing on her strong background in the field of education, Karina teaches families to be physically and mentally healthy. She engages with residents throughout the local communities to provide science-based health and nutrition



Karina Moore

information by implementing policy, systems, and environment changes that ensure healthier choices. Karina's focus thus far includes establishing PSE work with early childhood education sites, food pantries, and healthcare providers. She wants to be certain that the SNAP-eligible audiences not only have access to healthy and nutritious foods, but also have opportunities to stay physically active on a regular basis.

Looking forward, Karina wants to supportively work alongside community partners, helping them reach their missions and goals of providing environmentally friendly spaces with healthy food choices for participants and students. One effort that Karina is passionate about is helping community partners locate and apply for potential funding that enables them to more effectively carry out their mission of serving the families within their community.



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## STAFF

Aaron Dufelmeier  
County Director

April Littig  
4-H Youth Development  
Educator

Emily Sidwell  
4-H Youth Development  
Program Coordinator

Duane Friend  
State Master Naturalist  
Coordinator and Climate  
Change Specialist

Ken Johnson  
Horticulture Educator

Michelle Berg  
Agriculture and Natural  
Resources Program  
Coordinator

Jennifer Russell  
Community and Economic  
Development Educator

Dustin Fritsche  
Community and Economic  
Development Program  
Coordinator

Karina Moore  
SNAP-Ed Educator

Therese Wilson  
Office Support Specialist

Georgianna Flowers  
Office Support Assistant

Rebecca Schafer  
Office Support Assistant

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Morgan County Extension

104 N Westgate Ave  
Jacksonville, IL 62650  
(217) 243-7424  
Fax: (217) 243-1544  
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4:30 pm  
closed noon - 1 pm

### Calhoun County Extension

818 S Park, P.O. Box 366  
Hardin, IL 62047  
(618) 576-2293  
Fax: (618) 576-8013  
Tue/Thu, 8 am - 4:30 pm  
closed noon - 1 pm

### Cass County Extension

651 S Job  
Virginia, IL 62691  
(217) 452-3211  
Fax: (217) 452-7260  
Mon/Wed/Fri, 8 am - 4:30 pm  
closed noon - 1 pm

### Greene County Extension

25 N US Hwy 67  
Carrollton, IL 62016  
(217) 942-6996  
Fax: (217) 942-3827  
Mon/Wed, 8 am - 4:30 pm  
closed noon - 1 pm

### Scott County Extension

401 N Walnut  
Winchester, IL 62694  
(217) 742-9572  
Fax: (217) 742-3582  
Tue/Thu, 8 am - 4:30 pm  
closed noon - 1 pm

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## ONLINE



[uie-ccgms@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-ccgms@illinois.edu)



[facebook.com/UofIExtensionCCGMS](https://facebook.com/UofIExtensionCCGMS)



**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).

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