

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

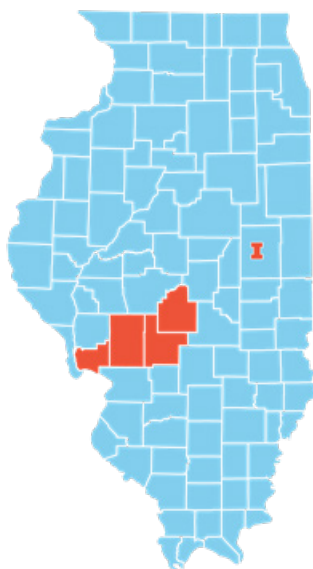


Serving Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Sara Marten
County Director



Connecting communities and cultivating growth

As I reflect on the past year, I cannot help but feel amazed and inspired by the work accomplished and appreciative of all our volunteers, community partners, and Extension supporters for making these successes possible. 2024 was a year of growth, innovation, success, collaboration, and teamwork. I am honored to share a few of our unit's highlights.

We have recently launched our new statewide strategic plan, which will guide both our program planning and goal setting over the next 10 years. Within this new plan, the values of learning, collaboration, credibility, and inclusivity were highlighted as vital to our success and core to our mission. Within the past year, our unit has shown our commitment to these values in the following ways:

Learning

Our focus remains on providing high-quality learning events for all people, organizations, and communities within Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties. From the 4-H fair to summer cooking schools and food preservation classes to Master Gardener training, each of our learning opportunities focuses on learning a new skill or making a positive change. In the following pages, we are happy to highlight a small portion of these learning opportunities focused on 4-H and thriving youth, workforce preparedness, chronic disease prevention and management, social-emotional health, and the environment.

Collaboration

We rely on many community partners, financial supporters, and volunteers to achieve our goals and support our daily work. We strengthened current partnerships while building new relationships. We continue to recognize a key community partner for their support each year, and this past year's honorees are highlighted on pages 4 and 5.

Credibility

We are proud to be a trusted resource and provide our communities with usable, research-based information. Our programs focus on balancing our long-standing traditions with new and innovative ideas that reach our communities with the information they need.

Inclusivity

From youth to adults, first-time attendees to lifelong learners, we provide resources and opportunities to all members of our communities. We strive to remain accessible, inclusive, and ready to assist whenever possible. In 2024, we expanded our reach to new audiences thanks to new partnerships and provided new programming opportunities to bring knowledge to all.

We continue to be grateful, privileged, and humble to serve the people of Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to continued success in the coming year.

With gratitude,
Sara Marten
County Extension Director

Cover photo: Tree Walk participants at Pere Marquette State Park. Learn more about this story on Page 12.

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



Economy



Environment



Food and Agriculture



Health



Partnerships



Technology and Discovery



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

67,917

Fair Exhibits

20,339

Members

261,012

4-H Experiences

Partnerships

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



Recognizing the birthplace of Illinois 4-H

Illinois 4-H boasts a rich history, with its roots tracing back to 1899 when William B. Otwell established the first boys' corn club in Macoupin County. Recognizing the potential of engaging youth, Otwell, a pioneer in 4-H, spearheaded initiatives like seed distribution and premium incentives to cultivate interest in agriculture among young people. In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act was passed in Congress, authorizing the Cooperative Extension Service in each state land-grant college of agriculture. Due to Otwell's experience with getting youth involved in their community, Extension found one effective way to reach rural men and women was through working with their children. Building upon Otwell's work, C. C. Coots from Palmyra, Illinois, organized the Union Pig Club, marking the birth of the official 4-H movement in Macoupin County. This early success quickly gained momentum, with thousands of young people participating in diverse projects such as livestock raising, gardening, and home economics, laying the foundation for the thriving 4-H program seen today.

After many years, the vision and planning of having a historic marker for Macoupin County 4-H was completed. Two 4-H signs were dedicated at the Macoupin County Fairgrounds. One highlights the start of Illinois 4-H in Macoupin County, while the other sign notes the Macoupin County Fair as the oldest fair in Illinois. 4-H Federation, alongside Committee Chair and 2024 Miss Macoupin County Fair Queen Braylee Gilmore, aimed to highlight the rich 4-H history in Macoupin County.

After the sign dedication, members enjoyed refreshments and shared conversation and fellowship — special thanks to Illinois 4-H Alumni Board President Jeff Behme, who spoke with the group.

Thanks to all the special people who made this project possible: 4-H Federation, PM Machine Shop, Tony Enrietta of Caps Vinyl Works, Fabricator Scott McAdams, Crown Cares Program, Angela Pauline, Macoupin County Fair, and many more.

Financial Report

Extension is funded through a combination of locally raised, county board, state, and federal dollars, which are returned to the community through educational programming. Illinois Extension is a three-way funding partnership that includes the state of Illinois, the United States Department of Agriculture, and Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery county boards. The SNAP-Ed programs are funded by a federal grant from the USDA. These partnerships bring thousands of programming dollars into the four counties, in addition to local contributions and state and federal support.

FUNDING		
	Amount	Source
●	57%	Local
●	26%	State
●	17%	Federal

Community Partner Award

Illinois Extension's impact is enhanced when creating partnerships with like-minded organizations, foundations, and corporations committed to supporting Extension programs. Illinois Extension provides research-based programs where youth and adults learn new skills and gain knowledge in an area that interests them.

The Extension Council is a volunteer board that serves in an advisory role, cooperating with Extension staff in planning, promoting, developing, implementing, evaluating, and financing Extension outreach that meets the needs, interests, and resources of the local communities served.

The local Extension Council sponsors the Community Partner Award, which recognizes a community partner annually. Illinois Extension is incredibly proud to award four organizations:

- LiveWell Fitness of Pana Community Hospital
- Jerseyville Public Library
- Macoupin County Wild Riders
- Litchfield Community School District #12





LIVEWELL FITNESS OF PANA COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

The fitness center was selected for its continued support of Illinois Extension's nutrition and wellness programs. A new partner in recent years, staff at the fitness center are always open to new ideas and readily assist in advertising, registration, and implementation. By making its teaching space accessible to many, LiveWell Fitness ensures that classes focusing on chronic disease prevention and food preservation reach a wide audience and have strong attendance. Nutrition and wellness programming in Pana was unsuccessful until this partnership, and Extension is very grateful to the hospital for providing essential health programming in the community. "We hope to continue to expand our collaboration in the future to meet the wellness needs of the Christian County community," said Lisa Peterson, nutrition and wellness educator.



JERSEYVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The library was selected for its continued support of Illinois Extension's nutrition and wellness, horticulture, and 4-H programs. They help reach a broader audience in Jersey County from various backgrounds and ages, from older adults to preschoolers and families. The library staff are always welcoming and genuinely aim to educate the public on various topics. "The library staff are incredibly enthusiastic! They're always eager to help, from spreading the word about our programs to assisting with registration and ensuring the classes run smoothly. They also generously share their local knowledge, suggesting new class ideas that would be a real hit with Jersey County residents," said Lisa Peterson, Extension nutrition and wellness educator.



MACOUPIN COUNTY WILD RIDERS

The Macoupin County Wild Riders have been a long-standing partner with the 4-H program in Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties. Each June, the unit utilizes their facilities – at the Gillespie Horse Arena – to host the unit-wide 4-H Horse Show. The group has been instrumental in making sure the arena is prepared and ready for the shows, operating a local food stand for exhibitors and families throughout the day, and assisting on show day by announcing classes, setting up trail and speed class equipment, and serving as ringside help. Additionally, some group members serve as 4-H club volunteers or assist 4-H members in training their horses throughout the year. While volunteer board members have come and gone over the years, their commitment to supporting the 4-H program has remained the same.



LITCHFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #12

The school district was selected for its support of Illinois Extension's program iDream/iCreate. The iDream/iCreate program is facilitated through local community leaders who network with students, share stories of success and failure, and encourage a culture of setting goals and having an entrepreneurial mindset. An essential part of the program is to bring in community leaders and entrepreneurs to help teach the lessons, allowing students to get to know adults in their community who constantly dream, set goals, and possess strong entrepreneurial traits. "Litchfield has proactively sought ways to bolster their student's skill sets and workforce opportunities by partnering with Extension. We are proud to have such an involved, supportive, and engaging partner. I like to stay connected to the program and enjoy working with area youth," said Valerie Belusko, Extension community and economic development educator.





Thriving Youth



Stirring up confidence

Twenty-four youth participated in the 4-H Food Challenge Competition, where they learned essential skills in food safety, preparation, nutrition, and kitchen safety.

Throughout the competition, participants honed their teamwork and communication skills as they collaborated on culinary creations. They also developed public speaking abilities by presenting their dishes to judges and peers.

This exciting new event provided a valuable platform for youth to practice proper food safety and handling techniques. Working in teams, they had only 45 minutes to plan, prepare, and present a dish that included all five components of MyPlate: vegetables, fruits, protein, grains, and dairy. The experience showcased their culinary talents and emphasized the importance of healthy eating and teamwork.

100%

of participants said they increased their skills in preparing nutritious foods

95%

of participants said they have a better understanding of key nutrients and general health functions of food

95%

of participants said they will practice better food safety measures as a result of participating in this program

Creating comfort for those in need

Local 4-H members embodied their pledge to “larger service” by participating in the 4-H National Day of Service, a nationwide civic engagement initiative. Youth and community members collected fleece fabric to create cozy tie blankets to donate to local organizations supporting displaced youth.



On the day of service, 16 4-H members transformed the collected fabric into tie blankets. This initiative showcased the 4-H members’ commitment to service and highlighted the power of community collaboration. By working together, these young individuals made a tangible difference in the lives of others, demonstrating the profound impact that collective efforts can achieve. Through their actions, they provided essential items and spread a message of hope and compassion, reinforcing the core values of 4-H and inspiring others to contribute to their communities.



Jersey County 4-H’ers joined forces to create tie blankets on National 4-H Day of Service.



Laying down roots for the future

Illinois 4-H, in collaboration with the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, completed the planting of 25 oak trees near Lake Glen Shoals in Hillsboro as part of the 4-H Green Communities Oak Tree Savannah project. 4-H members played a key role in this initiative, contributing to the restoration of oak-hickory forests in Illinois by helping combat the threats posed by invasive species and shade-tolerant trees like maples. By planting these trees, the youth helped restore biodiversity and improve soil and water quality in the local ecosystem.

The 4-H members involved received increased awareness of the importance of oak trees and how they improve wildlife habitats and help maintain a balance in nature. While promoting a sense of responsibility for its protection, youth could immerse themselves in nature. Attendees expressed how excited they were to see the trees grow over the years and their long-term environmental benefits. Youth were provided with an experience that taught them they, too, can be environmental stewards and the next generation of conservation leaders.



(left to right) Jason Anderson, board chairperson of Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Montgomery County 4-H member Ethan Marley worked together to dig holes and carefully plant oak trees.



Montgomery County 4-H'ers were ready to dig and plant trees on a windy day.



Participants in the charcuterie class learned how to make roses out of salami for their designs when creating their boards.

Beyond the board

Over the recent years, charcuterie has become a popular hobby. For the first time in the unit, local youth participants were introduced to the creative realm of charcuterie boards, offering a unique opportunity to develop culinary skills and self-expression. They explored a range of ingredients, from cheese and meats to fruits, vegetables, nuts, and spreads. Participants discovered the importance of including all five components of MyPlate: vegetables, fruits, protein, grains, and dairy into balanced, nutritious boards. They learned how vibrant colors enhance presentation and make meals more exciting. They were encouraged to step out of their comfort zones, challenge themselves to include five different colors, and creatively combine flavors, textures, and colors in their plates.

The workshop emphasized teamwork and fostered collaboration as youth worked together to create personalized boards and develop recipes. This collaborative process encouraged communication and decision-making and boosted confidence and creativity. Participants walked away with beautifully crafted boards to share with family and friends.

Parents and attendees highly valued the workshop, praising the culinary knowledge gained, the opportunity for self-expression through food, and the joyful learning experience. The blend of creativity and practical skills demonstrated the power of hands-on learning in inspiring youth and broadening their horizons. As part of the experience, three youth members bought ingredients to create charcuterie boards for their family's holiday gatherings, adding a personal touch to their celebrations.

I liked that they offered a variety of food options and instructions on how to do the complicated designs. The bonus was that I got to leave with a yummy treat and a new cutting board!

Olivia Moore, participant of charcuterie class





Workforce Preparation



A day in the life of struggling families

Community Action Poverty Simulation is an interactive workshop that helps participants deepen their awareness of the daily struggles of those living with limited resources and constant stress. This dynamic simulation, licensed by the Missouri Community Action Network, gives participants actionable insights and a renewed commitment to being “part of the solution.” During the simulation, attendees stepped into the roles of individuals and families in poverty. They had to navigate the challenges of securing food, shelter, and other necessities over a simulated month. Participants engaged with community institutions and resource providers to try to balance the complexities and obstacles of poverty.

This simulation ultimately gave participants a deeper appreciation for the depth and breadth of poverty, and 100% of respondents said they would recommend this simulation to others who work with individuals in poverty. The poverty simulations were offered to Illinois Valley Economic Development Corporation employees of Jersey and Macoupin counties and Hillsboro Community School District #3.

This simulation showed me that empathy is always important when dealing with families and establishing a great relationship with them will help better understand their needs.

Participant of poverty simulation

Ready or not, here comes adulthood

Imagine graduating high school without the knowledge to manage money or secure a fulfilling job. Unfortunately, that is the reality for many young adults who miss out on essential life skills. Offering opportunities for young people to develop these skills can guide them toward becoming successful adults who are happy in their careers and financially secure.

The Welcome to the Real World program is designed to build career awareness and the skills needed to excel. At Jersey Community High School, 183 sophomores participated in gaining invaluable knowledge and experience. Students were educated on financial management and engaged in a hands-on simulation. They made real-life choices and learned the basics of taxes, insurance, checking and savings accounts, saving money, and paying bills such as housing, transportation, insurance, and groceries. This immersive experience allowed them to reflect on skills learned, knowledge gained, and attitudes changed about financial management.

Through this program, youth gain a comprehensive understanding of financial processes, which empowers them to manage their funds better. Many participants realized that to achieve their desired lifestyle, they must secure well-paying jobs. This newfound awareness and practical knowledge have set these students on a path to financial stability and career satisfaction, equipping them with the tools they need to navigate adult life’s complexities successfully.





Mastering the art of service

Illinois Extension offers a 10-session course on Customer Service Training: On the Front Line, which can be modified to meet an individual entity's needs. Illinois Department of Natural Resources Statewide Superintendents took part in this course and learned valuable strategies for managing both internal and external conflicts through three consecutive sessions. By implementing these management techniques, the superintendents can shift their focus back to their primary mission of providing top-notch education to the public.

In addition to conflict management strategies, participants also gained insights into effective communication skills. Superintendents must be able to enhance visitor experiences at their facilities while also promoting education and ensuring public safety. By mastering these key elements of customer service, the superintendents are better equipped to handle any challenges that may arise in their roles.

This course has proven to be a valuable resource for organizations looking to improve their customer service practices. With its customizable nature and focus on practical skills, this course is a worthwhile investment for any business or organization looking to enhance its customer service capabilities.

66%

of those surveyed will focus on finding common ground as a strategy for conflict resolution

61%

of those surveyed will be aware of non-verbal communication to prevent misunderstandings with others

54%

of those surveyed will continue to learn about the visitors who come to their park by expanding their awareness of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility



Valerie Belusko, community and economic development educator, teaching 'Gone Fishin' for Customer Satisfaction: Reeling in Exceptional Service' with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Serving food safely

Certified Food Protection Managers courses were offered in Montgomery and Macoupin counties, training and certifying 62 individuals in safe food handling, storage, and preparation. The average test score was 89, and the course had a 99% pass rate.

The eight-hour course meets the coursework and examination requirements set by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Individuals who take the Certified Food Protection Managers course learn essential information on food safety, temperature control, sanitation, allergies, and preventing cross-contamination. Licensure needs to be renewed every five years.

As a result of this course, I implemented safe cooking temperatures based on the type of food rather than cooking every food to the same temperature in our school district. Staff noticed a substantial increase in youth eating more of their lunch and a reduced amount of food waste.

Participant of Certified Food Protection Managers

Understanding yourself and others

Navigating the complexities of human communication and identifying your preferred mode of communication can be daunting. Fortunately, Real Colors offers a transformative four-color personality assessment and workshop, expertly crafted to enhance self-awareness and foster effective interactions with others. Program participants acquire invaluable skills in deciphering different perspectives and uncovering underlying motivations, ultimately enabling them to connect with others on a deeper level. At the end of the workshop, attendees better understand human behavior, what motivates people, and their preferred communication styles.

A clash of communication styles hinders productivity, which is crucial for a cohesive workforce, but also creates unnecessary frustrations and conflicts that impede interpersonal relationships and personal growth. This program empowers attendees to enhance their communication skills, foster better teamwork, cultivate stronger relationships, explore self-discovery, and gain valuable insights into how others respond to different situations. The program is highly recommended for school staff, sports teams, businesses, government offices, those in the criminal justice and medical fields, churches, and community organizations.

Real Colors training reached nearly 30 participants with the Litchfield Middle School Volleyball Team, who participated in this program to learn how to better communicate among team members.





Health



Helping families eat healthier

SNAP-Education works with Illinois families in need to make healthier nutrition choices easier. Making healthy choices can be challenging, especially when families are struggling financially. Illinois Extension SNAP-Education provides practical, healthy eating and physical activity solutions for families and participates in strategic local, regional, and statewide partnerships to transform the health of Illinois communities.

Through classes, workshops, and collaboration with community partners, SNAP-Education positively affects families and communities by using research-based solutions to encourage healthier nutrition and physical activity choices.

SNAP-Education works with individuals and families who qualify for or receive benefits to help them manage their food budgets and the agencies, schools, and organizations that serve them. To meet the needs of families within the unit, the program has continued to have face-to-face classes. This year, a new partnership was formed with Christian County Health Department and Christian County CEFS Head Start, teaching My Plate for My Family.



1,331
Participants



234
In-person sessions

Bringing fun to nutrition education



During the school year, Jenny Foster, SNAP-Education community outreach worker, presented an introductory class, “Organ Wise Guys,” to kindergarten through second-grade students in Christian County.

The program is a fun and interactive way to engage students in nutrition education and physical activity. The students are taught about healthy eating using plush character organs of the human body. Students learn the importance of each organ and how to keep their organs healthy. The students participate in the lesson by learning a dance and a song to remind them to make healthy choices, drink plenty of water, and exercise. Each lesson provides students with an activity sheet to share with their parents.

Illinois Junior Chefs cooking up fun



SNAP-Education hosted Illinois Junior Chefs, a five-day summer cooking camp. These camps are free and open to children 8-13 years old. Each lesson focuses on a MyPlate food group and a cooking or food preparation skill.

The camp lets kids make nutritious meals and get excited about healthy foods like whole grains and low-fat dairy. The program showed participants how to add more fruits and vegetables to their daily meals. Students learned how to prepare delicious and nutritious foods and the importance of proper handwashing and sanitation procedures.



Wellness in every bite

Illinois Extension is fostering community health through partnerships with local organizations, bringing valuable cooking education to residents within the area. In collaboration with the Brighton Memorial Library District, Illinois Extension empowered over 50 participants with hands-on cooking skills through monthly sessions like Salsa Making, Heart-Healthy Air Frying, and Food Preservation. These free classes, held at the convenience of the local library, encouraged confidence in the kitchen and inspired attendees to make healthier choices, such as air frying instead of deep frying.

Recognizing the need for accessible health education in Staunton, an underserved community, a partnership was formed with the Community Hospital of Staunton to offer a series of interactive cooking classes. From Cooking from the Cabinets to Healthy Soup, these sessions catered to a diverse age group, engaging participants from 14 to 70-plus. Beyond culinary skills, these classes provided valuable insights into heart disease prevention, budget-friendly meal planning, and food safety practices. Building on this success, Illinois Extension continues its commitment to community well-being in 2025 with quarterly classes.

99%

of those surveyed indicated a better understanding of healthy eating habits

98%

of those surveyed indicated increased confidence in making healthy choices

93%

of those surveyed indicated increased confidence in preventing and/or managing chronic illnesses

87%

of those surveyed indicated a better understanding of the benefits of physical activity



Lisa Peterson, nutrition and wellness educator, teaches the importance of headspace needed when canning, which allows for the expansion of food while processing.



Jessica Jaffry, 4-H youth development educator, teaches students how to incorporate fruits and vegetables into their diets by making smoothies on the blender bike.

Healthy habits rock

What rocks? Health Rocks! Over 80 Macoupin County fifth graders participated in the yearly health program, renamed Health Rocks, aimed at exploring health from every angle. Over eight weeks, youth learn more about the dangers of vaping, brain and dental health, first aid basics, the impacts (and amounts) of sugar in everyday drinks, and movement of the body through yoga and physical therapy.

Health Rocks is designed to empower youth with the knowledge and skills to build healthy minds and bodies. Through weekly sessions integrated into physical education classes, students engage in activities focused on physical activity, nutrition, life skills, and decision-making. The program incorporates pedometer tracking to encourage movement and addresses both physical and mental health. It aims to equip young people with the tools to make responsible choices and resist risky behaviors, ultimately setting them up for future success.

Empowering youth fosters healthy futures

Jersey County 4-H has made a significant impact by partnering with Jersey Community School District in the Panther Kidz after-school program at West Elementary and Jersey Community Middle School. Through this collaboration, students enrich healthy living programs and learn essential skills about fueling their bodies, making healthy choices, and staying active. These activities promote physical well-being and empower students with knowledge and habits to benefit them for a lifetime. The partnership has created a supportive environment where young minds thrive, fostering a community of health-conscious, active individuals. This initiative exemplifies the positive influence of community collaboration on youth development.





Environment



Branching out while connecting kids to nature

Environmental education is crucial for fostering a connection with nature among young people. Tree walks at Beaver Dam and Pere Marquette State Parks have been making an impact on the community, not only by increasing environmental awareness but also by promoting social-emotional health.

The tree walks aim to educate youth about the importance of trees and the environment. The program targets children ages 8 to 18, providing them with hands-on learning experiences in tree identification at local state parks.

Spending time outdoors in nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and increase feelings of calmness and happiness. The tree walks allowed children to connect with nature, disconnect from technology, and experience the calming effects of the natural world. These outdoor experiences fostered a sense of curiosity and wonder in youth, encouraging them to explore, ask questions, and develop a deeper appreciation for the environment.

The tree walks include tree identification from leaves, bark, and fruit. The youth learned about tree planting, maintenance, and the role of trees in the environment and included hands-on activities. Participants were given cards of trees to find independently during the class. This outdoor program resulted in a rewarding experience for all involved.

Helping others grow



Empowering communities through horticultural education is at the heart of the Master Gardener program. Illinois Extension launched a Hybrid Master Gardener Training program, blending online and in-person learning to reach a wider audience.

The Hybrid Master Gardener Training aimed to provide comprehensive horticultural education to participants across Illinois with a connection to volunteer locally. The program combined virtual classes with hands-on sessions, allowing participants to learn at their own pace while gaining practical experience. This flexible format made the training accessible to individuals with varying schedules and commitments.

The training covered a wide range of topics, including plant biology, soil health, pest management, and sustainable gardening practices.

Illinois Extension is pleased to announce the successful completion of the Illinois Hybrid Master Gardener Training by four exemplary individuals. Their dedication to horticulture and community service is commendable. Please welcome:

Rachel McNew

With an extensive background in landscaping, Rachel also brings a profound understanding of beekeeping.

Whitney Demartini

A flower designer, Whitney is eager to impart her knowledge of flower arranging practices.



Wreath-making magic in action. Andrew Holsinger, horticulture educator, demonstrates his expert technique of weaving greenery and securing it with wire to the wreath frame.

Darryl Edwards

Darryl's passion for vegetable gardening and innovative approaches will greatly benefit the local community.

Deanne Edwards

Deanne's expertise in horticulture and commitment to educational outreach are invaluable assets to the program.

A heartfelt congratulations goes to these new Master Gardeners as they begin their journey to enhance the beauty and sustainability of our community.

Master Gardeners also participated, providing expert guidance and hands-on activities. Challenges such as coordinating virtual and in-person sessions and ensuring participant engagement were skillfully managed, resulting in a rewarding experience for all involved.

As part of the training, the program hosted virtual Q&A sessions once a week, providing ongoing support and resources to participants. These sessions offered opportunities for trainees to ask questions, share experiences, and connect with fellow gardeners, fostering a sense of community and continuous learning.



2,969.60

Master Gardener volunteer hours



190 pounds

of produce donated to the food pantry from St. Francis Hospital Garden cared for by Montgomery County Master Gardeners

Spreading holiday cheer

Engaging youth in creative and educational activities fosters community spirit and personal growth. The 4-H Youth Wreath Workshops in Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties made a significant impact on local communities, demonstrating the power of hands-on learning and youth empowerment.

The 4-H Youth Wreath Workshops aimed to teach young participants the art of wreath-making while promoting teamwork and creativity. The workshops were held at local extension offices, providing accessible locations for participants. Youth ages 8 to 18 were invited to join, learning new skills and creating beautiful wreaths for the holiday season.

The workshops included design, assembly, and decoration lessons, allowing youth to express their creativity and learn valuable crafting skills. The program instilled a sense of accomplishment in the young participants and contributed to the vibrant holiday spirit, adding decor to their homes for the holiday season.

The dedicated efforts of our local 4-H staff and horticulture educator resulted in a successful program that has been recognized for its contribution to youth development and community engagement.

The workshops provided hands-on instruction and support, including a presentation on evergreen foliage. "This year was an amazing year for the wreath workshops. We saw enthusiasm from the youth as one participant said it was their third time attending," stated Andrew Holsinger, horticulture educator.





2024 Miss Christian County Fair Queen Delaney Epley helped Christian County Ag in the Classroom talk about germs, pigs, and pumpkins at Pana Elementary School!



Planting seeds of knowledge

Ag in the Classroom is a statewide agriculture literacy program that provides educators and students with resources to help them understand the vital role of agriculture in their lives and society.

Christian, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties work to educate students, teachers, and the public about agriculture in fun and creative ways by going into local classrooms throughout the year and holding workshops for educators. Lessons are hands-on and feature where food comes from and different agricultural commodities grown in local areas in the state. While still featuring tried and true lesson kits such as embryology and the life-cycle of butterflies.

Riddle me this

Who knew that the minds of upper elementary students were so keen on riddles? This discovery has since become a popular lesson, taking riddle adventures to the farm in Christian and Montgomery counties. Students are immersed in a captivating journey of discovery, tackling riddles that explore the diverse world of farm animals and their vital roles in agricultural life. Working collaboratively in teams, they unravel each puzzling clue, getting a chance to win a prize.



5,904
Students reached



281
Learning sessions

Agventure is out there

Ten educators from Calhoun, Greene, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties explored more about agriculture during the Educator Agventure Summer Agricultural Institute conducted by the Macoupin County Agricultural Literacy Program. During the institute, educators toured several sites and tried hands-on activities as they learned more about the agriculture industry. Educators earned 14 professional development hours.

Traveling workshops included Backwoods Berry Farm in Hettick, Baisch & Skinner in St. Louis, and Bayer Crop Science in Chesterfield, MO.

Teachers completed many hands-on activities, learned more about agriculture and career opportunities, and received resources to use in their classrooms from different presenters. Presenters included Lee Deal from the Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom, Olivia Hoots from the Illinois Beef Association, and Connie Niemann from the Macoupin County Agricultural Literacy Program.

Local sponsors make this program and all the resources possible. The support of program sponsors, traveling workshop sites, and presenters is gratefully acknowledged, as it contributed to the success of this institute.

Traveling workshops allow you to see things you wouldn't usually get to see, and then you can share your experiences with your students.
Participant of the Educator Agventure Summer Agricultural Institute



Teachers picked fresh blueberries as Dale and Becky Conrady shared how they grow and market their crops at Backwoods Berry Farm.





STAFF

Sara Marten
County Director

Valerie Belusko
Community and Economic
Development Educator

Andrew Holsinger
Horticulture Educator

Jessica Jaffry
4-H Youth Development
Educator

Lisa Peterson
Nutrition and Wellness
Educator

Kate Harding
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Beth Steckel
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Taylor Pope
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Connie Niemann
Agricultural Literacy Program
Coordinator

Rebecca Niemeier
Agricultural Literacy Program
Coordinator

Cassie O'Connell
Marketing and
Communications Program
Coordinator

Jenny Foster
SNAP-Ed Community Outreach
Worker

Lisa White
Office Manager

Lisa Klaus
Office Support Specialist

Kenzie Drone
Office Support Assistant

EXTENSION COUNCIL

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Jerseyville, Jersey County

Connie Beck
Litchfield, Montgomery County

Tiffany Blasa
Grafton, Jersey County

Paige Cox
Palmyra, Macoupin County

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Mark Dugger
Carlinville, Macoupin County

Anna Fessler
Dow, Jersey County

Caleb Grover
Stonington, Christian County

Alicia Gullidge
Assumption, Christian County

Heather Haley
Carlinville, Macoupin County

Sandy Hefner
Jerseyville, Jersey County

Vicki Joiner
Carlinville, Macoupin County

Venise McWard
Taylorville, Christian County

Dennis Rahe
Carlinville, Macoupin County

Melinda Ward
Litchfield, Montgomery County

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Donna Abbott

Carrie Gunning

Vickie Housh

Anthony Joiner

Deon McConnell

Terri Pope

Jeanette Baker

Carol Hank

Emma Hughes

Erin Kistner

Tess Patton

OFFICE INFORMATION

Christian County Extension

1120 N. Webster St.
Taylorville, IL 62568
(217) 287-4246

Jersey County Extension

201 W. Exchange St., Ste A
Jerseyville, IL 62052
(618) 498-2913

Macoupin County Extension

60 Carlinville Plaza
Carlinville, IL 62626
(217) 854-9604

Montgomery County Extension

1 Industrial Park Dr.
Hillsboro, IL 62049
(217) 532-3941

ONLINE



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