



# Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



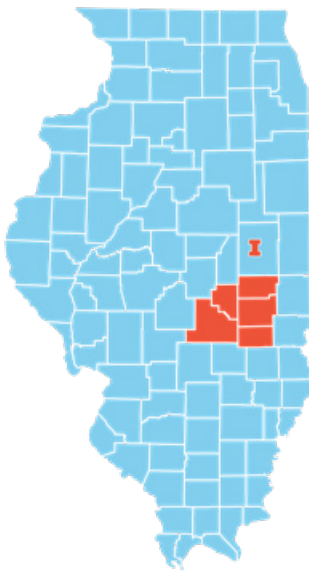
Serving Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby Counties  
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024







Jessie McClusky  
County Director



# A message from the county director

Reflecting on another year with Illinois Extension, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride. Our achievements this year would not have been possible without the dedication of our incredible team and the support from our community.

Together, we have accomplished so much, from expanding the 4-H youth development program to enhancing the well-being of our communities through educational workshops. As we look ahead, I am excited about the possibilities that lie before us, and I'm confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater success.

Our Extension team works hard to plan, promote, support, and be responsive to our community's needs, and I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to our team. Your hard work, creativity, and commitment to excellence have guided our success and made a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve. Each of you brings unique talents and perspectives that enrich our programs and initiatives, and your passion and resilience continually inspire me.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to our community partners, volunteers, and supporters. Your generosity and collaboration have been instrumental in helping us reach new heights. Whether through financial contributions, volunteer hours, or simply spreading the word about our programs, your support has been the cornerstone of our progress.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey. Here's to another year of growth, innovation, and positive impact.

I hope you enjoy the sampling of the work we have done over the past year on the following pages.

Warm regards,

Jessie McClusky  
County Director

Cover photo: Volunteers tend to a 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 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:

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

### Partnerships

### Resource Generation

<p><b>5,563</b> Program Volunteers</p>	<p><b>266</b> Community Gardens</p>	<p><b>2,922</b> School and Community Partners</p>	<p><b>\$15,735,213</b> Value of Volunteer Contributions</p>	<p><b>\$514,316</b> Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated</p>	<p><b>\$4.7M+</b> External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners</p>
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# Cultivating our community



A strong sense of community brings people together to develop shared goals, support one another in times of need and growth, and work together for the good of the whole. Having a sense of community can make people feel like they are part of something greater than themselves. When strong networks of peers and organizations come together, they can provide an outlet for people to share, helping increase confidence and encouragement to grow, be creative, and feel a sense of belonging.

Educators, staff, and volunteers serving Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties are making a direct impact within their local communities. Various programs and collaborations have been instrumental in connecting individuals with information, resources, and mentors to spark their creativity so they can thrive now and in the future. During the 2024 programming year, Extension was proud to reach 18,529 local participants through 649 unique community educational sessions. These programs extend knowledge and build partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments.

## Youth Development Impact



65  
4-H Clubs



931  
Club Members



115  
Volunteers



3,553  
Fair Exhibits



Learn more about 4-H  
[go.illinois.edu/ccdms4H](https://go.illinois.edu/ccdms4H)



Winners of the Shelby County tractor driving contest.

## 4-H ambassador leads brain builders

4-H teaches skills to lead for a lifetime. Illinois 4-H Healthy Living Ambassador Lilah Bonny showcased her leadership skills at Shelbyville High School through a brain builders workshop for faculty. Inspired by the Ignite by 4-H Youth Conference in Washington, D.C., she highlighted the impact of early experiences on brain development and well-being. The program emphasized the importance of supportive environments in nurturing healthy minds. Through interactive activities, participants learned how life experiences shape brain function and long-term outcomes. One attendee praised Bonny, saying, “Lilah did an amazing job! She was confident and presented valuable information.” Bonny was grateful for the opportunity to connect with peers and enhance her leadership skills. “Ignite was a fun learning experience, and I’m thankful for the chance to present to my educators,” she said. “Understanding brain development and its effect on health is crucial for teachers and community members. I am so glad that I got to be a part of this to really push myself to become a better leader.”



Lilah Bonny leads a workshop at Shelbyville High School.





### **PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH**

Knowing children are in a safe and nurturing environment can give parents peace of mind. In an inspiring display of community spirit, Greenup residents, through their group Growing with Greenup, partnered with Extension staff to provide real-life experiences for students. Addressing concerns about childcare and afterschool programming, they held programs at the Cumberland County Extension Education Building Association's (CEEBA) Event Center, with transportation support from Greenup schools. 4-H Cooking 101 taught youth about nutrition and healthy eating through hands-on activities. Participants learned basic food preparation and gained kitchen confidence as they discovered new foods. Ready4 Work will launch in 2025, focusing on workforce readiness with resume building, dressing for success, interviewing skills, career planning, social media etiquette, time management, and more.



### **WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD PREPARES TEENS FOR SUCCESS**

Young people don't often understand how much money it takes to cover the necessities of life, such as utilities, housing, and food. As the cost of living continues to increase, money management is more important than ever. Welcome to the Real World is an interactive program where students participate in a series of activities that culminate in a hands-on simulation where they choose a post-graduation path and make real-world decisions. During the 2024 program, students explored career options and made consumer choices related to future independent living. They also learned skills to manage finances by evaluating monthly income and expenses and balancing a budget. Five hundred high school students completed the program, giving them a well-rounded foundation, setting the path for success, and preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of adulthood.



### **YOUTH EXPLORE THE WORLD THROUGH INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM**

We're all part of a great big world, and Shelby County's International Night offered a captivating journey into the diverse cultures that make up our global community. 4-H clubs each represented a different country, from Germany to Brazil, Italy to India, and everywhere in between. Attendees had the chance to immerse themselves in the unique histories, traditions, and flavors of nations from around the world. One participant said, "My favorite part of international night is getting to see the different 4-H clubs and learn more about all of the countries. I love history, and this let me learn more about it!" Beyond the informative displays, attendees sampled culinary dishes, which sparked conversations about the universal language of food. The event showcased the beauty of diversity and the importance of cultural understanding in today's interconnected world.



### **4-H MEMBERS LEARN AND GROW DURING FAIR SEASON**

Local fairs are a tradition and the highlight for many 4-H members. The 4-H fair culminates many weeks, months, or even years of learning, creating, and discovering through youth development experiences. Through projects such as raising animals, photography, woodworking, culinary arts, and many more, 4-H members learn self-discipline and responsibility. During the judging process, youth answer questions and explain their project, which helps develop their public speaking, confidence, and interviewing skills. Additionally, they learn good sportsmanship during times of excitement and disappointment. Local youth who received state delegation at their county fairs had the option to travel to Springfield to show their projects at the Illinois State Fair this past August. 4-H events are a way to develop well-rounded individuals with a diverse set of skills and a strong sense of community.





# Sustaining natural resources



## Programs help sustain natural resources at home and in public spaces

There is growing evidence that time spent around plants and in green spaces has many benefits, including improved health, better interpersonal relationships, and a higher quality of life. Sustainable home landscapes also increase property values and build stronger ecosystems for plants and wildlife. Extension is dedicated to sustainable practices that support ecological balance. In a changing climate, Extension helps Illinois residents make informed choices on stewardship of these natural resources to ensure a sustainable environment and ecosystems supporting healthy living and climate-resilient communities. Illinois Extension's signature environmental initiatives bolster climate-smart programming through education and outreach for a more resilient future.

## Illinois Extension Volunteer Impact



**115**  
4-H Volunteers



**32**  
Master Gardener Volunteers



**24**  
Master Naturalist Volunteers



**15,873**  
Donated Hours



**\$535,829**  
Value of Volunteers Contributions



Make an impact as a volunteer  
[extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/volunteer](https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/volunteer)



Master Gardeners share a laugh as they prepare for a program.

## Celebrating the hearts of Extension volunteers

Dedicated volunteers provide incredible contributions to local Extension programs. Their commitment to service and community drives the positive experiences, unique opportunities, and overall success of the programs they serve. Extension programs simply wouldn't be possible without the passion and hard work of these volunteers.

Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and 4-H volunteers provide essential support and guidance. From organizing meetings and events to leading projects and workshops, mentoring, and offering a listening ear, their roles are diverse and crucial. They bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience, and their impact extends beyond the programs they serve. They help build stronger, more resilient communities. Volunteering with Extension opens the door to endless possibilities. Whether you're interested in becoming a 4-H leader, Master Gardener, or Master Naturalist, there's a place for you to make a difference.



Master Gardeners pose together at the Spring Into Gardening Conference.





## Master Gardeners: 30 years of helping others grow

Did you know the Coles County Master Gardener program was the first in rural Illinois? Thanks to former County Director Rose Myers Bradley, the program began 30 years ago. Illinois Extension Master Gardeners invest both their time and talents into local Illinois communities to grow food, support pollinators, sustain resilient home gardens, and share their knowledge with others.



Previous County Director Rose Myers Bradley speaks at the 2024 Master Gardener graduation.

In 2024, the Coles County Master Gardeners celebrated their 30-year anniversary. This group has significantly impacted the community through:

- Education: Providing educational outreach programs and workshops.
- Demonstration Gardens: Creating and maintaining demonstration gardens like the Idea Garden.
- Food Access: Producing thousands of pounds of produce annually through the Plant-A-Row Garden, donated to local food pantries.
- Hort Hotline: Answering home gardeners' questions through Hort Hotline.
- Youth programming: Sharing horticulture lessons with youth in schools, home school groups, and 4-H clubs.

Today, Illinois Extension Master Gardeners uphold the legacy of educating people on the art and science of gardening. Their dedication has nurtured green thumbs and inspired the next generation of gardeners, making their communities a more beautiful place. Take your love of gardening to the next level by joining the dedicated group of volunteers as an Illinois Master Gardener.



Learn about the Master Gardener program  
[extension.illinois.edu/mg](https://extension.illinois.edu/mg)

## Idea Garden creates enjoyable, relaxing, shared space

A community garden space can offer many benefits for the mind, body, and overall well-being. The Master Gardener Idea Garden Committee worked hard during the past year to make the garden an enjoyable, relaxing space for visitors. Beautiful additions have been made to the garden. To showcase the changes, local Master Gardeners led community tours highlighting the new additions, including the installation of the People's Garden Award and the Leopold bench. Master Gardener Jack Ingram was instrumental in constructing the signpost and bench.

Master Gardeners helped others learn to grow through workshops and programs such as:

- Beekeeping
- Composting
- Cacti
- Hypertufa
- Youth gardening
- Butterfly festival
- Earth Day celebration
- Seed sowing

The creation of an aesthetic, shared space and other gardening programs are examples of how local Master Gardeners bloom within their local communities, providing valuable knowledge and cultivating impactful projects, creating momentum for the future.



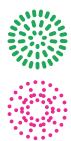
A Master Gardener volunteer enjoys the Leopold bench within the Idea Garden.







# Enhancing urban tree care and community wellbeing



## Hybrid series explores tree care

Trees are indispensable to the environment, offering essential ecosystem support that maintains ecological balance and enhances human well-being. They are crucial in cooling urban areas, purifying the air, and improving water quality. Illinois Extension is excited about the impactful work being done to support urban tree care and its significant benefits to communities.



Participants view materials during the tree care series.



Community Tree Care Series  
[go.illinois.edu/TreeCareSeries](https://go.illinois.edu/TreeCareSeries)

Research has shown that urban trees and greenspaces can boost mental and physical health, enhance children’s academic performance, and positively influence local economies. However, urban trees face numerous challenges, including stress from urban development and various biotic and abiotic threats. These stressors often lead to reduced lifespans and declining health, ultimately resulting in tree mortality. The preservation of urban trees relies on skilled professionals, yet the tree care industry is currently grappling with several challenges, such as a shortage of trained personnel, inadequate training programs, limited funding, and a lack of public awareness and education.

Recognizing these barriers, particularly in rural areas, Extension staff emphasized the need to increase accessibility to tree care training programs. In response, Extension has developed research-based educational resources. This initiative includes a comprehensive three-part webinar series on tree care and maintenance, a hands-on workshop, and informative materials detailing proper tree care practices and the benefits of trees.

Extension aims to overcome the barriers to effective tree care training by creating and delivering resources for rural tree care workers. These efforts are designed to enhance the skills of tree care professionals, ultimately leading to increased survival rates of urban trees and the continued provision of their invaluable benefits to communities. Extension is committed to ensuring the health and longevity of urban forests, fostering healthier, more vibrant communities.





## Renovated Plant-A-Row Garden provides produce to local pantries

Research shows a strong link between food insecurity, poor health, and even poor academic outcomes for children. Food insecurity is not just about hunger. It's about not having access to food options that meet nutritional needs, which is particularly important for individuals and families with limited resources. Extension's network of volunteers and partners work together to address food insecurity in locally relevant ways.

Master Gardeners and Sarah Bush Lincoln have been partners for more than 20 years. Their partnership started when the Master Gardeners created the Idea Garden on the Sarah Bush Lincoln campus, and it has continued to grow throughout the years to include the Plant-A-Row Garden. After undergoing a major renovation in 2023, the Plant-A-Row Garden at Sarah Bush Hospital is flourishing remarkably well. This success is attributed to the dedication of the Master Gardeners and the generous support of a grant from Coles Wind.

The garden is now thriving, producing an abundance of fresh vegetables and fruits, resulting in over 2,600 pounds of produce during the past year. All the produce harvested was donated to local food pantries, providing nutritious food to those in need and supporting the community's efforts to combat hunger. Community gardens that focus on feeding others have a profound impact on individuals, families, and entire communities. These impactful projects continue to be a core mission of Extension by growing and sharing locally produced food with those in need.



Produce harvested from the Plant-A-Row Garden is donated to food pantries to help combat food insecurity in local communities.



Local Master Naturalists assisted with bat monitoring at Grand Prairie Friends' property near Charleston. Big brown bat photo courtesy of the Organization for Bat Conservation.

## Master Naturalists aid in critical bat monitoring



The Illinois Master Naturalist program provides science-based educational opportunities that connect people with nature and help them become engaged environmental stewards. They share their time and talents in communities across Illinois to invest in the future of our natural world.

Local Master Naturalists assisted with bat monitoring at Grand Prairie Friends' property near Charleston. Each month, a team of volunteers hiked trails at Warbler Ridge Conservation Area to record the bat species present. Bats play vital roles in supporting our planet's health. They are critical to maintaining ecological balance, and they contribute to the well-being of both natural environments and agricultural systems. During the night hikes, volunteers used an acoustic monitoring device that recorded bat calls and identified the species by its vocalizations. Acoustic monitoring is an important tool for monitoring bat distribution and abundance. These surveys provided information that is critical to understanding the status of state and federally protected species and allow conservation managers to protect, conserve, and recover bat populations.

The bat monitoring program is one example of the impactful programs and efforts led by local Master Naturalists. The Master Naturalist program is designed to empower nature enthusiasts to put their unique skills to use through local conservation and restoration activities.



Learn about the Master Naturalist program  
[extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/master-naturalist](https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/master-naturalist)





# Growing, gathering, harvesting



## Programs address food access needs

Food insecurity affects every community in Illinois, including Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties. Illinois Extension connects youth, volunteers, and partners, working together to address the needs of communities most impacted by food insecurity through research, community service, and advocacy. Staff, partners, and volunteers came together in 2024 to address food insecurity through programs such as Partners in Produce, Hunters Feeding Illinois, Food Mobiles, and Community Gardens, which provided free groceries with nutrient-dense produce and lean proteins to those in need. These programs are examples of ways that Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education is meeting food access needs. SNAP-Ed programs included food preparation and nutrition education, fun activities incorporating healthy movement, and smart shopping tips. Other programs include Illinois Junior Chef, Teen Cuisine, Healthy Cents, Create Better Health, OrganWise Guys, and Walking Groups.

We're thrilled to see such enthusiasm among our young chefs. It's not just about cooking; it's about finding flavors, understanding ingredients, and appreciating the cultural diversity that food brings.

Ross Osterday, SNAP-Ed community worker

## SNAP-Ed Impact



**837**  
Participants



**62**  
Programs



**3,500**  
Pounds of Protein



**136,000+**  
Pounds of Produce



Local youth learn about healthy choices through OrganWise Guys.

## SNAP-Ed is a recipe for learning and fun

Community-based nutrition education is important for participants of all ages. Through partnerships with local agencies, Illinois Junior Chef helps young food enthusiasts nurture creativity in the kitchen while teaching fundamental cooking skills. Each session is structured to balance education with fun, ensuring kids not only learn valuable cooking techniques but also develop an appreciation for healthy eating habits. By empowering young minds through cooking, the program prepares them for the future as they learn kitchen skills.



SNAP-Ed provides nutrition education for participants of all ages.

Through adult SNAP-Ed programs, participants understand it is never too late to learn about good nutrition and physical activity. Create Better Health shows adults how to eat well and be active while on a budget. Participants are introduced to strategies around meal planning, grocery shopping, eating patterns, food safety, and how to be physically active as a busy adult. Recipes shared during the program were Spanish macaroni, hearty veggie quesadillas, and Mexican and garden omelets.



Learn more about Food and Nutrition  
[extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/food-and-nutrition](https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/food-and-nutrition)





## Venison shared through deer donation program

One in 10 people in Illinois experience hunger every day, including one in eight children. Hunters Feeding Illinois connects hunters, meat processors, and food pantries to bring lean protein to Illinois residents and families — providing a unique pathway to address and improve food insecurity.

The Illinois Deer Donation Program returned in October for its third donation season as Hunters Feeding Illinois. The name change is a reflection of an expanded partnership among Feeding Illinois, Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network, and Illinois Extension. For the 2024 hunting season, Hunters Feeding Illinois continues its efforts in east-central Illinois counties, and the program expanded south, adding an additional 16 counties. Another addition was a collaboration with Feeding Illinois, where monetary donations were doubled dollar per dollar, covering meat processing fees.

Through partnerships with meat processors and food pantries, the program created opportunities for hunters to donate their harvested deer so others can have a source of lean protein. Partnering meat processors turn harvested deer into ground meat (venison), and food pantries receive the ground venison to share with their customers. Along with access to the meat, food pantry guests receive support from the Eat. Move. Save. staff through recipe tastings, cooking and storage information, and more. The program is funded in part by the Health Equity Achieved Together Project, a multi-disciplinary collaboration with University of Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education.



Staff share venison with local food pantries.

## Deer Donation Program



**3,500**  
Pounds of Venison



**875**  
Servings of Protein

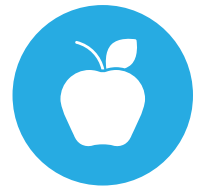


The SNAP-Ed team collects produce at the Arthur Produce Auction.

## Partners in Produce: Bringing freshness to local communities

Fresh fruits and vegetables provide essential nutrients that are vital for good health. The Partners in Produce program is known for delivering locally grown produce to local food pantries along with nutrition education, ensuring that everyone has access to fresh, nutritious food. The program helps alleviate hunger and promotes healthier eating habits. The program is a collaborative effort between SNAP-Ed, local farmers, volunteers, and food pantries. By working together, they bridge the gap between surplus produce and those in need. Produce is purchased or donated at the Arthur Produce Auction and distributed to various food pantries in Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties.

Year	Pounds of Produce
2019	25,268
2020	27,300
2021	64,212
2022	61,241
2023	108,601
2024	136,000+



Over the past six years, the program has seen an upward trend in numbers, with over 136,000 pounds of produce distributed to food pantries in 2024. Food pantry clients expressed their excitement about the quality, variety, and quantity of fresh, nutritious produce. Food pantry managers find the program rewarding, knowing that their efforts directly contribute to their neighbors' well-being. This program would not have been possible without two passionate and dedicated Illinois Extension professionals, Mary Beth Massy and Susan Stollard. In addition, the program is grateful for the ongoing support from the Arthur Produce Auction and Feeding Illinois.



Partners in Produce  
[extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/partners-produce](https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/partners-produce)





# Healthy choices, healthy lifestyles



## Healthy choices and lifestyles lead to healthy living

With increased mental health concerns and many individuals having chronic health conditions, some face inequities that make improving health challenging. People of all ages need trusted and reliable research-based information to make health decisions and improve their quality of life.

Extension has been providing education and resources to address health concerns as they evolve.

## Family Life Impact



120  
Programs



2,901  
Participants



66  
Published articles



Illinois Extension staff Stephanie Acevedo and Cheri Burcham trained 16 Adult Mental Health First Aiders at The Maschhoff's headquarters. These graduates are now prepared to identify signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, make helpful approaches, and provide appropriate resources.



Adults working with youth attend mental health training.

## Programs help combat mental health

According to the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 42% of high school students experience persistent sadness or hopelessness. Even more alarming, 22% of high school students nationwide seriously consider suicide, 18% make a plan, and 10% attempt to end their own life. These numbers highlight a critical need for mental health awareness and support in our communities.

RISE Behavioral Health and Wellness, in collaboration with the Douglas County Health Department and Illinois Extension's Moultrie-Douglas Office, launched a powerful mental health educational awareness campaign, which included Youth Mental Health First Aid for adults working with youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid training for Douglas County high school students.

The program trained 51 healthcare professionals, school administrators, and school staff, creating a network of informed adults capable of recognizing and addressing mental health challenges in youth. The program helped create awareness and support for high school students in the community, and 728 students were educated about mental health challenges, recognition of a mental health crisis, and appropriate responses. Of those, 400 plus student questions were answered by trained professionals during the program. Of those surveyed, 78% reported the course was important, and 88% responded that they would recommend the course to peers.

I think this was a good course to take in order to be more aware of how mental health can affect so many people around you.

Teen Mental Health program participant







## Wellness program reduces anxiety in youth

Mindfulness techniques for children can reduce their stress and anxiety, help them feel more connected, and how to better express compassion and gratitude. 4-H launched the Mindful Me program, a research-based health and wellness initiative designed for young children. This program, held at the Villa Grove Camargo Township District Library, introduced basic mindfulness concepts to youth through children’s literature and hands-on activities. Participants developed essential life skills, including goal setting, emotional regulation, stress management, time management, and mindful eating. Through these activities, children were able to build a strong sense of self and well-being, which is the foundation for healthy habits that will benefit them throughout their lives.



Children learn to reduce stress and anxiety through mindfulness activities.



## Extension helps residents take charge of their health

Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability and the leading driver of the nation’s healthcare costs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that six in ten adults in America have at least one chronic illness, with four in ten having two or more. Ignoring a chronic condition will not make it go away, and suffering is simply a poor management technique.

Take Charge of Your Health helps participants become better health managers. Classes are highly engaging with topics like dealing with difficult emotions, improving and maintaining strength, flexibility and endurance, nutrition, appropriate use of medications, and effective communication with family, friends, and health care professionals. Extension Educator Cheri Burcham and Senior Information Specialist Kara Brown co-facilitated this program. Upon completion, participants reported they changed how they choose the food they eat, had their medications reviewed by a healthcare provider or pharmacist, applied the skills they learned to solve a problem, and helped someone else use a technique they learned from the program.

## Embracing wellness in nature

There is increasing evidence that being in nature can benefit us both physically and mentally. Research shows that mindfulness techniques can significantly enhance well-being. Recognizing these benefits, a group of Illinois Extension staff formed an interdisciplinary workgroup called Wellness in Nature. The workgroup has been developing materials and a curriculum emphasizing the positive impact of green spaces, gardens, and nature on well-being. One resource is a set of Mindful Invitation yard signs. This set includes nine signs, each with instructions for a mindful activity. These signs are designed to be placed along nature trails in parks or nature preserves, allowing participants to follow the activities independently or with guidance from staff. Explore the benefits of nature and mindfulness and learn how to help spread wellness in your community at [extension.illinois.edu/health/wellness-nature](https://extension.illinois.edu/health/wellness-nature).



## Program keeps seniors steady and smiling

Falls are a common concern for older adults, with visits to the emergency room for fall-related injuries every 11 seconds. Falls can lead to serious injuries like broken bones or head injuries. Many people develop a fear of falling, leading to reduced activity, increased weakness, and a lower quality of life. A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns About Falls helps seniors manage their fear of falling and stay active. The program includes group discussions, problem-solving strategies, videos, and gentle exercises. Participants learn how to cope with their fear of falling, increase physical activity, and remain independent. Additionally, they build confidence in managing falls by improving their strength, finding ways to reduce falls, and learning how to protect themselves if they do fall. Extension Educator Cheri Burcham and certified trainer Penny Arthur led a summer class at Mid-Illinois Senior Services in Sullivan. Of those who attended the class, 90% said they made changes to their environment to reduce fall risks. A full 100% reported they would recommend the class to others, felt more comfortable increasing their exercise and discussing their fear of falling, and planned to continue exercising.



Older adults combat fall risks during balance program



Learn about health aging  
[extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/healthy-aging](https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/healthy-aging)





Educator Cheri Burcham presents a program to local seniors. Burcham was honored with state and national awards in 2024.



## Educator receives state and national awards

Outstanding staff are the heart of Extension. Cheri Burcham, Extension family life educator, was recognized for her outstanding contributions with both state and national accolades. She recently received a third-place national Florence Hall Award from the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences for her work on the Community Seminar Series project. In addition to her national recognition, Burcham and her team earned the College of ACES Team Award for Excellence for their role in the Illinois Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. This initiative, part of the larger 12-state North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center, focuses on supporting farmers and agricultural workers through stress management and mental health programming. For more information on this initiative, visit [farmstress.org](http://farmstress.org).



## Extension Council

The unit advisory council is an important advocacy group that supports Illinois Extension’s services as required by the County Cooperative Extension law. The council helps meet the challenges of maintaining close relationships and community awareness in each county by cooperatively working with Illinois Extension staff in planning, promoting, developing, implementing, and evaluating Extension programs, which are designed to meet the needs, interests, and resources of the local communities being served.

### Who serves on the council?

Membership is comprised of representatives from Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties who are willing to represent their organization, community, or interest in Illinois Extension services and resources.

### When and where does the council meet?

There are four to six meetings per year. Typically, meetings are held at either the Moultrie-Douglas or Coles County offices.

### How long is the commitment to serve?

New members begin their first term at the beginning of the calendar year and serve for two years with a maximum of two terms.

### Interested in learning more?

Contact Jessie McClusky by email at [mclusk2@illinois.edu](mailto:mclusk2@illinois.edu) or call 217-543-3755.

### Thank you to the 2024 Extension Council Members:

**Coles County**  
Denise Corray  
Dustin Hay

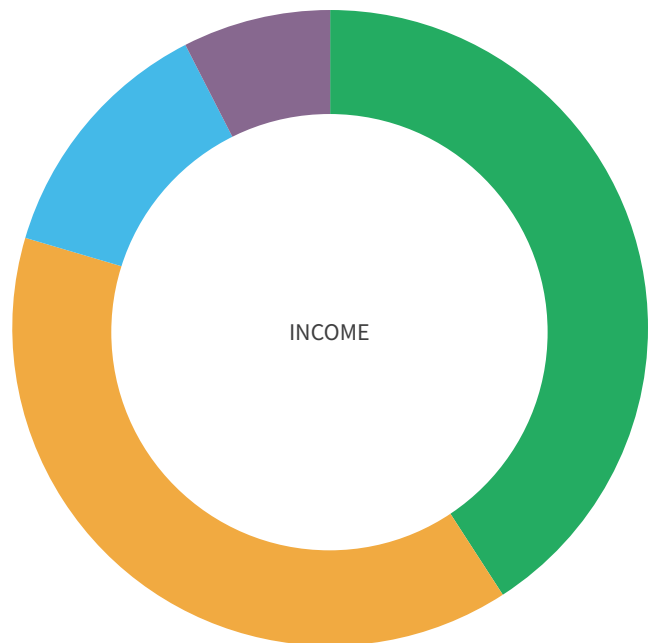
**Moultrie County**  
Travis Phelps  
Scott Seegmiller

**Cumberland County**  
Janet Blade  
Tom Webb

**Shelby County**  
Kelly Barringer  
Gary Gergini

## Source of Funds

Funding for Illinois Extension comes from a combination of local, county, state, and federal dollars returned to the community through educational programming and resources.



Amount	Source
38%	County Board Funding
36%	State Funding
12%	Local Funding
7%	Federal Funding







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## STAFF

Jessie McClusky  
County Director

Krista Houk  
4-H Educator

Meredith Probst  
SNAP-Ed Educator

Cheri Burcham  
Family Life Educator

Diana Litteral  
Office Support Assistant

Jessica Hays  
4-H Program Coordinator

MaryBeth Massey  
SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator

Jenny Lee  
Master Gardener and  
Master Naturalist Program  
Coordinator

Kathy Deters  
Office Support Associate

Melaina Kincaid  
4-H Program Coordinator

Penny Hood  
SNAP-Ed Community Worker

Macey Maxey  
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Rachel Stenger  
4-H Program Coordinator

Katy Titus  
SNAP-Ed Community Worker

Teri Boehm  
Office Support Specialist

Yolanda Nation  
4-H Program Coordinator

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Coles County Extension

809 Broadway Ave.  
Mattoon, IL 61938  
(217) 345-7034

### Moultrie-Douglas County Extension

304 E. Progress St.  
Arthur, IL 61911  
(217) 543-3755

All offices are open  
Mon - Fri, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
(closed noon - 1 p.m.)

### Cumberland County Extension

102 S. Meridian,  
PO Box 218  
Toledo, IL 62468  
(217) 849-3931

### Shelby County Extension

1125 W. North 2nd St.  
Shelbyville, IL 62565  
(217) 774-9546

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