

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



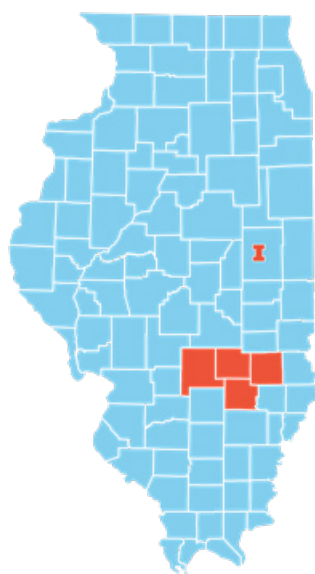
Serving Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Ginger Boas
County Director

A message from the county director



As I reflect on 2024, one key word emerges: change. We strive to provide relevant and practical education aimed at equipping people in Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper counties with the knowledge and resilience needed to meet the challenges of a changing world.

We actively work to ensure our programs are accessible to all, regardless of location or background. This commitment is especially evident in our rural areas and local schools. Our 4-H programs are among the largest and most active in the state. This year, we welcomed a

new horticulture educator, expanded our school programs, and increased food access through an innovative deer donation program for food pantries.

I am pleased to provide a snapshot of our work. I look forward to building new partnerships, beginning new initiatives, and meeting the needs of each community we serve.

Ginger Boas
Interim County Extension Director

Cover photo: Jasper County
4-H member James Lingafelter
shows off a fish caught during
a 4-H 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



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

Deer donation program rebrands and expands with the same mission



The Illinois Deer Donation program returns for its third donation season as Hunters Feeding Illinois. The name change reflects an expanded partnership among Feeding Illinois, Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network, and University of Illinois Extension.

Hunters Feeding Illinois provides a lean source of protein (venison) to low-income and food-insecure families in east-central Illinois. With community support, Hunters Feeding Illinois' 2023 season yielded 12,187 pounds of ground venison donated to 53 food pantries within 16 counties. The program, delivered through Illinois Extension, connects hunters, meat processors, and food pantries to support food security.

For the 2024 hunting season, which ran from October 1 to January 14, Hunters Feeding Illinois continued its efforts in Clay, Coles, Cumberland, DeWitt, Douglas, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Macon, Moultrie, Piatt, Shelby, Champaign, Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties. The program also expanded south, adding an additional 16 counties, including Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, White, and Williamson counties.



Staff from Salt & String Butchery display their certificate of appreciation for their assistance with Hunters Feeding Illinois.

Venison is a lean source of protein, which is often in limited supply at food pantries. We're excited to continue the partnerships and expand to serve additional areas of east-central Illinois and beyond to support food security for individuals and families.

SNAP-Ed Educator Michelle Fombelle



SNAP-Ed Educator Michelle Fombelle shares information about the rebranded and expanded deer donation program.

Another addition for the 2024 season was a dollar-for-dollar matching partnership. Thanks to the collaboration with Feeding Illinois, any monetary donations were doubled. External funds were used to reimburse meat processors \$100 per deer for their time and effort, meaning hunters did not have to pay the fees. External fundraising brought in approximately \$29,525 from local grants and monetary donations for the 2023-2024 season. Hershey, United Way, National Rifle Association, The Equity, Wal-Mart, and Birkey's Equipment contributed to the program. Small monetary donations from local businesses also added towards the total amount. The project has received abundant support from key partners, including Feeding Illinois, Eastern Illinois Food Bank, Whitetails Unlimited, and the Illinois Association of Meat Processors.

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

The State of Illinois food insecurity rate is 12%, while two local counties have food insecurity rates above that, including Clay (15.2%), Effingham (11.5%), Fayette (14.2%), and Jasper (11.7%). While the need is increasing, so are food prices. The average price per 100 pounds of beef sold at \$166.79 was 16 percent higher than in 2022. With food pantries being unable to pay the additional costs, Hunters Feeding Illinois hopes to assist pantries in closing the gap and fulfilling those needs.



Illinois Junior Chefs encourages kids in the kitchen

When youth don't know how to cook, they may be tempted to reach for unhealthy foods. Illinois Junior Chefs is an award-winning direct education curriculum designed to improve dietary attitudes and behaviors in youth ages 8 to 13 through learning hands-on cooking skills and MyPlate food group education. IJC is a 10-hour cooking education program designed for five two-hour classes. Each class focuses on a food group and related cooking skills. Recipes provided let participants practice specific cooking skills as they prepared items from the food group highlighted in each lesson.

IJC targets youth at in-school, after-school, and summer programming sites. Educators work with eligible schools and other community agencies to recruit youth at summer camps, libraries, churches, and community centers. These intervention components provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve cooking behaviors associated with healthier dietary intake over time.



Local youth learn kitchen skills at Illinois Junior Chefs.

In the summer months, SNAP-Ed transitions from school programming to summer cooking classes. During each cooking school, youth learned to measure, mix, chop, peel, grate, crack eggs, and other cooking techniques. Youth also learn about kitchen safety, knife safety, and how to make healthy choices.

Three SNAP-Ed staff taught 161 children at eight locations in Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper counties over the summer. At the end of the class, each participant went home with a cutting board, spatula, measuring cups, measuring spoons, and a cookbook filled with recipes they prepared during the classes.

I don't like pumpkin in anything, but I like these pumpkin pancakes! Can I have some more?
Hunter, Illinois Junior Chef participant

Training helps local food service staff serve healthy meals to students

Many students eat two-thirds of their meals at school, so it's important they receive healthy, nutritious food. ABCs of School Nutrition is a partnership between Illinois Extension and the Illinois State Board of Education. Extension educators throughout the state work to improve their communities through research-based education.

Extension works diligently to fulfill professional development needs for local school food service staff in rural communities with limited funding. Professional Standards for school nutrition professionals is a key provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The final rule requires a minimum amount of annual training hours for all state directors of school nutrition programs and distributing agencies, school nutrition program directors, managers, and staff. To meet the required standards, local food service staff often travel two or more hours to earn their required number of hours. Attendance is usually limited to one or two staff members due to budgetary constraints.

Recognizing the need within the area, Extension partnered with local Regional Offices of Education in Vandalia, Charleston, and Robinson to offer training sessions in August. Food service staff could attend a one-day training to obtain all required continuing education credits. School food service staff appreciate the opportunity to network with other schools, sharing advice, recipes, and solutions to common issues. Illinois State Board of Education also presented and was available for questions. In three days, 183 school food service staff from over 30 rural school districts attended one of three regional trainings in August 2024.

Through the ABCs of School Nutrition program, support is provided to all school nutrition professionals – from frontline workers to school administrators. This partnership is an example of the work Extension is doing to improve local communities through research-based education.



Local school nutrition professionals earned continuing education credit as they learned best practices for school food service.





Fayette County SNAP-Ed making an impact in local communities

Fayette County Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education works with families to make healthy choices and stay active every day. Through Create Better Health at the YMCA for the Silver Sneakers Senior Workout Class, seniors learned how to use items they already have in their pantries to create healthy and delicious recipes. Participants also learned how to use spices in place of salt to reduce sodium intake.

I have only been using spices in our food for the past two weeks, and my husband didn't even notice. Our doctor is going to be happy with us.
SNAP-Ed senior program participant

SNAP-Ed programming continued in Fayette County schools where kindergarten through second-grade students learn about OrganWise Guys, which teaches students how to take care of their organs by eating good food and exercising. Third through sixth graders explored Serving Up MyPlate as they learned about the food groups, the importance of eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables, and the importance of exercise. Programming at the alternative school for freshmen and sophomores covered Teen Cuisine. During this cooking school, students made and tasted healthy recipes. They learned proper cooking techniques, such as knife skills and measuring wet versus dry ingredients, which are life skills that they will carry with them into adulthood. Other programming included Eat. Move. Save. booths at the CEFS Food Pantry, where participants received nutritional information, incentives, and recipes to use with the items they received in their food boxes.



SNAP-Ed Community Worker Patty Edwards (R) presents the Golden Spatula Award to Mrs. Whitten's class.

Clay County works with local food pantry

The healthy choice isn't always the easy choice, especially on a limited budget. That is why SNAP-Ed staff provide practical tips to help families prepare safe and healthy meals and stay active. Lessons on food budgeting, grocery shopping, and label reading were provided to adults in collaboration with the Clay County Health Department and the Golden Nutrition Senior Center in Flora. SNAP-Ed in Clay County continued to have a positive impact on grade school students using the curriculums OrganWise Guys, BEPA2.0 (activity cards), and Serving Up MyPlate. Eat.Move.Save. Activity booths promoted different nutrition topics to Clay County Ministerial Alliance Food Pantry and Clay County Health Department participants. Recipes and informational nutrition handouts were used to help them utilize all the food they received in their boxes.



Students try out exercises during an Eat.Move.Save. physical activity booth.

New partnership added in Effingham County

It was an exciting year for SNAP-Ed in Effingham County, filled with new partnerships and opportunities. SNAP-Ed expanded partnerships with more adult audiences, including Community Support Services, Effingham County Probation Department, and El Shaddai Maternity Home. Extension also expanded its reach in the schools to include Beecher City Grade School, Effingham Junior High, Early Learning Center, Altamont Grade School, and Aspire Alternative School. SNAP-Ed also continued work with food access in the food pantries through Eat. Move. Save. Booths. As SNAP-Ed staff look forward to the next programming year in Effingham County, they are excited to expand even more to include new partnerships and programs to support low-income families.



532
Nutrition
Education Classes



2,445
Nutrition Education
Participants



83
SNAP-Ed Partnerships(K-12 Schools, Early
Childhood Centers, Emergency Food Sites, and
Other Organizations)



Two community gardens receive funding to increase access to fresh produce

Food insecurity affects every community within Illinois. Extension is increasing access to fruits and vegetables through Growing Together. The multi-disciplinary project, funded through SNAP-Ed, works in partnership with Illinois Master Gardeners. Through this collaboration, SNAP-Ed funds build or expand food donation gardens as local Master Gardener projects. The effort uses team-specific expertise, community education, and research-based interventions to expand access to produce, improve food utilization at donation sites, and increase community capacity to sustain donation gardens in food-insecure communities. Two community gardens received Growing Together funding in 2024. Effingham Community Garden and the Effingham County Master Gardeners received \$4,000, and the Fayette County Master Gardeners and the Vandalia Little Community Garden received \$2,000.

The Fayette Master Gardeners and the Vandalia Little Community Garden have existed for over 20 years. The garden, which started as a hobby garden, has grown into a 2.5-acre production garden that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to the local food pantries throughout Fayette County. With the assistance of SNAP-Ed, Vandalia Little Community Garden has received \$14,000 in Growing Together funding. Fayette County Master Gardener and volunteers' efforts have resulted in thousands of pounds of fresh produce donated to the local community throughout the years.

The Vandalia Little Community Garden is not so little any longer and something the volunteers should truly be proud of. The impact they have had on our community is remarkable and an example for Master Gardeners across the state.
Michelle Fombelle, SNAP-Ed educator



Master Gardeners gather supplies and plan for a day of work in the local community gardens.



Raised beds make planting and weeding much easier.

The Effingham County Master Gardeners have worked hard in the community garden for the past 11 years. It's truly a community effort as the groundwork, electricity, water, and mowing services are donated by the Effingham County Park District, the City of Effingham, and local businesses. The Effingham Community Garden donated 688.5 pounds of produce over the past summer. Last year, new raised beds filled with high-quality soil were also added to the garden. Since raised beds are higher off the ground, they make planting and weeding much easier, especially for those who find it hard to bend down. They often have fewer weeds and provide better drainage, which prevents water from pooling around plants.

Food pantries provide much-needed relief to food-insecure individuals and families but often rely on donations of canned and packaged foods with limited nutritional value. The project provides fresh fruits and vegetables to food pantry clientele. Produce is grown in community gardens run by volunteers with assistance from Master Gardeners who bring knowledge and expertise on planning, planting, maintaining, and harvesting. SNAP-Ed staff assist community partners in establishing a sustainable food donation system through education on usage, recipes, and suggestions for bundling with other meal items.

Funding helps Master Gardeners grow and harvest a variety of vegetables to share with local food pantries. We hope to be able to bring fresh food to many tables in the area as we share our mission of 'Helping Others Learn to Grow' throughout the community.

Linda Heynen, Effingham Master Gardener



17

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



\$42,642

Value of Volunteer Hours

Fayette County celebrates National 4-H week with recycled scarecrow contest



4-H is all about hands-on projects that make learning fun, and Fayette County 4-H celebrated last year's National 4-H Week with a brand-new event. The Recycled Scarecrow Contest challenged 4-H clubs to get creative and build a 4-H-themed scarecrow made completely out of recycled materials. No new items were used, and club members gathered their materials, ranging from old gloves and plastic bottles to junked fans and car parts. Three clubs set to work with enthusiasm, transforming these everyday items into unique and imaginative scarecrow creations.

Shafter Friends put their heads together during their September meeting to assemble their scarecrow. They used an old metal fan for the head, each club member put their handprint on their creation by painting the jeans, and old feed bags were used to fill his legs. The Shafter Friends Scarecrow was displayed right outside the Extension office in Vandalia.

St. James Hornets brainstormed and created their new club mascot: Hotrod Howie, which stood an impressive six feet tall and was built 100% out of old truck parts. Lane Stine, a St. James Hornets club member, got to use his welding skills to connect all the parts, and other club members set Hotrod Howie up with a very fashionable outfit. He was displayed at the Happy Hallow Pumpkin Patch in St. Elmo for all to enjoy.



St. James Hornets 4-H members pose with their entry for the scarecrow contest.



4-H members explore hands-on learning as they create homemade scarecrows out of recycled items.

The more the merrier with Loudon Bunch's scarecrow entry, as club leader Mandy Miller exclaimed, "The kids had a blast with the scarecrows!"

Club members met in October at the Loudon Township Building as they created six recycled scarecrows for National 4-H Week. Each scarecrow was made from items like plastic bags, milk jugs, old clothes, old hats, and even an old pillowcase they used to make a dress. Loudon Bunch Cloverbud members joined in the fun by making scarecrow faces using paper plates, pipe cleaners, and googly eyes.

The contest sparked creativity and emphasized the importance of recycling and environmental stewardship. Ultimately, the contest was a resounding success, bringing 4-H members together and inspiring everyone to think about sustainable practices. The contest became a cherished memory for Fayette County 4-H members, marking a fun and educational highlight of National 4-H Week.

It was fun watching them come up with ideas, and it got the older ones involved. Lane really enjoyed welding it together, and we couldn't have done it without him knowing how to weld!
Jo Stine, St. James Hornets 4-H club leader



Issac Dailey, Josh Dailey, Lawnee Erwin, Brody Steele, and Kelby Turner beautify Charley Brown Park in Flora.



4-H project adds trees to Charley Brown Park

Did you know that Illinois once held 14 million acres of trees, but that number has dropped to five million due to modern development practices? From creating habitats for local species to reducing stormwater runoff and erosion, trees offer many environmental benefits. Illinois Extension and 4-H recently added new trees to local parks and landscapes through 4-H Green Communities.

Clay County 4-H youth participated in the program, contributing to a tree-planting effort at Charley Brown Park in Flora. This initiative enhanced the park's natural environment while teaching 4-H youth the importance of environmental stewardship. Under the guidance of Clay County Extension and the Clay County Soil and Water Conservation District, participants learned about tree care and the role trees play in supporting ecosystems and improving air quality. This hands-on project allowed 4-H members to make a meaningful contribution to their community while reinforcing values like leadership and responsibility. The newly planted trees will benefit Charley Brown Park for years to come, creating a greener space for future generations.



Ty Worthey and Mason Lewis plant trees as part of the Clay County 4-H Green Communities program.

4-H ambassador team shines bright

The Jasper County 4-H Ambassador program empowers teen 4-H leaders with the knowledge and skills to be effective advocates for the Jasper County 4-H program. Ambassadors serve as positive role models for younger youth as they assist with numerous 4-H events and school programs, build relationships with community partners and sponsors, and promote 4-H in Jasper County and beyond.



Jasper County 4-H Ambassadors (L-R): Joslynn Pitcher, Katie Bierman, and Allison Brummer.

The 4-H Ambassador team provides opportunities for youth to represent 4-H through leadership and service at the county level. Last year, 4-H Ambassadors in Jasper County helped with events such as the 4-H Fishing Workshop, 4-H Week, 4-H Mini Lock-in, 4-H Camp Cloverbud, 4-H Fair shows, and much more. Team members also assist with school 4-H programs such as Mindful Me, Spark Your Imagination, Conservation Field Day, Safety Day, and Health Rocks. Members interacted with students in multiple grade levels throughout the year.



Carter Woods shows off his catch from the 4-H Fishing Workshop.

Not only does the 4-H Ambassador team help with numerous events and activities, but they also help guide and educate younger 4-H members in their own 4-H clubs. Their willingness to be a part of this youth leadership team demonstrates their dedication to the Jasper County 4-H program. Their work as ambassadors is an example of how 4-H empowers young people to become true leaders.



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



Effingham County celebrates 4-H week with Golden Rock Hunt

Effingham County 4-H celebrated National 4-H Week by hosting a Golden Rock Hunt that brought families and community members together for a week of fun and adventure. Each day, clues were posted on the Effingham County 4-H Facebook page, encouraging families all over the county to head outdoors, explore, and work together to track down the special golden rock. After a few days of suspense and excitement, the golden rock was found by Brody Enloe, Nolan, Jennifer, and Cody Helmuth. Congratulations to this team for their determination and sharp eyes in tracking down the hidden gem! As a reward for their efforts, they enjoyed a magical evening at The Polar Express, making all their hard work and perseverance worth it.

The Golden Rock Hunt brought families closer, encouraged teamwork, and reminded us of all the joy that comes from spending quality time together.

4-H Program Coordinator Patti Logan



Cloverbuds graduate into 4-H members

In July, Effingham County 4-H held its first Cloverbud Graduation Ceremony at the Effingham County Fairgrounds. The ceremony was a heartwarming and momentous occasion, marking the transition of Cloverbuds to traditional 4-H members. This significant step celebrated the growth, achievements, and dedication of young members as they embark on new challenges and opportunities within 4-H. The event was made even more special by the attendance of the Michael (Mike) Myers family. The generous memorial donations made it possible to host the ceremony in Effingham County. The Myers family's support has left a lasting impact, honoring Mike's legacy and fostering a sense of community and encouragement for our future leaders. The county shares a special thanks to the Myers family's generosity, which has ensured that this event will become a cherished tradition, inspiring and motivating 4-H members for years to come.



Cloverbuds graduate into traditional 4-H members.



Rebecca Kreke mixes ingredients during Cooking 101.

Cooking 101 inspires young chefs

Effingham County 4-H Cooking 101 has been a tremendous success, providing local homeschoolers with a fun and educational experience beyond the basics of cooking. Throughout the program, students gained hands-on kitchen skills, explored nutrition, and practiced teamwork while stepping up as leaders in each session.

From the start, students were introduced to the essentials of kitchen safety and cleanliness through interactive activities like the Glo Germ handwashing test, which made learning about food safety fun. This solid foundation set the stage for participants to confidently handle cooking tasks as they prepared a range of recipes, from sloppy joes and roasted potatoes to sweet homemade cupcakes. As they moved through the sessions, students mastered cooking techniques such as knife safety, measuring ingredients accurately, and timing meal preparation as they applied these skills in creative ways. They tackled more complex recipes, like vibrant homemade salsa and customized pancakes, while learning to balance flavors and experiment with new ingredients.

Leadership and collaboration were at the heart of the program, with students frequently volunteering to guide their peers through food demonstrations and cooking activities. Each session built on the last, fostering a supportive environment where young chefs could share their skills, take on new roles, and cheer each other on as they created delicious dishes together. By the end of the program, participants had grown from hesitant beginners into confident cooks capable of reading recipes, planning meals, and preparing dishes independently. Cooking 101 successfully blended practical skills with personal growth, leaving each student with new abilities, a sense of accomplishment, and some tasty recipes to try at home.



4-H clubs provide opportunities for youth to grow, learn, and connect



Although 4-H was first concentrated in rural farm areas, membership has changed as families have changed. Illinois 4-H had the biggest membership growth in urban and suburban areas last year and keeps getting stronger and stronger. There are more than 1,600 clubs all across Illinois, making an impact on the lives of youth within local communities. From traditional clubs to special interest clubs that focus on a specific project or Cloverbud clubs for youth ages 5 to 7, there's something for everyone in 4-H.



Ammon Brown shows off his watercolor prints.

4-H Programming



85
4-H Clubs



1,117
4-H Club Members



9,002
4-H Experiences



4,235
4-H Fair Exhibits



2.3%
Minority Youth Engagement



.89%
Hispanic Youth Engagement



Garrett Flood works on a project during welding club.

Effingham County 4-H has launched two new clubs, giving youth a chance to explore hands-on projects in electricity, welding, and fiber arts. These clubs are designed to teach valuable skills, spark creativity, and open doors to potential career paths.

Electric and Welding Club

This new club is for youth interested in building circuits and creating welded metal art. Members learn how to safely work with electrical systems and welding tools, gaining practical skills that can lead to rewarding career opportunities in fields like engineering and metalwork.

Fiber Arts Club

This club focuses on crafting with yarn and string. Youth explore techniques like crocheting, knitting, and weaving, building fine motor skills and gaining confidence while expressing themselves through creative projects.



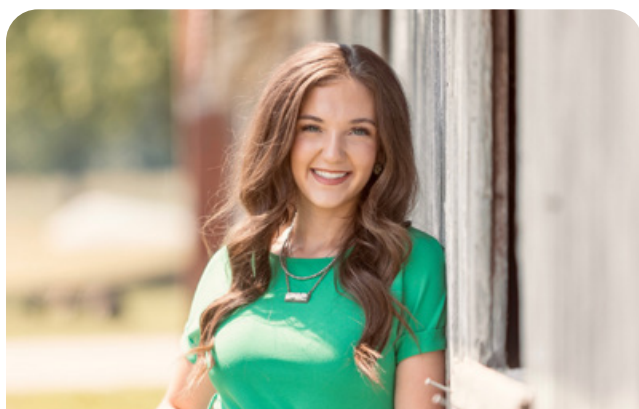
Kara Shouse works on a fiber arts project.

Both clubs provide a welcoming space for members to learn, make new friends, and have fun while preparing for future opportunities. 4-H clubs are an example of how America's largest youth development organization continues to empower nearly six million young people across the country with the skills to go beyond the expected.



4-H member shines in state competition

4-H projects, activities, and events allow students to learn and grow. Through setting goals, participating in competitions, and working collaboratively with peers, 4-H members gain confidence as they enhance their leadership abilities. A local 4-H member, Emma Beckman, was honored with the fourth place overall with an Illinois Junior College All-Around Award. Beckman competed against 910 youth in five Junior College Livestock Judging competitions at Blackhawk College, Lake Land College, Joliet, ICC, and Lincoln Land. Beckman, along with her achievements, will also serve as an Illinois 4-H Livestock Ambassador for a two-year term. The team develops leadership skills as they serve as role models who advocate for the livestock industry as well as Illinois 4-H. Their work includes planning, implementing, teaching, and evaluating events for other younger 4-H members throughout the state.



Emma Beckman was honored with the fourth place overall Illinois Junior College All-Around Award



Teen entrepreneur creates game-changing farm technology

Charlie Ring, from Effingham County, attributes his readiness for a career in agriculture to his experiences in 4-H. At just 17 years old, Ring founded his own agriculture solutions business, Farm Engage, which manufactures remote-powered seed box openers designed to quickly, easily, and safely open boxes without the need for climbing. Farm Engage's mission is to bring innovative, farmer-designed products to the broader agricultural community. Their first product, the Box Raider, is a seed-box opener specifically created to streamline the seed-loading process. With just the push of a button, the Box Raider opens bulk seed boxes, eliminating the need for manual labor or climbing into high spaces. What sets it apart is its user-friendly design, compatibility with various battery brands, and a price point over \$350 lower than similar products on the market. Additionally, the innovative farm that contributed to its design will receive a royalty for each unit sold. Through 4-H, Ring developed valuable skills such as hard work, leadership, networking, and craftsmanship, which have been crucial in creating his successful business.



Charlie Ring founded his own agriculture solutions business and attributes career readiness to his time in 4-H.

Congratulations to 4-H Hall of Fame inductees

The Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame recognizes 4-H volunteers who have shown exemplary service to 4-H or an outstanding career or community achievement in Making the Best Better through local 4-H programs. Extension is excited to recognize the following local volunteers who were honored in 2024:



Mark Pierson (with daughter Megan Pierson), Clay County



Doug McCain, Effingham County



Randy Probst, Jasper County



Debbie Boley, Fayette County



4-H and SNAP-Ed collaboration provides opportunities for local students

Collaborative projects meet local youth where they are to develop new skills and prepare them for future success. In 2024, the 4-H and SNAP-Ed teams created a new partnership with the Regional Office of Education 3 that serves Bond, Christian, Effingham, Fayette, and Montgomery counties. Students from the FOCUS Safe Schools Program and New Approach Alternative High School received programming in social-emotional learning, college and career readiness, digital citizenship, and healthy living.

FOCUS junior high students worked through the Your Feelings Matter program to identify, regulate, and understand their feelings and emotions. They then moved into studying digital citizenship while working through a program called WeConnect. Through these lessons, students became experts on culture, values, perceptions and assumptions, stereotypes, and taking responsibility for their actions. Youth stepped out of their comfort zones, created relationships with those they wouldn't normally work with, and explored areas of their life that they may not have previously tapped into.

The SNAP-Ed team worked on MyPlate knowledge through their program Serving Up My Plate. Youth practiced making sure their meals incorporated all five food groups, created menus for meals, and put their skills to the test with a fun trivia game. Students tested their cooking skills through a cooking show format where teams competed against one another to see who could make the best dishes with a limited pantry stock. In the schoolwide competition, youth were given a secret ingredient to include in their dishes. From sweet to savory, appetizers to desserts, students were creative in making their dishes, and Extension crowned Deem's Team the winner of the competition.

Students also finished a college and career readiness program called Welcome to the Real World, where they chose a job, made choices that impacted their everyday living, worked through simulations to pay their bills, and met with professionals in insurance, real estate, and banking. In the end, students had a brief reality check on how their decision-making could affect their futures.



FOCUS test out their cooking skills during the food challenge.

Extension receives community service award

Extension is a leading force in fostering a legacy of sustainable development, lifelong learning, and community resilience in community, economy, environment, food and agriculture, and health through technology and discovery, partnerships, and workforce excellence.

Service in Action celebrates community members who share Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Shelby counties Economic Opportunity Corporation's dedication to their communities. Extension partners with CEFS through different initiatives like 4-H, the Deer Donation Program, SNAP-Ed, and Eat.Move.Save. The programs provided activities, resources, and education to the families part of the CEFS Fayette County Outreach Office and Food Pantry through continued support for the Fayette County community.



Extension staff members (L-R) Chrissy Caudle, Olivia Snyder, Michelle Fombelle, and Patty Edwards are presented with an award from CEFS Chair Chuck Buchanan (R).

Celebrating Extension staff and their impact on local communities



Extension professionals are committed to the values of collaboration, credibility, inclusivity, and learning. Extension is excited to celebrate the accomplishments of current staff and also welcome new staff members. Their work to develop educational programs, extend knowledge, and build partnerships supports people, communities, and their environments as part of the state's land grant institution.

Horticulture educator joins Extension

Sreelakshmi Suresh joined Illinois Extension in August 2024 as a horticulture educator serving Clay, Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper counties. Throughout their career, Suresh has taught both in the US and abroad in Japan, worked in a research museum, and been a professional beekeeper. They graduated with a Master of Science in Entomology from University of Illinois in May 2024, where they studied honeybee foraging, though Suresh also has a passion for native pollinators and plants. They're thrilled to utilize their skills as an educator and scientist to support programs within the community.



Sreelakshmi Suresh

Office support assistant joins Effingham County

Kurtis Cameron joined Effingham County in November 2024 as an office support assistant. He was raised in Shelbyville with his younger brother. Cameron graduated with a bachelor's degree in human biology and physiology from Logan Chiropractic College in 2017 and is currently working on a master's degree in higher education for student affairs. Cameron's passion for helping students blossomed after spending 2022 as an English teacher for kindergarten through eighth-grade students in South Korea.



Kurtis Cameron

SNAP-Ed/EFNEP team receive national award

SNAP-Ed Educator Michelle Fombelle and the SNAP-Ed team received a first-place SNAP-Ed/EFNEP national award at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Showcase of Excellence in Tucson, Arizona. The award recognizes outstanding evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions and projects for persons eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or low-income families, particularly those with young children. The award honors exceptional nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions and projects through complementary direct education, multi-level interventions, and community and public health approaches to improve nutrition.



Michelle Fombelle

Educator receives community award

4-H Educator Kasey Kemme was selected as a Top Community Leader Under 40. Through this award, the Effingham County Chamber of Commerce recognizes individuals who make a difference in the community. It's given to those who possess empathy, the ability to inspire, strong communication skills, and pride in their community.



Kasey Kemme

Staff member recognized for years of service

Erin Maxwell was recognized for 20 years of service in the SNAP-Ed program in Clay County at the Illinois Nutrition Education Program Conference. Maxwell has been working in Clay County since July 2002, first as Extra Help and then as a SNAP-Education community worker beginning in June 2004.



Erin Maxwell



Staff Spotlight: Patty Edwards makes big impact in 18 months

“It’s not where you work; it’s who you work with that makes a job worth going to,” is what Extension colleagues say about Patty Edwards, who joined Extension in March 2023. Since then, she has been an asset to the SNAP-Ed team. She has a heart of gold and a passion for making a difference in her community. A “hot mess” is how she often refers to herself. However, that is only because she is involved in so many things. No matter how busy she is, she always carries a smile and laughter with her wherever she goes.

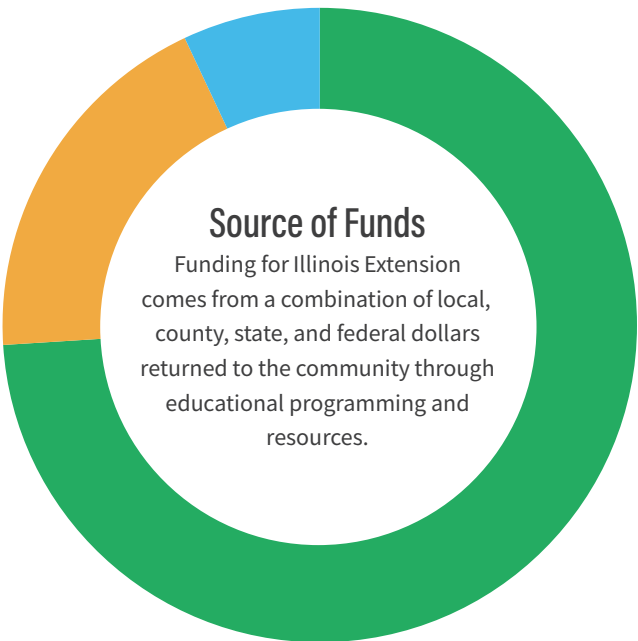
In a short 18 months, Edwards is programming in all four Fayette County schools and four food pantries. She has reached 1,057 participants through 146 sessions. She is also excited to be back at FOCUS & New Approach, sharing nutrition education through Serving Up My Plate. Edwards has also gained new partners within Fayette County that were once difficult to secure due to her positive attitude and easy-going nature. She is often a resource for programming in Fayette County, offering advice on who to contact. Due to her outgoing and naturally funny personality, she knows a lot of people in the community. If she doesn’t know the answer, she will make a few phone calls to acquaintances willing to help her, knowing she would do the same for them. She not only promotes SNAP-Ed in a professional manner but also personally through posting photos on social media showing her love for her job.



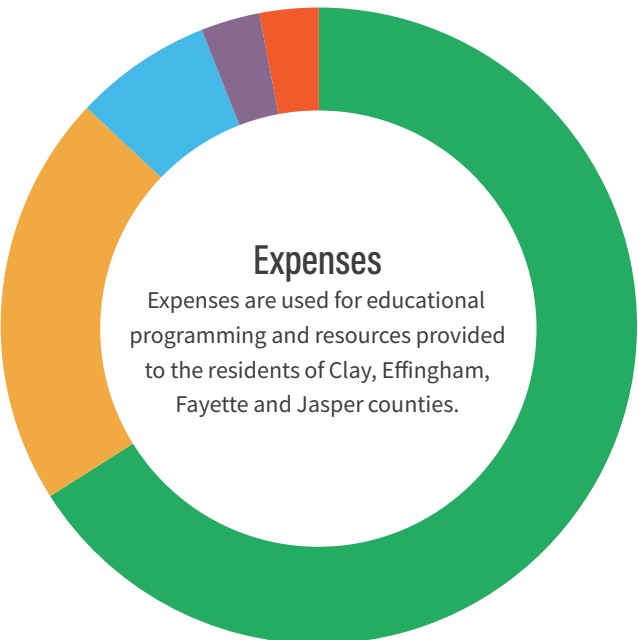
Patty Edwards provides SNAP-Ed programming to students in Fayette County schools.

Community partners have quickly become big fans of her, including public shout-outs on social media. CEFS Fayette County Food Pantry “was thrilled to have Patty Edwards from U of I Extension in our office. THANK YOU, Patty! You are amazing, and we value you and all the knowledge that you brought yesterday!”

I love my job because working with kids just brings me joy. Seeing lightbulbs go off when they start catching on is simply the best.
Patty Edwards



Amount	Source
74%	State funding
19%	Local funding
7%	Federal Funding



Amount	Source
66%	Personnel
21%	Programming
7%	Facilities/Utilities
3%	Travel
3%	Other

STAFF

Ginger Boas
Interim County Director

Michelle Fombelle
SNAP-Ed Educator

Kasey Kemme
4-H Youth Development
Educator

Sreelakshmi Suresh
Horticulture Educator

Patti Logan
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Megan Pierson
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Olivia Snyder
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Katie Turkal
4-H Youth Development
Program Coordinator

Patty Edwards
SNAP-Ed Community Worker

Erin Maxwell
SNAP-Ed Community Worker

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Office Support Specialist

Natty Aumiller
Office Support Assistant

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If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, please contact the event coordinator. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your needs.

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