

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

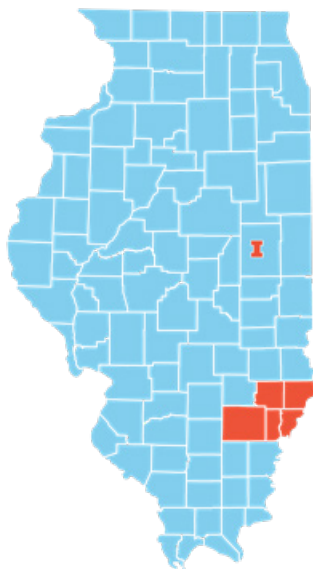


Serving Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Tara Buerster
County Director



Extension is making big strides, locally and statewide

In 2024, University of Illinois Extension, serving Edwards, Richland, Lawrence, Wabash, and Wayne counties, engaged with 857 4-H members, provided 769 educational sessions, and saw a significant increase in overall program attendance within in our five-county area. Wow! As always, this would not be possible without the support of our local community governments, partnering organizations, generous donors, and dedicated volunteers. While locally, we've celebrated another year of growth, Extension is also making big strides at the state level.

This fall, Illinois Extension launched a new strategic plan, the driving force behind Extension's programming for the next 10 years. Eight new priorities target key areas of community, economy, environment, food and agriculture, health, partnerships, technology and discovery, and workforce excellence. However, the mission of Extension remains the same: "to develop educational programs, extend knowledge, and build partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments as part of the state's land grant institution."

To further support this new initiative, our unit is expanding resources and providing more education in our communities by adding a new SNAP-Ed educator for the five-county unit. We've also added a marketing and communications program coordinator to assist with our marketing efforts and increase awareness of and participation in Extension's programs. Our unit is excited to grow and transition towards these new priorities while continuing to meet the needs of our local communities.

Now, I am asking you a simple favor. I encourage you to review this report and share Extension's impact in your community with friends, family, and coworkers. Inspire them to reach out about 4-H opportunities for their children, attend a training or workshop, follow us on Facebook, and visit our website at extension.illinois.edu/elrww. There, you'll learn more about our local programs and may browse Extension's vast, researched-based information and resources. As a result, may we invite a new 4-H member, support a new local business, prepare more students for the workforce, and more in the year 2025.

Tara Buerster, Extension county director

Cover photo:
Pollinator Plot in Wayne County.

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



4-H provides opportunities for ALL youth

No Limits Livestock Show is an all-inclusive swine show where youth swine exhibitors team up with individuals who have intellectual or physical disabilities to allow them the opportunity to show a pig.

Lawrence and surrounding county 4-H members stepped into the show ring and shared their swine show skills while assisting with the first No Limits Livestock Show that took place at the Lawrence County Fairgrounds in June. 4-H members enrolled in swine served as mentors to youth with disabilities. Mentors taught show ring techniques and how to prepare a pig for show.

While the focus in a show ring is usually on evaluating the physical conformation of a pig, this event was more about opportunity, building friendships, and gaining a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Participants received an opportunity to shine in the ring with the pig and receive a grand champion ribbon for their mastery of skills.

Future plans are to expand farther within the state and to increase the number of participants. The event may expand into other species as well.

In the future, we hope to open this event to more counties and be a guide to others who would like to create this opportunity across the state.

Maisie McClure, Lawrence County 4-H program coordinator

This event was a great learning experience for all involved, and an impact was made within the youth. We are excited to provide more opportunities such as this to the youth of our communities.

Samantha Gaither, Extension 4-H youth development educator



4-H members Gracie and DJ Brashear discuss with Nikolai Ramsey their plan for inside the show ring.



4-H member DJ Brashear shows Nikolai Ramsey how to brush a pig as they prepare to go into the show ring.



4-H members and leaders embody the mission of 4-H, told by parents Shaun and Andrea Gress

In 2011, our 2-year-old son, Westin, became very sick with viral encephalitis. A few weeks later, while still recovering in the hospital, he developed worsening symptoms and was diagnosed with autoimmune encephalitis. He spent 109 days in the hospital receiving antiviral treatment, immunotherapy, and therapy services. His illnesses were treated successfully, but he was left with an acute brain injury that affected multiple parts of his brain. He's made a remarkable recovery over the years but continues to battle epilepsy.

A couple of years ago, his dad bought a few Boer goats to clean up our woods. Westin and his sister, Becca, took an immediate liking to them. As our herd grew, so did the bond between them and the goats. We eventually decided to enroll Westin and his sister in a local 4-H group. They worked hard all year caring for, conditioning, and grooming their goats in anticipation of the 4-H livestock show held in July. Unfortunately, Westin developed severe side effects in June from a new seizure medication. Despite our efforts to mitigate his symptoms, they were still present when it was time for the show. We became discouraged, thinking he might miss the opportunity to display months of preparation and hard work. We were so thankful when another 4-H member, Taygen Rotman, agreed to assist Westin in the show arena. Others offered their support as well, including members and leaders, to help Westin succeed. It's because of their compassion and generosity that he was able to experience his first goat show.

He enjoyed competing with his peers and won several awards doing so, including Reserve Grand Champion Jr. Showman. The biggest takeaway, however, was experiencing the servant hearts and hands of our 4-H community during a time of need. Our family is grateful for their heartfelt service, and we hope to be able to pay it forward in the years to come.



Westin and his helper, Taygen, walk his goat around the ring during the goat show.



Students work on the cup-stacking challenge.



Students succeed with STEM

4-H offers a variety of in-school programming, and among them is content related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, also known as STEM. As a result, students are being prepared to enter a society and workforce spearheaded by technology.

STEM programming was provided over many months to fourth grade classes in Lawrenceville, known as First Fridays in STEM, and to seventh grade classes at St. Joe Catholic School in Olney. During each class, students were divided into groups and given a STEM challenge to complete. Students were responsible for approaching the challenge with a plan.

Examples of engineering-based challenges included using materials like spaghetti and marshmallows, popsicle sticks and glue, or gum drops and toothpicks to build towers, bridges, and houses designed for height or strength.

Encouraging students to think like engineers, design items with limited resources, and work together to complete a project may ignite a desire to pursue a career in STEM or simply exercise skills and creative processes they may not normally have the chance to.



372 students

are better prepared for overall financial health through the 4-H Welcome to the Real World program



628 students

were challenged by STEM-related programs



48 4-H programs

provided to local schools. Because many programs meet with classes more than once, the number of times Extension met in schools is well beyond 50.

Health Fest encourages healthy decisions

Youth face challenges every day that concern their health. They have several choices to make with regard to substance abuse, peer pressure, and mental health, and sometimes those decisions are tough.

The Lawrence County Health Department and Lawrence County 4-H collaborated to create Health Fest for the sixth graders of Lawrence County. At Health Fest, youth moved through eight stations that taught them about the effects of substance abuse, vaping, how stress can affect them, proper hygiene, and who and what can influence their decisions.

Another topic was making good decisions and finding a trusted adult they could confide in. Having the Lawrence County 4-H youth ambassadors present helped the sixth graders connect with role models they can look up to and seek advice from.

Throughout the day, several youths proclaimed they were going to discuss the dangers of smoking and vaping and how social media can affect a person with their parents, siblings, and friends. Youth also stated that they had never thought about the music they listen to and how it could influence their decision to explore drugs or alcohol.

The Lawrence County Health Department and 4-H office heard positive feedback from school administration, county board members, and the public who attended the day. This was such a success that the program will be repeated next year.

Students refine skills needed for the workforce

Preparing for a job interview, let alone the workforce, can be daunting for any high school student. The Illinois 4-H Ready4Work program, hosted at Edwards County High School this fall, strives to set students up for success when it comes to both.

Throughout eight sessions, students became more familiar with subjects and situations they'll come across in the workplace. On a personal level, they learned how to manage their time effectively, what personal accountability looks like, and how to set S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based) goals. To prepare them for interviews, students created their resumes, reviewed the levels of professional attire expected in different job settings, and even practiced tying a tie. Finally, community members served on a panel during mock interviews, allowing students to put it all into practice in a no-pressure situation.

Students now have the foundation necessary to stand out amongst their peers in an interview while succeeding as an individual and teammate once hired.





Hatching chicks builds excitement and responsibility

The embryology program provides students with a unique, hands-on learning experience that combines science education with real-world agricultural concepts. Over the 21-day incubation period, students learn about the parts of chicken eggs, the chicken embryo life cycle, the steps in the incubation process, and the poultry industry. This program also instills a sense of responsibility as students care for the fertilized eggs, ensuring the precise conditions required for successful hatching.

After hatching, students name and interact with the chicks, which remain in the classroom for a few days before being sent to a farm. This initiative not only educates students about food production and agriculture but also addresses grand challenges such as thriving youth through responsibility and food production by exploring the poultry industry. As a highlight of the school year, the program generates excitement throughout the building and raises awareness of Extension programs in the community.



A student stretches slime made of glue, baking soda, contact solution, and shaving cream.



Chemical change creates slime

When local teachers asked for more science content, Logan Kennard, Wabash County 4-H program coordinator and former science teacher, did just that.

Kennard took fundamental science principles and turned them into a fun lesson for third grade students in Mt. Carmel. He began his lesson with an overview of physical and chemical changes in science, reviewing specific characteristics of each.

Then, following a recipe of common household items, students produced a chemical change while making something everyone their age loves — slime. What a great way to get students excited about science too.

Food Challenge develops healthy habits

When young adults are taught basic nutrition, how to safely prepare a meal, and the importance of consuming foods from all food groups, they can achieve a more healthy, balanced diet. According to the Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [Impacts and Return on Investment Report](#), SNAP-Ed programming helps reduce obesity and disease, among many other long-term health benefits.

Extension hosted the Richland County Food Challenge with approximately 45 high school students to reinforce these practices. Each day, students were teamed up and challenged to create a meal using specific ingredients and foods from every food group, including fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy. Judges then selected the best pizza, omelet, pasta, and other meals prepared by the teams.

The top team competed at the Illinois Food Challenge in Decatur, and took home second place. However, the real win was when students shared that they used the skills gained in the classroom to prepare healthier meals at home.

Extension provides demonstration on eclipse

The total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024, was not only a huge tourism attraction for Southern Illinois but also an excellent opportunity for education centered around the rare phenomenon. Ryan Littlejohn, Wayne County 4-H program coordinator, captivated students and staff with an enlightening solar eclipse program at Wayne City Grade School. The program, which was held in the third through eighth grade classes, featured an engaging presentation that detailed the science and significance of solar eclipses.

Students learned how solar eclipses happen, the different types of eclipses, and the historical and cultural impact of these celestial events. Visual aids helped bring the topic to life, making complex astronomical concepts accessible and exciting for the young audience. 4-H staff emphasized the importance of safety when viewing a solar eclipse, demonstrating the proper use of eclipse glasses and other protective equipment.

Students were thrilled to participate in hands-on activities, such as creating their own pinhole projectors and simulating the eclipse with models of the Earth, moon, and sun. These interactive elements helped reinforce their understanding and left them eager for the upcoming eclipse. The program was met with widespread acclaim from students and teachers, who praised it as both educational and entertaining.





Young chefs thrive at Illinois Junior Chef

Young chefs are more likely to consider and prepare healthy meals at home when introduced to basic cooking techniques like measuring and mixing ingredients, chopping and peeling foods, and following a recipe.

Students learned these basic skills and kitchen safety while at Illinois Junior Chefs, a signature program offered by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education. The IJC cooking school was hosted in Edwards, Richland, and Wayne counties as a week-long program. Students also learned about MyPlate, a program that teaches how to achieve a balanced diet and how to prepare meals and snacks such as vegetable pizza, chicken strips, banana pudding in a bag, and more.

After the program, students received a set of kitchen utensils and a cookbook to continue building their cooking skills. One participant, Lyndsey, wrote, “This is an amazing class, 10/10, and I would love to do this next summer.”



413

Nutrition classes provided in 2024



1,456

Participants provided SNAP education and resources



49

Partnerships between SNAP-Ed programs and schools, food pantries, and other organizations

North Side Elementary School students love nutrition

Whether it's to teach the OrganWise Guys curriculum in kindergarten and first grade or the Serving Up MyPlate curriculum to third graders, students at North Side School look forward to nutrition classes. This became apparent to Jane Jones, Wayne and Edwards County SNAP-Ed community worker, as she walked the hallways to arrive for a scheduled class. As students approached her, they would ask her who she was visiting that day and when was she coming to their class, showing an interest and excitement for learning more about nutrition.

In the classroom, students were always anxious to share what new food they had tried or when they chose a healthier food option. They were anxious to learn more about food and its benefits. One student shared a story about visiting the doctor with her grandfather and seeing Hardy Heart on the shelf. She connected the OrganWise, a SNAP-Ed program, stuffed heart character with a heart model at the doctor's office. Many lessons introduce a basic concept that sparks a desire for more learning. The lessons tie into language, arts, math, science, and other core learning standards.

Studies have shown that small changes can have big impacts over time. This holds true whether it is a change in money habits, communication habits, cleaning habits, or others. Small steps toward eating healthier can reap positive changes in overall health. This can start by introducing basic healthy eating concepts to children and continue through their lifetime. Together, the partnership between North Side Elementary School and Illinois Extension Nutrition Education programs can influence the children who will become tomorrow's leaders.





RESIDENTS LEARN TIPS FOR EATING WELL WHILE SPENDING LESS

With the rising cost of food, it's helpful to hear ideas for saving money on groceries and learn new ways to prepare meals and snacks. Knowing that residents living at an apartment complex in Olney may benefit from such a program, Illinois Extension hosted a Create Better Health class for their residents.

During class, SNAP-Ed Community Worker Kirby Hunt recommended specific ingredients and foods to keep stocked in a pantry that are both commonly used in recipes and great to buy in bulk. She also shared ideas for healthy snacks, like apples and peanut butter, and hummus and bagels. Lastly, to avoid throwing out expired food, she shared how to keep a pantry organized, being mindful of ingredients that have upcoming expiration dates.

With these tips and more, residents were prepared to create healthy meals with ingredients in their pantry while hopefully keeping a few extra dollars in their pockets each month.



DELICIOUS DISCOVERIES WERE MADE AT SUMMER COOKING CAMP

This summer, the Delicious Discoveries Cooking Camp was the ultimate destination for young aspiring chefs in the North Wayne School District. Specifically designed for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, the camp offered a delectable journey into the world of cooking, flavors, and fun, combining culinary adventures with youthful creativity. Wayne County 4-H Program Coordinator Ryan Littlejohn and the Wayne County SNAP-Ed Community Worker Jane Jones created a world of science experiments, physical activity, and cooking for youth to explore.

Delicious Discoveries Cooking Camp believes the kitchen is a playground where imagination thrives and palates expand. Throughout the week-long camp, participants explored various culinary techniques and recipes, from baking sweet treats to creating savory dishes. The camp emphasizes the importance of fresh ingredients, balanced nutrition, and food safety. The camp also incorporated physical activities to keep the energy levels high and to emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle.



EXTENSION PARTNERS FOR SAFETY DAY

The Wayne County Extension office partnered with the Wayne County Farm Bureau at their annual fourth grade Safety Day in Fairfield. Extension conducted both a poison look-alike safety station and a safety session all about water. Ensuring students understand the importance of water in various aspects is important for their overall health.

During the Why Water Wins station, students learned about dehydration, staying hydrated through food and drinks, and how water impacts cleanliness and personal hygiene. Extension staff used the Glow Bug activity to reinforce the importance of good handwashing visually. Using a spray to represent germs, students placed their hands under a black light to see the germs on their hands. After washing, students placed their hands back under the light to see how many germs they left behind.

Through its partnership with Safety Day, Extension not only provided valuable safety tips related to water but also connected with approximately 190 students who currently do not receive SNAP-Ed programming.





Flowerbeds at the Edwards County Memorial Plaza that were planted and maintained by local Master Gardeners.



Master Gardeners share their talents

The local Master Gardeners group is a small but mighty one. Together, and with the assistance of community and 4-H members, they worked on various projects to beautify their communities and establish new local pollinator plots.

At the Edwards County Fairgrounds, they created a pollinator and succulent garden featuring a walking path, encouraging passersby to admire their work and learn more about pollinator plants. With the help of 4-H members, they also planted and maintained the flowerbeds in preparation for the annual fair.

In the heart of Albion, you would see their work all around with flowerpots full of beautifully curated flowers along business fronts, brightening the downtown area. Two memorials also received their expert touch, with a refresh and weeding at the Angel of Hope memorial and planted red, white, and blue petunias at the Edwards County Memorial Plaza.

They also maintained the flowerbeds at the Moravian Cemetery in West Salem and assisted Local Food Systems and Small Farms Educator Katie Bell with the Wayne County pollinator garden and ginger-growing project.

Their work brings awareness to the Master Gardener program and educates the public on subjects that may not be commonly known, like pollinator plants and gardens. The local Master Gardeners deserve applause for sharing their expertise and volunteering their time in their local communities.



\$9,493

The value of Master Gardener volunteer hours donated in 2024

Successful growing season produces 18 pounds of ginger

Illinois Extension educators are working to expand specialty crop production across the state. Fresh ginger may not be the first crop that comes to mind when considering high-value produce, but it could be a valuable addition to the rotation for some Illinois farmers.

Zingiber officinale roscoe, edible ginger, is an herbaceous perennial typically grown in the tropics for its spicy roots called rhizomes. Almost all U.S. commercial ginger production is in Hawaii. While ginger needs a long growing season with warm tropical temperatures and steady rainfall, “baby ginger” can be produced in Illinois’s shorter growing season.

A team of Illinois Extension educators is developing best practices for fresh market baby ginger in Illinois. The research trail will utilize grant funds to provide seed and supplies to educators and farmers participating in the research across Illinois. The Wayne County Extension office will serve as the southeastern research site for the 2025 growing season.



Ginger that was harvested from Wayne County caterpillar tunnel.

During the 2024 growing season, 18 pounds of fresh ginger were grown in a caterpillar tunnel at the Wayne County Extension office. A caterpillar tunnel is a seasonal extension structure made of metal hoops covered with durable clear plastic; these semi-permanent structures are named for their resemblance to long caterpillars. The tunnel provides a warm and humid environment where ginger thrives and allows for a controlled growing environment.

The baby or immature ginger was weighed and then used for an educational program in Richland County about growing and cooking ginger. Attendees participated in a canning demonstration led by Nutrition and Wellness Educator Mary Liz Wright and each took home a jar of pickled ginger.



The 2024 Annie's Project graduating class displays their certificates.



Annie's Project empowers women in agriculture

While women have historically played a key role in agriculture, they are often under-supported and under-recognized. Women in agriculture can find themselves feeling alone and without good educational resources. There is also a lack of risk management education for women in agriculture. Family farms are a staple in rural Illinois, but risk management is often overlooked.

In the male-dominated agriculture industry, women may not feel confident to ask questions, provide input, or make management decisions. Today, managing risk on the family farm is key to a thriving agricultural business. Without the support of Extension, women in agriculture may not be empowered to speak up with new ideas or make hard decisions with confidence.

Annie's Project is an agribusiness education course for women. In February, 13 women from Richland, Edwards, Wabash, and Wayne counties met once a week for six weeks in Albion for the spring 2024 Annie's Project. The participants learned about the five areas of agricultural risk management: production, risk marketing risk, financial risk, legal risk, and human resource risk. All attendees had the opportunity to ask questions from loan officers, attorneys, and grain merchandisers. Annie's Project participants gained local contacts with farmer resource organizations like Illinois Extension, Farm Business Farm Management, and the Farm Service Agency.

Through 18 hours of coursework, participants learned business skills, built connections with local agencies, and developed life-long friendships with classmates. Graduates gained new communication skills, learned about stress management, and received resources for developing comprehensive disaster management plans. Women who participated in Annie's Project indicated increased confidence when dealing with issues related to agribusiness and the confidence to continue working in agriculture.

Pollinator plot takes off

Pollinator decline is a globally recognized issue linked to several factors, including the loss of habitats. Accidental damage to habitats can be caused by well-meaning individuals with poorly timed mowings or off-target insecticide applications. Modern-day landscapes and monoculture agriculture systems often don't provide a variety of food sources throughout the seasons or adequate shelter for overwintering. The lack of local education and resources limits community involvement in preserving pollinator habitats. Homeowners are often overwhelmed by the amount of information regarding pollinator habitat preservation or establishment as well.



Katie Bell plants in the pollinator plot.

Without pollinator education, habitats will continue to be lost, directly contributing to further pollinator decline. Pollinators play a key role in our food system, directly and indirectly contributing to the production of a third of the foods and drinks we consume. These keystone species are not only important as pollinators but also serve as a food source for other insects, birds, and mammals.

The Wayne County Pollinator Garden was refurbished in the Summer of 2024 through a Wayne County Farm Bureau Community Impact Grant. The grant-assisted project established live plants, mulched areas, and demonstration areas. Katie Bell, local foods and small farms educator, designed and implemented the native pollinator garden as a teaching tool for adults and youth in Wayne County. The pollinator garden will serve as a living laboratory for 4-H members, Master Gardeners, and community members to observe pollinators and native plants. Visitors to the garden can identify insects and native plants and interact with an active pollinator site. Providing education and demonstration areas makes pollinator habitats more approachable to beginners and students.

As a result of this project, 2,400 square feet of permanent pollinator habitats were established. The renovated space has already beautified the location, and it will continue to educate community members about the value of pollinators and their habitats. Nineteen different species of native plants were established to provide food and habitats for various pollinators. Numerous wasps, butterflies, bees, birds, and even monarch caterpillars have made use of the newly planted gardens. An example of each plant is labeled with the plant name and a QR code for easy identification by community members. The garden would not have been possible without the help of Extension employees, Master Gardeners, and volunteers. The Wayne County pollinator garden will be used for demonstration, educational programming, and as a resource for the community.



LIVESTOCK JUDGING CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH ENTERING COLLEGE

Learning to evaluate livestock is not only a skill that will assist youth in the show ring but also may create a pathway to a career. Fifteen teens spent many hours studying and participating in live workouts to improve their skills for an impressive judging season. The team accomplished being the High team overall twice during the Illinois Junior College All Around Contest in addition to earning a third overall, fifth overall, and tenth overall finish. The team excelled in the sheep and goats division at every contest. In the end, four team members placed in the top 15 out of 900 youth who participated in the Illinois Junior College All Around Contest. Each contest gave youth the opportunity to not only evaluate livestock but also explore junior colleges as well. Three team members will also continue livestock judging together in college, thanks to this experience.



YOUTH GET BACK TO THE BASICS WITH COOKING 101

Cooking 101 is a new 4-H program that was hosted in Edwards County over a period of five months. Every month, participants were taught a new skill before preparing a recipe. They learned the basics of food safety, kitchen safety and cleanliness, knife skills, measuring ingredients, food groups, essential nutrients, and food sources. Additionally, they learned how to set a proper table. The youth worked in groups to prepare different recipes, including fruit salad, omelets, salsa, muffins, and pasta salad. The program concluded with a showcase for parents to taste the recipes that the youth had prepared over the past several months. On the final day of the program, the participants arrived early to prepare the dishes and set up the tables. An hour later, the parents and family members arrived, allowing the kids to share this experience with their families.



SEWING WORKSHOP DEVELOPS NEW SKILLS

In an exciting development for young crafters and aspiring seamstresses, Wayne County 4-H held a unique workshop that combined the art of sewing with the fun of creating a personal fidget toy. The event, aimed at youth ages 8 to 18, was an engaging session where participants learned the basics of sewing through a hands-on project: making a marble maze. The marble maze project is not only a beginner-friendly introduction to sewing but also results in a fascinating fidget toy that participants took home and even held races with. This sewn maze provides endless hours of tactile entertainment, making it both a productive and playful endeavor. Thank you to Sheila Zurliene for spending the day helping teach the workshop! The workshop was a fun-filled day of learning, crafting, and community building, echoing 4-H's commitment to developing skills in young people that last a lifetime.



4-H SERVES SWEET GESTURE ON PI DAY

Pi Day is celebrated on March 14 because the mathematical value of pi is 3.14, and it is the perfect excuse to celebrate the day with real pies. Edwards County 4-H members participated in a Pi Day community service project, delivering pies to community members in the county who they felt were important to them. The evening before Pi Day, Blue Ribbon 4-H club leaders Debbie Fearn and Hayley Kelsey hosted a pie-making workshop. During the workshop, members learned how to make homemade crust and put fruit fillings in the pies. Then, they took the pies home to bake and prepare for delivery the next day. In total, around 20 pies were delivered to various parts of the county. Each delivery was made with a smile, and the recipients were pleasantly surprised. Community service is a significant aspect of 4-H, and members come up with creative ways to show residents that they are an important part of their well-being and happiness.





Dean Germán Bollero visits local Extension

Life in rural, southeastern Illinois differs in many ways compared to life in the suburbs and cities of Illinois. In the city, one may hop on the bus and take a quick ride to the grocery store for a few items, while in southern Illinois, public transportation and a nearby grocery store can be hard to find.

So, when University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Dean Germán Bollero, Director of Extension Shelly Nickols-Richardson, and other guests from the university and state Extension office decided to visit Edwards County, local Extension staff were excited to showcase how Extension and local businesses are helping residents address food access concerns in a variety of ways.



Heather Spray shows off produce during tour of Joy Lane Produce.

In the spirit of such, a lunch using local ingredients was catered by local caterer, Mama's Little Kitchen. Hannah Argueta and Jaclyn Caldwell, owners and bakers of Mama and Mrs. Sweet Treats in Mt. Erie, were also invited to speak about their business and how Extension helped them become familiar with the cottage foods regulations.

After lunch, the group met with Andrew and Heather Spray, owners of Joy Lane Produce in West Salem. The Sprays have also utilized University and Extension resources since starting their hydroponic greenhouse. Their operation provides fresh produce, such as lettuce, spinach, and more, to local residents via onsite sales while distributing regionally to restaurants and markets.

The visit was an excellent opportunity to discuss local programs and showcase how information and resources available through Extension have helped develop local businesses that go on to impact their local communities further.



Extension staff with Dean Germán Bollero at Andrew and Heather Spray's greenhouse.



Extension staff recognized at conference

Jane Jones and Ryan Littlejohn received awards at the Illinois Extension Annual Conference in November. Jones, a Wayne and Edwards counties SNAP-Ed community worker, was recognized with the Individual Extension Excellence award. Littlejohn, Wayne County 4-H program coordinator, was recognized as a member of the 4-H professional development team with the Team Excellence award.

As a SNAP-Ed community worker, Jones provides nutrition education and resources by facilitating workshops for local housing authorities, school programs in Edwards and Wayne counties, and hosting cooking schools for area youth. Jones was recognized for her diligence in advancing the mission of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program through connections with local organizations and food pantries, as well as her participation in local community health events. Jones has been with Illinois Extension since 2021.

Littlejohn serves as the Wayne County 4-H youth development program coordinator and joined Illinois Extension in 2022. As a member of the 4-H professional development team, he was recognized for his collaboration in spearheading a new initiative called Campapalooza. This professional development opportunity empowered 4-H educators and coordinators statewide to advocate for opportunities at 4-H Memorial Camp through a camp-like learning and networking experience.



Tara Buerster presented certificates to Ryan Littlejohn and Jane Jones at annual conference.



Tara Buerster congratulates Jessica Simpson with a certificate.

Jessica Simpson receives Meritorious Support Service Award

Jessica Simpson was awarded the Meritorious Support Service Award by the Illinois Alpha Nu Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi, a professional organization for Extension employees.

Simpson started her career with Extension in 2012 and serves as the Office Support Associate for the Wayne County Extension office. Simpson was nominated for her willingness to go the extra mile, assisting with additional fiscal, civil rights, and marketing duties while expanding her skillsets to support specific projects. She's instrumental in helping the unit and local programs understand how to support Wayne County best. Her commitment to supporting her coworkers, Extension, and community stands out.



New employees join Extension. Welcome!



Meet Rileigh Lear, Marketing and communications program coordinator

Rileigh Lear joined Illinois Extension as the marketing and communications program coordinator serving Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne counties.

Lear is an alumna of the University of Southern Indiana, receiving her Bachelor of Science in public relations and advertising. She comes to Extension with experience in higher education, sales, and several years of expertise in event planning and management. Outside of work, she volunteers with the University of Southern Indiana Alumni Council and is a Junior League of Evansville member.



Meet Kit McDonald, SNAP-Ed community worker

Kit McDonald joined Illinois Extension as a SNAP-Ed community outreach worker serving Wabash and Lawrence counties. McDonald will provide education and resources that support balanced nutrition and overall health and wellness through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

McDonald is a certified family and community development specialist and previously worked with Wabash Area Development Inc. as a Head Start teacher. McDonald looks forward to connecting with local families, schools, and community partners to create healthier communities and brighter outcomes for future generations.

McDonald resides in Mt. Carmel with her husband, two sons, and family pets. She enjoys crocheting, swimming, reading, and, as she puts it, “attempting to have a green thumb.”

Extension Council Members

Jim Brewer - Chair
(2024-2025)
Lawrence County

Kimberly Fisher - Vice-Chair
(2024-2025)
Lawrence County

Justine Basnett - Secretary
(2024-2025)
Wayne County

Karissa Anderson
Wabash County

Paul Bruinsma
Wayne County

Haleigh Buchanan
Wabash County

Julie Clodfelter
Richland County

Seth Clodfelter
Richland County

Megan Daugherty
Lawrence County

Michelle Piller
Edwards County

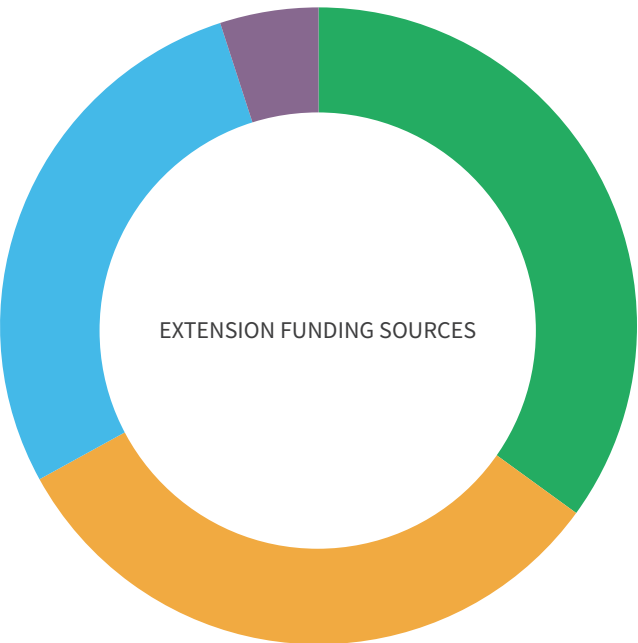
Tonya Potts
Wabash County

Andrea Puckett
Richland County

Doug Raber
Edwards County

Lily Simpson
Wayne County

Matthew St. Ledger
Edwards County



Amount	Source
35%	County Board funding
32%	Federal funding
28%	State funding
5%	Local funding

STAFF

Tara Buerster County Director	Maisie McClure 4-H Program Coordinator	Debbie Buchanan Office Support Assistant	Extra Help- Office Support
Katie Bell Local Food Systems & Small Farms Educator	Kirby Hunt SNAP- Ed Community Worker	Alizah Harper Office Support Assistant	Lydia Anderson
Samantha Gaither 4-H Youth Development Educator	Jane Jones SNAP- Ed Community Worker	Dana Hart Office Support Associate	Annie Buckles
Debra Collier 4-H Program Coordinator	Kit McDonald SNAP- Ed Community Worker	Sheri Pitts Office Support Assistant	Lauren Russell
Logan Kennard 4-H Program Coordinator	Raleigh Lear Marketing & Communications Program Coordinator	Jessica Simpson Office Support Associate	Renee Smith
Ryan Littlejohn 4-H Program Coordinator	Theresa Reid Office Support Specialist, Fiscal		Deb Sterchi
			Debbie Webb

OFFICE INFORMATION

Edwards County Extension Office

7 N. Fifth St.
Albion, IL 62806
(618) 445-2934
Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 4:30 PM
(Closed Noon - 1 PM)

Richland County Extension Office

306 S. Fair Street
Olney, IL 62450
(618) 395-2191
Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 4:30 PM
(Closed Noon - 1 PM)

Wayne County Extension Office

2B Frontier Drive
Fairfield, IL 62837
(618) 842-3702
Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 4:30 PM
(Closed Noon - 1 PM)

Lawrence County Extension Office

10722 Cherry Blvd.
Lawrenceville, IL 62439
(618) 943-5018
Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 4:30 PM
(Closed Noon - 1 PM)

Wabash County Extension Office

738 N. Market St.
Mt. Carmel, IL 62863
(618) 262-5725
Tuesday-Thursday, 8 AM to 4:30 PM
(Closed Noon - 1 PM)
Monday & Friday, by appointment

ONLINE



Edwards County 4-H
facebook.com/EdwardsCounty4H

Wabash County 4-H
facebook.com/WabashCounty4H

Main Office Page
facebook.com/UIExtELRWW

Lawrence County 4-H
facebook.com/4HLawrenceCounty

Wayne County 4-H
facebook.com/wayne.county.il.4h

Richland County 4-H
facebook.com/RichlandCountyIllinois4H

Master Gardener
facebook.com/MasterGardenerELRWW



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Local Extension Councils Cooperating.
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

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

The Illinois Nutrition Education Programs are funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.