



Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

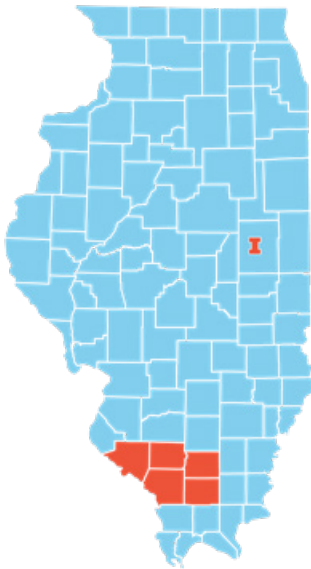


Serving Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Lynn Heins
County Director



Welcome

Welcome to University of Illinois Extension in Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties. It is my privilege to lead a team of dedicated staff and volunteers who provide reliable, research-based programs to audiences across all demographics within our communities. This work would not be possible without the support of partners and stakeholders like you.

Our organization unveiled a new strategic plan this year. Our mission statement captures our broad and enduring purpose, which is 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.

We are your educational partner that addresses issues surrounding food, health, economy, environment, community, technology, and partnerships. We do this through the program areas of 4-H youth development, agriculture and agribusiness, community and economic development, family and consumer sciences, integrated health disparities, and natural resources, environment, and energy.

This year, staff from Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties delivered 1,584 educational programs to 48,046 participants. Participants engaged with Illinois Extension in a variety of ways, including agriculture and horticulture programs, direct nutrition programs in classrooms, book walks, mobile teaching kitchens, 4-H youth development programs in classrooms, 4-H clubs and shows, family life programs, educational booths at community and partner events, and so much more.

The work outlined in this impact report would not be possible without community partnerships and strong support from county boards, 4-H and Extension foundations, home and community education associations, county farm bureaus, Farm Credit of Illinois, and individual and business contributions. I am pleased to share this brief impact report highlighting Extension's local work. Thank you for your continued support.

Lynn Heins
County Extension Director

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to eight strategic priorities:



Community



Health



Economy



Partnerships



Environment



Technology and Discovery



Food and Agriculture



Workforce Excellence

2024 Engagement

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

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

Partnerships

Resource Generation

5,563 Program Volunteers	266 Community Gardens	2,922 School and Community Partners	\$15,735,213 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$514,316 Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated	\$4.7M+ External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners
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Farm to table homesteading series educates community



Nowadays, information is just a few clicks away, and while it is easy to quickly search for new information, there is a steady decline in knowledge of where food and resources come from. For the second year in a row, Extension offered a year-long Modern Homesteading series that featured a variety of hands-on, in-person, and virtual programs led by educators and industry professionals throughout the state.

The phrase “modern homesteading” has different meanings to different people, and there are many reasons why people choose to homestead. One reason is to live better by being more connected with the food and local resources you have. Because most homesteaded food is locally sourced, often just outside your back door, there is a smaller carbon footprint to get food to the table, and people have the satisfaction of knowing how their food was grown.

The program debunks the common myth that you have to own a large piece of land or be a dedicated farmer to practice homesteading skills. From planning and organization to prioritization and multitasking, the series empowered individuals to strike the perfect balance between homesteading tasks and everyday life commitments as they learned to grow, raise, and preserve their own food.



A participant practices placing a jar in a canning pot.



A participant at the apple pie making workshop shapes their crust.

Twenty unique programs were offered over the past year, covering a diverse range of topics and offering participants hands-on opportunities. While each program was a separate event in the series, many attendees returned for each event, eager to learn more. This year’s topics added hands-on opportunities, including a workshop where each participant made their own apple pie. Favorite program topics will return in 2025, along with additional more hands-on programs.

Programs featured in the 2024 series included:

- Growing fruit trees and small fruits
- Composting
- Canning
- Organic gardening
- Seed saving
- Soap making
- Permaculture
- Gardening for native bees and beekeeping
- Laying hens
- Growing herbs and cut flowers
- Fall gardening
- Understanding cottage food law
- Cover crops in the home garden
- Beginning sourdough
- Growing ginger in southern Illinois



Learn more about the series
go.illinois.edu/ModernHomesteading



Local volunteers honored for contributions to community



Local Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers stayed busy throughout the year, assisting Illinois Extension with various educational and volunteer opportunities. The Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs continued to grow, and this year had 24 Master Gardeners and 31 Master Naturalists. Volunteers spent their time at partner sites educating the public, collecting citizen science data, and providing garden and natural resource stewardship across southern Illinois.

During the 2024 Illinois Master Garden State Conference, volunteers Pam Appleton and Michael Biesk received the State Outstanding Master Gardener Award, and Sally Cook received the State Master Gardener Sustained Excellence Award. A State Master Gardener Teamwork Award was also given to Perry County Master Gardeners, including Jane Chapman, Sally Cook, Karen Glynn, Beverly Harsy, Don Harsy, Dustin Hatch, Ramona Hatch, Janet McClurken, Jon McClurken, Mary Jo Novak, and Pam Swallers.

These dedicated volunteers have made a significant impact on their communities, and their efforts continue to inspire and support the growth of gardening and natural resource stewardship throughout southern Illinois.



4,347

hours of volunteer work



\$145,564.62

Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Volunteer Value



Learn more about becoming a Master Gardener
go.illinois.edu/SouthernIllinoisMG



Participants on the Golden Hour Moth Stroll examine light traps for moths.

Moth Week highlights importance of nocturnal pollinators



Moth populations are on a steady decline. Unlike their colorful counterparts, moths are less vibrant and more abundant at night, causing them to receive less attention. Many are unaware of the important role moths play in local ecosystems. Assisting with pollination and acting as a main food source for nocturnal wildlife, moths are essential to southern Illinois habitats.

National Moth Week is held during the last week of July with a mission to promote understanding and appreciation of moths. Illinois Extension celebrated National Moth Week by holding various activities throughout the week, including a Golden Hour Moth Stroll at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. During the stroll, attendees learned how to attract moths and identify them. Light traps were set up so participants could see moths up close and learn the differences between moths and butterflies.

By bringing awareness to moths, people will learn to be more mindful around them and may plant pollinator-friendly gardens to support all pollinator populations. This increased awareness and action can help ensure the survival of these vital creatures and the health of our ecosystems.



Food donation garden harvests generosity

Rising prices at the grocery store have made it difficult for Americans to afford food where they live. The consequences of not having access to healthy food options have far-reaching implications affecting physical and mental well-being, cognitive development, and educational outcomes. Through collaboration with community partners, Extension maintained the Cultivating Care Donation Garden, a shared space for the community to grow. Volunteers helped with garden maintenance and upkeep during the growing season, including harvesting and delivering fresh produce. With continued support from the community, the garden grew and donated 863.8 pounds of food to the Salvation Army Food Pantry.



Local youth assist with harvesting herbs in the Cultivating Care Donation Garden.



Mobile food market brings fresh food to the community

When households experience low food security, they often reduce their food intake or skip meals, which can lead to increased health risks over time. Recognizing this need in their community, the Franklin County 4-H Hunger Ambassadors club launched a mobile food market in 2017. This initiative, in partnership with the St. Louis Area Foodbank and the City of Sesser, continues to provide fresh food to those facing food insecurity. During each market, club members organize and bag the food before distributing it to community members. Items they distribute include a wide range of fresh produce, frozen items, and canned goods. Through their work, local 4-H members have strengthened community bonds and fostered a culture of support and resilience.



21,516
community members served since 2017



771,708 lbs
of food distributed since 2017



Food Security Summit empowers local change

According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, over 45,000 Southern Illinoisians do not have enough food to eat. That is nearly 15% of local residents. During the Southern Illinois Food Security Summit, community partners gathered to collaborate, learn, and prioritize healthy food access initiatives. Trevor Johnson, nutrition initiatives program manager for Illinois Public Health Institute, served as the keynote speaker. He shared the foundation of Food is Medicine and how organizations can engage with FIM programs. The rest of the summit was filled with short-dynamic lightning talks about WIC and special nutrition programs, food donation gardens, Herrin House of Hope, healthier food pantries, and how to take advantage of a mini-grant opportunity. Illinois Extension team members led a nutrition education and cooking demonstration where they showed how they engage learners through a variety of hands-on classes and activities. By collaborating with numerous organizations to promote healthier spaces, they strive to make the healthier choice the easier choice for local children and families.



1,089
Nutrition Education Classes



64
Partnerships with Early Childhood Centers and K-12 Schools



21
Partnerships with Emergency Food Sites



119
Policy, systems, and/or environmental changes adopted by SNAP-Ed partner organizations



5,410
Nutrition education participants



SNAP-Ed Community Worker Misty Bernhard performs cooking demonstrations.



Young chefs learn cooking skills during summer classes

When youth don't know how to cook, they tend to turn to unhealthy food choices. Illinois Junior Chef is a fun and engaging program that teaches youth about nutrition and kitchen skills, encouraging them to try new, healthy recipes. Illinois Extension hosted 15 cooking programs throughout Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties during the summer, reaching 175 participants. Staff taught students about kitchen safety as they learned to use cooking utensils and properly measure ingredients. Recipes used during the program introduced healthy food options, and each student received a cookbook filled with healthy recipes to try at home.



Youth learn knife safety and cutting tips while getting hands-on practice during Illinois Junior Chef.



Local book walks engage young minds

With the rise of handheld technology, there has been a decline in youth reading for fun. Reading for pleasure has many benefits, including increased academic achievement, cognitive function and stamina, and development of empathy and knowledge. Illinois Extension hosted book walk programs for youth in 17 different locations throughout Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties. The walks were a continuation of the program from 2023, with an addition of two locations in Randolph County. The program offered a rotation of different books throughout the summer where families could walk throughout the site and read each page of the book. Books were selected to encourage kids to move and get active while reading. While most locations were only open for the summer, some locations are open year-round with indoor book walks. The walks have helped to strengthen partnerships with local libraries and park districts that have seen an increase in participation from the community and look forward to their return in 2025.

I did several book walks with my great niece, who loved them and has asked about them since they have been removed! She has a lot of energy, so the physical activity was great for her.
Community Participant

Navigating change to embrace opportunity

Facing change is one of the very few constants in our lives, and adapting to it can be difficult. Surprisingly, it is not just because we are stubborn. The Navigating Change as You Age program was offered nine times throughout the year. The program explored what change looks like in our brains while offering an explanation as to why it can be difficult to manage. It also identified some of the changes we face throughout our lives and the skills that are common in those who successfully navigate change. A new addition this year was an adaptation to the program for staff development, which leaned into exploring how to navigate change in the workplace. By mastering the skills to manage change, you can embrace new opportunities, overcome challenges, and drive personal and professional growth.



Enhancing mobility with Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention

Older adults are more likely to fall, which can cause serious injury. Many studies have shown that tai chi is one of the most effective approaches for preventing falls. Medical authorities agree that suitable exercise for people with arthritis should incorporate components that can improve muscular strength, flexibility, and fitness. Illinois Extension offered a Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention program in Jackson and Williamson counties. The 16-session class was held twice a week and ran from October through December. During class, participants worked through an extensive warm-up before getting specific instruction on one of the ten forms that make up the 21 different movements. They then practiced all forms learned up to that point in class and performed a cool-down routine. One participant shared that she was able to do more around her house because of her increased mobility. Illinois Extension plans to offer more tai chi programs in 2025, including Seated Tai Chi and Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention 2.



Participants practice their newly learned tai chi skills.



Ewing Field Day cultivates knowledge and community

Ewing Demonstration Center has served the local community since 1910. From the beginning, it was a place where area farmers and agricultural professionals worked with University researchers to develop and implement research that would benefit the local farming community. The center has featured no-till research and demonstration plots for over 50 years, offering representative growing conditions for southern Illinois. The center continues the tradition of annual events, including Ewing Agronomy Field Day. Educators and campus faculty engaged with local growers and provided best management practices. People movers transported guests to field stations throughout the grounds for concurrent presentations. Topics from this year's event included:

- Expanding mental health knowledge and resources in agriculture
- Economic outlook and trends impacting corn and soybeans
- Conducting on-farm precision experiments with the Illinois Extension and the data-intensive farm management project
- Managing diseases in field crops: Current status in Illinois
- Updating recommendations on P and K management for southern Illinois
- A yearlong assessment of soil health and nutrient losses in soybean production in southern Illinois



People movers driven by Extension staff transport guests to the next field station.



Youth learn environmental stewardship at DuQuoin Conservation Fair

Nature supports all life on earth, therefore, its conservation is essential in protecting humans, animals, and plants. Programs and learning activities about conservation can spark an interest in youth to learn more about the world around them. In the fall, students from schools across the region attended the Conservation Fair at the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds. The two-day fair offered hands-on activities for kids to learn about wildlife, pollinators, composting, and science.



Students examine real turtle shells and skeletons while learning about turtles' importance in the environment. Photo courtesy of DuQuoin Elementary School.

One of the highlights of the fair was the opportunity for students to examine real animal pelts and turtle shells. These tangible experiences allowed kids to connect more deeply with the material, fostering a greater appreciation for wildlife and the importance of conservation. With 1,900 students in attendance, the event was a great way for kids to learn more about everything Extension has to offer. Encouraging youth to explore more about the environment at an early age creates building blocks for them to step into the role of advocates for future conservation efforts.

Kids In The Park helps youth soar

Summer days are best enjoyed outdoors, but it can be a challenge getting kids outside. 4-H offers many fun and engaging activities that help connect youth to nature, including Kids in the Park. Kids in the Park is a local program that gets kids outside with fun activities, field trips, and learning opportunities. Local Master Gardeners helped lead this six-part series where they worked on a service project, building birdhouses donated to Pyramid National State Park. The program also included field trips for youth to kayak, hike, and explore nature, diving deeper into the theme: Birds of Prey. Volunteers shared information about their habitats, nesting, breeds of birds, and how birds build nests. An extension of the program this year included a night hike at a local state park where participants observed owls. The program is a great way to kickstart the summer and prepare kids for more outdoor adventures all season long.

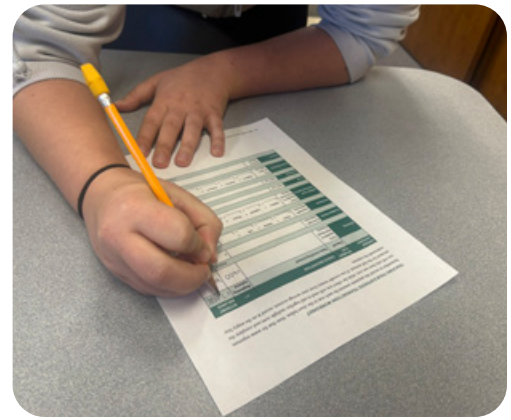


Volunteers assist youth with building birdhouses.



4-H SIMULATION BRIDGES FINANCIAL LITERACY GAP FOR STUDENTS

Many Americans live paycheck to paycheck, making money management strategies critical in today's society. Youth often do not understand the cost of living and what it takes to cover necessities like food and bills. The Welcome to the Real World simulation offered by 4-H aims to bridge this gap and teach life skills to local students. The program, conducted in five schools throughout the area, reached many students and, on some days, the entire school body. During the program, students explored potential careers or occupations they might pursue in the future. Through hands-on activities, they rotated through stations where they paid monthly bills, balanced their accounts, and developed personal budgets. This program helps students learn how to budget and prioritize necessities when making financial decisions, preparing them for real-world financial responsibilities.



4-H YOUTH TEST THEIR LIVESTOCK KNOWLEDGE

When youth are given the opportunity to compete alongside one another, they can socialize with like-minded peers, building friendships and connections that last a lifetime. 4-H members from across the unit were invited to participate in this year's annual Livestock Quiz Bowl. Three age divisions divided members into groups based on grade level, testing them on many different topics, including livestock equipment, feed and supplements, breeds, meat cuts, and a written test. Stations were set up for each test, which included an area with equipment where members could visually see and touch each piece of equipment before making their identification. The feed identification test is similar in that each member was given the opportunity to view, feel, and smell each feed type before making their final decisions. The competition is a great way for members to connect across counties and even outside the area, with participants traveling from neighboring counties to compete.



YOUTH ENGAGE IN FUN AND LEARNING DURING SUMMER CAMPS

4-H clubs, programs, and camps help students explore new things while meeting new friends. These events go beyond just a break from school during the summer months. They offer a range of benefits that contribute to personal, social, and even academic growth. This summer, Jackson County helped youth nurture their inner artist and chef, hosting weeklong camps about art and cooking. The littlest explorers, ages 5 to 7, in Williamson and Franklin counties learned about all things outdoors during Cloverbud Camp with lessons about birds, seeds, crafting, and cooking. 4-H is all about sparking an interest in what youth enjoy the most. Whether learning how to build a robot, caring for the environment, or painting a masterpiece, 4-H encourages children to be themselves by exploring their interests and choosing a path that leads to happiness.



REGIONAL 4-H HORSE BOWL HIGHLIGHTS YOUTH'S EQUESTRIAN EXPERTISE

Many 4-H programs and competitions equip youth with valuable skills that extend into various aspects of their lives. The 4-H Horse Bowl challenges members and encourages public speaking, objective reasoning, and decision-making. During the 4-H Horse Bowl, members from across southern Illinois were tested on a variety of horse-related topics and competed in the team quiz bowl. Participants were tested on their knowledge of horse breeds, coat colors and patterns, and horse care. During the quiz bowl portion, teams worked together to answer questions, buzzing in to earn points and facing off against opposing teams. The competition was a great way for members to not only enhance their knowledge but also foster personal growth and lifelong friendships.





Community spirit shines at DuQuoin State Fair

The DuQuoin State Fair has been a tradition for over a century. This past year, Extension showcased a variety of programs and events during the fair. Staff and volunteers could be found engaging youth at the 4-H booth, educating the public on gardening topics, and assisting with various fair activities.

Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers shared information about volunteer opportunities and answered horticulture-related questions. They led pop-up programs on propagating plants, testing soil, and regrowing vegetable scraps.

4-H youth stayed busy at this year's fair, participating in competitions, working at various booths and displays, and volunteering at events like the horse races and cowboy shooting contest. Through the Thank a Farmer exhibit, 4-H youth, staff, and volunteers led participants through an interactive display, highlighting the farming community's crucial role in our food supply, economy, and more. Members also showcased their creativity in a wheelbarrow decorating contest. Clubs created themes for their wheelbarrows and constructed unique displays inside of them to showcase during the fair.

This year, the DuQuoin State Fair donated a barn to the 4-H and FFA programs. They held a petting zoo where fairgoers could meet a variety of farm animals and learn more about them.

Another new addition was the 4-H Regional Showcase. Members were invited from across the region to compete and showcase their projects from the year. Many members entered general projects, displaying their creativity and hard work, while others showed off their livestock. The event was a great opportunity for youth to showcase their fair projects and gain more experience with public speaking while making connections with youth across the region.



4-H members prepare delicious dishes to be judged in the 4-H food challenges.

For the second year in a row, the 4-H food challenge showcased member's cooking talents and skills. During the three competitions, members were challenged to make dishes such as quick veggie pizza, magical fruit salad, and a basic plain omelet. Members were provided with basic ingredients but were encouraged to bring special or secret ingredients to include in their dishes. While contestants were cooking, the audience was able to observe as they cooked on stage. Each competition allowed 45 minutes of preparation and cooking before each dish was tasted by the judges.

Every year, fairgoers mark the beginning of festivities with the Twilight Parade, which is a beautiful march around the fairgrounds filled with many local community members, floats, and displays. Rhonda Shubert, 4-H program coordinator for Perry County, was honored as the DuQuoin Fair Twilight Parade Marshal. Shubert was honored with a plaque and walked with the 4-H group, which proudly led the front of the parade. To continue the festivities, a 4-H member performed the national anthem at the opening ceremony for the fair. The DuQuoin State Fair continues to be a vibrant celebration of community, agriculture, and youth development, bringing people together year after year.



Rhonda Shubert 4-H program coordinator



Learn more about 4-H
go.illinois.edu/4-HJourney



4-H members display diverse projects at local fairs

4-H shows provide an opportunity for youth to showcase the knowledge and skills they have gained through their 4-H experiences. During this year's general shows, 4-H youth presented projects in visual arts, photography, robotics, foods, and more. Those who received state delegation had the chance to travel to Springfield to exhibit their projects at the Illinois State Fair.

In the livestock shows, 4-H members displayed the animals they had raised and cared for over the past year. Showmanship competitions fostered confidence as youth communicated their knowledge and experience directly to the judges, discussing the health and care of their livestock. Youth who raised beef, swine, sheep, poultry, and rabbits for their annual projects also participated in the livestock auction. The event was a success thanks to the support of local businesses and community members, with all proceeds from the sales going directly to the participating youth.

4-H events play a crucial role in developing well-rounded individuals, equipping them with a diverse set of skills and a strong sense of community.



66
4-H Clubs



15,092
4-H Affiliations (4-H Experiences)



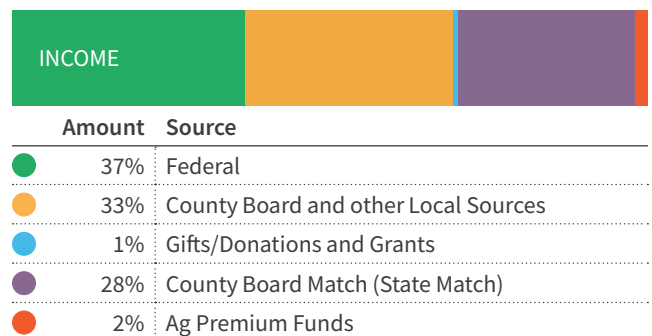
2,937
Fair Exhibits



A local 4-H member shows her pig in the Franklin County Fair.

Financial Report

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



STAFF

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Illinois Extension

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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.