



# Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.



Serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark Counties  
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024



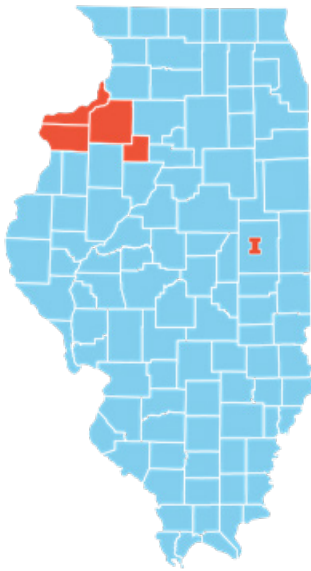


Jenny Garner  
County Director

# Celebrating our achievements and looking ahead

Greetings from University of Illinois Extension! I want to thank you for your commitment to our mission. Your support has enabled us to achieve so much in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties.

Our 100 dedicated 4-H adult volunteers expand our reach by guiding and supporting youth to build confidence and life skills. We also collaborate with 325 partner agencies to address community needs.



Illinois Extension connects people to opportunities for improving their lives. In the Quad Cities region, we embody the land-grant mission through innovation, education, and community engagement. Our work, driven by community needs, includes ensuring food access, building resilient neighborhoods, supporting water quality with cover crops, and empowering lifelong learning.

To our funders—county boards, foundations, home and community education, agriculture businesses, and individual donors—thank you for believing in the power of education, collaboration, and service. Your support makes a difference: individuals learn new skills, youth explore opportunities, and communities solve problems.

This year, 12 new Master Gardeners joined our 85 dedicated volunteers. They share their horticulture expertise through workshops, garden shows, demonstration gardens, newsletters, a live Help Line, and community programming.









We are excited to build on these successes and continue providing relevant programming that helps people learn, grow, and improve their lives. Thank you for your trust and shared commitment to building stronger, healthier communities.

Jenny Garner  
County Extension Director

Cover photo: Illinois Extension horticulture staff and Master Gardeners work on the rain garden at Riverside Park in Moline.

# 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:

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

### Partnerships

### Resource Generation

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

In 2024, Illinois Extension embarked on a strategic journey to create a sustainable, equitable, and innovative future. With community input, we developed a strategic plan focused on the needs of our communities. Our vision is clear: to be a transformative force in sustainable development, lifelong learning, and community resilience, dedicated to the environment, food and agriculture, health, community, and economic growth. This report highlights how our local programs reflect these values and priorities.

### 2024 Impact Highlights

**Empowering youth and future leaders:** Our dynamic 4-H programs provide youth with life skills, hands-on learning, and leadership opportunities, fostering community contribution and lifelong success.

**Advancing agricultural and environmental sustainability:** Illinois Extension supports farmers and environmental stewards through precision agriculture, nutrient management, and conservation practices. Events like “Cultivating Conversations” and the Farm Series facilitate knowledge sharing.



Read the Illinois Extension Strategic Plan  
[go.illinois.edu/IIExtensionVision](https://go.illinois.edu/IIExtensionVision)

Emily Hoskins, SNAP-Ed community worker, demonstrates knife safety skills as part of Illinois Extension’s SNAP-Ed programs, which bring cooking and food safety education to schools and non-profit agencies.

**Enhancing health and wellness for all:** Illinois Extension’s nutrition and wellness programs offer resources on food safety, chronic disease management, and overall health, making nutritious food and essential skills accessible to all.

**Growing community connections:** Illinois Extension’s horticulture staff and Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers create vibrant educational gardens and enhance urban green spaces through workshops, trainings, and opportunities like the Tree Equity program.

**Strengthening community and economic development:** Illinois Extension empowers local leaders through initiatives like the regional housing study and disaster preparedness programs, fostering economic growth and resilience.

**Explore the stories of impact and transformation in this report.** Guided by our new strategic vision, we are committed to delivering innovative, research-based programs that empower individuals and communities to thrive. Together with our partners, we are building a future where everyone has the knowledge, resources, and support to succeed.



## Navigating weather and environmental challenges: Illinois Extension's impact

Illinois Extension is at the forefront of equipping communities with tools and knowledge to understand and address the impacts of changing weather and environmental trends. Through innovative programs, expert-led workshops, and partnerships, Extension educators empower individuals, families, and professionals to adapt, prepare, and mitigate risks for a more resilient future.

### Preparing for Natural Disasters

Recognizing the growing threat of floods, tornadoes, droughts, and power outages, Illinois Extension's Disaster Ready programs provide critical resources to help communities prepare for emergencies. Educator Russell Medley leads efforts such as Disaster Ready Quad Cities, state hazard mitigation planning, and the Extension Education During Disasters national committee. Medley, alongside Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas, hosts workshops on emergency preparedness, offering attendees free kits with FEMA-recommended items. Bogdonas also teaches food safety during disasters and has shared her expertise nationally, presenting at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Session.

During National Preparedness Month, Illinois Extension's workshops reached hundreds, teaching practical strategies for creating emergency communication plans, building food and water supplies, and safeguarding health during crises. These initiatives not only strengthen individual preparedness but also enhance community resilience.



Russell Medley, community and economic development educator, leads a Disaster Preparedness workshop in Kewanee.



Find Disaster Preparedness resources  
[go.illinois.edu/DisasterPrep](https://go.illinois.edu/DisasterPrep)

## Adapting to changing environments

Illinois Extension's programs address the intersection of environmental change and community well-being. The nutrient loss reduction strategy program, led by Watershed Outreach Associate Nicole Haverback, promotes best practices for soil health, water quality, and greenhouse gas mitigation. From blogs and podcasts to field days and workshops, these efforts align with state goals to minimize nutrient loss and improve environmental quality.

Urban forestry is another critical focus. Horticulture Educator Emily Swihart's Tree Equity program educates homeowners on the benefits of planting trees, including energy savings, property value increases, and mental health benefits. Through workshops and tree giveaways funded by Constellation and the Mark W. Schwiebert Fund for Environmental Studies, Extension is promoting tree equity and greening urban neighborhoods.



Emily Swihart, horticulture educator, demonstrates tree care during one of the Tree Equity programs.

### Gardening and Climate Change Action

Illinois Extension's horticulture initiatives empower gardeners to adapt to shifting weather patterns. Programs like Gardening in the Air's water-wise gardening techniques and the Four Seasons' rain garden essentials webinars offer practical advice on how to conserve water and ensure sustainable landscapes. Urban forestry sessions teach participants to design resilient green spaces that mitigate climate impacts and pest outbreaks.

### Supporting Agriculture Amid Climate Risks

Illinois Extension equips farmers with tools to navigate extreme weather events through Climate Risk Tools workshops. Digital Ag programs and Everyday Environment webinars provide strategies for climate-smart farming and reducing environmental footprints, demonstrating Extension's commitment to a sustainable future.



## Championing community resilience and growth

Illinois Extension’s community and economic development programs are vital to the development of initiatives that significantly impact the regional growth and resilience of the communities we serve. Russell Medley, community and economic development educator for our region, has spearheaded significant state and local initiatives that help our communities thrive.



Illinois Extension’s housing study for Henry, Mercer, and Stark counties examines current trends and future housing needs, helping communities like Geneseo plan for sustainable growth.

### Addressing Housing Challenges To Foster Growth

Illinois Extension conducted a comprehensive housing needs assessment for Henry, Mercer, and Stark counties in collaboration with University of Illinois Urban and Regional Planning graduate students. With nearly 800 survey responses, the study captured critical data on local housing conditions and future needs. This effort equips local governments with actionable insights to address housing shortages and expand the region’s housing stock, supporting long-term economic growth and community resilience.

### Fostering Awareness Through Poverty Simulations

Illinois Extension’s immersive poverty simulations in the Quad Cities region, led by Medley, helped nonprofit and government professionals understand poverty challenges and advocate for impactful policies and programs.

### Enhancing Community Hazard Mitigation

Illinois Extension, in partnership with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency Office of Homeland Security, played a key role in updating the State Hazard Mitigation Plan for technological and human-caused hazards. Medley and his CED team’s work on this update not only strengthens community preparedness but also secures billions in federal funding for mitigation efforts for state communities. This plan empowers communities across the state to reduce disaster risks and protect lives.

### Boosting Workforce and Economic Growth

Through strategic collaborations, Illinois Extension contributed to the development of regional and local workforce plans for nine counties, addressing employment, training, and business needs. Medley’s work on these plans helps guide workforce initiatives that enhance economic opportunities and build stronger communities. Illinois Extension also supported workforce development through Medley’s service on regional workforce boards, providing expertise on economic trends and demographic insights.

### Building Disaster-Resilient Communities

Illinois Extension strengthened disaster preparedness across the region with Medley organizing Volunteer Reception Center Training in collaboration with local and state partners. This training included a simulated tornado response, preparing participants to manage volunteers effectively during emergencies. Additionally, Illinois Extension supported the establishment of a Community Organizations Active in Disaster group in Henry, Mercer, and Stark counties to bolster long-term disaster readiness. Medley led public education programs on household preparedness, offering actionable emergency planning and safety guidance.

### Empowering Leaders For Resilient Communities

Illinois Extension provides training on issues important to legislators and county officials and organizes the annual United Counties Council of Illinois Leadership Academy, where Medley led a workshop on economic development. He works with local economic development leaders as part of the Emerging Cities of the Quad Cities networking group. Medley facilitates the meetings where they tackle regional initiatives in areas like renewable energy, workforce training, and rural development. These efforts reflect Extension’s commitment to fostering resilient, vibrant communities.



Russell Medley, community and economic development educator and chair of Disaster Ready Quad Cities, shared Illinois Extension disaster preparation resources at a local conference.



Members of the Senior Horse Bowl Team: Maddie Oltman, Sophie Oltman, Anna Hessel, Coach Danielle Gorbach, Bailey Callahan, and Emma Steiger.



Members of the Junior Horse Bowl Team: Brooklynnne Martin, Jocelyn Erickson, Jasmine Frerkes, Paisley Martin, and Lily Miller.



## Empowering Futures: 4-H Triumphs in 2024

The 4-H program, led by educators Jennifer Peterson and Elaine Kaple, saw growth, new achievements, and strong community engagement. Tracy Pestle retired after 15 years, leaving a legacy of support in Mercer County, with Lyndsey Flickinger taking her place alongside Kristen Parchert (Henry/Stark) and Melissa Fudge (Rock Island). The team continues to empower youth through educational programs, clubs, and community projects.

### Mission and Impact

Over 4,000 youth participated in clubs, fairs, and workshops, exploring interests from STEM to animal sciences. The supportive environment helps youth find their “spark,” connect with their community, and develop essential life skills.

### Horse Bowl and Hippology Teams Excel

4-H Horse Bowl and Hippology teams studied all year to prepare for regional and state competitions. The Mercer County junior team was the state champions in the 8-13 age division. The Rock Island/Henry senior team was the state champions in the 14-plus age division and advanced to nationals. They attended the National Horse Congress where they placed tenth in both performance class and overall as a team.

### State Speech Team Achieves Top Honors

In the Illinois 4-H Horse Speaking Contest, Jocelyn Erickson and Jasmine Frerkes of Mercer County placed first in the junior division team presentation. Molly Wannemacher of Henry County placed first in the junior formal division. They succeeded on the highest level through hard work, excellent coaching, and pledging their “Head to Clearer Thinking.”

### 4-H Clubs Provide Hands-On Experiences

4-H offers a range of dynamic clubs and learning experiences that encourage youth to explore their interests. The Livestock Fitting Clinic in Mercer County, hosted with Sherrard FFA, taught participants vital animal care and fitting techniques. The Goat Club, led by volunteer Steve Ausmus — who offers to bring in goats for youth who don’t have one of their own, gives urban youth the opportunity to work weekly with the same goat, learning how to care for and show it. Other opportunities include special interest clubs like fishing, archery, and visual arts, as well as special events like DIY holiday crafts, entrepreneurship for teens, and Cloverbud Academy for ages 5 to 7.

4-H also embraced digital learning with programs like the “Build Your Future” virtual club, which helped students focus on career readiness skills through activities like interview practice and social media literacy. Collaboration with local schools brought 4-H into classrooms, introducing mindfulness and social-emotional learning to younger children. Elaine Kaple’s “Art of Drawing” series at the Moline Public Library was another highlight, teaching students valuable art techniques. All of these programs combine to provide nearly 5,000 4-H affiliated learning experiences this past year.

These initiatives exemplify 4-H’s dedication to helping youth discover new skills, gain confidence, and express themselves creatively.



63  
4-H clubs



842  
Members



## 4,711 4-H affiliate experiences

Engaging youth through clubs, workshops, events, partnerships, and more!



4-H member Caelen Fuhr discusses his general project with judge Trent Zwicker.



## Showcasing talents at county fairs

4-H members from Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties proudly showcased their projects and livestock at county fairs, highlighting skills from agriculture to creative arts. We had 400 youth enter the show ring with their livestock, and almost 650 participated in general projects shows, exploring diverse areas like cooking, photography, and horticulture. These shows provide more than a platform for exhibits — they help youth build confidence, communication, goal-setting, and critical thinking skills essential for future success. Participants received feedback from judges, celebrated their accomplishments, and some advanced to the State Fair in Springfield.

Beyond competition, 4-H projects embody values like independence, growth, and community service, reinforcing the 4-H pledge of “Hands to Larger Service.”



2024 Henry County 4-H Heifer Show Grand Champion Colton Kies poses with his heifer, along with his brother Miller.



## 2,617 fair exhibit entries

across Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark

## Civic Engagement Develops Leaders

Edison Junior High’s Civic Engagement program, led by Peterson, fostered student leadership through weekly sessions on teamwork and public service. Participants strengthened school connections by creating teacher appreciation baskets, baking cookies for first responders, and promoting community involvement.



Edison Jr. High Civic Engagement Club members bake cookies for local heroes during National First Responders Day.

## 4-H And Snap-Ed Teach Life Skills And Healthy Meals

4-H and SNAP-Ed partnered to deliver the Edison Junior High Cooking Club, offering students a safe, enriching after-school environment. Participants learned essential skills like food safety, hygiene, healthy eating, and kitchen safety while preparing nutritious meals. The program also fostered teamwork, belonging, and positive associations with life skills, equipping youth for a healthier future.



Rock Island County 4-H clubs honored veterans by making ornaments and placing them on graves at the National Cemetery on the Arsenal.

## Community Service Drives 4-H Clubs

From food drives to playing bingo with nursing home residents to cooking community meals, community service is at the heart of the 4-H experience and an integral part of every community club’s year. There was also a focus on military veterans with Rock Island clubs decorating trees with homemade ornaments for placement at the National Cemetery on the Arsenal, and Mercer clubs helping to serve at veteran dinners, showing what it truly means to pledge your “Heart to Greater Loyalty”.





## 4-H empowers youth through art and social-emotional learning

With busy extracurricular schedules and academic pressures, many students miss opportunities to explore the arts. This is unfortunate, as research shows that engaging in the visual arts benefits students in numerous ways, enhancing academic performance and fostering critical social-emotional skills.

The arts offer a unique platform for social-emotional learning, promoting patience, practice, and creative expression. Through artistic activities, youth develop important skills such as communication, empathy, and active listening — skills vital for emotional well-being, heightened since the pandemic.

4-H’s partnerships with schools and community agencies allow local youth the opportunity to explore their creativity while gaining hands-on learning experiences that integrate social-emotional learning. Students participated in painting, drawing, mindful art, clay modeling, sculpture, and collage. Program sites included Arrowhead Youth and Family Services, Spring Forward, Moline Parks and Recreation, and the Moline Public Library.



A student at Washington Jr High School displays a mask.

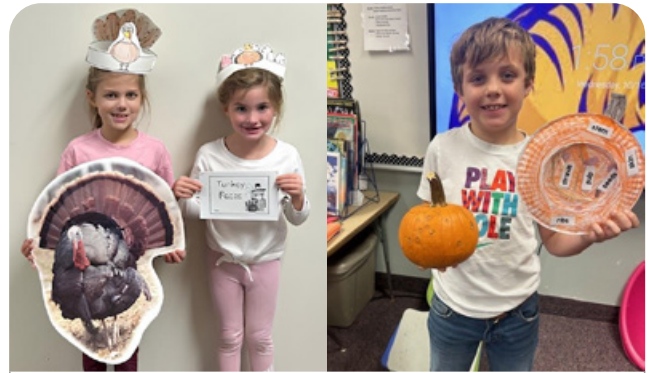


A contour drawing by an artist in the Art of Drawing Series.



Students at a Social-Emotional Learning workshop.

## From classroom to community: building agriculture literacy in Mercer County



Winola students: (left) Lenora Stead, and Jordyn Calderone, and (right) Charlie Bell show their handiwork from in-school programs led by Kirwan and her Ag Education volunteers.

Hundreds of youth across Mercer County are growing in their knowledge of agriculture through lessons Illinois Extension and our partners share as part of the Mercer County Ag Education program. Coordinator Teresa Kirwan promotes agriculture literacy through lessons and community-focused activities.

During Agriculture Month, students across the county show their creativity in contests featuring Flat Aggie and coloring Ag-Fact posters and coffee sleeves for display at local stores and shops. Kirwan also distributes thousands of agriculture activity packets for at-home use through libraries and other non-profit agencies. Teachers benefit from the Summer Ag Institute, where they gain tools, knowledge, and curriculum to integrate agriculture education into their classrooms.



Families look forward to the free Farm in the Park event each summer, where they learn about agriculture through ag trivia, the petting zoo, hands-on activities, farm machinery, and more.

The Mercer County Ag Education program continues to enrich agricultural understanding and appreciation for students, families, and educators throughout the county and beyond.



Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas leads a healthy snacks class at the Wyoming Public Library.



## Nutrition and wellness: empowering health through education

### Expanding Food Preservation and Nutrition Skills

Nutrition and Wellness Educator Kristin Bogdonas continued to foster health and wellness across our communities through a wide range of hands-on workshops and digital outreach. Her popular food preservation sessions include canning, fermentation, and “Ginger Ale Make-and-Take” workshops, which equipped residents with practical skills for reducing food waste and maximizing the value of seasonal produce. These sessions not only fostered a deeper connection to local foods but also promoted sustainable habits that benefit both families and the environment.

### Innovative Digital Health Outreach

Illinois Extension continues to expand its reach through innovative digital health initiatives, delivering practical health information to diverse audiences. Through the Start the Week Off Right column in the QC Times and Dispatch, Bogdonas connects with thousands on topics like chronic disease prevention, food safety, and preservation. The Wellness Wake Up Call podcast, now a statewide project, offers weekly health insights, enriched by contributions from the Nutrition and Wellness team. This approach blends in-person engagement with a growing digital footprint, ensuring accessible resources that promote community wellness locally and beyond.

### Serving The Aging Population

By 2050, the global population of individuals aged 65 and older is expected to double, making education on topics like nutrition, chronic disease management, and physical health more vital than ever. Illinois Extension is addressing the unique health needs with programs such as Eating Well as We Age, In the Kitchen with Osteoarthritis, and 5 Ways to Protect Your Bones. These popular offerings by Bogdonas, which address challenges like reduced muscle mass, chronic disease, and cognitive changes, continue to make a meaningful difference for aging individuals in our community.

### Extension brings cicada education to landscapes and kitchens

Illinois Extension responded to the historic simultaneous emergence of cicada Broods XIII and XIX, the first since 1803, with a comprehensive outreach program. Educators tackled the environmental impact on trees and shrubs and highlighted cicadas as a sustainable, protein-rich food source consumed worldwide.

Nutrition experts like Bogdonas showcased edible insects through live cooking demonstrations featuring creative recipes like cicada pesto pizza and cicada sundaes. Horticulture educators like Emily Swihart guided the public on mitigating cicada damage to plants via blogs, podcasts, and community presentations.

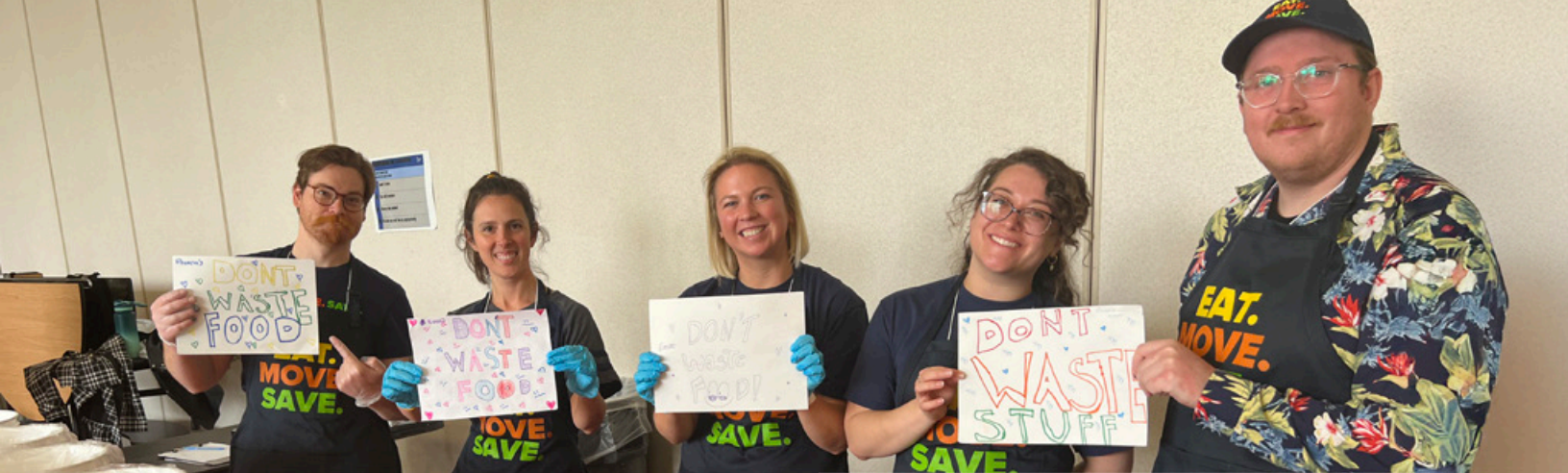


Bogdonas led a cooking demonstration using cicadas. Participants said they enjoyed the taste, and many expressed a newfound openness to edible insects.

The effort reached a broad audience, with 750,000 social media views, over 105,000 website visits, and coverage by 75+ media outlets. By reducing unnecessary pesticide use and promoting sustainable practices, Illinois Extension empowered communities to embrace the environmental and culinary opportunities presented by this rare cicada event.



Download the adapted cicada recipes at [go.illinois.edu/CicadaRecipes](https://go.illinois.edu/CicadaRecipes)



## Food waste detectives: improving school lunches

Illinois Extension’s SNAP-Ed and Nutrition and Wellness program staff conducted a tray waste study at Rock Island Math and Science to reduce waste and emphasize the value of school meals. The team produced a “Food Waste Detectives” video explaining the importance of reducing school food waste, visited classrooms, and held a poster contest during Food Waste Prevention Week. The successful program cut school lunch waste from 195.8 pounds to 90.3 pounds! The team plans to expand tray waste studies to more schools. Their “Food Waste Detectives” video was chosen to be adapted for state-wide use as part of the ABCs of School Nutrition.

## Fresh food access in floreciente

The Floreciente Community Donation Garden is a vital source of fresh produce and community connection. Since its inception, it has yielded approximately 600 pounds of produce, supplemented by 3,000 pounds gleaned from backyard growers, Master Gardener volunteers, and local organizations.



Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Emily Swihart works with youth from Head Start on a plot at the Floreciente Garden.

Palomares Social Justice Center plays a crucial role in the garden’s success as a co-leader and financial supporter. Thanks to abundant produce donations, garden harvests are distributed to Project NOW Head Start, benefiting over 40 children and their families. Through community involvement in planting and maintenance, the garden ensures sustainability and serves as a model for tackling food insecurity while strengthening local ties.

Illinois Extension SNAP-Ed and nutrition staff, including Mitchell Walker, Kristin Bogdonas, Taler Louscher, Emily Hoskins, and Kyle Goldsmith, led a food waste study.

## Expanding Impact Through Middle School Programming

Illinois SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Workers are expanding nutrition education to middle and high schools, reaching students at a formative stage to promote healthier lifestyle choices. Programs like Teen Cuisine and Eat Fit provide hands-on lessons in cooking, reading nutrition labels, and balancing food and fitness. This initiative fosters lifelong healthy habits and addresses long-term health disparities.

At schools such as Central Junior High and Kewanee High School in Kewanee, and Washington and Edison in Rock Island, these programs empower students with practical skills like meal preparation and the importance of physical activity. The ripple effect extends to families and communities as students share their knowledge, helping to build healthier communities.



SNAP-Ed Community Worker Darcy Eggimann leads an Illinois Jr. Chef program in Kewanee.

## Illinois Junior Chef: Cooking Up Skills

Illinois Junior Chef offers year-round, hands-on cooking and nutrition education, teaching kitchen skills, food safety, and healthy eating at schools, camps, and nonprofits like Eugene Field Elementary, Colona Elementary, and Abilities Plus. Participants receive a cookbook to promote healthy cooking at home, fostering confidence and habits that support personal and community well-being.



Watch the Food Waste Detectives video  
[go.illinois.edu/FoodWasteDetectives](https://go.illinois.edu/FoodWasteDetectives)



## Cultivating knowledge and community impact: horticulture highlights

### Expanding Educational Gardens

Illinois Extension's horticulture team of Educator Emily Swihart and Program Coordinator Tracy Jo Mulliken, along with dedicated Master Gardener volunteers, continue transforming community spaces into vibrant educational hubs. Master Gardeners maintained gardens in collaboration with local organizations, creating lasting resources for community learning.

In Mercer County, visitors can explore the pet-themed perennial garden at the Animal Shelter, the Perennial Pollinator Garden at the Fairgrounds, and the Sensory Garden at the YMCA entrance. In Rock Island County, volunteers maintain perennial and raised bed gardens at the Illinois Extension office in Milan, as well as pollinator, vegetable, and rain gardens at Riverside Park in Moline. They also collaborate with The Arc to provide gardening programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and assist with the Floreciente Community Garden. Each garden is enhanced with educational signage, enriching their value as teaching tools.

### Innovative Digital and In-Person Outreach

Illinois Extension reaches thousands through diverse outreach methods. Emily Swihart's award-winning The Outsider newsletter and contributions to the Good Growing blog and podcast delivered timely, research-based advice. Virtual events like the Gardening in the Air seminar engaged over 550 participants across 23 states, making horticulture education widely accessible.

### Empowering Communities Through Online Learning

Programs such as the Four Seasons Gardening webinars and self-paced Master Gardener training offered expert-led content that participants could access at their convenience. These digital tools ensure Illinois Extension continues meeting the evolving needs of diverse audiences.

### Tree Equity In Action

The Tree Equity program addressed environmental justice by increasing urban forestry in underserved areas. Funded by Constellation and the Mark W. Schwiebert Fund for Environmental Studies, the initiative provided free trees and tree care education to residents in neighborhoods with low tree equity scores. Youth at Butterworth Elementary School also participated in a tree-planting event, connecting with nature while improving their community.

By enhancing urban green spaces, this program has improved air quality, reduced mental fatigue, and strengthened residents' connection to their environment.



Illinois Extension led a tree planting day at Butterworth Elementary, combining hands-on learning with environmental stewardship.

### Driving Environmental and Educational Impact

Illinois Extension's efforts this year have empowered communities to adopt sustainable practices through innovative programs and partnerships. From distributing free trees to fostering urban forestry, Illinois Extension remains a trusted resource for advancing environmental stewardship, community wellness, and lifelong learning.



Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists gather at the holiday party with Tracy Jo Mulliken and Emily Swihart (center).



## Helping others learn to grow

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists play a vital role in enriching communities through their expertise, passion, and dedication to continuous learning. Their volunteer efforts significantly enhance Illinois Extension's outreach, fostering environmental stewardship and community well-being across Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties. Master Gardeners volunteered countless hours maintaining community gardens, hosting garden therapy programs, and leading educational sessions, positively impacting the lives of many residents.

### Answering the Call

Master Gardeners provide valuable services through the horticulture helpline, answering calls and emails from residents with gardening questions.

### Spreading Knowledge Through Presentations

Through the Speakers Bureau, they provide engaging presentations on a wide range of topics, fulfilling requests from groups and organizations across our four-county region.



Illinois Extension's garden at the QCCA Lawn & Garden Show showcased the educational outreach we bring to our communities.



**97**  
Master Gardener  
Volunteers



**12**  
Master Naturalist  
Volunteers



Master Gardeners and horticulture staff grew flowers and made bouquets for nursing home residents (Emily Swihart, Heather Culver, Tracy Jo Mulliken, and Phil Cray).

### Inspiring the Next Generation

Master Gardeners in Henry and Stark counties revitalized horticulture outreach programs in local schools, delivering engaging lessons to kindergarten through fifth-grade students. These lessons inspire young learners and encourage a lifelong appreciation for plants and the environment.

### Creating Opportunities for Learning

Master Gardeners collaborate with horticulture staff to create diverse educational opportunities. The Nursery School: Lessons in Gardening event celebrated its 25th year, attracting over 200 attendees, while the QCCA Flower and Garden Show welcomed over 10,000 visitors who enjoyed the Illinois Extension educational display garden, attended Master Gardener-led horticulture presentations, received resources and answers at our information booth, and reveled in the beauty of the flower-filled event space beautified by Illinois Extension volunteers.

### Celebrating Volunteer Excellence

This year, Master Gardeners Dick Potter and Liz MacDonald received the prestigious State Outstanding Master Gardener awards, recognizing their exceptional contributions. Additionally, the innovative Spring Series team members Deb Corso, Judy Hartley, and Pam Ross were honored for adapting their programming to meet evolving community needs.

### Welcoming New Master Gardeners

Illinois Extension welcomed a dozen new Master Gardeners through its fall hybrid training program. Equipped with a passion for plants and the environment, these new volunteers are ready to contribute to their communities, further expanding the program's impact.



**4,946** volunteer hours

by our Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists to community gardens, education, outreach, and support.

# Revolutionizing agriculture: 2024 highlights



Nicole Haverback and Jessica Grissom, Mercer County SWCD, with cereal rye cover crop seed provided through Illinois Extension



## Driving Statewide Change

The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy is a statewide, collaborative effort working to reduce the amount of nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, entering Illinois waterways. The Extension nutrient loss reduction team, including Nicole Haverback, watershed outreach associate in Henry and Stark counties, focused on the Lower Rock River and Flint-Henderson watersheds, addressing nutrient loss through innovative conservation practices.

## Cover Crop Seed Distribution Success

The NLRS recognizes cover crops as being one of the most effective in-field management practices for mitigating both nitrogen and phosphorus losses, and cover crops are considered a climate-smart practice. Illinois Extension's NLRS team received funding from the Illinois Soybean Association Checkoff to provide free cover crop seed to farmers located in NLRS N-priority watersheds, one being Mercer County, which received \$20,000 worth of cereal rye crop seed. It was distributed in partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to support farmers who were new to using cover crops, allowing them to try adding cover crops without taking on the additional cost of purchasing the seed. These efforts support healthier waterways, improved soil quality, and long-term agricultural resilience across Illinois.

## Expanding Digital Outreach

The NLRS team expanded its digital outreach by adding a dedicated website that features NLRS information, educational resources, webinars, and a video on saturated buffers. Other tools include a podcast and blog series co-produced by Haverback, which offers insights from experts on agricultural conservation practices. A newsletter promotes these resources, upcoming events, and highlights from the biennial report, educating audiences on sustainable practices and ongoing efforts to empower Illinois farmers.



Haverback organized a bioreactor installation demonstration to showcase an effective strategy for nutrient loss reduction.

## Bioreactor Installation And Peer Learning

Illinois Extension partnered on a grant through the One Good Idea initiative to receive funding for the installation of a woodchip bioreactor on Brian Corkhill's farm in Galva. As part of this project, Haverback also helped organize a field day event titled "Cultivating Conversations: How and Why Illinois Farms Implement Edge-of-Field Practices." The event brought together four Illinois farmers who shared their experiences with implementing edge-of-field practices, discussing the benefits they've seen and the role these practices play in protecting Illinois' waterways. Attendees had the opportunity to learn more edge-of-field practices through demonstration tabletop models and connect with local farmers and professionals working on similar initiatives.

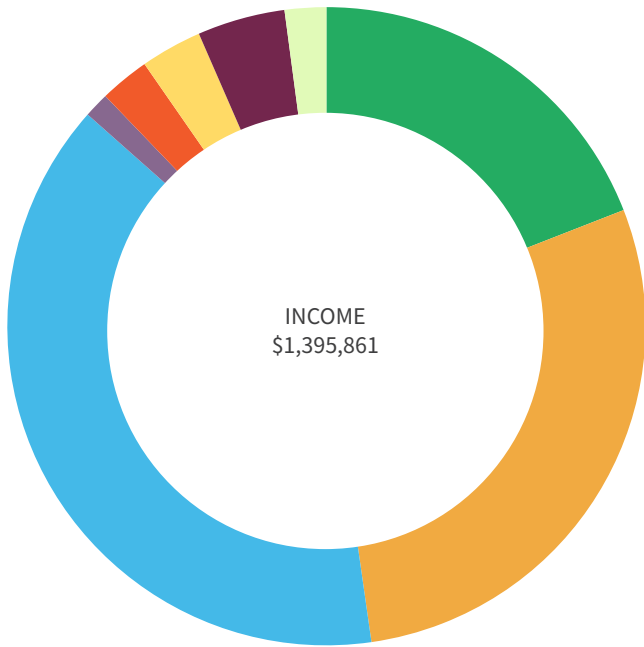
The day concluded with a presentation from Catherine DeLong, water quality program manager at Iowa State University Extension, who provided valuable strategies for communicating the positive impacts of these practices. In addition to the field day, the grant also funded the creation of educational videos and an NLRS podcast episode, which documents the installation process and emphasizes the importance of adopting edge-of-field practices for water quality, land stewardship, and rural resilience.



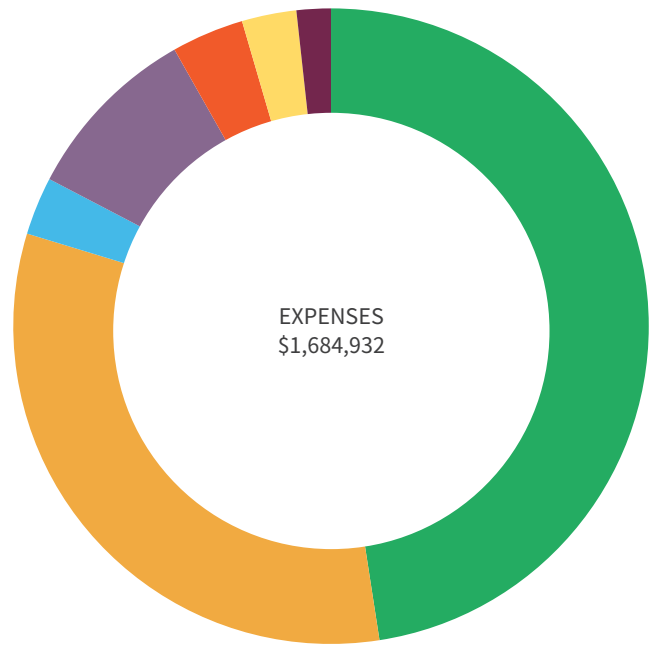
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Amount	Source
\$266,193	State Funds/Match
\$400,256	County Board
\$541,595	Federal SNAP Grant
\$17,805	Grants
\$35,221	Program Fees
\$43,451	Foundations, Donations, and Farm Bureau
\$62,000	Smith Lever
\$29,340	4-H Premiums



Amount	Source
\$801,367	Program Expenses and Salaries
\$541,595	Federal SNAP Program
\$49,749	Materials/Supplies
\$154,073	Utilities/Rent
\$62,000	Smith Lever
\$46,808	Transportation
\$29,340	4-H Awards

## Financial Report

University of Illinois Extension is a three-way funding partnership between the State of Illinois, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the county boards in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark. Our SNAP-Ed programs are funded by a federal grant from the USDA.

These partnerships bring hundreds of thousands of programming dollars into our four counties, matching local contributions with state and federal support. Many local businesses, foundations, and individuals provide additional support by donating through our local foundations, including to the Henry County 4-H Foundation, the Mercer County Extension & 4-H Foundation, the Rock Island County Extension & 4-H Education Foundation, and the Stark County 4-H Foundation. Support also comes from our local Extension Council and the Illinois 4-H Foundation. These resources are part of the local donation income that helps sustain our programs.

## 2024 Grants and Sponsorships

Illinois Extension educators collaborate on state team grants as well as on local programming grants. All of these sources are vital in helping fulfill our educational mission.

### Grants and sponsorships for projects specific to our unit:

- \$8,000: Ag in the Classroom Grant for Mercer County
- \$3,451: Mel McKay Charitable Trust for horticulture programs
- \$3,350: Mercer County Agriculture Education Program
- \$1,000: Rock Island Community Foundation for 4-H programs
- \$500: Big River Resources for agriculture programs
- \$500: Gold Star FS, Cambridge for agriculture programs
- \$500: River Valley Cooperative for agriculture programs
- In-kind: NRA grant for ammunition for 4-H Shooting Sports

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## STAFF

### County Director

Jenny Garner

### Educators

Kristin Bogdonas  
Nutrition and Wellness

Elaine Kaple  
Metro 4-H

Russell Medley  
Community and Economic  
Development

Taylor Louscher  
SNAP-Ed

Jennifer Peterson  
4-H

Emily Swihart  
Horticulture

### Associates

Nicole Haverback  
Watershed Outreach

**Program Coordinators**  
Becky Buckrop  
Marketing & Development

Lyndsey Flickinger  
Mercer County 4-H

Melissa Fudge  
Rock Island County 4-H

Teresa Kirwan  
Mercer County Ag Literacy

Tracy Jo Mulliken  
Horticulture & Agriculture

Kristen Parchert  
Henry & Stark 4-H

Mitchell Walker  
SNAP-Ed

### Community Workers

Casey Davidson  
SNAP-Ed

Darcy Eggimann  
SNAP-Ed

Emily Hoskins  
SNAP-Ed

Hannah Reeves  
SNAP-Ed

### Office Support

Amy Spence  
Specialist

Teresa Frakes  
Assistant

Barbara Jackson  
Assistant

Paula West  
Assistant

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Henry-Stark County Extension

358 Front Street  
Galva, IL 61434  
Phone: 309-932-3447  
Fax: 309-932-3454  
Tues, Wed, Thur., 8 am - 4 pm  
(Closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

### Mercer County Extension

910 13th Street  
Viola IL 61486  
Phone: 309-513-3100  
FAX: 309-513-3101  
Tues, Wed, Thur., 8 am - 4 pm  
(Closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

### Rock Island County Extension

321 W 2nd Avenue  
Milan, IL 61264  
Phone: 309-756-9978  
FAX: 309-756-9987  
Mon- Fri., 8 am - 4 pm  
(Closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: uie-hmrs@illinois.edu

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**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.