



Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

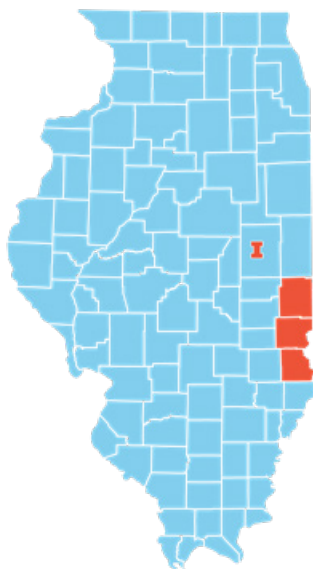


Serving Clark, Crawford, and Edgar Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Susan Sloop
County Director



A note from the county director

I am excited to share my first impact report as the County Extension Director for Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties. Leading a team dedicated to Illinois Extension's mission — empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and driving innovation through education — is an honor. Over the past year, our team has made significant strides in engaging youth, supporting local leaders, promoting health and wellness, and fostering economic and agricultural development. I am proud of our accomplishments and look forward to building on this success.

In the past year, our Extension programming in Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties reached 14,471 individuals across 519 educational sessions, underscoring our commitment to lifelong learning and community growth. Additionally, 34 local leaders received government education resources, enhancing their ability to serve their communities. Our 4-H programs are thriving, with 899 youth members across 55 clubs showcasing their skills through 3,140 fair exhibits. Dedicated adult volunteers contributed over 9,300 hours, valued at \$340,046, to support youth development. Our nutrition education programs reached 1,091 participants through 271 classes, equipping individuals and families with essential skills for healthier living.

Our work in Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties directly supports Illinois Extension's mission: "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."

Looking ahead, we are excited to explore new programs that address emerging community needs, enhance our existing initiatives with innovative approaches, and strengthen our partnerships with local organizations. By focusing on our strategic priorities, we create even more opportunities for growth, learning, and positive change in our communities.

Through these efforts, our counties play a vital role in advancing Illinois Extension's mission to serve communities, drive innovation, and create positive change. Together, we can continue to make a lasting impact and build a brighter future for all.

Thank you for your continued support in making this impact possible.

Susan Sloop
County Extension Director

Cover photo: Jackson Meese
exhibiting in the swine show at
the 2024 Crawford County Fair.

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



Volunteers transform Clark County fairgrounds to enhance 4-H showing experience

In a remarkable display of dedication and community spirit, a group of passionate volunteers has undertaken a series of renovations aimed at improving the experience for Clark County 4-H members. The effort, months in the making, reflects the community's deep commitment to fostering youth development through agriculture and livestock education.

The renovations include the expansion of the show ring, allowing for a larger, more accommodating space for competitions and exhibitions. This upgrade ensures that both participants and spectators can fully enjoy the events, creating a more inclusive and engaging environment.

Additionally, the project involved the construction of a dedicated beef barn, sheep barn, goat barn, and swine barn. These specialized facilities provide 4-H members with state-of-the-art spaces to house and showcase their animals. Each barn has been designed to meet the specific needs of the livestock it shelters, emphasizing safety, functionality, and comfort for both animals and handlers.

The transformation of the fairgrounds is more than a physical upgrade — it's a testament to the power of community collaboration. Volunteers contributed countless hours to the project, bringing together a variety of skills and resources to

make the vision a reality. From planning and fundraising to hands-on construction, their collective efforts have created an enduring legacy for future generations of 4-H members.

Clark County 4-H leaders and members have expressed their gratitude for the volunteers' hard work and generosity. "These renovations are a game-changer," said BJ Titus, livestock superintendent and co-chairman of the Clark County 4-H facility improvement project. "They not only improve the facilities but also demonstrate to our youth that their passions and efforts are valued by the community."

The enhanced fairgrounds are set to debut at this year's Clark County Fair, where the improvements will undoubtedly elevate the experience for participants and visitors alike. This initiative reinforces the county's commitment to supporting its youth programs, ensuring that 4-H members have the resources they need to thrive and succeed.

As the finishing touches are put on the project, the community looks forward to celebrating this milestone achievement. The volunteers' hard work serves as a shining example of what can be accomplished when people come together to invest in the future.



Learn more at
go.illinois.edu/cce



SNAP-Ed Community Worker Hope Dennis introduces students to her partner, Bob, from the OrganWise Guys program.



Teaching lifelong healthy habits

Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education offers community-focused nutrition education for individuals and families, aiming to prevent obesity and lower chronic disease risks by promoting nutritious foods and active lifestyles. Known as Eat. Move. Save. and administered by Illinois Extension, the program demonstrates positive outcomes by encouraging healthier behaviors among residents. SNAP-Ed is vital for eligible SNAP beneficiaries, teaching them how to maximize their benefits, shop for and prepare healthy meals, and maintain physical activity, with initiatives reaching communities statewide. Adults involved in the program learn to prioritize their health by cooking healthier meals, reducing unhealthy fats, increasing fruit and vegetable intake, and engaging in more physical activity. Additionally, SNAP-Ed's school initiatives educate children on the significance of fitness and maintaining a healthy body while also connecting low-income individuals with food access, nutrition education, and support for American agriculture.



7

Partnerships with K-12 Schools



8

Partnerships with Emergency Food Sites



17

Partnerships with Other Types of Organizations



271

Nutrition Education Classes



1,091

Nutrition Education Participants



Nutrition and Wellness Educator Mary Liz Wright helps participants in a pie filling workshop.

Reaching all generations

Families with young children are often too busy to attend a program offered by Illinois Extension, senior citizens are limited in their opportunities to get out of the house, and young working people are often overscheduled to the point where they cannot fit one more thing into their calendar. All these people would benefit from the information offered by Illinois Extension. In 2024, Nutrition and Wellness Educator Mary Liz Wright shifted her focus from scheduling programs at the local Extension offices to working with local partners to join existing events. Wright now attends several public libraries' story hour/family groups, senior center meal sites or bingo games, cardiac rehab sessions at a local hospital, and even yoga classes. Wright goes where the people are. She offers a condensed lesson on her monthly topic to the attendees of these events. The feedback has been exceptionally positive, with people not associated with any of the events sharing that they heard Wright was doing good things. Participants look forward to her attending their events and regularly share positive feedback on the materials and information she provides. Even the employees of the various locations eagerly await her monthly "talks." Wright believes that she is living out the mission of Extension, extending the research-based information of the University to the people where they are.



50

Food Education Classes



2,769

Food Education Participants





Master Naturalists in action

The Master Naturalists successfully completed a garlic mustard eradication event at Blackhawk Park in Paris, which involved removing this invasive species to protect local ecosystems. Additionally, they continued their efforts to establish a native plant garden at Farm Credit in Paris by weeding the area and introducing native plant starts and seeds.



Master Naturalist Joy Turner with a bag of invasive garlic mustard that was pulled from Blackhawk Park in Paris.



Master Gardeners continue their mission

The Master Gardeners continued their dedicated work at Schwartz Park by pulling weeds and removing invasive plants to promote a healthier ecosystem. They identified various plants and trees within the park, enhancing the area's biodiversity and educational value. With collaboration from the City of Paris, they installed plant identification signs, making it easier for visitors to learn about the local flora and fostering a greater appreciation for the park's natural resources.



1

Community Garden



262

AAB/NREE Education Participants

Addressing food insecurity

On December 17, members of the 4-H Federation, Stratton Jr. Farmers, and Raiders Super Stars came together to pack food bags, ensuring 200 Edgar County children had meals during the holiday break.

Thanks to a grant, Extension was able to purchase ready-to-eat and microwaveable food to supplement the Food for Kids program, which provides meals to 200 students each week when school is not in session. This initiative helps ensure children have access to nutritious meals even when they are away from school.

Any leftover food from the packing event was distributed to various community resources. It was placed in Blessing Boxes around town to support homeless individuals, donated to the local pregnancy center to help mothers feed their families, and given to the Hopes and Dreams House, which provides meals and shelter to displaced teens. Through teamwork and generosity, Extension was able to make a meaningful impact on the community this holiday season.

Crafting memories

The 4-H Fall Festival was a resounding success, bringing together around 120 youth for an evening filled with fun and creativity. Various clubs set up engaging games for the kids, fostering a spirit of friendly competition and teamwork. One of the highlights of the day was the beaded butterfly craft station, where young attendees showcased their artistic talents by creating colorful masterpieces. The event culminated in an awards ceremony honoring the achievements of dedicated 4-H members. The festival not only celebrated the hard work of youth but also strengthened community bonds, leaving everyone eager for the 4-H year ahead.



Youth at the fall festival enjoy a craft while learning all about 4-H.



Crawford County 4-H returns to its roots

Crawford County 4-H brought back a long-standing tradition to youth and volunteers in 2024, revitalizing a sense of community and pride among the participants. 4-H Program Coordinator April Knoblett set a clear and ambitious goal to reintroduce the Crawford County 4-H Achievement Night during the 2023-2024 4-H year, fully aware that this would be no small feat, especially considering that the last event took place back in 2001. One pervasive question loomed in Knoblett's mind: "Will people come?" To address this concern and generate interest, she took the initiative to create and distribute an awards application to all 4-H members and volunteers at the beginning of the year, clearly outlining the various awards and recognitions available.

To her pleasant surprise, submissions began pouring into the office by August, surpassing her initial target of 10 applications and ultimately totaling an impressive 27 award submissions. This overwhelming response from the participants showcased not only their enthusiasm but also their readiness to be recognized for their hard work and dedication. The night itself was held at the Crawford County Fairgrounds in October, and it was met with a warm and enthusiastic turnout, boasting around 100 attendees.

During this highly anticipated event, awards were presented in various categories, including Cloverbuds, Cloverbud Completion Members, My Experience Award Winners, Outstanding 4-H Members, and the esteemed 4-H Club of the Year. Each recognition served to highlight not just individual accomplishments but also the collective efforts of the community in nurturing the growth and development of the youth involved. For Knoblett, the overwhelming success of Achievement Night marked a significant milestone in her career; witnessing a program she had tirelessly worked on come to life and flourish was profoundly gratifying. The positive feedback and high spirits that filled the venue were indicative of a bright future for the program. Looking ahead, Knoblett is more motivated than ever to surpass this year's achievements, with plans already underway to expand and enhance the 2025 4-H Achievement Night.



Exploring nature

Who doesn't love to fish? It's a beloved pastime that connects us with nature and creates lasting memories, especially for young people. In Crawford County, the 4-H program has collaborated with the Eastern Illinois Sportsman's Club in Eaton, Illinois, to provide local kids with this wonderful opportunity. The Eastern Illinois Sportsman's Club comprises dedicated local individuals who came together to revitalize a local property, transforming it into an accessible outdoor haven featuring a serene lake, a shooting range, and scenic nature trails. Inspired by this initiative, Jacqui Hollensbe, a passionate local Master Gardener and 4-H volunteer, teamed up with 4-H Program Coordinator April Knoblett to pitch an innovative idea aimed at engaging local youth in outdoor activities. This collaboration led to the formation of the 4-H Fishing Club, a vibrant community where kids not only get to test their fishing skills but also benefit from the wealth of expertise shared by seasoned club members.

Each meeting begins with a skill-building session, where club members learn essential techniques or tips, and this is followed by an exciting outing on the water, allowing them to put their new skills into practice. The success of the 4-H Fishing Club sparked even further interest and engagement among local children, leading to the creation of the 4-H Nature Club. This new club mirrors the fishing club in purpose and mission but focuses on the beautiful nature trails established on the property. Members of the Nature Club have had the opportunity to explore the great outdoors while participating in various educational activities, including leaf collections, bug identifications, and learning vital nature survival skills that deepen their appreciation for the environment. The collaboration with the Sportsman's Club has proven to be incredibly fruitful, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose over the years. Extension is excited about the future, as there are already plans to expand the clubs further and introduce additional engaging programs designed to encourage both kids and adults to immerse themselves in and appreciate the wonderful offerings of this beautiful property.





FOOD EXPLORATION WITH 4-H

Kansas TLC provides education to youth who have been removed from public school due to behavioral problems. During the 2023-24 school year, Youth Educator Jaylynn Schober provided weekly lessons to all students from kindergarten to eighth grade. These lessons revolved around food: how to prepare food, where it comes from, food groups, and MyPlate. Each lesson builds upon the other to help the students create a toolbox of culinary skills to help them make healthier decisions. Each lesson builds upon the other to help the students create a toolbox of culinary skills to help them make healthier decisions. As a thank you for the lessons, the principal presented Schober with a certificate for “sparkling wonder and curiosity in the world around us.” By showing up weekly, fostering connections, and believing in the students, Schober created an environment for these youth to learn about food to help influence their own lives, their own eating habits, and their own health journey.



BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ERASING STIGMA

Your Thoughts Matter. You matter. What you say has an impact. Someone may be struggling with something you have no idea about. These were some of the many impactful lessons surrounding the Your Thoughts Matter lessons with the Martinsville eighth graders. Youth Educator Jaylynn Schober and Clark County 4-H EPC Jennifer Bishop teamed up to teach the Your Thoughts Matter curriculum to a group of eighth graders in the Martinsville school district. Students learned about different disorders, the stigmas around them, and how they can be resilient. In the resilience lesson, youth used hammers and household objects to identify which objects were resilient and which weren't. This activity translated into a conversation about how students can use resources around them to become resilient. At the end of the program, students created their own mental health toolkit to help them be prepared and increase their own mindfulness around mental health issues.



DISCOVERING YOUR SPARK!

2024 brought a new favorite summer activity — Camp Clover. Hosted three times across the three counties, this camp for youth ages 8 to 12 boasted six hands-on sessions. Each youth who attended made the layers of the Earth with cereal, created their own healthy snack with apple nachos, got creative with bubble art and different painting mediums, discovered measuring skills in the culinary station, piloted drones for a new spin on Twister, and gained some essential skills in a personal development station. Extension's goal with Camp Clover is to introduce new skills and interests to a young audience in hopes we SPARK a lifelong passion for them. The youth and staff are looking forward to the 2025 Camp Clover with some big plans in the works.



STAFF GROWTH THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Camping is a favorite summer tradition for many. This includes youth across the state as they spend a week at 4-H Memorial Camp in Monticello, but this time, it was the staff's turn. Staff spent two days at camp exploring the grounds and attending sessions to improve their own camp-like programming. Brittany Smith, Edgar 4-H coordinator, said, “It was fun the first night coming back together and learning about what the other staff did that day. It really helped us put an idea together about what we wanted the day camp to look like.” Staff were able to use the workshops attended to bolster the Camp Clover offerings for the summer of 2024. Tiffany Cervantes, college and career readiness coordinator, shared her experiences, “I feel that by experiencing life in the day of a camper, we are better prepared to pump up camp and all it has to offer. It was a lot of fun to “camp” with fellow 4-H staff, share meals, and learn together.”





Culinary Thunderdome

Clark, Crawford, and Edgar counties held eight food challenges during the 2023-24 school year, with youth from all three counties competing. Extension held three 4-H challenges, three in-school settings, one after-school, and one grand finale to find state qualifiers. Extension also held a more advanced competition as part of a staff professional development day.

Throughout the program, youth have grown in their abilities and creativity. In a discussion with one teacher, she explained how her students are taught to follow a recipe all year long. Then, the food challenge turns that on its head by making youth develop their own recipe with random ingredients. The challenge sparks creativity, problem-solving and teamwork amongst students vying for the top spot.

In Marshall High School, there was a student who had struggled all year long in the foods class, but participating in the food challenge had him hit his stride. He and his partner created a dish that earned them a spot in the finale. While the teacher and principal had hesitations, Extension went full-steam ahead, and they competed at the area food challenge finale. He and his partner came alive. They created a robust dish, engaged meaningfully, and proudly presented their dish. He was a different student when given the freedom to creatively explore the culinary world.

When Extension announced the winners headed to state, one student turned to her team immediately and said, “Let’s go. I want to go.” This competition provided students with recognition outside of the traditional sports celebration. It was new sparks created for youth to display their talents. “It is nice for them to get acknowledged — especially since sports people do,” said a high school participant’s mother.



The Food Challenge also opens up new opportunities for learning moments: erasing stigmas around certain foods and failing is okay.

During the competitions, low-cost foods were incorporated in addition to soy-based ingredients. An example is canned chicken. Canned chicken is high in protein, shelf-stable, and easily incorporated into dishes. By highlighting these often looked-down-upon foods, Extension fights to erase stigmas around nutritious, affordable food.

In the 4-H finale, local 4-H coordinators competed against youth. Extension used the moment to create a learning experience. The 4-H coordinators “accidentally” mixed up sugar and garlic salt on their strawberries as well as cinnamon instead of cumin. When the judges tasted their food, the mishaps were spotted and discussed. The adults modeled how you take feedback, handle obstacles, and create a safer environment to grow in. While eating a strawberry covered in garlic salt wasn’t the judges’ favorite bite of food, the understanding and compassion emanating from the youth made it one of the best bites of food.

The food challenge sparks learning opportunities and encourages growth for participating youth, highlighting students who excel in other ways.

The Food Challenge lessons that my students participated in allowed them to learn techniques when cooking as well as to experience foods that they otherwise would not have even tried. It also exposed them to healthy competition, teamwork, and various people and resources within our community. In my opinion, it is one of the most valuable programs that could be provided to them.

Shelia Grant, Paris-Mayo CAST Club Leader





4-H teens as teachers

“As a parent of a Teen Teacher, it was fantastic to see my child in action with her team, interacting with students and teaching all things animal science. It is truly rewarding for all students,” said Tiffany Cervantes, college and career readiness coordinator.

“The students participating in teen teachers have grown so much in this experience. It goes beyond exploring teaching; it gives them an opportunity to develop skills needed for life such as public speaking, communication, and teamwork,” shared Jaylynn Schober, youth development educator.

What did you want to be when you grew up? Astronaut? Princess? Marine biologist? Teacher? 4-H Teen Teachers provides an opportunity for high school students to explore the teaching profession in a hands-on, engaging experience where they teach a series of lessons in a classroom.

It started in October when they attended a training course to learn how to be teachers. Some of these lessons were exploring experiential learning, understanding youth developmental stages, and building a solid foundation in classroom management. After the training, the youth spent the next months creating lesson plans and supply lists in preparation for teaching.

In the spring semester, there were six cohorts of teachers who taught lessons in the Marshall School District. The topics were food science, animal science, mindfulness and relaxation, social and emotional learning, cake decorating, and life skills. These lessons were taught to students from first grade to sixth grade. While not every lesson was a home run, the teens learned more about teaching through the experience. Staff were able to see the Teen Teachers grow each week — their confidence in their capabilities, their relationships with the students, and their teamwork abilities.

This was such an impactful program that 80 percent of the students who taught returned for the 2024-2025 school year. There was also a growing interest from hosting teachers to welcome the 4-H Teen Teachers into their classrooms. This program provides a glimpse into what teaching could be, and Extension was happy to help youth discover their passions that will lead them to their dream careers post-high school.



New partnerships

In 2024, programming saw significant expansion, particularly through the establishment of new connections with homeschooling families in the Marshall area. This collaborative effort led to a series of engaging cooking lessons tailored specifically for youth, beginning with the 4-H Food Challenge for participants aged 11 to 18. During this program, students immersed themselves in essential culinary skills, learning how to create personalized spice mixtures, exploring nutritious food substitutions, and understanding how various flavors interact to enhance dishes.

Concurrently, the younger participants, ages 5 to 10, took part in Cooking 101, where they developed foundational cooking skills through lessons on MyPlate nutrition guidelines, accurate measuring techniques, and basic cooking methods. After completing seven interactive sessions, both groups came together for an exciting culminating challenge: the older youth were tasked with using three mystery ingredients to create a unique dish within a one-hour time limit, while the younger participants showcased their creativity by crafting edible art that reflected their learning experiences. These cooking courses are designed not only to teach valuable culinary skills but also to empower youth to make healthier food choices and gain confidence in preparing nutritious meals for themselves, fostering lifelong habits that support their overall well-being.





Highlights



21,616
Local Website Users



519
Educational Sessions



22,061
Educational Direct Contacts



112
Extension Volunteers



55
4-H Clubs



899
4-H Club Members



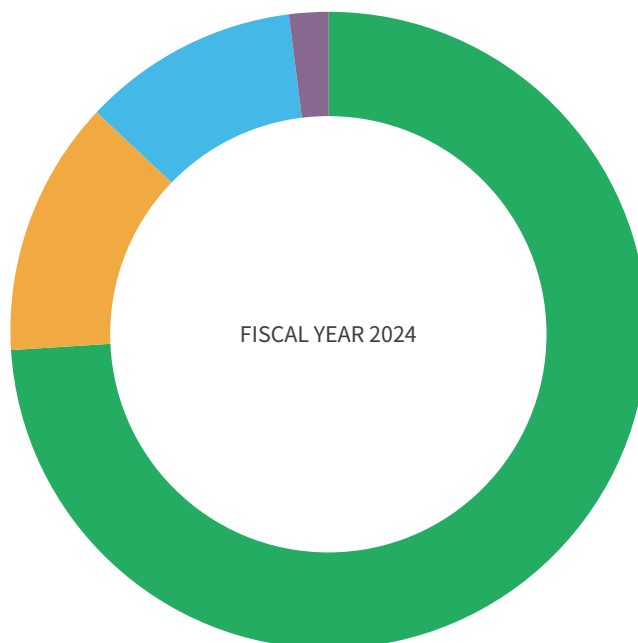
14
Master Gardener & Master Naturalist Volunteers



664
Hours donated by Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



\$340,046
Volunteer Valuation (MG, MN, and 4-H Volunteers)



Amount Source

74%	Personnel
13%	Program Supplies
11%	Facilities/Utilities
2%	Travel

Clark, Crawford, and Edgar County Extension are funded through a combination of federal dollars (23%), state dollars (30%), and local dollars (47%), which are returned to the community through educational programming.

Today's Illinois Extension

Illinois Extension serves as a regional network with a presence in every Illinois county. We link communities, businesses, and the general population to the research and development and technical resources of the university and its partners. Illinois Extension is also a provider of 4-H youth development and leadership services, helping to provide the next generation of workers, leaders, and responsible citizens.

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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.

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