

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

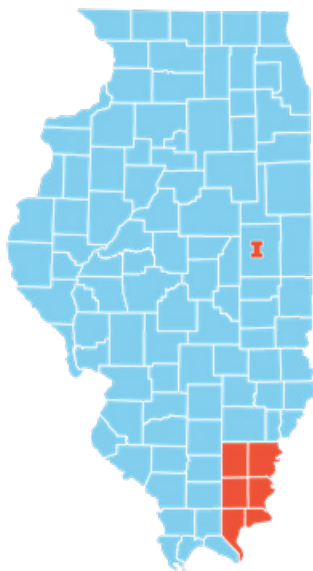


Gallatin, Hardin, Hamilton, Pope, Saline and White Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Angela Messmer
County Director



A note from the County Director

2024 has flown by. There have been so many successes this past year, and I would like to share a snapshot of them in this report. As you look through our memories of 2024, you will see pictures and stories highlighting cooking schools, ag programs, 4-H shows and programs, nutrition education, community gardens, and so much more.

Please take time to appreciate the employees of University of Illinois Extension who serve Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline, and White counties. I am proud to work with an outstanding and dedicated team that continually strives to ensure their communities receive the best. We are proud to serve our communities through 4-H youth development, SNAP-Ed nutrition education, agriculture and natural resources, small farms and local foods, and community and economic development.

As we reflect on another year of growth and accomplishments, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to our volunteers, partners, and communities. Your unwavering dedication and enthusiasm have been the driving force that allowed so many wonderful programs to

happen. Each event, program, and milestone we celebrate carries your imprint. To our 4-H families, we recognize the effort and time you invest in your children's growth through our programs. Your partnership and encouragement make a significant impact on our mission, helping to create resilient and community-minded young leaders. To our local supporters, businesses, organizations, individuals, and County Boards, thank you for standing by us and believing in the work we bring to your community. Your financial contributions, resources, and volunteer hours have allowed us to extend our reach and deepen our impact. Your support and generosity have ensured our programs remain accessible and that our community continues to thrive together.

As we look forward to 2025, I am inspired by the foundation of support from our communities and the dedication of the team I am honored to work with. We will work alongside our youth, communities, and partners to create lifelong learning opportunities.

Angela Messmer,
County Extension Director

Cover photo: Participants of the Beginning Forest Land Owner Program congregate in the shade to review material.

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

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



Community



Economy



Environment



Food and Agriculture



Health



Partnerships



Technology and Discovery



Workforce Excellence

2024 Engagement

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

730

Communities Served

805K+

Program Attendees

9.7M+

Webpage Views

22.4M+

Social Media Impressions

2.5M+

YouTube Impressions

547

Educational Sessions/Week
(28K+ Annually)

90

Online Courses Accessed by
12K+ People

12,484

Local Government Education
Webinar Reach

1,840

4-H Clubs

67,917

Fair Exhibits

20,339

Members

261,012

4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,563

Program Volunteers

266

Community Gardens

2,922

School and Community Partners

\$15,735,213

Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$514,316

Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4.7M+

External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners



4-H Youth Development



Growing leaders for tomorrow

Extension believes that every young person has the potential to learn and thrive. 4-H youth development programs nurture the skills, curiosity, and confidence that help youth become strong leaders, innovative thinkers, and engaged citizens. Whether building a solar car, designing robotic programs, or learning teamwork through community service projects, our youth are not just preparing for the future — they are shaping it.

This year, youth across Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline, and White counties took part in a variety of hands-on programs tailored to meet local needs. From workforce development initiatives like Ready 4 Work, where students practiced resume writing and interview techniques, to cutting-edge STEM projects in Virtual Welding and Drones in Agriculture, we provided learning experiences that inspired curiosity and career readiness.

4-H clubs are at the heart of our youth development efforts, providing a supportive space where young people can explore their passions, build friendships, and develop leadership skills. Across our counties, local clubs took on exciting projects, including livestock care, gardening, cooking, and technology. Youth also learned the value of generosity and teamwork through community service, such as producing over 100 lap blankets for veterans as part of the Honor Flight initiative. Their hard work and dedication culminated at county fairs. The fairs

not only showcase the talents of our youth but also highlight the connections they've built along the way.

Thank you to the families, volunteers, and community partners who make our work possible. Your support allows us to provide meaningful programming that helps youth discover their passions, develop their talents, and build a brighter tomorrow.

Together, we are shaping the next generation of leaders.
Together, we are 4-H.

2024 4-H Year in Review

4-H Youth Development by the numbers



38
Clubs



577
Memberships



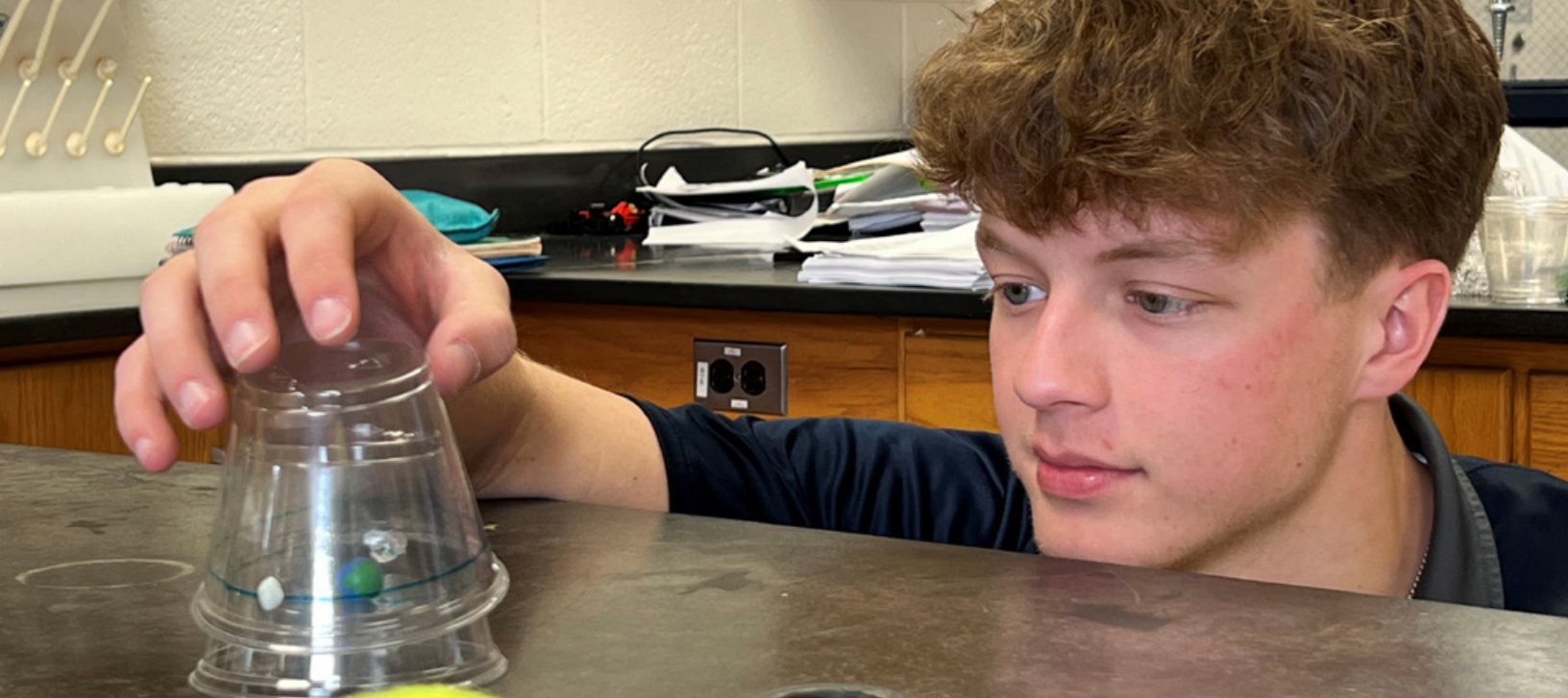
8,192
4-H Affiliations (4-H Experiences)



\$299,981
4-H Adult Club Volunteer Valuation



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



Eclipse Education: Inspiring youth under the path of totality

In January 2024, our local 4-H team launched a mission to engage and educate over 2,000 youth across all counties in our unit about the awe-inspiring science behind a rare total solar eclipse. This once-in-a-lifetime event on April 8 placed our region directly in the path of totality — a narrow band across the country where viewers experience complete darkness as the moon fully covers the sun. For many youth, this was a singular opportunity to witness a cosmic alignment that won't occur in our area again for centuries, making it a landmark educational experience.

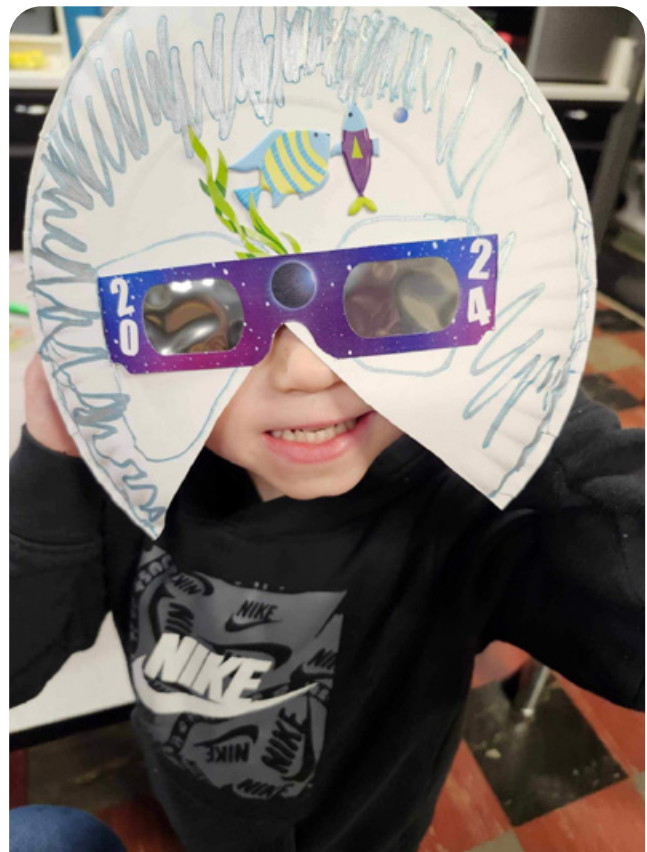
Throughout the months leading up to the eclipse, each county's Extension program coordinator supported hands-on, interactive activities designed for different age groups. High school and junior high students took part in the "eclipse in a cup" model activity, gaining insight into the earth, sun, and moon's orbits and why total solar eclipses are so rare. Meanwhile, elementary students designed and customized their own safety viewers, learning not only about eye protection but also exploring the engineering behind safe solar observation.

As the excitement spread, some students naturally became eclipse ambassadors, sharing what they learned with their families, friends, and communities. By passing along accurate information and safety tips, they helped extend Extension's reach and fostered community-wide enthusiasm and readiness for the big event.

With a focus on inspiring curiosity and building community, the 4-H team's eclipse education efforts created a memorable experience for youth in local counties, sparking lifelong interest in science and appreciation for one of nature's most extraordinary spectacles.

The eclipse simulated through a cup was a neat way to demonstrate how they work. This explained and offered a perspective on eclipses in a way I'd never seen before.

Issac Walters, Gallatin County student



White County student Jonathan Locklar proudly displays his eclipse glasses and safety viewer made during an educational program about the 2024 total solar eclipse.



Engaging youth through school programming and workshops

In 2024, the 4-H team reached students across every grade level through a wide array of school programs and workshops, creating unique and immersive learning experiences focused on STEM, workforce development, and environmental awareness. Through hands-on workshops and interactive school programs, students built critical skills for the future while fueling their curiosity and expanding their understanding of the world around them.



Stem Programming: Inspiring the Innovators of Tomorrow
STEM programming brought hands-on science and technology experiences directly into the classroom, igniting students' interest in fields such as robotics, drones, and virtual welding. Through projects like Drones in Agriculture, students learned not only the mechanics of operating drones but also their applications in modern farming, from crop surveying to precision agriculture techniques. In the robotics workshops, students explored basic engineering and programming concepts, culminating in challenges that tested their designs' durability and functionality. For younger learners, the introduction to welding through virtual simulators offered a safe yet realistic way to understand this critical trade. These programs cultivated a sense of exploration and innovation, inspiring many students to consider careers in STEM fields.

Hardin County has such limited resources and services for our youth. There is a great need for engaging and interactive educational experiences that provide students with the opportunity to connect and belong to a greater community. As the school social worker, I have seen the value of their STEM/Robotics club for our Hardin County junior high school students. This program has given them an experience that goes beyond the classroom and allows them to connect with other students with shared interests. We look forward to ongoing experiences with 4-H!

Alisha Foster, Hardin County schools



Workforce Development: Building Skills for Success

With a focus on preparing students for life after high school, Extension's workforce development programs emphasize practical skills that will serve them in future careers. Through Skills to Pay the Bills workshops, students practiced resume building, participated in mock interviews, and learned essential skills for job success. In the Welcome to the Real World simulation, students practiced budgeting and decision-making exercises with the support of local businesses and institutions. Representatives from local banks, insurance agencies, car dealerships, and real estate offices spoke to students about their fields and guided them through realistic choices, like buying a car, finding housing, and managing finances. By participating in these immersive activities, students developed not only valuable life skills but also a deeper understanding of the opportunities available to them. This program aimed to instill confidence in each student's ability to navigate the professional world, with many expressing newfound enthusiasm for career planning and personal development.

Other hands-on workshops, like our electrical skills session, introduced students to the fundamentals of circuit design and wiring safety, giving them a practical glimpse into skilled trades. These immersive experiences in different fields, from finance to technical trades, encouraged students to explore career options and build valuable life skills. Many students left with a renewed sense of confidence and enthusiasm for their future pathways, equipped with foundational knowledge for career planning and personal development.





Gallatin County 4-H'ers participated in the Oak Tree Savannah's program. They planted oak trees at the Ridgway Park.



Environmental education: cultivating conservation and stewardship

Environmental stewardship was a central theme this year, with programming designed to inspire young conservationists and deepen students' connection to their local ecosystems. Workshops in ornithology encouraged students to observe and identify local bird species, learning about their habitats and the importance of biodiversity. In the Solar Cars sessions, students explored renewable energy sources by designing and racing solar-powered model cars, making the concepts of sustainability and clean energy tangible and exciting.

Additionally, in the Oak Tree Savannahs program, 4-H'ers partnered with their county's Soil and Water Conservation teams to plant 25 oak trees across their counties. Twenty years from now, each of these 42 oak savannahs will:

- Produce 54 tons of oxygen, allowing 58,008 people to breathe for an entire day
- Generate 59,439 gallons of water evaporation, providing the cooling effect of one air conditioner running continuously for 5 ½ years
- Capture and store 20 tons of carbon monoxide

These efforts demonstrate how trees serve as nature's most effective carbon capture technology. By restoring oak savannahs, the most endangered forest ecosystem in Illinois, area students contributed to local conservation and gained firsthand experience in environmental preservation.

Through this diverse programming, local 4-H teams empowered students to explore their interests, build vital life skills, and consider their role in the world. From budding scientists and skilled tradespeople to passionate environmentalists, the young people reached through these initiatives are now better equipped to make a positive impact on their communities and beyond.



Celebrating 4-H achievements at county fairs, Illinois State Fair, and regional showcase

2024 marked an exciting year for 4-H members as they showcased their hard work and dedication at local and regional fairs. This year, 4-H'ers had the distinct honor of being invited to show at the DuQuoin Regional Fair for the first time in several years, giving them a unique opportunity to display their projects in front of a wider audience and compete at a new level.

Local five-county fairs featured a variety of competitions and exhibits that highlighted the diversity of 4-H programming. From general exhibits showcasing creativity and innovation to specialized events like livestock shows, horsemanship competitions, and dog obedience/ agility, 4-H members had many opportunities to demonstrate their dedication to their projects. In addition to the animal shows, some fairs hosted home shows that featured 4-H'ers talents in areas such as baking, sewing, and other creative and hands-on skills.

The Illinois State Fair, one of the largest and most prestigious events of the year, provided a special platform for top-performing 4-H members to represent their counties and exhibit their projects. For many of the youth, the experience was a memorable one as they competed against some of the best in the state. The 4-H exhibits at the State Fair offered a glimpse into the future of Illinois agriculture, science, and community leadership.



Hadley Beever discusses the care and characteristics of her bearded dragon with a judge at the Pope-Hardin County 4-H general show.



Learn more about 4-H project areas
4h.extension.illinois.edu/projects-programs



Molly Kitchens discusses her project with a judge at the Gallatin County 4-H show.

This year also marked a special milestone, as several 4-Hers who had previously competed only in county-level shows were able to showcase their projects at the DuQuoin Regional Fair. This regional stage allowed our youth to expand their reach and gain new experiences, furthering their personal growth and fostering a deeper connection to their communities.

Whether competing at the county, regional, or state level 4-H members took great pride in their work, building confidence, learning from their experiences, and celebrating the successes of their peers. The fairs were a true reflection of the skills and passion that the 4-H program cultivates, giving youth a chance to shine and continue growing into future leaders.

Showing at the 4-H show helps me learn about the project area and teaches me how to interview well with people. It helps me be more comfortable with people I don't know and helps me learn to take constructive criticism well.

Katelyn Davis, White County 4-Her

2024 4-H Show Stats



345
Participants



1,954
Entries



61
State Fair Entries



Showing projects at a 4-H show allows youth to showcase their skills and creativity in a project area of interest.





DSAC Youth Gardening Class

Youth gardening classes at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center were back in 2024 for the third year. Classes met once a week throughout the summer, and participants were successful in maintaining the youth high tunnel area. Each week, participating youth harvested and weighed produce, pulled weeds, watered garden beds, planted seeds, and completed any other task that was necessary. After weighing the produce, it was then placed in the community blessing box, where it was free to any community member in need. In addition to maintaining the garden, youth also learned about sun safety, monarchs, and succulents through lessons from staff and Master Gardener volunteers. In 2024, a total of 894 pounds of produce was donated back to the community.



Kinley Graves taste testing a tomato that was harvested during youth gardening class at the Dixon Springs Ag Center.



Hardin County School Garden

The raised garden bed at Hardin County School was established by Program Coordinator Jennifer Warren in 2019. During the past five years, this space has been used for various programs and initiatives, including Great Garden Detective, I-Pollinate, and food donations. During the spring of 2024, Master Gardener volunteer Nancy Drone wanted to use the area to educate students about where their food comes from and encourage them to learn how to grow their own food. With careful planning and collaboration with the teachers, Nancy was able to bring hands-on lessons to the third grade classrooms. Students learned about composting, square-foot gardening, and different types of fruits and vegetables. They planted seeds and took care of those plants as they grew by scouting for weeds and insects. A few weeks later, the students made their first harvest of radishes, kale, lettuce, and spinach. This produce was donated to the students and their families. Over the summer, when school was not in session, the produce was donated to the Hardin County Golden Circle. A total of 73 pounds of produce was harvested and donated.

SNAP-Ed and 4-H team up to donate produce to local food pantries and senior centers

In 2024, SNAP-Ed staff continued work with the White County 4-H GIFT Garden, which has provided fresh produce to pantries, senior sites, and youth groups since 2016. 4-H Program Coordinator Amy McCarty worked with the SNAP-Ed Educator and Master Gardener volunteer DeAnna Dyer to plan for the season, secure funding, and track harvested produce to help tell the garden's story. SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator Lacey Barnhill connected sites to the fresh produce, assisted with a delivery schedule, and provided nutrition education materials, including recipe cards and information on how to store fresh produce.

The 2024 donation sites were the Grayville Senior Center, receiving over 249 pounds; the White County Senior Center, receiving over 266 pounds; and the Cherry Street General Baptist Church Food Pantry, receiving over 263 pounds of fresh produce.



Produce from the White County 4-H GIFT Garden displayed at the Grayville Senior Citizens Center along with recipe cards and other educational materials provided by SNAP-Ed.

Extension food donation gardens in 2024



7

Active food donation gardens



7,884

Pounds of produce donated

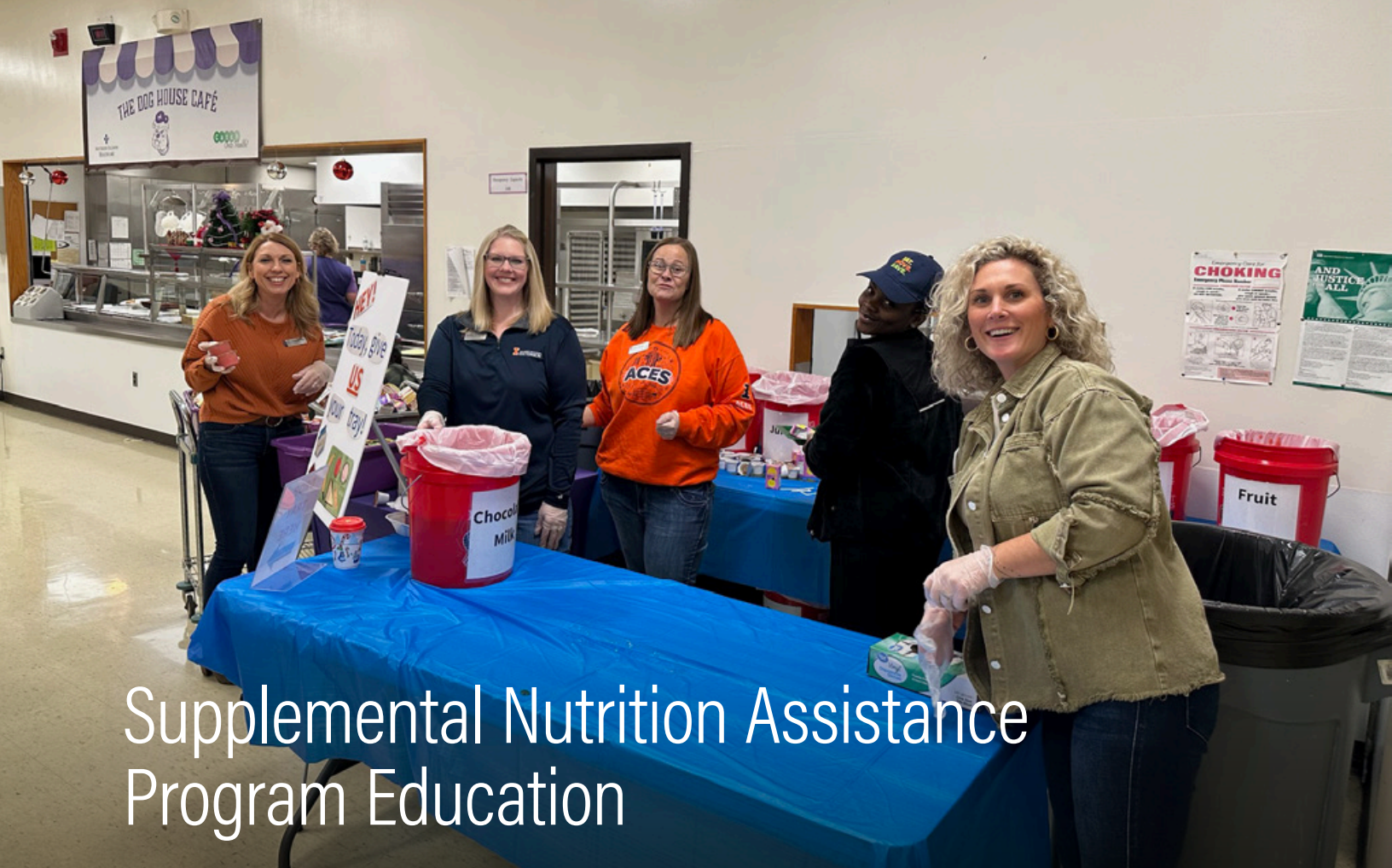


\$13,955

Value of produce donated



Participants of the youth gardening program work with Ag Gardener Julie Zakes planting celery in the youth high tunnel at Dixon Springs Ag Center.



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education provides free, easy solutions to improve the health of Illinois families and communities through strategic partnerships focused on healthy eating, physical activity, and improving access to healthy foods. These solutions are provided through in-person lessons, online resources, and collaborating with organizations and communities to promote healthier settings and choices. Our three components of implementation are direct education, healthy messaging, and policy, systems, and environmental change.

SNAP-Ed provides free and engaging nutrition education classes and events and connects individuals and families to additional online resources. Another approach of SNAP-Ed is Policy, Systems, and Environmental change interventions. PSE change can improve community health by addressing socioeconomic factors and working collaboratively to support making the healthy choice the easy choice. The Illinois SNAP-Ed team partners with community groups to make healthy choices easier for those they serve. Extension works where SNAP-eligible audiences live, work, eat, play, learn, and shop.

In 2024, SNAP-Ed worked with partners representing food banks, food pantries, K-12 schools, colleges, public health, social services, retail, libraries, housing authorities, healthcare, not-for-profits, senior centers, meal sites, coalitions, and faith-based groups.

2024 SNAP-Ed Impacts



14
Partnerships with K-12 schools



36
Partnerships with emergency food sites



37
Partnerships with other types of organizations



508
Nutrition education classes



2,069
Nutrition education participants



56
Policy, systems, and/or environmental changes adopted by SNAP-Ed partner organizations



Learn more about SNAP-Ed
extension.illinois.edu/global/snap-education-impact



Direct education

Adult Programming

SNAP-Ed community outreach workers had much success this year providing adult programming across the unit. Programming took place in a variety of settings, including at new partner sites. Programming locations included Shawneetown Library, Harrisburg District Library, Golconda Library, Wabash Heritage Apartments, Hamilton & White Co senior centers, Southeastern Illinois College, Southern Illinois Resource Advocacy Center, Egyptian Health Department, and Arrowleaf. The Create Better Health curriculum was the star of 2024 but Healthy Cents lessons were also delivered.

During a Create Better Health program at the Shawneetown Public Library, Community Worker Nanci Berger observed that several participants had questions about how to adapt recipes for an air fryer. Some noted that the air fryer was great during the summer months because using an oven put out too much heat in their homes. Berger decided to incorporate this cooking method into her lessons. As a result, participants were able to learn how to make healthy meals using equipment they already own. Berger demonstrated several recipes using the air fryer including Easy Kabobs and Pizza. Direct Education allows Extension to provide solutions that will benefit the everyday lives of participants and flexibility to pivot to meet specific needs.



Community Worker Nanci Berger demonstrated how to use an air fryer to prepare healthy recipes at home during the CREATE Better Health program.

In 2024, SNAP-Ed created an exciting partnership with Gallatin Counties Southern Illinois Resource Advocacy Center (SIRAC) and Coleman Tri-County Services. This connection not only provided free nutrition education to SIRAC guests but they also provided a space for Coleman Tri-County Services to participate

in the adult program CREATE Better Health. The initial lesson focused on introducing participants to MyPlate and highlighted physical activity. Create Better Health lessons always conclude with a hands-on opportunity to prepare a recipe from the curriculum. Participants were encouraged to try new flavors and to be creative in customizing a recipe to their individual tastes.

I can't imagine NOT eating whole wheat items knowing what I know now!

Healthy Cents participant



Community Worker, Terra Russell, discusses MyPlate and it's associated messages with participants of a Create Better Health program.

Connecting With Individuals and Families through Eat. Move. Save. Booths

Eat.Move.Save. booths are a great way for the SNAP-Ed team to connect with individuals and provide nutrition education, share resources, and, at times, provide recipe samples. EMS booths are interactive and promote direct education classes. They are also a way to share the EMS and Find Food IL websites as well as connect participants with the healthy text program and monthly newsletter. Twenty-five booths were provided at various partner sites and community events in 2024.



"My Son never eats everything in a meal, but he did this and he wanted more!"





Local Schools and Community Centers Play Host to Youth Nutrition Education Programs

It was another rewarding year working with local youth and youth-serving agencies to bring impactful nutrition education programming to our communities.

For the summer's Illinois Junior Chef programs, Extension was thrilled to partner with new sites as well as try a new three-day delivery approach with summer cooking camps this year. Harrisburg High School, Eldorado High School, and the New Haven Community Building were all locations offering the three day camps. What was also new with these camps in 2024 was a collaboration with summer meal programming. Students attending these particular camps received summer meals on-site coupled with activities.

SNAP-Ed continued building a strong partnership with Carmi's We Love White County youth program, ARROWS, by providing participants in grades 6 to 12 a unique fun summer cooking experience called Teen Cuisine. Like Illinois Junior Chef, Teen Cuisine's lessons are traditionally taught for two hours each day over a course of five days. However, this summer, participants were especially happy to be part of a new experimental SNAP-Ed concept Cooking Camp. This opportunity allowed the youth to spend three fun-filled educational days at the WLWC Seed Station.

As part of the camp, not only did students get to prepare and eat their Teen Cuisine creations, ranging from waldorf salad, breakfast fruit pizza, oven baked chicken nuggets, etc. but they also received lunch daily provided by WLWC as part of their Free Summer Sack Lunch initiative. Fifteen teens participated in a total of five lessons with topics including: Eat Smart, You Are What You Eat, Power Up with Breakfast, Find the Fat and Kick the Sugar Habit. Each lesson highlighted many opportunities to build their kitchen competencies, such as honing knife skills, learning food safety, how to read the nutrition facts label, ways to identify empty calories, and how to find added sugar, to name a few. Before the end of each lesson, a physical activity element was incorporated. Participants enjoyed playing physical activity charades, learning about intensity levels, ways to reduce screen time and how to do wall-sits, pushups, and squats.

Before departing, participants not only received lunch, but they were also gifted several incentives including kitchen utensils and a cookbook to take home so they can continue to improve their kitchen skills and prepare nutritional recipes.



92

Illinois Junior Chef and Teen Cuisine Participants



1,862

Youth reached in school programs



White County Teen Cuisine participant Maverick Slay prepares chicken for homemade chicken nuggets.

OrganWise Guys Program

Extension's most implemented and beloved curriculum, OrganWise Guys, continues to bring joy and knowledge to community youth. OWG includes fun and engaging nutrition education and physical activity lessons in grades kindergarten through second. The curriculum includes dolls and organ-named characters that teach children about healthy choices and the importance of taking care of their bodies. OWG was implemented in six schools, with almost 400 sessions provided.

I teach my brother and sister what you teach me.
OrganWise Guys Participant



Community Worker Kristina Aldrich, leads a class in an OrganWise Guys "Wisersize" story problem at Eldorado Elementary School.





Participants at the Pope County Illinois Junior Chef program use the slicing skills they learned to create a healthy and delicious fruit pizza.



Healthy food access

Increasing access to healthy food through donations and partnerships

One goal for Illinois SNAP-Education is to increase access, availability, utilization, and sustainability of high-quality food to improve nutrition security. To meet this goal for SNAP-eligible families in our local counties, SNAP-Ed PSE staff work closely with various sites and organizations that serve this population and link them to pantries, senior sites, and communities with limited access to nutritionally dense foods.

In addition, SNAP-Ed works alongside other Extension program areas like 4-H to provide fresh produce for local sites. The White County 4-H GIFT Garden, 4-H program coordinator, and Master Gardeners continued to collaborate with SNAP-Ed in 2024 to provide over 700 pounds of fresh produce to one food pantry and two senior centers in White County.



Food donations from the Healthy Lifestyles Action team drive are delivered to a local blessing box in Saline County. Food from the drive was distributed to pantries and blessing boxes throughout Saline and Gallatin counties.



Find food near you
extension.illinois.edu/food/find-food-illinois

Coalition involvement increases SNAP-Ed reach

Actively engaging in local coalitions is another way SNAP-Ed staff help to increase access. SNAP-Ed staff, currently serving as member and chair, are part of The Healthy Lifestyles Action Team, an action team of the Southeastern Illinois Community Health Coalition. The action team continued support of the Golden Circle's Hoe Down Garden in Ridgway by providing new compost/soil for their beds, along with new equipment to make harvesting easier. The site planted early spring and summer crops this year, which included onions, lettuce, zucchini, squash, cucumbers, beans, peppers, and tomatoes. The produce was utilized by kitchen staff for meals or donated directly to seniors to take home.

The action team also provided monetary support to the Harrisburg Golden Circle for the implementation of their first on-site garden. SNAP-Ed staff coordinated the donation of plants, garden beds, and resources to the site to get started. They were able to harvest over 160 pounds of produce.

Garden gleaning is another avenue PSE staff use to fill the nutritional gap in our communities. Staff help guide pantries on how to glean produce from local growers and also take advantage of produce grown from the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center. Utilizing active partnerships with local food pantries, PSE staff coordinate the delivery and drop off of fresh produce from the Ag Center. In 2024, SNAP-Ed PSE staff delivered 794 pounds.

Healthy food drive engages community

SNAP-Ed PSE staff led a healthy food drive in partnership with the Healthy Lifestyles Action Team. Utilizing the Illinois SNAP-Ed Nourish Your Neighbor Toolkit and working with community partners, the team encouraged healthy pantry staple donations across Saline and Gallatin counties. Over 200 pounds of food items were donated, with many of those items being from the suggested staple items from the toolkit. Healthy food donations can play a significant role in nutrition security and help support healthy choices for our community. These donations were distributed throughout Saline and Gallatin counties.



Hunters Feeding Illinois partnership brings valuable protein to local food pantries

The Illinois Deer Donation Program returned for its third donation season as Hunters Feeding Illinois. The name change is a reflection of an expanded partnership among Feeding Illinois, Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and University of Illinois Extension. Hunters Feeding Illinois has the same mission: to connect hunters, meat processors, and food pantries and support access to lean protein for Illinois residents and families. The expanded partnership covers 16 counties in East-Central Illinois and 16 counties in Southern Illinois. In the 2023 season, Southern Illinois Hunters for the Hungry processed 70 deer and provided more than 3,000 pounds of venison to food-insecure neighbors in Illinois. The goal for the 2024 hunting season was 200 deer.

Regional processors involved in this year's project were R&M Meat Processing in Ellis Grove, Birkner's Processing in McLeansboro, Sanchez Meat Processing in DuQuoin, Shirley Farms Deer Processing in DeSoto, Triple C Meats in Anna, and R&R Deer Processing in Vienna.

Thanks to a collaboration with Feeding Illinois, donations will be doubled dollar per dollar. A \$50 donation becomes \$100, which covers the processing of one deer. For those interested in supporting the southern Illinois region, donations are accepted through the Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network or Feeding Illinois.

Southern Illinois SNAP-Ed team members help with the coordination of donated venison getting out into local pantries. In addition, we provide nutrition education and recipe samples so that folks know how to prepare and store the venison. Neighbors have access to materials, recipe books, and recipe videos. Guests who may have never tried venison had the opportunity to taste a recipe, and others learned to use it in new ways.



Pantries in Gallatin, Hardin, Saline, and White counties received venison donations totaling over 600 pounds this hunting season.



Venison protein booth at the Shawnee Development food pantry. Visitors of the pantry had the opportunity to try a sample of a venison dish as well as take home venison recipe cards to inspire meal ideas.



To support this program with a monetary donation
donorbox.org/hunters-feeding-illinois
or sicf.org/sifpn

Hunters Feeding Illinois 2024 Donations



4,472

Pounds of venison



Venison and educational materials at a donation site.



Learn more about Hunters Feed Illinois
extension.illinois.edu/food/hunters-feeding-illinois



Food on the Move mobile food pantry brings nourishment to Gallatin County

The Food On The Move mobile pantry program, a partnership with TriState Food Bank, wrapped up its pilot year in October 2024. Monthly distributions continued in Gallatin County at the New Haven Community Building. In 2024, an average of about 62 households and 135 individuals were served monthly, receiving about 50 pounds of food, including fresh produce, lean proteins, milk, eggs, grains, and other meal staples. A majority of the guests, 67.61%, resided in New Haven, while several other Gallatin and even White County communities visited the mobile pantry this year.

Two pop-up events were also held in Hardin County at Rosiclare Park, with an average of 77 households and 176 individuals served at each event. Nutrition education was provided by SNAP-Ed, as well as healthy nudges and recipe examples. Guests at FOTM events were asked about the educational materials distributed as well as the recipes and recipe samples. 61% said they tried a recipe sample at an event, and 59% made a recipe at home. 96% agree that their fruit and vegetable intake increased, and 65% agree their protein intake increased.

This was great! So many things to choose from, and the fresh produce was wonderful. The volunteers were all friendly and so helpful. It helped so much with my monthly budget. It was a blessing. Thank you!

Guest of Food on the Move mobile pantry in New Haven

Educational materials throughout the mobile pantry encourage healthy choice and provide information on how to get the most out of the items available.

GUESTS BY ZIP CODE

Amount	Zip Code
67.6%	62867
10.1%	62979
5.8%	62869
4.5%	62871
4%	62821
2.2%	62984
1.2%	62934

GUESTS THAT SAMPLED A RECIPE AT A FOTM DISTRIBUTION:

Amount	Source
61%	Yes
39%	No

GUESTS THAT MADE AN EAT. MOVE. SAVE. RECIPE AT HOME:

Amount	Source
59%	Yes
41%	No



SNAP-Ed provides resources for partner sites and professional development opportunities

Food Pantries Adopt Strategies to Encourage Healthy Choices
Have you ever considered how food is displayed at a grocery store? Promotion and placement can influence what individuals choose. The same marketing strategies can be applied to food pantries. Illinois SNAP-Ed uses a nudge strategy to encourage clients to choose healthier foods through subtle display changes and marketing. PSE staff implement these environmental changes through healthy signage like posters, shelf talkers, and yard signs to prompt healthy choices; booths that offer taste tests of a specific item to help familiarize clients with a product; bundling items in the pantry to show how clients can combine them to make a healthy meal or snack; and provide recipes to introduce clients to new foods and preparation techniques of nutritious items found in the pantry.



Recipes and preparation techniques are prominently displayed at the 4C's food pantry to encourage visitors to select healthier items and provide ideas for incorporating them into meals.

Lunchrooms Implement New Strategies and Attend School Nutrition Training

PSE staff enjoyed working with local schools to implement changes, support initiatives, provide professional development, and engage in fun activities and interventions.

School nutrition staff from Eldorado Unit 4 Schools received professional development with the ABCs of School Nutrition training from SNAP-Ed Educator Lizz Cooley-Questelle. Twelve staff members learned best practices for cafeteria share tables and reducing sodium in school meals. Post training, nutrition staff at Eldorado High School were excited to implement a flavor station in their lunchroom. Flavor stations can increase the amount of food eaten, decrease food waste, and help students get the nutrients they need. Lacey Barnhill, SNAP-Ed program coordinator, helped the site create a creative display for their station.

SNAP-Ed PSE staff worked closely with Harrisburg's East Side Intermediate School this year. They've supported National Breakfast Week activities, breakfast Try Days, and other improvements and activities surrounding their Breakfast Expansion grant and initiatives. Students had the option to try new products the school is exploring to add to their menu and vote on their favorites. They also learned about the benefits of breakfast while engaging in fun activities. In addition, the SNAP-Ed team provided consultation, connection to resources and grant opportunities, and was able to work with the school to conduct a preliminary tray waste audit. The purpose of these audits is to identify food waste, educate schools about the amount and type of waste, encourage ways to reduce waste, and encourage eating more of the nutritious foods provided. Results from the audit will guide suggested interventions and strategies for waste reduction and better meal participation.



Flavor station in Eldorado Unit 4 school cafeteria. Here students are encouraged to add flavor to their lunches.

Professional Development Opportunities

SNAP-Ed provides and supports professional development opportunities to community partners in multiple settings. In 2024, SNAP-Ed Educator Lizz Cooley-Questelle provided trainings to individual pantry managers, pantry staff & volunteers, school food service staff, teachers and school administrators, and school wellness committees, as well as community members and professionals attending the 2024 SI Food Security Summit.



SNAP-Ed Educator Lizz Cooley-Questelle provides training during the ABC's of School Nutrition Training.



Local Food Systems and Small Farms



Expert assistance provided in the areas of food, agriculture, and environment

During the past year, numerous calls and emails from residents have come to local Extension offices seeking direct assistance for a wide range of agricultural and environmental issues. A total of 172 agriculture and 30 natural resource-related questions were answered by Bronwyn Aly, local food systems and small farms educator.

Typical questions include: Why are the bottom leaves of my tomato plants starting to die? What is this insect? Where can I get my soil sampled?

More specific questions involving production agriculture include: How do I control buttercup in my pasture? Can you provide information on starting a U-pick blueberry farm? What can I spray for broad mite control on peppers in my high tunnel?

The Cooperative Extension Service is offered nationwide, and Illinois Extension draws on research-based expertise from the land-grant system of universities to provide unbiased, direct assistance for residents seeking information.

It is one of the most rewarding and exciting services I provide in my role as an Extension educator. Some questions can be answered easily, while others take more time to research to find the best solution. In either case, being able to provide someone with information that allows them to solve a problem, consider a new business venture, or gain confidence in growing their own food is an opportunity for me to be of service in my community.

Bronwyn Aly, Local Food Systems and Small Farms Educator

EXPERT ASSISTANCE RESPONSES: 202

	Amount	Source
●	33.2%	In person
●	22.3%	Email
●	39.1%	Phone
●	5.5%	Social Media

Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News

The Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News newsletter was first created 30 years ago to communicate timely, research-based information to commercial fruit and vegetable growers within Illinois. Over the years, this newsletter has benefited not just Illinois growers but also producers across the Midwest. Each issue of the IFVN is currently sent to 1,200 email subscribers, mailed to 20 US postal addresses, and housed on Extension's website. Campus-based extension specialists and Extension educators are asked to submit research-based articles, provide regional updates, and post upcoming programming beneficial and relevant to commercial fruit and vegetable growers.

Bronwyn Aly, local foods systems & small farms educator, contributes articles and regional updates along with her duties as co-editor, expanding the breadth and reach of the local food systems and small farms programming. Since the IFVN first began, articles and research updates from fruit and vegetable research being conducted at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center have been published. These newsletter articles and updates not only capture the scope of research being conducted locally but also disseminate the information to an audience much wider than just the residents within the six counties.



Read or subscribe to Illinois Fruit & Vegetable News
extension.illinois.edu/newsletters/ifvn



High tunnel production field day highlights campus-based research and demonstration

In July, DSAC hosted a High Tunnel Production Field Day. This was the second year for this meeting, and the plan is to make it an annual event. Last year, USDA, NRCS, and FSA staff talked about programs that each agency offers to support high tunnel production and specialty crop growers. To build on those topics, this year, a local contractor with experience in greenhouse construction was in attendance to share basic concepts of installing and assembling a high tunnel. Dr. Kacie Athey, Extension Specialty Crops Entomologist, gave an overview of the biological insect control work that has been conducted at Dixon Springs over the past four years. Those in attendance had the opportunity to see examples of damage different insect pests cause on tomato and pepper fruits, including aphids, thrips, stink bugs, worms, and roly polies or pill bugs.

University of Illinois students working in the area of farm robotics demonstrated the robot's ability to take photographs of plants in the high tunnel autonomously, the first step in being able to scout and identify insect pests on the plants. The robot also has the ability to assess the ripeness of red cherry tomatoes and harvest the ripe fruits. While we may be located 250 miles south of the main University of Illinois campus, Illinois Extension provides programming and research that creates the link from campus-based faculty to the local stakeholders that will benefit from new discoveries and solutions.



University of Illinois students setting up the robot to move down the aisle and scan and photograph the tomato plants.



Learn more about local events
extension.illinois.edu/ghhpsw

Southern Illinois Summer Twilight series provides a space to learn and network

The 2024 Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series visited farms in four different counties, including Legacy Meats, LLC in Lawrence County, McLane Farms in Union County, Blessed Blooms in Wayne County, and Sunnybrook Gardens in White County.

Legacy Meats shared information about their cattle and hog operation and their custom meat processing. McLane Farms was the first aquaculture farm highlighted in the Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series and participants learned about raising and marketing large-mouth bass along with rice production. Blessed Blooms is not only a cut flower farm but also provides a market space for vendors in the Fairfield area to sell locally grown and made products.



Attendees of the Twilight meeting at Sunnybrook Gardens explore the farm and discuss the diverse production practices implemented there.

Sunnybrook Gardens first hosted a Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Meeting in 2015, and they were just getting started with processing frozen sweet corn. It was great to come back nine years later and see the progress and expansion that has been realized in their business.

A long-term networking impact was identified this year while at the McLane Farms in Union County. As the family was talking to the participants about their overall diversified farming operation that includes row crops, large-mouth bass, and rice, they mentioned attending the 2018 Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Meeting at Cahokia Rice and how it helped them get started in rice production. Their daughter was in college studying agriculture and had an interest in growing rice, so the family attended the meeting. They had the opportunity to talk with the farmer at Cahokia Rice, Blake Gerard, and have continued a relationship of sharing information.



Extension Forestry Specialist Chris Evans explains maple syrup production to students attending the 2024 Stewardship Week.



Stewardship Week 2024

A rich history of youth conservation education

The last week in April is special for grade school students and their teachers across southernmost Illinois. It is when they travel to the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center to participate in Stewardship Week. In this multi-day outdoor environmental education program, students learn and experience what it means to be stewards of the land. Students enjoy their day as they trek through learning stations where resource professionals lead short natural resource-related programs. It may be a nature walk, hands-on activity, or animal encounter. Topics include soil conservation, wildlife management, natural heritage preservation, wetland restoration, forest conservation, geology, water quality, entomology, invasive species, weather, and more.

The program, created in 1990 by the Illinois Forest Resource Center, has brought together dozens of co-sponsoring organizations and hundreds of natural resource specialists and volunteers over the past three decades. While Illinois Extension is the lead organization for this event, Stewardship Week has realized continued success because of the partnerships forged with the various agencies, presenters, volunteers, donors, and event support staff.



The US Forest Service, an original partner beginning in 1990, not only provides monetary support but also provides resource professionals to lead nearly one third of the total learning stations.

Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development provides monetary support along with staffing the information tent and has been a partner since 1990. One of the state paleontologists with the Illinois State Geological Survey has presented an Earth science lesson every year except one. Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers are dedicated presenters across various topics. Many presenters have invested years educating youth, and their commitment to natural resource education is an invaluable asset to Stewardship Week.

Cooperating partners include but are not limited to:

Illinois Conservation Police
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Illinois Forestry Association
Illinois State Geological Survey
Illinois State Water Survey
Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc*
National Wild Turkey Federation*
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation*
Saline/Gallatin Farm Bureau
Southern 7 Health Departments
Southern Illinois University - GRASS Outreach
University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners
University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalists
Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Trees Forever
University of Illinois Extension staff
U.S. Forest Service - Shawnee National Forest*

*Partners that provide monetary support for Stewardship Week



Participant Ruby Lewis was eager to encounter a snake at the reptiles and amphibians stewardship station. At this station, students learned about animals they may encounter in the wild.

The goal of Stewardship Week is to create awareness among young people of the need to carefully manage natural resources. They learn how to better understand the relationships between soil, water, plants, and animals by participating in activities presented by real-world professionals. They learn how to think rather than what to think about environmental issues in their backyard. Thirty-five years later, Stewardship Week continues to thrive as a relevant and impactful program. More than 75,600 elementary students have been through the Stewardship Week program. In the past six years, some resource professionals who attended Stewardship Week as youth returned as presenters, demonstrating the long-term impact of this outstanding program.



Learn more about Stewardship Week
extension.illinois.edu/dsac/stewardship-week



Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists improve their communities through volunteerism and sharing knowledge

Illinois Extension Master Gardeners invest their time and efforts in local communities to grow food, support pollinators, and share their knowledge with others. They are trained volunteers who dedicate their time and skills to make their communities a better place. There is a wide range of volunteer opportunities, which include speaking to local organizations, establishing community gardens, and conducting programs with groups of all ages.

As stewards of the environment, Master Naturalists share their time and talents in communities to invest in the future of our natural world. Trained volunteers are environmental advocates who take part in local conservation and restoration activities. These activities include invasive species removal, teaching groups about the environment, and learning about the health of local waterways. The Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs both require training and an application process. They do not require a degree, but volunteers should be able to dedicate some time to the program.



White County Master Gardener receives award

Charlie Nolan was honored with the prestigious State Outstanding Master Gardener Award in 2024 for exceptional service and commitment to the community. Presented during the State Master Gardener Conference in Champaign, Illinois, this award recognizes an individual Master Gardener who has demonstrated exemplary leadership, innovative programming, and a profound impact on their community. Charlie has made significant contributions to the White County 4-H GIFT Garden and the youth summer gardening classes held there. His passion for gardening and nature shines through his commitment to the Master Gardener program and his many hours of volunteer work. The dedication of all Extension volunteers is greatly appreciated.



Charlie Nolan,
Master Gardener

Seed libraries offer opportunities for local home gardeners

In 2023, Master Gardener volunteer Deanna Dyer set out with a vision to bring seed libraries to several of our local towns. Starting out small, she worked with Carmi Public Library to get a seed library in place in 2023. After talking with local businesses and securing more seed donations, she began working with other libraries. Her work included repackaging seeds into smaller amounts that could be used by a backyard gardener and organizing the packages so they could be delivered to various locations. By the spring of 2024, her idea had expanded to include libraries in Carmi, Grayville, Shawneetown, and Norris City. In total, around 500 people benefited from the seed libraries by taking seed packets and other literature.



Master Gardener DeAnna Dyer established a seed library at Groff Memorial Public Library in Grayville. The library made seeds available to everyone in the community along with educational materials.

Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists in Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline and White counties reported:



1,207
Volunteer Hours



\$40,422
Value of Volunteer time put back in to local communities



Become a volunteer:
extension.illinois.edu/global/volunteer



Animal Science at the Dixon Springs Ag Center



The Dixon Springs Agricultural Center is a key site for animal science research, education, and outreach. Encompassing 580 university-owned acres plus 4,200 additional acres under a U.S. Forest Service special use permit, the University of Illinois Department of Animal Sciences operates a pasture-based cow-calf SimAngus herd at the satellite facility. This year, around 425 calves from the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 calving seasons were sent to campus, supporting a range of animal science research projects.

Among recent core studies was a continued GrowSafe project, which assessed feed efficiency in 110 Hereford x Angus cow-calf pairs. This system, installed in 2012, monitors residual feed intake for up to 126 animals, aiding in the understanding of genetic feed efficiency. Notable projects include examining post-weaning dry matter intake classification and partnering with the American Hereford Association to assess long-term breed impacts on progeny performance. Additional research includes ongoing pasture forage studies, fetal programming, creep feeding, and tolerance to tall fescue—a predominant pasture grass at DSAC. Legumes and other warm-season grasses also contribute to pasture diversity.

University of Illinois Extension hosts Teresa Steckler, Ph.D., as the on-site Livestock Extension Educator, facilitating educational outreach. DSAC welcomes undergraduate students through the Illinois Beef Experiential Learning and Industry Exposure Fellowship program to gain hands-on experience in beef production, research, and industry collaboration. 2024 I-BELIEF summer interns Madilyn Brummer and Nicole Freisleben worked collaboratively to examine the correlation between phenotypic traits and fertility in heifers. Krescene Holscher worked to evaluate the impact of invasive plant species on the type and influx of wildlife populations in southern Illinois.

As a prospective veterinary student, I have no doubt that the skills and resources that I gained from my time at DSAC will serve me well throughout my life and future career. The endless learning opportunities extended to me through my internship further developed my knowledge about the animal agriculture industry in a true production-based setting. The professional and personal connections fostered at DSAC are an invaluable element of my University of Illinois education that will continue to enhance my abilities as an individual in the classroom, workforce, and beyond, for which I am immensely grateful.

Krescene Holscher, University of Illinois student



2024 I-BELIEF interns Madilyn Brummer, Krescene Holscher and Nicole Freisleben pictured in front of the student house on-site at DSAC where they resided throughout the summer to work alongside the animal science staff.



Forestry at the Dixon Springs Ag Center



Maple Syrup Workshop

The eighth annual Backyard Maple Syrup Production Workshop was held at DSAC, with over 90 in attendance. The event included tours of the DSAC sugarbush, lessons on maple tree identification, demonstrations of sap collecting and processing, and discussions on advanced techniques to increase efficiency, produce a quality syrup, and increase production levels. Kids activities were included that focused on maple syrup production. Immediately preceding the workshop, a pancake breakfast with real maple syrup made at the Ag Center was held as a fundraiser for the Pope-Hardin 4-H.



Kevin Rohling, Extension forestry specialist, demonstrates the use of a hydrometer to measure the sugar content of syrup to determine when it is ready for bottling.

The University of Illinois Extension Forestry Program continues to develop its maple syrup production program and expand the sugar bush. This coming season, there will be additional lines and taps as well as a trial using a vacuum system to increase productivity. Plans are also being made to expand syrup production to other species.

Beginning Forest Landowner Program

The Southern Illinois Beginning Forest Landowner Program started its third year earlier in 2024. This program provides new landowners opportunities to learn more about forest management and land ownership. The program consists of four weekend sessions plus additional virtual and in-person events.



Topics covered include forest ecology and development, tree identification, chainsaw safety, forest planning, timber harvest, invasive species, prescribed fire, working with consultant foresters, cost-share and technical assistance, pruning, thinning, soils, and forest taxes. This program uses a hands-on approach, with attendees getting the opportunity to experience forest management in the field, talk to experts, and practice management techniques. The 2024 class includes 24 forest landowners from across the region.



Learn more about the Maple Syrup Workshop
go.illinois.edu/maplesyrupday



Extension Vision

University of Illinois Extension will be a leading force in fostering a legacy of sustainable development, lifelong learning, and community resilience regarding environment, food and agriculture, health, community, and economy via technology and discovery, partnerships, and workforce excellence.

We will leverage innovative research, cutting-edge technology, and collaborative partnerships to build a future where every community member is equipped to thrive in an evolving world.

Our commitment to excellence, inclusivity, and transformative education will be the catalyst for positive societal change.

Extension Mission

Our mission is our broad and enduring purpose:

University of Illinois Extension develops educational programs, extends knowledge, and builds partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments as part of the state's land grant institution.

Community Sponsors

Gallatin County Board	Pope-Hardin County HEA
Hamilton County Board	Rotary of Golconda
Hamilton County 4-H Foundation	Saline County Board
Hamilton County 4-H Federation	Shawnee RC&D
Hamilton County Home and Community Education	White County Board
Hardin County Board	White County 4-H Support Committee
SGHP 4-H Extension Foundation	White County 4-H Federation
Pope County Board	White County Association for Home and Community Education

Extension Values

As Extension professionals, we are committed to the following values:

Collaboration:

We foster equitable and accountable relationships across the state to provide programs that meet each community's diverse needs.

Credibility:

We act with integrity and build trust by using evidence-based research, following through on our commitments, and supporting our stakeholders to effectively face challenges through tested solutions and new innovations.

Inclusivity:

We acknowledge and respect the similarities, differences, and contributions of all people and communities in identifying new ideas and approaches to our work. Our success is dependent on valuing, engaging, and including everyone in creating a culture of belonging.

Learning:

We deliver evidence-based knowledge through teaching, collaboration, and partnerships that provide those we serve with varied opportunities for growth, well-being, and resiliency.

FUNDING SOURCES		
Amount	Source	
42%	Local Including County Governments	
14%	Federal Funds Including SNAP	
42%	State Match and Ag Premium Fund	
2%	Gifts and Donations	

STAFF

Angela Messmer
County Extension Director,
Director of DSAC

Lindsay Adams
4-H Youth Development
Educator

Bronwyn Aly
Local Food Systems and Small
Farms Educator

Elizabeth Cooley-Questelle
SNAP-Ed Educator

Lacey Barnhill
SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator

Paula Hatfield
Hamilton Co. 4-H Youth
Development Coordinator

Nancy Lambert
Saline Co. 4-H Youth
Development Coordinator

Amy McCarty
White Co. 4-H Youth
Development Coordinator

Abbey Reeves
Hardin & Pope Co. 4-H Youth
Development Coordinator

Kathryn Scates
Gallatin Co. 4-H Youth
Development Coordinator

Jennifer Warren
Horticulture Program
Coordinator

Julie Zakes
Ag Gardener

Kristina Aldrich
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Nanci Berger
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Terra Russell
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Sheila Stamer
Office Support Specialist

Ashlea Grumley
Office Support Assistant

Lois Jones
Office Support Assistant

Lindsay McGuire
Office Support Assistant

Katharine Oglesby
Office Support Assistant

Joey Parr
Building Mechanic

Seth Parks
Building Mechanic

Stacey Simmons
Farm Mechanic

OFFICE INFORMATION

Hamilton County Extension

100 S. Jackson St.
McLeansboro, IL 62859
(618) 643-3416
Fax: (618) 643-3206
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

White County Extension

1715 College Avenue
Carmi, IL 62821
(618) 382-2662
Fax: (618) 382-2276
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

Hardin - Pope County Extension

354 State Hwy 145 N.
Simpson, IL 62985
(618) 695-6060
Fax: (618) 695-2492
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

Dixon Springs Agricultural Center

354 State Hwy 145 N.
Simpson, IL 62985
(618) 695-2441
Fax: (618) 695-2492
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

Saline County Extension

912 S. Commercial St., Ste 4
Harrisburg, IL 62946
(618) 252-8391
Fax: (618) 252-3006
Mon - Fri, 8 am - 4 pm

ONLINE



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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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