

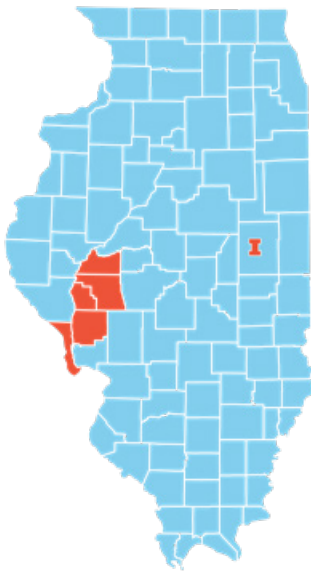


EXTENSION IN ACTION

Serving Calhoun, Cass, Greene,
Morgan, and Scott Counties



Aaron Dufelmeier
County Director



Impacting the hearts and minds of those we serve

I have been extremely fortunate to be a part of University of Illinois Extension for 25 years, and I can honestly say that it is just as exciting today as it was when I began. If you wonder why, it's because of people like you that we are privileged to serve.

I believe my role as the county director is to inspire and motivate our staff to deliver programs that meet our communities' needs. I challenge our team to live their lives with the purpose of helping others, understanding that the work we do impacts the hearts and minds of the people we serve.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." As you will recognize reading our report, our staff have a natural ability to connect with people in a way that makes learning fun while teaching them in a way that helps them retain knowledge.

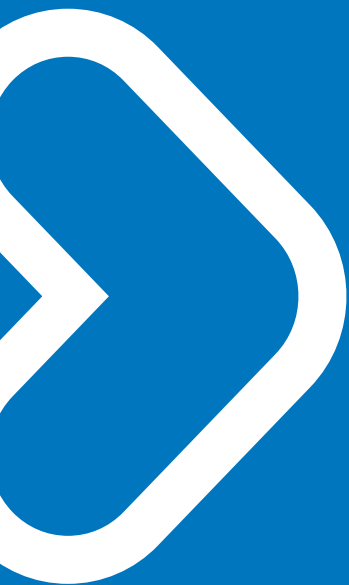
Every day, I am the beneficiary of watching our team involve people throughout our communities to learn together. As you will see and read, our staff are responsive, attentive, dedicated, and engaged.

I believe that when we approach each day as a new experience filled with nothing but opportunity, we can accomplish great things.

I listened to a keynote speaker talk about how we sometimes like to reference the good old days. I would ask that you keep that thought in mind as you read and reflect upon the highlights in this report, contemplate some of our stories from the past, and consider what we might write about for 2024. In doing so, I am hopeful you will say those were, these are, and the ones yet to come are truly the good old days.

Aaron Dufelmeier
County Director

Cover: Youth explore the beautiful McCully Heritage Project woods during EcoExplorers Camp.



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 five grand challenge themes:



Community:
Support Strong and Resilient Residents



Economy:
Grow a Prosperous Economy



Environment:
Sustain Natural Resources at Home and in Public Spaces



Food:
Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply



Health:
Maximize Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health

2023 Engagement

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

657 Communities Served	745K+ Program Attendees	12.7M+ Webpage Views	58.5M+ Social Media Impressions	1.8M+ YouTube Views
555 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	90 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	10,158 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,799 4-H Clubs	199,400 4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,682
Program Volunteers

274
Community Gardens

2,634
School and Community Partners

Resource Generation

\$15,259,785
Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$463,368
Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4M+
External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners

Kindergartners explore food production and farm life



Since 2008, Extension has hosted the “Where Your Food Comes From” program to educate youth on the importance of farmers, land, and life basics. This annual program relies on extensive collaboration between Extension and local organizations, including FFA, Farm Bureau, the local implement dealership, and local farmers. These individuals are an intricate part of delivering sessions, providing tractors and combines, serving as volunteer group leaders, assisting with snacks and lunches, and supplying animals for the program.

Kindergarten students learn that their food does not come from the grocery store or refrigerator but rather from the farm or orchard. The program focuses on planting season for many crops. Extension educators developed hands-on learning topics related to food access and production.

- By-products from animals.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Ag literacy.
- Importance of soil and water.
- Farm machinery.
- Corn and soybean products.
- Pollinators.

Each year, more than 300 kindergartners from Jacksonville, Winchester, Bluffs, and Salem Lutheran school districts now have a greater understanding of where their food comes from and the impact of food production, food access, and nature.

Images reflect multiple program years.



This kindergarten student learns how to milk a cow.



The students were surprised at the size of the farm equipment.



Many students had their first experience with farm machinery.



YMCA youth grow vegetables at Lukeman Garden & Education Center

By teaching youth to grow vegetables, Extension provides lifelong skills that lead to better health and self-sufficiency. Planting a garden together allows young people to collaborate and cooperate in healthy team-building activities, as well as build a commitment to community and service.

The University of Illinois Extension Lukeman Garden and Education Center is located at Lincoln and Morton Avenues in Jacksonville on property donated by Judy Lukeman Williams, Thomas Lukeman, Tom Williams, and Kelly Clancy. This space allows Extension professionals and volunteers to demonstrate different horticulture concepts and best practices.

In 2023, Extension provided hands-on learning opportunities in food access and environmental issues in a collaborative effort with the Bob Freesen YMCA, 4-H, and Extension Master Gardeners. In the spring, 4-H members constructed raised vegetable garden beds. During the summer, 44 youths attending summer camp at the Bob Freesen YMCA cared for and maintained the vegetables.

Participants planned their own raised beds using the square-foot gardening method and planted their vegetables. During the summer, they cared for the plants by watering, weeding, scouting for pests, and eventually harvesting their crops with the help of Master Gardener volunteers and unit staff. Youth also learned the importance of giving back to their community by providing over 375 pounds of produce to a local food pantry and their families.

Funding was provided by several sources, including the Morgan County Garden Club, the Jacksonville Youth Engagement Grant Program, and the Extension Master Gardener Know More Grow More project, to purchase raised beds, soil, and gardening equipment. Vegetable seeds were donated by local businesses.



Youth at the Bob Freesen YMCA Summer Camp weed the garden beds.



YMCA campers water the growing garden vegetables.



YMCA camper harvests radishes from the garden.



Ken Johnson, Extension educator, discusses plant health at the Bob Freesen YMCA Summer Camp.



I-Rural Tourism Development Toolkit guides rural communities

In response to the growing demand for rural tourism in Illinois, Extension Educator Jennifer Russell, in collaboration with University of Illinois professors Sharon Zou and Joelle Soulard, embarked on a groundbreaking 2-year project. The objective was to understand the needs of rural tourists and develop a comprehensive toolkit to empower local communities in rural Illinois to harness the potential of tourism for sustainable economic development.

Project Overview

The I-RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT was born out of extensive research aimed at addressing the economic challenges faced by rural communities. With a focus on outdoor recreation activities, the project sought to provide rural Illinois communities with resources to strategically plan and implement tourism initiatives that not only meet the growing demand but also align with local values and priorities.

Key Achievements

- **Strategic Planning Support:** The toolkit offers guidance on planning and gathering support for tourism development, enabling communities to chart a course for sustainable growth.
- **Community Asset Mapping:** Utilizing the Community Capital Framework, the toolkit assists communities in identifying and leveraging their unique assets to enhance tourism experiences.
- **Vision and Strategy Development:** A crucial component of the toolkit is dedicated to creating a vision and brainstorming strategies for tourism development, fostering a sense of direction and purpose.

As we reflect on the culmination of this impactful project, it is evident that the I-RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT is a valuable asset for rural communities in Illinois. The comprehensive resources provided empower these communities to not only meet the challenges of the present but also to envision a future of sustainable economic development through innovative and community-driven tourism initiatives. We look forward to witnessing the continued growth and success of these communities in the coming years.

Jennifer Russell

- **Workshop Facilitation:** The Community Workshop Workbook Template aids communities in organizing workshops to engage stakeholders and gather valuable input for tourism planning.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The Stakeholder Interview/Protocol Guide Template facilitates effective communication and collaboration among community members, ensuring a holistic approach to tourism development.
- **Visitor Insights:** With tools like visitor surveys and visitor templates, communities can gather valuable insights to tailor tourism offerings to visitor preferences.
- **Project Funding Guidance:** The toolkit provides comprehensive information on funding your projects, empowering communities to seek financial support for their tourism initiatives.
- **Digital Marketing Strategies:** Recognizing the importance of digital presence, the toolkit includes resources on digital marketing, enabling communities to reach a broader audience and enhance their visibility.

Impact on Economy

The I-RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT goes beyond meeting the demands of tourists; it is a catalyst for economic growth in rural Illinois. By fostering collaboration, supporting local entrepreneurship, and advancing workforce development, the toolkit contributes to the creation of a robust and sustainable economic ecosystem.

How to Access the Toolkit

The I-RURAL toolkit is available online, providing easy access to a wealth of resources. Additionally, interested parties can request a physical copy from their local Extension office.



Learn more and check out the I-RURAL toolkit link go.illinois.edu/RuralTourism



Extension supports rural grocers

University of Illinois Extension Educator Jennifer Russell was one of eight participants nationwide to take part in Kansas State's Rural Grocery Specialist pilot program.

This program covered key topics for supporting rural grocers through business transition. The Business Transition Model developed at the University of Nebraska was discussed during the program. Other topics included transition planning, business valuation fundamentals, community asset mapping, understanding grocery operations, and buyer funding, along with a variety of resources within the industry.

Jennifer has stayed in contact with several area grocery stores and keeps these stores aware of state and federal resources. Recently, state lawmakers have passed funding to support independent grocery stores. If your store would like to be included in future grocery updates, please contact your local Extension office to be added to the list.



Read more about the funding process
gov.illinois.gov/news/press-release.29544.html



Real Colors™ teaches participants to work with many personality types

Jennifer Russell worked directly with the Greene County Health Department to facilitate the Real Colors personality assessment training in Greene County. Over 50 people representing education, probation, healthcare, and non-profits attended the program.

Participants spent the first half of the training completing the personality assessment tool and working in groups to:

- Recognize their own strengths and the strengths of others
- Build rapport quickly with clients, peers, family, and students
- Learn, practice, and discuss best practices of communicating with other groups
- Understand how others process information

Guest speaker Dr. Roop followed with a discussion on addiction and the trait-based model of recovery. Two organizations in the region requested to have this training repeated at their organizations following attendance at this event.

The best interactive meeting I've ever been part of!
Program Participant



Final draft of Cass County Natural Disaster Mitigation Plan submitted

University of Illinois Extension provided support and guidance to members of the Illinois Rural Water Association and Cass County leadership, reworking and updating the Natural Disaster Mitigation Plan to reflect current information and trends.

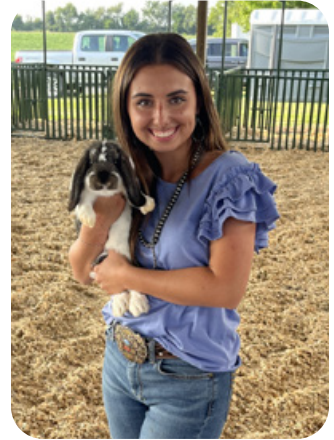
The purpose of keeping and maintaining this plan is to better protect and serve local residents, as well as allow access to grant money that could be used to prepare for or recover from a natural disaster. This plan, which is typically updated every five years, had not been addressed since 2011.

Carrie McKillip of Extension, Meirah Williamson of the Illinois Rural Water Association, and Roger Lauder with the Cass County ESDA provided primary leadership during the process and were supported by Dustin Fritsche, Extension CED program coordinator; Jennifer Russell, Extension educator; and several rotating members of the Illinois Rural Water Association.

During four meetings, the former plan was examined, new information was reviewed, data was gathered, and an updated plan was drafted. Feedback was gathered from the representatives of the local jurisdictions that would be governed by the plan, including school districts, local governments, townships, public works, and first responders. The plan lays out mitigation measures that can be taken by local jurisdictions, such as designating and fortifying tornado shelters and updating flood plain maps. It is a very comprehensive examination of potential disasters and how to lessen their impact.

The final draft of the plan has been put together, and once it has been reviewed by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, it will be adopted by the local jurisdictions involved. Upon its adoption, it will become part of the state and federal emergency management plans. Dustin Fritsche will also assist with a yearly maintenance schedule for the plan going forward.







4-H workshops inspire creativity, teamwork, and skill development

4-H Workshops foster confidence and leadership skills, offering a creative outlet and collaborations that blossom new friendships. Several workshops were hosted throughout the unit.

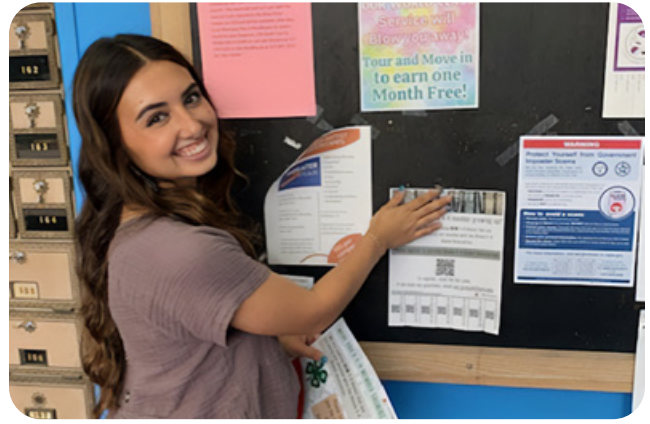
- “The Basics of Drawing” demonstrated the power of simplicity by using common household items to become a work of art.
- “Cake Decorating” took edible masterpieces to the next level by expressing individuality with vivid colors and techniques.
- “Outdoor Adventure” was an interdisciplinary workshop that allowed participants to explore the McCully Heritage Project and feel comfortable understanding directions, reading a map, and building a first-aid kit to be prepared prior to the expedition.

By combining artistic expression and the thrill of discovery, workshops allowed youth to be mentored in a safe environment about topics that sparked a passion.



4-H Federation builds today’s leaders

4-H Federation, open to youth in eighth through 12th grade, cultivates essential skills like communication, teamwork, and strategic thinking. These meetings create a sense of community that goes beyond the individual 4-H club and connects like-minded young leaders. Activities are inclusive to encourage everyone to be involved, gain confidence to try something new, and potentially bring that same idea back to their own club to enjoy. “Building a Spaghetti Tower” is always a favorite. This team-building activity has groups create the tallest tower with limited materials. To celebrate the holiday season, Federation members purchased items off the Salvation Army Angel Tree program wish list. 4-H Federation is more than a leadership meeting; it’s a welcoming space for youth to be authentic and make new friends.



We want to know: Are you a 4-H alum?

“Are you Illinois 4-H Grown?” was a summer-long campaign to identify those who were involved in the Illinois 4-H program as a youth in order to increase membership and outreach for the Illinois 4-H Alumni Association. All 4-H alumni who are not yet registered for the alumni association are encouraged to register for a free membership.

Informational flyers were placed in various businesses to spread the word. The unit received the state’s Alumni INSPIRE Award for its effort to build Illinois 4-H.



Register for the Illinois 4-H Alumni Association
go.illinois.edu/4halum

Calhoun County	23 4-H Members	9 Project Exhibits
Greene County	105 4-H Members	195 Project Exhibits
Scott County	133 4-H Members	833 Project Exhibits
Cass County	119 4-H Members	587 Project Exhibits
Morgan County	246 4-H Members	1,041 Project Exhibits



1,351
After School and School Enrichment Participants

Illinois State Fair	75 Exhibits	8 Grand Champions
	6 Reserve Champions	8 Inspire Awards



Representative Randy Frese at the Rexroat Prairie in Virginia, Ill.

Representative Frese visits new constituents in Cass County

Due to legislative redistricting following the 2020 census, Cass County became a part of the 99th legislative district and is no longer part of State Rep. Norine Hammond’s constituency. The leaders in Cass County have had a long and productive relationship with Rep. Hammond, and this type of relationship with our state government representatives is vital.

In an effort to cultivate a strong relationship with our new representative, Extension CED program coordinator Dustin Fritsche coordinated efforts to meet with the new representative for the county, Rep. Randy Frese. The Cass County Overall Economic Development Commission and Cass Communications sponsored two meet-and-greet opportunities and a bus tour. Also attending the day’s events were Raquel Sparrow, district director for Rep. Frese, and Belynda Allen, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

The Beardstown City Council chambers served as the starting area, followed by a tour of the Old Lincoln Courtroom and Museum. The group boarded a West Central Mass Transit District bus to the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area. Site Director Nate Goetten and Acting Site Director Nick Norton answered questions and gave an informative tour of the impressive, beautiful park. Participants observed the campgrounds and cabins, as well as the sunflower fields used during dove hunting season.

Another meeting was held at the Caraway Pub in Virginia where Rep. Frese participated in a ribbon cutting for the newly opened game room and patio, as well as met citizens and answered questions.

The historic Rexroat Prairie at the edge of Virginia was the final stop. The citizens and leaders of Cass County got a chance to share their questions and concerns while showing off the beauty and potential of Cass County. It was a very productive day, with lots of time spent getting to know Rep. Frese.



Staff explore nature during Health and Wellness Day at McCully Heritage Project

Extension staff enjoyed a day of learning at Greene Fields Farm and the McCully Heritage Project. Greene Fields Farm is a family farm that offers an experience for individuals and families to connect with the beauty of fall. The McCully Heritage Project provides facilities and programs for high-quality environmental education, research for youth and adults, and an opportunity for the public to appreciate the cultural, historical, and natural resources of the lower Illinois River Valley.



Dustin Fritsche (left) with Rep. Randy Frese.



Rep. Frese with Randy McClure, mayor of Virginia, (middle) and Chad Winters OEDC chairman, at the Caraway Pub in Virginia.



Good growing



At ‘Good Growing,’ we keep growing and growing

Home gardening remained popular in 2023, and Illinois Extension helped homeowners and communities create sustainable gardens and landscapes that provided beauty, food, and property enhancements.

Ken Johnson, area Extension horticulture educator, in collaboration with fellow horticulture educators Chris Enroth and Emily Swihart, have built a vast outreach program, branded as Good Growing. Good Growing tips are now available as weekly blogs, podcasts, videocasts, and newsletters.



Subscribe to our Good Growing Weekly Newsletter
go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowingSubscribe



Watch our Good Growing Educational Videos
go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowingVideos



Listen to our Good Growing Podcasts
go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowingPodcast



Read our Weekly Good Growing Blogs
go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing

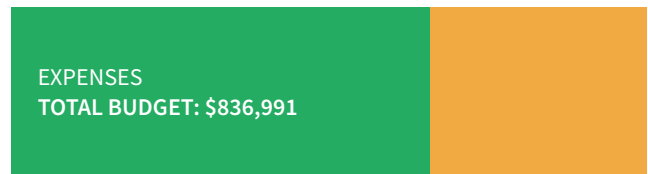
Thank you for providing this information in a fun and practical way. I enjoy learning about new things each week and have slowly increased my knowledge to make my own garden better and share what I have learned with others.

I love the diversity of information that Good Growing provides in all of its forms. Even with all of the classes I’ve taken over the years, I feel like I learn something new every single time I take advantage of this wonderful resource, and that means a lot to me!

Financial Report



Local	47%	\$393,499
State	35%	\$295,124
Federal	6%	\$50,000
Other	12%	\$98,368



Personnel	66%	\$552,831
Non-Personnel	34%	\$284,160



59,000 Views of 54 new Good Growing blogs in 2023



663,000 Lifetime views of the Good Growing blog



30,000 Plays of 50 new podcasts and 38 videocasts in 2023



43,000 Lifetime plays of all podcasts and videocasts



1,530 Subscribers to the weekly newsletter

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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

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

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

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