

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Master Gardeners take an active role to address food security and access

In 2022, [University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners](#) (EMG) serving in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties were challenged to dedicate a portion of their volunteer time and continuing education for addressing and learning more about food security and access. The direct impact they made within the year is very impressive and is expected to continue to grow.

EMGs recorded 1,513 hours of service in nine local food donation gardens, such as Morton Giving Garden and [Garden of Hope](#). The gardens were encouraged to become members of the Community Garden Network which helps the gardens connect and share resources with each other and local food pantries.

Volunteers also participated in the Grow A Row program which is a partnership with [Tazewell County Health Department](#). This program gives food donation gardens and people with home gardens a place to bring the produce they grow and donate it to the [Food Pantry Network](#). The Food Pantry Network distributes the produce to food pantries or agencies where it can be most effectively utilized.

Extension Master Gardeners volunteered 120 hours of working in home gardens to grow, harvest, and donate produce. Grow A Row had a total of 23,279 pounds donated in 2022.

The number of gardens participating in this program increased from 4 gardens in 2021 to 26 gardens in 2022. The food donation garden that gave the most produce was St. Anne's Garden of Hope. The EMG who volunteered the most hours in a food donation garden this season was Jane Mottram.

To equip the volunteers with information on producing vegetables Extension Horticulture Educator [Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle](#) provided resources in several different forms. The book studies in 2022 included five books providing information on different techniques and strategies to grow more productive vegetable gardens.

Continuing education for Master Gardeners included speakers from local agencies that work to address food insecurity. A program about Food Security issues was created for the EMGs' Speakers Bureau. The Food Security program was given to a Rotary Club in Tazewell County and has been requested by other groups.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

*Extension Master Gardener and OSF's and St. Anne's Garden of Hope community garden coordinator Mike Brooks speaks to a group of EMGs and Extension staff. The garden is one of nine food donation gardens in which EMGs volunteer. EMGs made a more concerted effort in dedicating their volunteer and continuing education hours to address food security and access.*

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