

2019-2020

Addressing Local Needs, Solving Global Challenges



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Henderson, Knox, McDonough,
and Warren Counties

A Message from the County Director

This has certainly been a year like no other. Since I came to University of Illinois Extension in January of 2002, I have been in awe of how 4-H and Extension programming has the ability to adapt and respond to the ever changing world and this year was no exception. It started off like any other, but a few kinks quickly emerged, changing the way we function. Extension had to go from a no remote work policy to an everyone works remote policy within about 24 hours. Our longstanding culture of face-to-face programming switched to a virtual format in about that same timeframe.

As we all headed home and set up our offices at kitchen tables, in spare bedrooms and living rooms, and maybe even a storage closet or two, none of us could have known just how long we were going to be making this change. The

Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren County Extension offices had staff working remotely from March to August. Since then, we have partially opened offices to the public with most employees working a hybrid schedule, working some days in the office and some days at home. Hopefully, by the time this is printed and you are taking a few moments to read it, most staff will have returned to their normal working conditions.

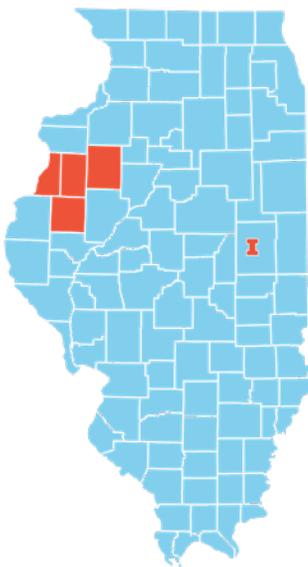
What will normal look like now? Well, we have found that Extension does have the ability to do programming virtually in a variety of formats. While face-to-face programming won't go away, we will have the ability to provide programming to the residents of Illinois and beyond in ways that may fit their lifestyles better than being in an auditorium at 2 p.m. on a Wednesday. We have also found that our staff can work in a variety of different locations and conditions, so while we will

have an office to serve your needs, it may not need to be staffed with everyone every day of the week. We even learned that we can do a fair virtually, but I have to say I missed corndogs, lemonade shake-ups, and sweating all day in 110 degree heat the most of any portion of my job.



*Lisa Torrance
County Director*

Staff Serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough, & Warren Counties



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Educator, 4-H Youth
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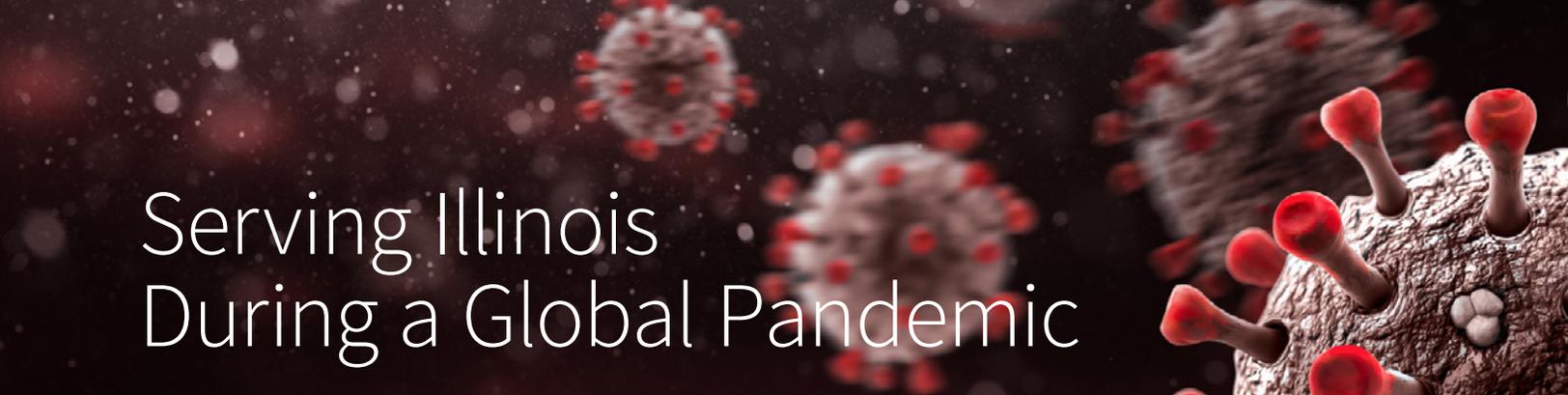
Lorie Schwerer
Associate, McDonough County

Diana Dugan
Associate, Warren County

Avis Skinner
Associate, Knox County

Vicki Jackson
Associate, Henderson County

Serving Illinois During a Global Pandemic



When early signs of COVID-19 arrived in Illinois, families and businesses across the state were forced to confront a reality unlike anything they could have imagined. With schools transitioning to virtual learning, parents were hungry for information about managing the physical and emotional health of their at-home learners. Families suddenly found themselves together at home more, where they explored new hobbies, such as gardening and food preservation. Farmers needed to navigate the numerous challenges facing both local and global food supply chains. Almost overnight, restaurants and retail stores had to rethink their business models or risk becoming irrelevant in a suddenly virtual world.

As the challenges mounted, the Illinois Extension network emerged as an effective method for creating and sharing timely, research-backed solutions to many of the most pressing issues we were grappling with. Extension's educators led the way forward during a time of uncertainty for many. We are proud to share some of our highlights from the past year.

Illinois Extension provided applied research and education to address statewide challenges and local issues.

We nurtured local talent. Extension supported 7,207 Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Money Mentor, and 4-H volunteers. They devoted nearly 570,000 hours of community services and support, valued at \$16 million.

We met learners where they lived. During the past 12 months, Extension websites garnered more than 12.8 million visits. Our social media strategy generated more than 200 million impressions, highlighting Illinois news, events, and research.

We partnered to create synergy. Our impact is magnified through more than 2,000 local, state, and national partnerships. Extension helped partner organizations secure more than \$7 million in grant funds, enabling Illinois communities to address local challenges in areas such as food access, rural economic infrastructure, and workforce development.

An independent research firm valued Extension's annual impact on the State of Illinois at \$603 million, about ten times its 2019 budget of \$60.9 million.

Illinois Extension created positive economic benefit for the state of Illinois. The positive economic outcomes of Extension's programs were estimated as at least \$477 million in 2019.

Extension programs stimulated local and state economies through employment and program expenditures. Economic output in Illinois related to Extension expenditures was \$126 million for 2019. Illinois Extension directly employs 655 FTE personnel, and generates an additional 403 FTE jobs through indirect and induced impact effects.

Extension helped residents, businesses, and local governments adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators and faculty specialists dove deeply into unique needs related to the pandemic. Farmdoc's Coronavirus and Ag seminar series attracted more than 7,400 live participants over 20 seminars, covering topics such as retail food prices, livestock markets, trade, and ethanol.

Program partnerships helped Illinois families connect with local food resources. Extension's Illinois Nutrition Education program published Find Food IL, showing the location of free and subsidized meals and food access points in a searchable, mobile-friendly mapping application.

Our staff learned to create rich, meaningful online learning experiences. With in-person meetings restricted, we hosted nearly 25,000 online and in-person educational sessions, benefiting more than 600,000 attendees. Illinois 4-H embraced an online format for summer exhibitions in every county, showcasing the work of 2,200 members at the virtual Illinois State Fair.

Our technology supported connectivity for online learners and remote work employees. Five county Extension offices piloted "drive-up" WiFi sites to make internet accessible to those with needs for schoolwork, online businesses, and social connection.



Applying a Local Lens to Statewide issues

University of Illinois was established as part of the land grant system to provide world-class education, pioneer research, and put learning and discovery into practice to benefit the health and wellbeing of the state's residents and communities.

Extension is built on a local community framework, but our educators and specialists are part of a statewide network of Extension professionals. They work every day to improve the lives of Illinois residents and bring stability and innovation to businesses and communities.

This statewide network of educators, faculty experts, and staff are dedicated to the mission of aligning research to needs and translating that research into action plans. Their work allows Illinois youth, families, businesses, producers, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities. Educators in local units contribute to statewide efforts in their expert content area. In turn, local units benefit from these collaborative efforts and high-quality resources.

Through input from internal and external stakeholders, Extension focuses on statewide priorities in five core areas: community, economy, environment, food, and health. This blend of long-range focus, shared expertise, and local accountability is a powerful strategy that ensures we stay true to our mission while we tailor our programming to meet local community needs.

Illinois Extension's Grand Challenge Framework

Community Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities

-  Thriving Youth
-  Connectedness and Inclusion
-  Involvement and Leadership

Economy Grow a Prosperous Economy

-  Economic Vitality
-  Financial Wellbeing
-  Workforce Preparedness/Advancement

Environment Sustain Natural Resources in Home and Public Spaces

-  Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources
-  Engagement with Home and Community Landscape

Food Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

-  Food Access
-  Food Production
-  Food Safety

Health Maximize Physical and Emotional Health for All

-  Chronic Disease Prevention and Management
-  Social and Emotional Health
-  Healthy and Safe Environments

Hallmarks of strong, resilient communities include residents who feel connected, have a strong sense of belonging, and appreciate the diversity represented in their neighborhoods. These communities often experience lower rates of violence and offer a higher quality of life. Research has shown that civically engaged youth are more likely to contribute to their communities as adults. Illinois Extension activities play a pivotal role in designing strategies to sustain a leadership pipeline, discovering opportunities for volunteers to actively engage in meeting local needs, and supporting development of robust community networks.



COMMUNITY

2,966

Program Attendance

59

Educational Sessions

9

Online Learning Sessions

898

4-H Club Memberships

154

Total Volunteers Engaged*

\$343,545

Volunteer Value**

* Total Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, and 4-H volunteers.

** Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.

Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as the foundation of strong and resilient youth, families, and communities.



Connectedness and Inclusion

A sense of community brings people together to support each other and overcome threats to survival and growth. Accepting and celebrating our differences is essential for creating environments where all voices are important and heard. Thriving families and communities are supported by a diverse and deep pool of community members and organizations.



Involvement and Leadership

Community pride soars when residents who volunteer, advocate, contribute, or lead see themselves as part of the solutions to local issues. Decision-makers can best enhance community vitality and improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas when equipped with the skills and research-based information.



Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Our mentorship-based youth development model applies a holistic development framework. It focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H club experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive, today and tomorrow.



Connectedness and Inclusion Local Program Success Stories

Experiencing Poverty

The poverty simulation is designed to give participants a firsthand glimpse into the challenges someone living in poverty faces in their daily life. Participants are challenged to provide for their family by securing food and shelter with limited financial means. They leave with a better understanding of the obstacles poverty creates and the decisions that low-income families are forced to make.

When organizations and schools go through the simulation, they begin to see beyond the generalizations that are often applied to low-income individuals and instead focus on ways that their institution can contribute to a positive solution.

Appreciating the Viewpoints of Others

Everyone has personality type that affects how they interact and collaborate with others. Tessa Hobbs-Curley, family life educator, facilitates the Real Colors program, which helps participants identify key aspects of their personality like how they communicate and what motivates them.

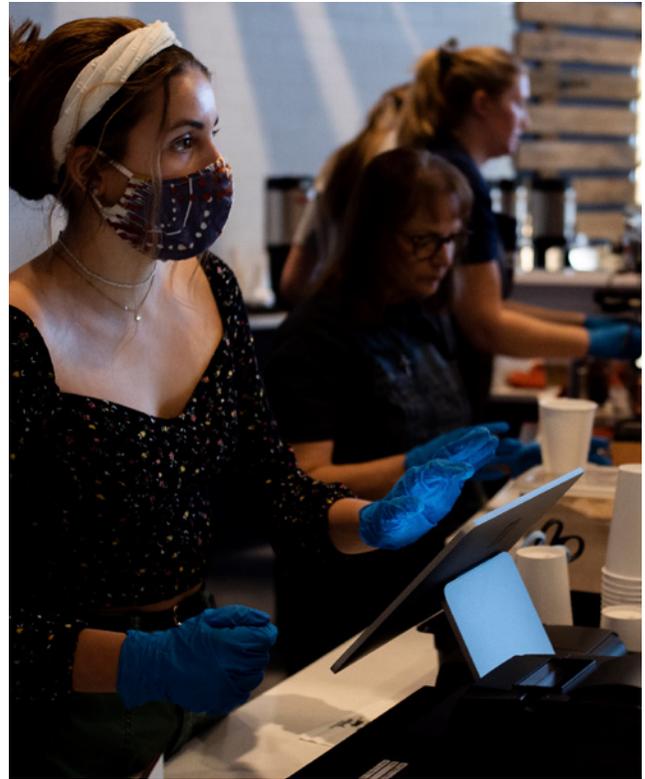
Through the program, participants learn their own strengths, as well as the strengths of those around them, helping them to understand and even appreciate other viewpoints and communicate more effectively with colleagues or teammates.

Improving Communication Between Generations

The Age Matters program highlights the life influences, values, and purchasing habits that define people from each generation. Understanding these differences strengthens communication between individuals from different generations, which can strengthen relationships between co-workers or help an organization recruit and retain volunteers.



Macomb Youth Leadership Organization students who identify as blue in the Real Colors program. Photo: Shelby Carlson



Learning about the outside influences of different generations is very interesting. We often forget that people of different ages have vastly different experiences and influences.

CARRIE MCKILLIP, EXTENSION EDUCATOR

“Whether you work in retail, health care, government, or any other walk of life, learning about the outside influences of different generations is very interesting. We often forget that people of different ages have vastly difference experiences and influences,” said Carrie McKillip, community and economic development educator. In early 2020, McKillip began updating Age Matters to include more recent data on Gen Z and iGen, generations currently entering the workforce.

When the pandemic required the program to go virtual, she adapted it by adding breakout group discussions and animations to keep participants engaged. Since then, McKillip has presented Age Matters to a variety of audiences, including a college class on customer service, a Leadership Academy, and the Henderson County Health Department.



Jack Link gathering his thoughts to place the class at the Warren County Livestock contest in 2019. Photo: Shelby Carlson



Thriving Youth Local Program Success Stories

Starting a Virtual Trend

When one locally hosted livestock judging contest was canceled and another looked like it might soon follow, 4-H members in Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren counties became trendsetters. 4-H Youth Development Educator Shelby Carlson developed a virtual livestock judging contest for youth in the four county region. Nearly 40 youth competed in the virtual contest — the first of its kind.

Soon, the need for similar virtual contests rose across the state. After gathering a team of 4-H members to provide feedback, the contest was re-opened for statewide participation. Their feedback contributed to the successful transition of the state fair’s 4-H Livestock Judging Contest to a virtual format.

Igniting a Spark

Teachers at Steele Elementary School noticed that their students continuously performed poorly in a district contest that focused on life skills, such as public speaking, conversation, and leadership. Extension’s youth development team developed a program that not only taught public speaking and related skills, but did it while helping youth discover their spark.

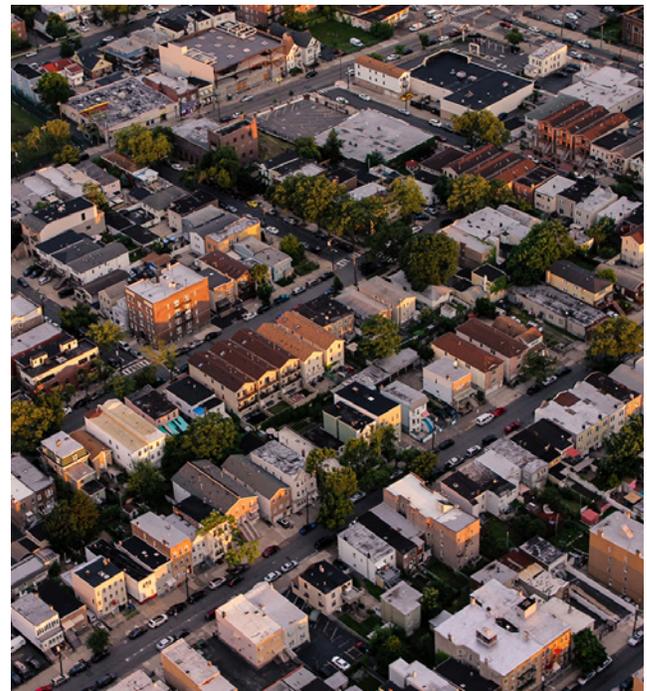
Those sparks, areas of interest or passion a child may have, are an important component of the Youth Thriving Model adopted by Illinois 4-H and they are often the subjects that help develop positive relationships with a caring adult. Extension staff were able to use these sparks to build up conversation and public speaking skills in the students.

Community Involvement and Leadership Outcomes Local Program Success Stories



Building Strong Leaders

The 2020 Leadership Academy pivoted to a virtual platform, offering county officials online workshops on a variety of topics, including crisis communications, managing economic development initiatives, finding and using data, leadership styles, managing change, ethical considerations, fiscal and economic impacts of COVID-19, and reversing population decline.



Local and state economies depend on recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce and sound economic planning and development. Agricultural operations, large and small, make a foundational contribution to local and state economic vitality. Population projections suggest that metro and rural Illinois communities will experience demographic shifts thanks to the exit of younger workers and a growing retiree population. These shifts are expected to produce serious economic issues. To compound the situation, many communities are already grappling with short- and long-term economic implications of COVID-19.

ECONOMY



4,669

Program
Attendance

95

Educational
Sessions

24

Online Learning
Sessions

Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as effective supports for economic stability and prosperity.



Workforce Preparedness and Advancement

The global pandemic has reinforced the need to develop innovative ways to nurture the Illinois workforce. These include career exploration, formal training and re-training programs for economically vulnerable populations, management training, and opportunities for professionals to meet regulatory and licensure requirements for continuing education. Ultimately, a prepared, skilled workforce increases tax revenues.



Financial Wellbeing

Financial wellbeing can affect physical, mental and social health which can result in poorer job performance, reduced ability to concentrate, and bankruptcy. Preventing bankruptcy and financial insecurity reduces the community need for support services. Extension supports financial wellbeing across ages and stages of life.



Economic Vitality

Rural and urban communities must be built on solid foundations. They must plan for growth, prepare for emergencies, and share responsibility for continually seeking ways to promote economic vitality. Agricultural operations, both large and small, are critically important contributors to the economic vitality of Illinois' local and state economy.



Workforce Preparedness and Advancement Local Program Success Stories

Career Day

Ninety high school juniors, from three school districts in Henderson and Warren counties, took part in University of Illinois Extension’s Career Day. Local businesses opened their doors to the teens and provided a glimpse into what a day in the life of their career looks like. Participants were asked to identify a career they were considering, then were matched with community partners who share a passion for the same field. From video game coder, to diesel mechanic, to actor, participants not only learned about a potential career choice, but connected with professionals who do those jobs locally. Students left with new insight into their potential careers and what it takes to make a business run day to day.

Thirty-three participants expressed an interest in one of the fastest growing career industries — health. These students were able to interact with health professionals and practice skills they could use daily in their future health care careers, such as giving injections, guiding a laparoscopic surgery tool, performing CPR, reading an x-ray, and compounding a prescription. Many students reported that they learned about a new health career field that they hadn’t known about before.



Students practice injecting an orange with a saline solution.
Photo: Jackie Spence



Knox County Binary Bullets with their Innovation Award.

Despite Setbacks, 4-H Robotics Teams Persevere

Despite the challenges facing 4-H robotics leaders, mentors, coaches, volunteers, and youth over the past year, the teams put their best foot forward to make the best of 2020.

The Knox County FIRST LEGO League (FLL) team, RoboStorm, started by advancing to the state tournament, earning great scores in robot design, core values, and project presentation. The team continued to compete in virtual competitions throughout the year.

The senior Knox County FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) team, Binary Bullets, got off to an amazing start by ranking in the top three at their qualifier and winning the program’s highest honor, the Inspire Award. They moved on to state, where they finished in 2nd place and received the Innovation Award, which qualified them for the World’s Competition. Due to COVID-19, that event was cancelled. While the team was disappointed, they quickly put their minds to the next season.

McDonough County Robotics exploded this year, adding a senior FTC team, an FLL team, and three junior FLL teams. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, these new teams were put on hold, but a different opportunity to come together and sharpen skills was created. Members were invited to participate in a monthly, virtual Saturday morning STEM class.

The Macomb Bitty Bots had two additional teams join this year — the Macomb Bitty Billionaires and the Macomb Bitty Bionics. All three teams competed in the BoomTown Build competition, each earning an award for their performance.

The Macomb Mega Bots FTC team continued to design, build, program, and operate robots to compete in head-to-head challenges in an alliance format. The Mega Bots describe what they do as “the hardest fun you’ll every have.”



Economic Vitality Local Program Success Stories

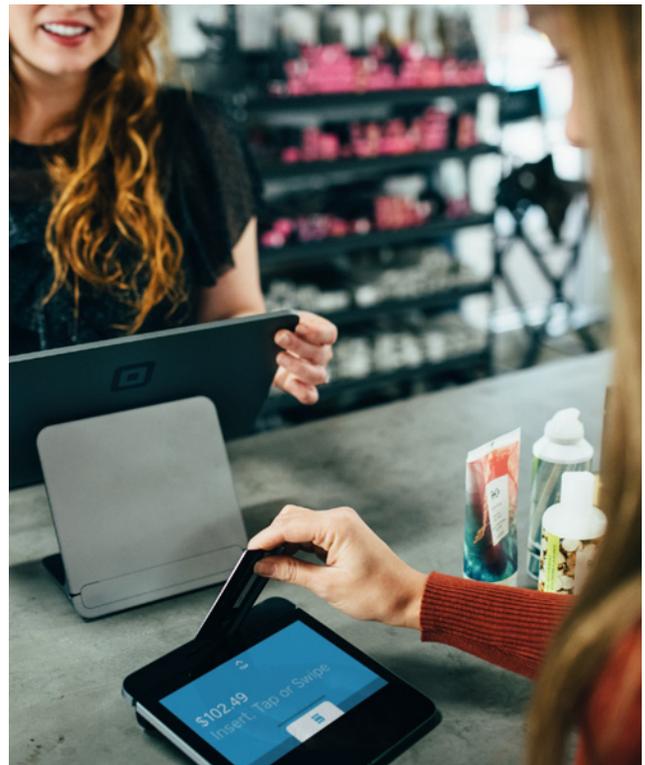
Helping Communities Prepare for Disaster

Early in 2020, Henderson County Community Organizations Active in Disasters partnered with Henderson County Medical Reserve Corps to host a tabletop exercise. The group talked through a blizzard scenario, similar to the actual blizzard on Thanksgiving weekend in 2018.

Facilitated by Carrie McKillip, community and economic development educator, the exercise led to a meaningful discussion of emergency rescue procedures, vulnerable population check-ins, and stranded motorist housing. According to McKillip, this type of activity is one of the best ways for communities to prepare for disaster.

We have a tendency to become fairly complacent during good weather, and periodic tabletop exercises help everyone think about what can be done before an event occurs.

CARRIE MCKILLIP, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EDUCATOR



Helping Create Excellent Customer Service

Customers demand great service and individuals working on the frontlines of local businesses, agencies, and organizations must be ready to meet their needs. Effective customer service keeps our communities thriving and that's exactly why Extension's On the Front Line: Skills for Excellent Customer Service in your Community was developed.

The program looks at a variety of topics related to customer service — in person, over the phone, and online — and the impacts it has on a local economy. The 10 sessions can be adapted to meet the specific needs of an organization or business. Participants learn what customer service is, techniques to provide fantastic customer service, how to understand the diversity of their customers, how to keep customers happy, and what to do when customers are unhappy.

The natural wonder of Illinois is more than just its beautiful scenery. The land provides recreation for residents and visitors, habitat for pollinators and wildlife, pastures for grazing livestock, fields for growing food, and the safe water that is essential for all living things. Threats to our land, air, and water can be managed with the identification, promotion, and adoption of environmentally sustainable policies and practices. Carefully developed green spaces and natural assets help youth and adults improve learning and enhance physical and mental wellness. Sound environmental and agricultural policies contribute to a sustainable and diverse environment, increase comfort, reduce government costs, and enhance property values.



ENVIRONMENT

2,676	73	25	72	\$56,750	231
Program Attendance	Educational Sessions	Online Learning Sessions	Trained Volunteers*	Volunteer Value**	Expert Consultations***

* Total Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers.
 ** Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.
 *** Supporting home and natural environment inquiries.

Illinois Extension sustains natural resources in home and public spaces by focusing on these educational priorities.



Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

Water, land, and air quality have significant implications for our survival. These shared resources must be managed through ecological balance and sustainable practices. Our future depends on our ability to effectively steward these resources for generations to come.



Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

There is growing evidence that exposure to plants and green spaces provides many benefits, like improved health, quality of life, concentration, and relationships. Sustainable home landscapes can net economic benefits to communities through increased property value. They also can create environmental benefits for all by supporting pollinators and other important contributors to ecosystems.



Enhancing and Preserving Natural Areas Local Program Success Stories

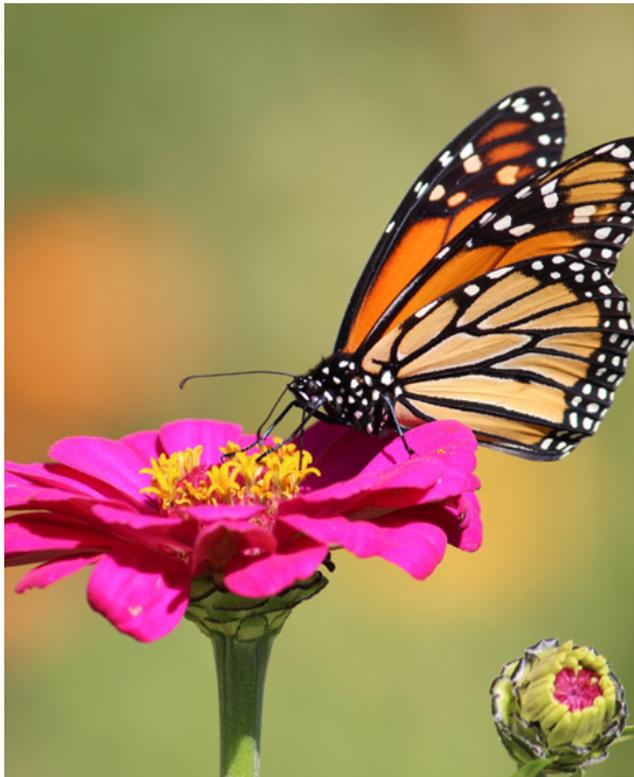
Love Nature? Join our Master Naturalists

Master Naturalists complete training on the basic principles of the natural world; the interdependent nature of plants and animals in the various ecosystems of Illinois; mammals, insects, reptiles, fish, and birds native to Illinois; the impact of individuals on nature in rural or urban areas; and practical techniques for managing and teaching others about natural areas.

Popular Festival Continues In a New Way

Like many other programs, the annual Monarch Migration Festival transitioned to a virtual format in 2020. Master Naturalists and volunteers, along with partners including the City of Galesburg's Parks and Recreation Department, Illinois Farm Bureau, and Galesburg Public Library, demonstrated their creativity and dedication by turning a one-day event into a five-day webinar series geared toward children and their families.

The webinars featured science-based information on the Monarch's lifecycle and migration, in addition to art projects, a gardening activity, and book readings. Local participants picked up activity bags containing all of the supplies needed to complete each of the projects discussed during the webinars. One teacher made a six-hour round trip to pick up kits for her students. The online format allowed youth from as far away as California and Virginia to participate.



This participant completed a water bottle greenhouse to grow milkweed for Monarch butterflies. Photo: Whitney Pruett

Thank you for the kits.
This year looked very
different for the holiday
and the girls were excited
to do something different.
PARENT OF A TAKE HOME KIT PARTICIPANT

Master Naturalist Take Home Kits

In the fall of 2020, Master Naturalists came up with a new way to share their knowledge with elementary students who were learning at home. They launched Take Home Kits with four different projects designed for both educators and parents. Each kit contained all of the supplies needed to complete a fun nature or gardening-inspired project, along with complete instructions and a lesson plan to guide adults through facilitating the activity.

Kits were requested by parents and teachers in Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren counties. One parent was particularly grateful for the Thanksgiving-themed project in a year when the holiday looked very different. "The girls were so excited to do something different that morning when they woke up!" said the parent. In total, Master Naturalists distributed 314 kits throughout local communities.



Engagement with Home and Community Landscape Local Program Success Stories

Master Gardeners Have the Answers

Helping others learn to grow is the mission of the Master Gardener program. Our Master Gardeners do just that by volunteering in the community and sharing their knowledge with others. Master Gardeners complete training in botany, annuals and perennials, soils, insects, woody ornamentals, vegetables, fruits, turf, integrated pest management, and wildlife. They are local experts in their communities.

Master Gardeners Engage Their Community

In a year that presented numerous challenges to the way we work and interact with others, the Three Rivers Master Gardeners found innovative ways to engage their community and make a difference. They grew and donated much-needed fresh produce to local food pantries, answered their neighbor's gardening questions, and participated in citizen science projects, like the I-Pollinate program.

Master Gardeners also sought out opportunities for continuing education, increasing their knowledge and expertise through scientific journals, webinars, state and national conferences, and independent research. While the methods of engagement certainly changed this year, the value added to our community by these dedicated volunteers remained constant.



The start of a summer home garden favorite — tomatoes.
Photo: Marilyn Morris, Master Gardener

This webinar was fantastic. It was very informative. I learned a great deal and am planning to watch it again. I've paid for webinars that weren't nearly as good as this one. I hope my tax dollars are going towards this program. It is worth every penny. Thank you.

A Year of Good Growing

With families spending more time at home in 2020, there was a spike in home gardening and home landscaping. The Good Growing team of educators, Christopher Enroth, Ken Johnson, and Katie Parker, saw the demand for information and met it through blog posts, podcasts, videos, and weekly emails.

The Good Growing blog has been a regional favorite for years, but in 2020, Good Growing content and its reach have achieved a new high. The team's 72 blog posts were viewed 98,000 times across the state of Illinois and beyond. The posts covered popular topics, such as lawn aeration and overseeding, how to grow sweet potatoes, the trouble with tomatoes, and bald eagles. Educators shared their knowledge on hot topics and answered questions by expanding to weekly podcasts and then videocasts, which were played 5,800 times. The team gathers all of their weekly content into an email newsletter, which is distributed to a rapidly growing list of subscribers. In 2020, the number of subscribers increased an incredible 417% over the previous year. As the year went on, the team began to plan their first webinar series.

The future looks bright for Good Growing as the team continues to look for ways to meet the needs of local communities and beyond. As one subscriber said, "I like being able to access your GG information because I know it is research-based. I don't want fads. I want info I can access and implement with a high expectation of success. You guys rock!"



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Advances in agricultural practice driven by research and technology have the dual benefit of improving production efficiency and reducing the environmental impact caused by the food production system. While our production is high, one in every nine Illinois households experience food insecurity, and its rise over the past 10 years significantly impacts the health and wellbeing of Illinois residents. Over 2 million Illinois residents rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food assistance according to May 2020 totals from Illinois Department of Human Services, with a 14% spike in the latter half of the year associated with the effects of COVID-19.



FOOD

1,189
Program
Attendance

46
Educational
Sessions

33
Online
Learning
Sessions

3
Community
Gardens*

328
Pounds of
Produce
Donated
**

\$472
Value of
Donated
Food

* Supported by Extension staff and volunteers.

** Volume of produce donated to local communities.

*** Based on average value of \$1.44 per pound.

Illinois Extension supports a safe and accessible food supply by developing knowledge and educational programs in these areas.



Food Access

Issues with access and affordability of healthy food options can perpetuate chronic illness. Healthy people and communities require safe, nutritious, and abundant food and the education to make every food choice and every food dollar count.



Food Production

COVID-19 presented challenges never before realized: supply shortages from the closure of food and meat processing plants, shifted demand from the closure of restaurants and schools, and consumer fear over uncertain transmission of the virus.



Food Safety

COVID-19 created new areas of concern for consumers on food safety from eating and storing carryout foods and potential transmission on food packages to safely preserving foods grown in home gardens.



McDonough County food donations for Genesis Gardens.



Food Access Local Program Success Stories

Giving Back to the Community

Our youth took the 4-H pledge to heart during the pandemic, looking for ways to better their clubs, their communities, their country, and their world. Community service projects come in many forms: beautifying parks and public spaces, baking cookies for local firefighters, hosting food drives for area food pantries, and everything in between. Although they had to find creative ways to provide service safely and timely under COVID-19 restrictions, these 4-H clubs shared the same goal of making sure everyone in their community felt loved and appreciated during these trying times.

In the fall, the Scotland Clever Clovers helped sort, clean, and prepare 450 bags of food for Genesis Gardens, a non-profit organization based in Macomb, to distribute to families in need. The McDonough County 4-H Federation donated cookie bags to the WIU food pantry for students spending the holidays away from home and Mosaic residents. Each bag contained cookie mix, icing, a holiday-themed cookie cutter, and a note from one of the Federation members. The Project Santa Program provided over 200 children in Hancock, Henderson, McDonough, and Warren counties with a happy holiday full of gifts, food, and clothing. The 4-H Goal Diggers created and delivered goodie bags full of snacks and bottles of water to teachers in the Bushnell Prairie City school district to say thank you for all of their hard work during the school year. The Blandinsville Blue Ribbons donated stockings stuffed with care for Project Santa. Both the Blandinsville Blue Ribbons and 4-H Goal Diggers created festive Thanksgiving door decorations for local assisted living residents.



Food Production Local Program Success Stories

Pesticide Safety Education Program

Pesticide safety training is critical for anyone who works with pesticides, but especially for certified applicators and operators. Every year, Illinois Extension offers training courses designed to establish or reinforce the information participants need to prepare for certification exams given by Illinois Department of Agriculture. In-person trainings are held locally in Galesburg, Macomb, and Monmouth, and at other locations across the state.

This year, Extension specialists developed an online version of the course when in-person instruction became impossible. All of the information previously covered in face-to-face training is now available online. Participants watch instructional videos and work through questions at their own pace.



extension.illinois.edu/psep/

Nationally, about 86% of annual health care spending is related to chronic disease with research suggesting that up to 80% of premature heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes diagnoses could be prevented. There is clear evidence from health, nutrition, and behavioral research demonstrating the positive impact of research-based communication and outreach to promote physical, emotional, and mental health. With health disparities felt unevenly across Illinois communities, education and outreach efforts need to pay special attention toward surfacing and understanding trends impacting limited-resource populations.



HEALTH

11,751
Program Attendance

396
Educational Sessions

34
Online Learning Sessions

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships

9
K-12
Schools

9
Early Childhood
Centers

6
Agencies or
Community Centers

2
Emergency
Food Sites

Illinois Extension works to maximize physical and emotional health for all Illinois residents by focusing on these priorities.



Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

Chronic diseases prevention has collective benefits to all residents of Illinois, such as lower health care costs, increase employee productivity and morale, and decrease absenteeism.



Social and Emotional Health

COVID elevated a growing mental health crisis in the country. Extension has added resources and staff to address the growing need to provide hope and care for struggling individuals and families in the state.



Health and Safety Environments

From school lunchrooms and home-based settings, to 4-H club meetings and day care facilities, Extension is building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environments.



Chronic Disease Prevention and Management Local Program Success Stories

Focus on Brain Health

Alzheimer’s disease affects roughly 5.8 million people in the U.S. and is the fifth leading cause of death among Americans, 65 and older. Positive lifestyle, wellness choices, and effective management of other health conditions are contributing factors to brain and body health. Through a variety of in-person and virtual programming formats, the family life team made brain health a primary focus of their programming with the goal that participants adopt long-term health-promoting behaviors to enhance physical and mental wellness.

The team’s brain health programs center around research that supports lifestyle factors contributing to brain health, such as rest, diet, socialization, stress management, intellectual engagement, and physical activity. The team facilitated 135 brain health programs directly reaching 3,107 participants. They also delivered brain health education by indirect means through news articles, social media posts, the Extending Wellness texting program, radio interviews, podcasts, and articles included in the Bathroom Buzz newsletter for a total reach of 317,501. Their Family Files blog had 10,248 views, with many of the articles featuring a brain health-related topic.

With the onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent halt to in-person programming, the family life team quickly adapted their delivery focus to a virtual platform. A six-week Discover Brain Health webinar series was designed to help participants understand the brain as we mature; tips and strategies were provided to maintain and improve brain health and function, including activities to challenge the brain. A total of 2,863 participants engaged in the webinars, tuning in from 41 states and three countries. After the series, participants provided information on the changes they’ve implemented. Examples included attending an online exercise class twice a week, trying to remember their grocery lists without writing them down, challenging themselves in new ways, and learning something new each day.



extension.illinois.edu/global/discover-brain-health



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education

SNAP-Ed works with Illinois families in need to make the healthier choice an easier choice. Through classes, workshops, and collaboration with community partners to adopt research-based solutions encouraging healthier nutrition and activity choices, SNAP-Ed positively affects families and communities.

In 2020, SNAP-Ed virtual education and resources:

-  Addressed community partner needs by providing resources and collaboration opportunities
-  Provided live, virtual classes families could join from their own phone, tablet, or computer
-  Distributed print materials to families on topics such as recipes made with common pantry ingredients
-  Increased reach via social media, text, and e-news with relevant nutrition and activity information
-  Created a new community food resource map, Find Food Illinois, on the Eat. Move. Save. website

In the spring, we continued our lessons with students using the school’s online platform after their day became 100% virtual. Their teacher sent the activity books home so we could work together. The students were so excited to see me again!

AMY FINLEY, SNAP-ED COMMUNITY WORKER



Social and Emotional Health Local Program Success Stories

Mental Health Matters

Youth across Illinois were invited to learn more about mental health by participating in Your Thoughts Matter. Participants joined a weekly session where they discussed their own mental health and learned how to be mental health advocates. While connecting virtually, students were able to form relationships with peers and caring adults.

Leave Your Legacy

Writing down special moments in life to share with family can be difficult. That’s why Tessa Hobbs-Curley, along with family life educators from across the state, hosted Share Your Life Story. This virtual series met for eight sessions during the month of May. Around 50 participants attended each session to learn about life story writing techniques, gain motivation to write, and find helpful feedback from peers. To show continued support in writing, the group decided to meet monthly after the program ended.

Keeping Wellness in the Spotlight

The family life team developed and delivered numerous virtual webinars throughout the year. The Discover Wellness series, held in March and April, consisted of six weekly topics pertaining to overall positive well-being. The series had a total of 1,011 registrants from 28 different states and two different countries. Tessa Hobbs-Curley, family life educator, co-facilitated a couple of the webinars. In How High Do You Bounce? participants learned how to build resiliency skills to manage and thrive. Caregiver Self-Care participants learned how to thrive during difficult times and tough decisions, while taking care of a loved one. These two sessions were attended by 465 total participants.



extension.illinois.edu/global/discover-wellness



I wish I could have had (the program) earlier in our relationship.

Building Stronger Relationships in Couples

The new Illinois Strong Couples project is an online program for couples seeking help for their relationship. Family studies researchers at University of Illinois partnered with family life Extension educators to make the program free for enrolled couples.

Every couple has challenges in their relationship that they have to work through. In the program, they learn research-tested skills, ways of thinking, and ways of interacting that help to build their relationship. After completing the program, one husband stated, “My wife and I really communicate much better.” Whether the goal of enrolling in Illinois Strong Couples is to build greater intimacy and connection, being able to communicate more effectively, or to protect a marriage from divorce, help is just a click away.



go.illinois.edu/ILStrongCouples

What You Do Today Influences Your Future

In the Keys to Embracing Aging program, participants learn how to embrace aging, mature gracefully and successfully, and increase longevity. The program was designed to help aging adults develop strategies to take care of themselves by maintaining a positive attitude and good nutrition, socializing, taking care of their brain health, managing stress, and staying safe. Feedback from past participants has shown that the skills learned can improve daily lives.



Health and Safety Environments Local Program Success Stories

Help Is at Your Fingertips

Teachable moments come in all shapes and sizes. Now, when those unexpected moments occur, parents and educators can rely on the new Terrific Teachable Moments mobile app to help them take advantage in convenient and meaningful ways.



“We are excited to launch this app to provide a resource that can be used immediately to provide a teachable moment for children in pre-school through high school,” said Tessa Hobbs-Curley, family life educator and one of the app’s developers. “There are four age-appropriate sections with a navigation menu to make lessons easy to find.”

Terrific Teachable Moments is a simple, activity-based teaching resource, now available as an app on both Android™ and iOS™ smart devices. The program allows teachers, parents, and youth mentors to provide simple, hands-on learning experiences designed to help kids of all ages develop emotional awareness and make positive character choices. The versatile learning tool can be used both at home and in classroom settings to reinforce behaviors, such as helping others, honesty, compassion, problem-solving, and self-control. The app includes over 150 mini lessons and each can be done in under 10 minutes. Lessons are based on the 4-H Youth Development framework of experiential learning that leads kids to participate in a short activity, reflect on the experience, and apply what they learn by connecting it to real-life situations.

Zoom Meetings

Whether we were working in the office, from home, or even from the car in between offices, our staff stayed connected. We met regularly throughout the year to not only talk about what was happening in Extension, but to check in on each other and laugh. After all, we are all in this together!



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Cover photo: Seminary Street in downtown Galesburg

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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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