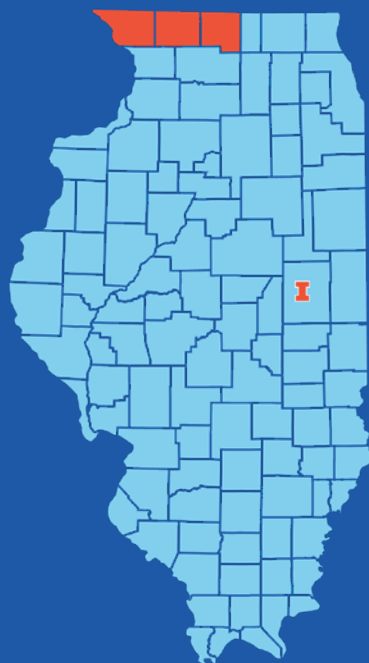




Illinois Extension

University of Illinois Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future. Based in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Extension is the statewide outreach program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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A Message from the Chancellor

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is an economic engine and a driver of innovation, deeply rooted in the Illinois prairie and engaged statewide, from Cook County to Cairo. Illinois Extension brings the university to your doorstep. Extension educators live and work alongside you in every county, allowing the university to support local leaders, businesses, farmers, and residents to address grand challenges and everyday problems with practical, research-based solutions. As a youth, my own 4-H experience inspired a rewarding career in agricultural research and higher education. Today, it's an honor to lead this great public university and deepen its commitment to serve the people of Illinois.

Robert J. Jones
Chancellor, University of Illinois

A Note from the County Director

2020 was a year like no other for University of Illinois Extension. Rather than focus on what we could not do, let's take a look at what we could do, and do well. Our unit came together quickly to solve problems, communicate about opportunities, and to support our 4-H clubs, Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers, and, most importantly, our communities. Because we were already a group that used technology well, we did not lose time trying to figure out new processes and ways to get things done. Once it became clear that working remotely was more than a short-term situation, we moved forward quickly.

For some, a fast pivot to online programming using Skype and Facebook Live allowed planned programs to go on — for the original audience and a new, expanded one. As the program teams, including our educators, began to organize series of webinars, we shared those opportunities broadly via email and social media platforms. We stayed in front of our usual audiences and gained new followers, as well.

When we learned that 4-H shows would go on, but would be virtual, it was a chance to continue our positive messaging to 4-H families. Although many activities were cancelled, we were able to offer each member the chance to show a project and receive feedback from local experts. Although participation was lower than normal, we did receive positive feedback on the experience from both families and judges.

I am so proud of our staff, who truly worked as a team to continue providing programs and resources. The incredible work of local staff, supported by those on campus and around the state, allowed us to not only continue our work, but also to grow and develop new skills. We learned a great deal this year and that will stay with us as we enter the “new normal.” Thank you for being part of our Extension family.

Margaret Larson, County Extension Director



Stephenson County 4-H Camp Counselors Logan Tessendorf and Colton Thies, 4-H Program Coordinator Becky Gocken, and International Visitor Leadership Program participants in front of the University of Illinois Extension office at Highland Community College.

Stephenson County Welcomes International Visitor Leadership Program Participants

Representatives from numerous countries, including Bulgaria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba visited University of Illinois Extension Stephenson County's office on the Highland Community College campus in March for the International Visitor Leadership Program through the U.S. Department of State. County Extension Director Margaret Larson and Program Coordinator for 4-H and Youth Development Becky Gocken led a discussion on the promotion of youth leadership within the 4-H program. 4-H camp counselors Logan Tessendorf and Colton Thies presented their experiences growing up in 4-H and the positive impact it had on them. Additionally, Tessendorf and Thies shared examples of the knowledge they acquired through extensive camp counselor training with Extension staff.

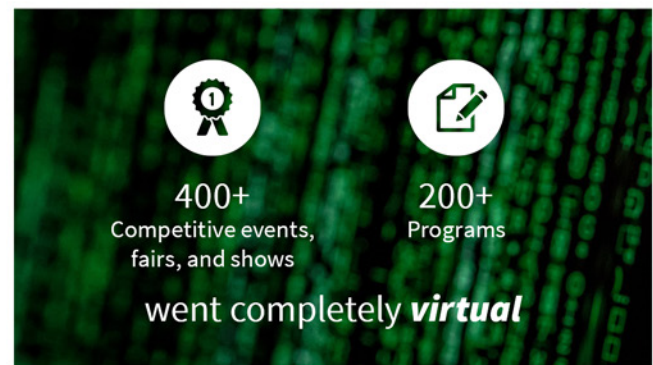
Having the opportunity to talk to people from so many different backgrounds, but with the common theme of youth development, was a wonderful experience. Everyone involved learned a lot and I'm happy I could be a part of it.

COLTON THIES, FREEPORT HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR AND 4-H CAMP COUNSELOR



4-H Takes Positive Youth Development Virtual

4-H staff statewide designed and delivered a new suite of online experiences so youth could continue to thrive!



Our 4-H Clubs remained resilient with more than:



No matter what is happening in the world, 4-H stands ready to innovate to meet the needs of today's youth!



Michelle Marck
Stephenson County
4-H

In 4-H, I grew as a leader and a person. 4-H is a great place to get basic life skills, become a leader, make friends, and have fun!
MICHELLE MARCK

Michelle Marck and Dalton Wachter Recognized

Michelle Marck, a nine-year member of the Freeport Fantastics 4-H Club, was recognized by the state 4-H office for her accomplishments in project mastery. “Michelle has shown the dedication to her craft and her fellow 4-H members to be successful with these important life skills,” said Becky Gocken, program coordinator in 4-H youth development.

Marck is a Stephenson County 4-H ambassador, 4-H buddy, junior leader, and currently serves as club treasurer.



Dalton Wachter
Jo Daviess County 4-H

I have learned more about myself and made some great friends on this journey. 4-H offers many wonderful experiences. It has helped me grow into the person I want to be tomorrow.
DALTON WACHTER

After high school, she plans to study music therapy at Illinois State University and wants to explore becoming a creative writer.

Dalton Wachter has been a 4-H member for 10 years and is currently a senior at River Ridge High School. He plans to study forestry and wildlife management at Highland Community College. Wachter was recognized as a state 4-H award application winner in personal growth. He also received a Legacy of Leadership scholarship and a Key Award. The Illinois 4-H Key Award recognizes youth leaders who mentor and serve their community.



Jo Daviess County What a Hoot 4-H Club built owl houses, placed them in trees, and is collecting data for a monitoring program designed to track statuses and trends in the reproductive biology of birds.



Environmental & Agricultural Collaborations

Local educators and program coordinators often work with environmental and agricultural groups, providing connections to university research, resources, and expertise to collaborative projects. Improving agricultural production practices and water quality were among the common threads for these efforts in 2020.

Prior to the pandemic, the Jo Daviess Soil and Water Health Coalition had several field days and knowledge-sharing meetings scheduled. Educators Phillip Alberti and Jay Solomon helped this farmer-led group adapt to a virtual format, making it possible for them to continue to meet and share knowledge. Solomon created virtual field day presentations about implemented soil erosion reduction and nutrient loss practices using videos from host farms. Alberti participated in soil health discussion meetings, helping participants interpret and compare the standard soil test results to the more comprehensive Haney test samples from two host farms.

Solomon and Program Coordinator Nikki Keltner hosted the Northwest Illinois Forage and Grassland Council business meetings via Zoom. This allowed the group to continue to organize projects, such as the bi-weekly Hay Auction. The auction provides a vital connection for producers in need of livestock feed and those with forage to sell.

The Northwest Illinois Land Stewardship Coalition brings together conservation foundations, state and federal agencies, wildlife enthusiast organizations, and landowner organizations around common conservation goals and challenges. The group focuses on developing collaboration and resources to achieve shared goals of better land conservation management across the area. Solomon provided leadership to the landowner and community education components of the effort, ensuring that the role of private landowners in accomplishing these goals remains a key component.

The Urban and Developed Land working group formed in May 2020 as part of the Health Land and Water Organization: A Plan for Northwest Illinois initiative to improve Northwest Illinois water quality through land conservation methods. Solomon was invited to join the UDL working group, tasked with identifying conservation steps, policies, and practices for municipalities and landowners.

Both efforts recognize that moving environmental policy and improvement forward requires community action built on individual participation.



Agriculture and Natural Resources

The healing power of plants. The healing power of food.

In 2020, many people turned to cultivating plants and enjoying nature as they spent more time closer to home. Home gardeners expanded their food production, and farmers – large and small – worked tirelessly to ensure a steady food supply during a time of uncertainty. Extension was there to help residents and agricultural producers surround themselves with thriving plants, get more out of their time in natural areas, and maximize their food production.



6,525
ANR Program Attendance



74
Master Gardener Volunteers



37
Master Naturalist Volunteers



13
Community Gardens
(includes gardens inactive due to COVID-19)



5,399
Pounds of Food Donated



1,019
Expert Consultations



187
Information Services
Provided by Master Gardeners

Access to Statewide Programs



285
Webinar Sessions Accessible Anywhere



182
New videos and Podcast Episodes



Midwestern Hemp Database: Science Informing Policy

In 2018, USDA legalized production of hemp in the United States for the first time in nearly 70 years. As a result, there was a tremendous need for information on variety performance and best management practices for industrial hemp in Illinois. In response to these needs, Phillip Alberti worked to develop an industrial hemp educational program over the course of late 2019 and early 2020. Basics of Industrial Hemp Production and the Grower Spotlight series were just two of the 30 programs resulting from that effort, reaching over 3,000 attendees. Program evaluations and needs assessments indicated a strong desire for further research and education in this new production area.

In response, Alberti developed the Midwestern Hemp Database. The MHD is a collaboration between Midwestern land grant institutions, private laboratories, and a vast network of grower-cooperators. In short, participation in this program provided hemp growers with an exciting opportunity to receive discounted laboratory analysis in exchange for data collection and data sharing. In its first year of operation, over 130 growers participated across the four participating states (Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana). The results of the cannabinoid testing and information on production systems (variety, planting date, target population, fertilizer rates, etc.) were made available in a publicly accessible interface. Participating researchers and farmers can use the database to identify suitable hemp varieties and production strategies.

During the fall of 2020, USDA re-opened the public comment period for the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program, asking for feedback on several contested topics. Data from the Midwestern Hemp Database was ultimately used to support changes in THC testing and negligence, harvest windows, and exemptions for research in the Final Rule for the Domestic Production of Hemp, which was published in January 2021.

“This ended up being a perfect project to take on during an unpredictable 2020,” said Alberti. “We have been able to take advantage of grower networks across the region to

gain valuable insight on a new crop, while influencing policy. Refining and expanding this program will improve a greatly underdeveloped knowledge base for hemp in our region and continue to allow science to impact policy. The resources and partnerships we develop will enable hemp producers to make informed decisions building on the combined experiences of researchers and other growers.”

We have laid the groundwork for a successful future and have received SARE funding to expand this project to more states (Kentucky, Iowa, and Ohio) and partnering laboratories (ACT Laboratories) in 2021 and beyond.
PHILLIP ALBERTI

The screenshot shows the 'Midwestern Hemp Database 2020 Research Report' page. It features a title, a QR code, and several sections of text and figures. Figure 2 shows four pie charts representing production system information: Irrigation, Cannabinoid of Interest, Seeding Method, and Row Spacing (feet). The text explains the importance of the project and the type of information available in the database.



go.illinois.edu/HempDatabase
extension.illinois.edu/jsw/industrial-hemp-production



Get Growing: Fruit and Vegetable Digital Educational Series

The switch to virtual education created an opportunity for Extension programming to reach new audiences, while still connecting with the individuals who previously attended in person. In the spring, Grant McCarty, local foods and small farms educator, developed a series of Zoom webinars called Get Growing. This series of eight, 90-minute webinars covered a different topic each week, such as growing tomatoes and peppers, container vegetable gardening, managing vegetable garden pests, and growing herbs. Extension was able to connect with many new vegetable gardeners in the area through the live presentations and each video was uploaded to the unit's YouTube Channel, allowing their reach to stretch even further.

In total, the series had 837 live participants representing 53 counties throughout Illinois. On average, there were 93 participants per webinar and 97 participants attended more than one webinar.

In the summer, McCarty continued to focus on digital education in the form of short educational videos focused on fruit and vegetable production. These four to five minute videos, which McCarty learned to film and edit himself, covered topics like Japanese beetles, tomato hornworm, soil sampling, and okra. Shared widely on social media, they provided quick tips during the growing season and were aimed at individuals who may not be interested in long videos or webinars. All of the videos are available on YouTube and are often used to answer frequently asked questions or to compliment other Extension resources. For example, residents picking up a soil kit from a local office can be directed to the video on soil sampling.

McCarty is planning additional digital education in 2021, including the virtual Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference and a second season of Get Growing.



Extension Held Master Gardener Training Online

University of Illinois Extension in Stephenson County hosted Master Gardener training in the fall with 11 participants. Following a flipped classroom style, participants completed assignments and listened to recorded lectures prior to the live online class where that week's specific topic was discussed with Extension educators. The class met once a week for 12 weeks to complete the required number of study hours. Topics included botany, lawns, fruit, vegetables, trees and shrubs, soils, living with wildlife, integrated pest management, disease and diagnosis, annuals and perennials, and more.

“This hybrid, flipped classroom-style training was a fun way to be able to offer Master Gardener training in this unique year,” said Nikki Keltner, Extension program coordinator. “I’ve worked with the Master Gardeners since shortly after joining the staff 13 years ago and we have talked for many years about changing the way we offer the training. This year was the perfect opportunity to try the flipped classroom style; it worked very well and we had a great group of participants complete the training.”

While the Master Gardener program is nationwide, Illinois held its first training in 1975, and now boasts more than 3,500 Master Gardeners across the state. Annual training is offered throughout Illinois on a rotational basis, so each county might host training once every three to four years.

Through a number of community and donation gardens managed by Extension, nearly 6,500 pounds of fresh produce were donated to food pantries and other agencies for distribution to food-insecure families in our communities.

Extension Donation Gardens Provide Fresh Produce to Food Pantries and Others

Extension Master Gardeners and staff worked diligently over the summer to make fresh produce available to those in need. Through a number of community and donation gardens managed by Extension in our region, nearly 6,500 pounds of fresh produce were donated to food pantries and other agencies for distribution to food-insecure families in our communities.



<https://extension.illinois.edu/jsw/horticulture>



Master Gardener Helpline

2020 was a busy year for the Master Gardener Helpline in Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties. Volunteers worked the helpline remotely this year, with Extension staff collecting questions, forwarding them to the Master Gardeners via email, and Master Gardeners responding directly to community members via email or phone.

Collectively, the counties answered 222 calls and volunteered 394 hours answering these calls. The most common questions in all three counties were about tree health issues, such as oak galls and maple tar spot. Questions about vegetables were a close second.

Once we got through the technical aspects of working remotely, helpline was really business as usual. We received questions from clients, researched the answers, telephoned them with answers, and provided assistance with emailed documents. Internal reporting was with traditional forms, but filled out online and emailed. We handled a remarkable number of client issues without a presence in an office.

GENE FOX,
WINNEBAGO COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Answering questions on the helpline was like a great treasure hunt! The little “jewels” of information that I could find for people was a great pleasure to me. Most of the callers were people without technology at their reach. They are just so happy to speak to a real person! Serving on the helpline is a privilege and I hope to do it again.

CATHERINE LOWE-JONES,
STEPHENSON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Extension Offers Expert Assistance

Locally, Illinois Extension is well known for knowledge, resources, and programming on a wide range of topics. Individuals often visit Extension offices when they need to purchase a training manual, farm record book, or other publication. Many Extension staff have a level of expertise on specific topics and are sought out via phone, email, and in-person visits. In 2020, there was a subtle, but definite uptick in the number of these contacts, as reported by staff.



In the agriculture and natural resources area, requests for assistance can range from simple garden-related issues, which are handled by our Master Gardener volunteers, to complex legal issues related to estate planning for farm clientele. During the 2020 growing season, one educator received nearly 100 unique contacts requesting assistance with a variety of issues and problems. In many of these cases, a phone call is a sufficient means for conveying information and resolving the issue. However, others require a farm visit (our staff were granted Essential Worker status for just that reason), or a great deal of research into the problem at hand. Sometimes Extension staff may need to bring campus faculty in to assist.

Two members of the Supplemental Nutrition Education Program team working in the area of policy, systems, and environment, offer support and assistance to local agencies in food deserts and underserved communities. For these educators, providing expert assistance is just part of the job — serving on committees and coalitions, presenting at conferences, and offering one-on-one consultation to agency leadership.

Summer brought many calls about food safety and food preservation as more people, many of whom were first-time gardeners, tried their hands at canning, freezing, and preserving their bounty. Nutrition and wellness staff provided much-needed expertise in the very specialized science of food preservation, accurately answering questions and referring callers to trusted, research-based sources for recipes and information.

In addition to answering specific requests, Extension’s statewide teams developed a number of webinars covering a wide variety of topics. These videos are another widely accessible source of information for individuals seeking answers to common questions and related issues.



Healthy Lifestyles

Nutrition and Wellness Educator and registered dietitian Diane Reinhold continues to provide research-based education to those who are living with chronic disease, or caring for someone who is. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability and accounts for 90% of the nation’s \$3.8 trillion in annual healthcare expenditures. Sixty percent of U.S. adults have a least one chronic disease, and 40% have two or more chronic health conditions.

Reinhold has offered many chronic disease prevention and management programs throughout the region and 2020 was no exception. Despite a statewide stay-at-home order, Reinhold quickly adapted to provide research-based programming addressing many healthy living programs virtually, which served as an alternative to in-person education. These programs educate consumers about the short- and long-term health benefits of consistently making healthy lifestyle choices.

Programs included:

- Exploring Current Diet Trends: The Good, the Bad, and the Hard to Maintain
- Emotional Eating: Understanding How Stress Impacts Hunger and Appetite
- Diabetes: Practicing Self-Care During Difficult Times
- Making a List and Checking It Twice: Managing Holiday Stress
- The Basics of Arthritis
- The Role of Nutrition in Aging: The MIND Eating Plan
- Saving Money: Eating In vs. Eating Out
- Busy Lives, Easy Meals: Slow Cookers and More
- Cooking Oils 101: What to Know

Having a busy life, although fulfilling, sometimes makes eating and staying healthy a challenge. Whether people are juggling a busy schedule or planning around others’ busy schedules, finding time to prepare and cook healthy meals can be difficult. In a pandemic, however, when many families found themselves working and learning remotely, the thought of making healthy choices may have been too much to bear. Nutrition and wellness programming helped families find healthy alternatives when preparing meals at home.

Home food preservation was one of the hottest topics in 2020. Whether people were new to canning or had been doing it for years, many reached out to Reinhold for expert advice on home food preservation.

The nutrition and wellness team also offered the Fill Your Pantry: Home Food Preservation webinar series. Reinhold

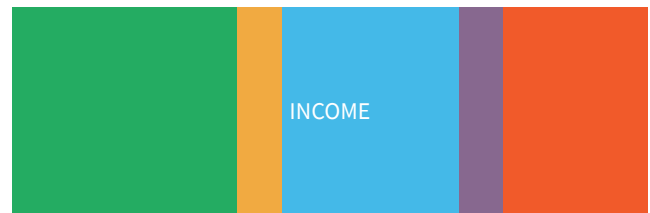
developed, presented, and moderated many of those sessions throughout the summer, including Water Bath and Pressure Canning Basics, Freezing Your Summer Harvest, and The Basics of Fermentation. There was also a month-long social media campaign addressing many related topics.

Professional Development for the Food Service Industry

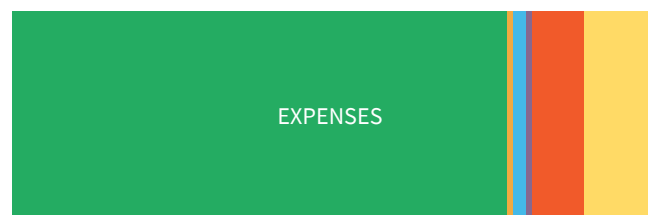
The pandemic brought many economic challenges and the restaurant industry was among those hit hardest. Countless restaurants were shuttered early in the pandemic and later permitted to open with restrictions hampering an already challenging industry with narrow profit margins and stiff competition.

In 2020, University of Extension offered low-cost food safety training to help restaurant owners and their staff. Food safety is more important than ever, given the complex financial challenges facing many in the food service industry. The Certified Food Protection Manager course is a nationally-accredited program that meets the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Food Service Sanitation Code requirements.

Finances



- 36% County Boards
- 7% Local Donations
- 28% State Sources
- 7% Self-Supporting Funds
- 23% FNP/Federal



- 78% Salaries/Wages
- 1% Equipment
- 2% Travel
- 1% EEOC/Accommodations
- 8% Program Expenses
- 10% Rent/Utilities



SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EDUCATION

SNAP-Education 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-Education positively affects families and communities.

In 2020, SNAP-Education 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

After learning about ways to increase physical activity during SNAP-Education classes through Rockford Housing Authority, one participant shared her healthy changes. She walks the stairs, dances to her favorite music, and stretches regularly. She is feeling much healthier thanks to these small changes.

- Linda Ricker, SNAP-Education Community Worker

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships



14
K-12 Schools



9
Early Childhood



45
Agencies or Community Centers



15
Emergency Food Sites

Growing Food for Rockford

One Garden at a Time

During a year of uncertainty, Extension worked with community partners to grow vegetables for our neighbors. The Growing Together Illinois grant provided funds and other resources to address food access in Rockford. Between two gardens, over 800 pounds of vegetables were harvested in 2020.

In the spring, when gardeners were making plans for the season, there were questions around whether communities could safely continue public garden activities. At the same time, many residents were losing their jobs because of the pandemic and food insecurity was on the rise. The Growing Together project allowed University of Illinois Extension, local volunteers, and Master Gardeners to provide fresh, healthy produce for their communities.

“There is one thing I know about gardeners — they are resourceful. They will find ways to get their hands dirty despite obstacles that come their way,” said Carol Erickson, Extension educator and project coordinator. Erickson and local Master Gardeners worked alongside community partners to build 15 new raised beds in two locations this spring.

Masked volunteers from Rockford Boys and Girls Club assembled nine raised garden beds in late April. One Master Gardener donated additional funds to expedite the construction. By early May, many of the new beds were home to seedlings that had been started by youth in the club’s new facility inside the former St. Paul Lutheran School. Youth were able to see the results of their hard work from seed to tomato.

“The wonderful thing about our teaching garden is that it is a hands-on, mind-on experience where kids can learn together,” said Gayle Dixon, unit director. Parent Marquita Simms said, “My children liked spending time in the garden, getting their hands dirty, watching the plants grow, and bringing home the vegetables.” Over the course of the growing season, the garden provided 325 pounds of fresh vegetables for club members and their families.

In June, six new raised beds were built at the Broadway Growing Together garden by volunteers from Rockford YouthBuild. This formerly vacant city lot now houses 18 beds that yielded almost 500 pounds of tomatoes, greens, potatoes,



and other vegetables in 2020. Volunteers from Rockford and Crusader Community Health helped plant, water, and harvest throughout the season. The fresh produce was delivered twice a week to Rock River Valley Pantry, located across the street from the garden inside Crusader Community Health.

This was the third year for the Growing Together Illinois initiative, which is funded by Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education. The first garden was built at St. Elizabeth Community Center in 2018. Youth from the center planted, watered, and harvested produce that they delivered to St. Elizabeth Food Pantry and took home to their families. The project works closely with University of Illinois Extension's Master Gardener program to address hunger on a local level.



Produce from the new raised bed in Broadway Garden was donated to the Rock River Valley Pantry inside Crusader Clinic.

During this past year of seemingly unending solitary confinement and bad news, I took great solace in helping those who needed a little help to better their world and I found it was just the medicine I required to better mine. Like Cicero said, 'If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.'

MICHAEL LACOMINI,
MASTER GARDENER, JO DAVIESS COUNTY



Our local government education programs increased outreach in response to the COVID-19 crisis and developed a critical partnership with the Illinois Office of Broadband's initiative to extend high-speed internet access across the state.



go.illinois.edu/communitybroadband

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.



go.illinois.edu/leadershipacademy

Statewide Webinar Reach



37
Webinars in 2020



1,706
Reached In Community Involvement and Leadership Webinars



926
Reached in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webinars



5,182
Reached in Economic and Financial Stability Webinars



1,115
Reached in Community Resiliency Webinars

The University of Illinois Extension's community and economic development team helps communities build capacity for creative and informed decision-making to enhance their quality of life.



<https://go.illinois.edu/LGE>

STAFF

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Cover photos: (top left) Youth and adult volunteers receive CPR certification from American Red Cross instructor Heather Baker; (top right) college student Ellie Chidley helps at the Broadway/Crusader Growing Together Garden site; (bottom left) Stephenson County 4-H members participate in a painting party at Jelly Art Studio in Freeport; (bottom right) Helen Wenger of the Country Cuzins 4-H Club.

Illinois Extension

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).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.