



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



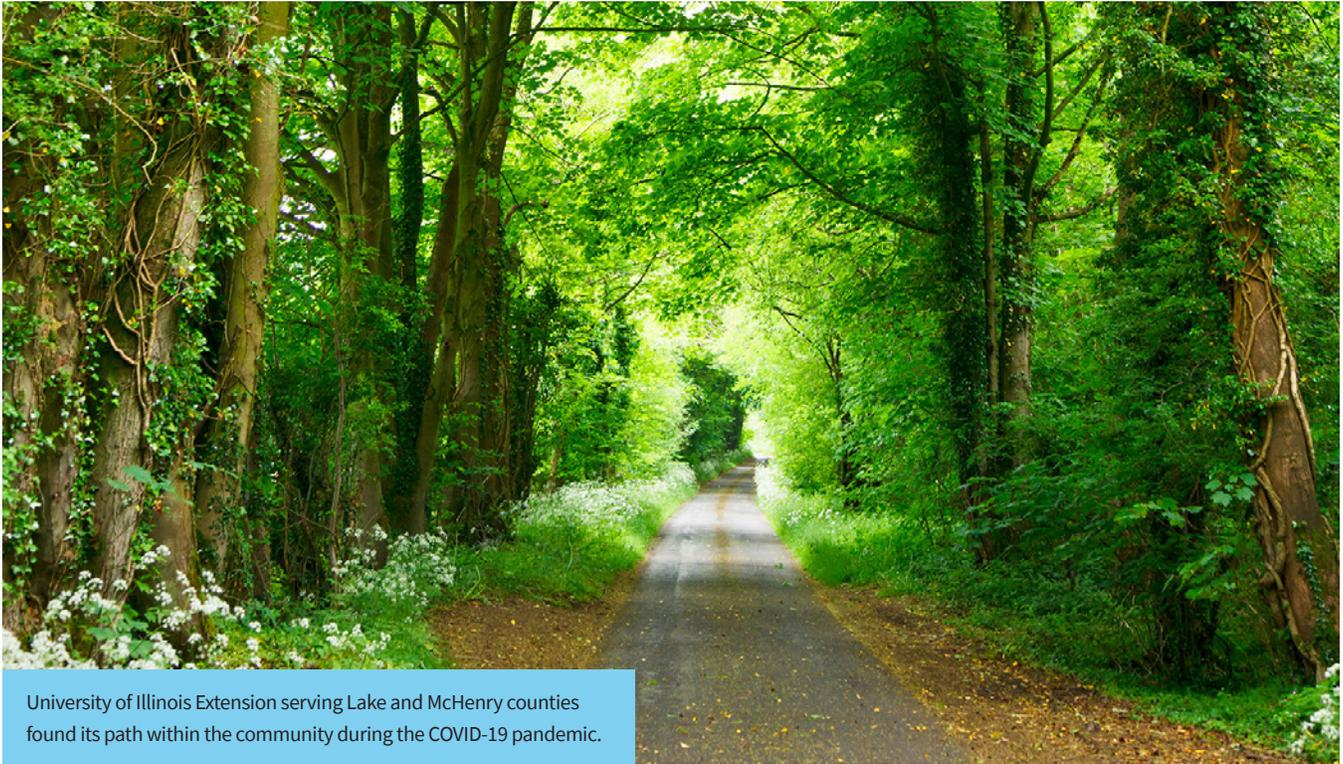
A Message from the County Director

University of Illinois Extension purposefully designed its mission to ensure that research-based knowledge is not confined to academic circles, but is deliberately and professionally provided to individuals and organizations, enabling them to solve problems, adapt to changes and new opportunities, make informed decisions, develop new skills, and carry innovations forward into practice.

The whirlwind of the 2020 pandemic, economics, and racial inequalities forced Extension to change its path and look at the world through different lenses. These outbreaks caused immense stress and undermined psychological well-being around the country, but Extension staff continued to show resilience and encouragement, as they transitioned to work from home. It became an opportunity for Extension staff to refocus, learn new skills, and use new platforms to assist its volunteers and educational partners and to continue its youth and adult impact locally and across the nation.

The pandemic required Extension staff to be more creative and resourceful to address needs in the areas of food access and health. Extension addressed these needs by creating and sharing virtual programs and supporting its local partners. Staff engaged volunteers in both Lake and McHenry counties to address food access through educational webinars related to safe gardening during a pandemic. Volunteers were encouraged and planted extra vegetables in their gardens to donate to local food pantries safely. Extension SNAP-Ed staff continued to partner with local food pantries to assist with their educational needs and to work with teachers to provide virtual programs to youth about healthy eating habits and basic nutrition skills. Our 4-H staff created virtual, safe, and inclusive educational programs where all youth had the opportunity to develop their skills in partnership with caring adults, while feeling a sense of belonging.

Extension staff works with adults and youth of all ages, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, ancestry, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, or disability.



University of Illinois Extension serving Lake and McHenry counties found its path within the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 devise new methods for safely participating in farmers markets and navigating 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 with which we were grappling. By pairing deep understanding of local Illinois communities with the knowledge and expertise of University of Illinois, Extension’s educators led the way forward during a time of uncertainty for many. We are proud to highlight some of the ways we worked with Illinois residents over the past year.

Extension embodies the land grant mission of University of Illinois, providing applied research and education to address societal grand challenges and local issues.

Illinois Extension leaders work with a network of local stakeholders to define annual priorities that allow us to respond to evolving and emerging needs, while still ensuring meaningful progress toward key outcomes in each of the grand challenge areas: community, economy, environment, food, and health.

- In 2020, Extension made 600,000 educational contacts and conducted nearly 25,000 educational program sessions, equating to an average of 11,000 contacts and 450 educational sessions each week.
- Extension’s 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 needs, such as food access, rural economic infrastructure support, and workforce development.
- Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, and 4-H adult volunteer programs trained 7,118 volunteers, who devoted 573,685 hours of support, delivering services valued at \$16 million.
- Extension educational websites garnered more than 12.8 million visits over the past 12 months. Our social media strategy generated more than 200 million impressions highlighting Illinois news, events, and research.



Visit us at extension.illinois.edu/lm

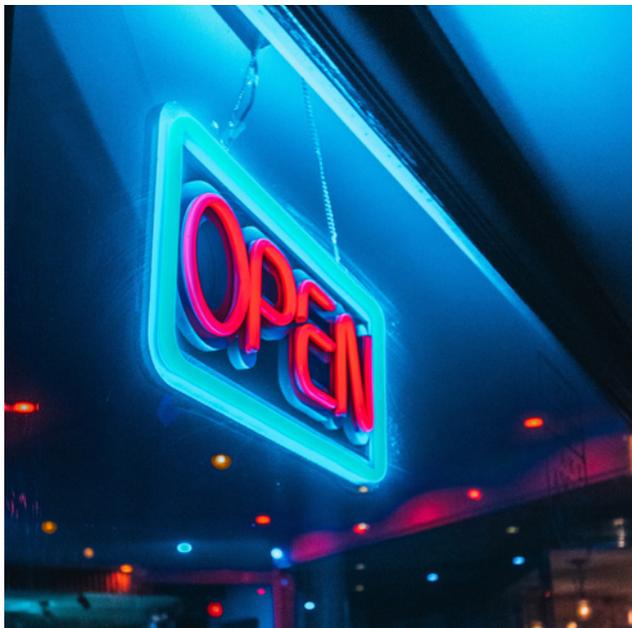


An independent research firm valued Extension’s annual impact on the state of Illinois at \$603 million, about 10 times its 2019 budget of \$60.9 million.

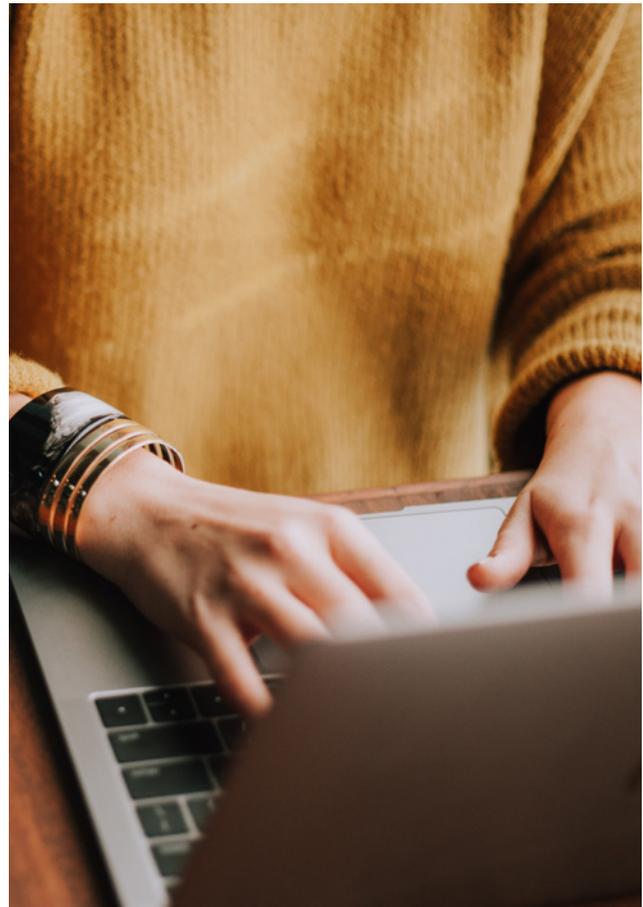
- The positive economic outcomes of Extension’s programs were estimated as at least \$477 million in 2019.
- Economic output in Illinois related to Extension expenditures was \$126 million for 2019. Illinois Extension directly employs 655 FTE personnel and generates an additional 403 FTE jobs through indirect and induced impact effects.

Extension helps residents, businesses, and local governments adapt and respond to the COVID-19 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.
- 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.
- With in-person meetings restricted, Extension transitioned its delivery method, hosting 1,900 online webinars with nearly 114,000 participants during April through December. 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.
- Five county Extension offices piloted “drive-up” WiFi sites to make internet accessible to those with needs for schoolwork, online businesses, and social connection.



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



Extension educational websites garnered more than 12.8 million visits over the past 12 months.

Illinois Extension Impact, Topline Numbers

While Extension is built on a local community framework, our educators are part of a statewide network of Extension professionals working every day to improve the lives of Illinois residents and to bring stability and innovation to our businesses and communities. Educators in local units contribute to statewide efforts in their expert content area. The table below summarizes some of our key performance indicators for statewide impact from the past year.

| Grand Challenge Area (Core Focus Areas) | Educational Contacts (Participants in All Programs) | Educational Events (Educational Sessions Offered) | Digital Education (Webinars and Online Learning Events) |
|--|---|---|---|
| Community | 15,526 | 449 | 89 |
| Economy | 95,449 | 2,008 | 520 |
| Environment | 72,366 | 1,556 | 466 |
| Food | 83,961 | 1,867 | 236 |
| Health | 342,714 | 17,215 | 556 |



Serving Lake and McHenry Counties

In 2020, Lake County had an estimated population of 696,600; McHenry County had an estimated 307,800. By working with the county boards, local governments, community groups, not-for-profits, and residents, University of Illinois Extension was able to have a positive impact on our community through its core components: 4-H, the Master Gardener program, Local Foods and Small Farms, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, Home and Community Education, and Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant. Through these individual components, Extension was able to address many needs within our communities using research-backed solutions.

Extension is advised by an Executive Council, consisting of representative members of the community. Council members serve two-year terms.

| Extension Executive Council Member | County |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Clinton Bunch | Lake |
| Michael Evans | McHenry |
| Addison Gjelsten | Lake |
| Ericka Johnson | McHenry |
| John Jung, Jr. | McHenry |
| Cecil Lampkin | Lake |
| Brian Malone | Lake |
| David McDermott | McHenry |
| Theresa Meshes | McHenry |
| Dawn Scichowski | McHenry |
| Gina Scichowski | McHenry |
| Linda Sharken | Lake |
| Simeon Viltz | Lake |
| Patricia Warren | Lake |
| John Wasik | Lake |
| Tyler Wilke | McHenry |
| Sarah Zack | McHenry |



Community

Hallmarks of strong, resilient communities include residents who report that they 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.

Our Foundational Beliefs

To support strong and resilient youth, families, and communities, our work is guided by the following beliefs.

Community pride begins when people can see themselves as part of the solution to their local issues. Extension helps communities analyze issues and establish plans to address those issues.

Extension believes in supporting strong and resilient youth, families, and communities.

When armed with research-based facts and an appreciation for the experiences and views of others, people have the ability to improve their lives and plan for the happiness and prosperity of their families, businesses, and communities.

Understanding local needs is a critical step in creating learning programs that will affect and sustain meaningful change for individuals and communities.

All youth can grow when they're surrounded by people who are cheering for their success. By empowering active participation in decision-making about their future, youth learn that they can choose their own path to leadership and career success.

Opportunities for education, mentoring, career exploration and development, access to technology, and safe environments should be available to all.



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:

- 
 782
Club Members
- 
 72
Clubs
- 
 126
Adult Volunteers
- 
 97
Youth Volunteers



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

On Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In response to current social justice issues, Extension educators collaborated with colleagues across University of Illinois to develop a statewide diversity, equity, and inclusion webinar series.

Race Matters attracted 1,052 University of Illinois employees to participate in social justice education. The four-part webinar series, which took place in July and August 2020, provided a safe space for colleagues to explore and discuss the impact of recent social injustices. Topics included:

- The Unheard Voices of People of Color
- Systemic Racism
- Authentic Allyship
- Building a More Inclusive Organization

Michelle Cox, 4-H educator, was instrumental in the overall planning process of the webinar series. Additionally, Cox and her colleagues developed and co-presented a session on creating a racially equitable future as inclusive leaders. A total of 272 employees registered for that session.

Qualtrics was used to collect post-program feedback from participants and the results were excellent.

Webinar Series Outcomes

- 95% of participants indicated an increase in understanding about racism, or strategies to address racism.
- 89% of participants found the content of the webinar(s) relevant to their work in Extension.
- 65% of participants indicated that training provided in their unit helped them better understand racism and related topics.



For more information on Extension's 4-H program, email Dr. Michelle Cox, 4-H educator mcx@illinois.edu



Virtual 4-H Juntos: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

In Illinois, only 21% of Hispanic residents, ages 25 and older, have attained post-secondary education at the level of an associate's degree or higher in comparison to 48% of white, non-Hispanic residents. The majority of Latino youth in our schools are U.S.-born children of immigrants. While parents are the strongest support system for youth, many Latino parents are new to the American educational system and lack the knowledge and skills needed to help their children bridge the gap from high school to higher education.



4-H Juntos Together for a Better Education is a program based on the belief that the educational success of Latino youth requires groups of people working together, calling upon the collaboration of families, schools, and communities. Each of the components and activities are culturally appropriate and address the specific needs and challenges most often faced by Latino families in their educational journey. The program is presented in Spanish for the parents, who are most comfortable with and adept at learning in Spanish. In the past, 4-H Juntos had been presented in a series of two-hour workshops. Due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, 4-H Educator Sandra Prez created virtual 4-H Juntos workshops, so that parents and their middle and high school students could learn together at home.

With the help of two community-based bilingual facilitators trained by Prez, the first group of virtual participants attended four, two-hour interactive workshops covering topics, such as making education a family goal, family and school communication, requirements for graduation, how to finance higher education, and completing a plan of action. Sixteen families attended four sessions and received a Spanish-language copy of the guide to higher education as a gift from community partner and program host, Wauconda Public Library. The developers of the 4-H Juntos program report that 100% of youth participants demonstrate improved grades at school, while 90% improved their school attendance and had an increased desire to attend college. Additionally, after completing the program, 90% of participants felt like they “belong” at school, a key indicator for high school graduation.

Wauconda Public Library was the first community partner to present Virtual 4-H Juntos, with training sessions set for McHenry Public Library and Harvard Community School District 50.



Lake County Millburn Clover 4-Hers participated in a generous community service project, The Penny's Purpose Blanket Drive. Club members purchased fleece material and individually made blankets for the drive. A total of 12 blankets were made and donated.

Lake County 4-H Adopts a Virtual Platform

Lake County 4-H Program Coordinator Sabrina Agee worked with local 4-H community project clubs to support strong and resilient leaders, parents, and youth, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the unprecedented year of 2020, 4-H was challenged to switch quickly to a virtual platform, which left leaders and families uncertain as to how this change would affect their lives. Through quick action, Agee worked with her colleagues, state 4-H staff, other counties, and leaders to create a welcoming virtual transition that would keep clubs participating.

The Lake County 4-H clubs successfully created safe, socially-distanced meetings, craft activities, club fundraisers, community service projects, and a holiday gingerbread contest. These activities certainly kept the participants moving strong.

Together, Lake County 4-H members, volunteers, and staff are continuing to encourage and remind each other of the 4-H motto — “To Make the Best Better” — no matter the circumstances.



For more information about the Juntos Together for a Better Education program, contact 4-H Metro Educator Sandra Prez at sprez@illinois.edu.



For information on Lake County 4-H, email Program Coordinator Sabrina Agee at huley@illinois.edu.



McHenry County 4-H

4-H Project Day Returns

So many projects, so little time! With more than 100 different projects from which to choose, it can be difficult for youth to know which activities they might be interested in, if they have never tried them before.

To help spark interest in some lesser-known project areas, Extension 4-H decided to spend a day exploring 16 different activities with youth, ages 8 to 15. 4-H volunteers and older youth from the Ambassador and Federation teams assisted staff in hosting 4-H Project Day in February 2020. This allowed youth to explore activities from multiple project areas, including robotics, jewelry making, cooking, cake decorating techniques, grid drawing, paper quilling, STEM activities, hands-only CPR, animal science ethics, and more. In the spirit of 4-H giving back to their community, all youth had an opportunity to participate in making tie blankets to be donated to a local children’s hospital.

The day of fun and exploration led to increased enrollment in project areas, new knowledge and skills, additional 4-H enrollment, and 16 blankets donated to the children’s hospital.



The McHenry Co. 4-H Project Day allowed youth to explore activities from multiple project areas, including jewelry making.



Jayden, New Wave 4-H Club, exhibits his market lamb in the 4-H Virtual Livestock Show.

4-H Makes Virtual Happen

Among the many challenges presented in 2020, was the question of how to maintain the learning by doing philosophy of youth development emphasized in 4-H’s hands-on activities. Faced with social distancing obstacles, the program had to make an abrupt shift, transitioning from in-person to virtual meetings.

With the assistance of exceptional volunteers, spring and summer programming continued, offering youth the opportunity to participate virtually in special interest clubs, workshops, and classes almost every day of the week. In addition to community club meetings, virtual programming included cooking clubs, horse workshops and demonstration videos, dog training classes, shooting sports programs, photography workshop series, yoga classes, and a summer clovers 4-H club. These programs enabled youth to continue to gain valuable skills and knowledge with plenty of opportunities to learn by doing. We are grateful to the many adult and youth volunteers who embraced the transition and delivered valuable virtual programs to our 4-H families.

Over two-thirds of McHenry County 4-H members participated in the Virtual 4-H Show, demonstrating the project skills they had gained throughout the year by submitting videos, slideshows, and pictures of their final projects. To celebrate their success, staff and volunteers hosted a drive-through celebration where members received ribbons, awards, and certificates in recognition of their achievements.



For more information about McHenry County 4-H, email Program Coordinator Michele Aavang at maavang@illinois.edu.



Food Access: Healthy people and communities require safe, nutritious, and abundant food and the education to make every food choice count.

Food Production: COVID-19 presented challenges — food supply shortages, shifted demand, and consumer fear over virus transmission.

Food Safety: COVID-19 created new consumer concerns about food safety, including virus transmission on packaging and food storage safety.

Food

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 well-being of Illinois residents. More than 2 million Illinois residents rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food assistance, according to May 2020 figures from Illinois Department of Human Services, with a 14% spike in the latter half of the year associated with the effects of COVID-19.

Our Focus in 2021:
Supporting a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

Our Foundational Beliefs

To support strong and resilient youth, families, and communities, our work is guided by the following beliefs.

Strong communities care for the well-being of all residents, and Extension has a role in assisting in the development of community policies that facilitate food access.

Families should thrive physically, emotionally, and economically. As such, every individual should have access to safe and adequate food to meet their health needs.

Agricultural producers are stewards of the land in their care and, when given sound, unbiased information, will make sound agricultural production decisions that provide for their operation's economic well-being, while ensuring the health of our state's natural resources.



SNAP-Ed Priority Issues

SNAP-Ed has identified two priority issues on which to focus their efforts: food access and chronic disease prevention and management. During a strategic planning session this fall, the SNAP-Ed team drafted a vision statement to guide their work in these areas.

SNAP-Ed’s vision is for fresh and nutritious food to be available in all community networks. While the overall goal is to decrease obesity and medical costs associated with unhealthy eating, the team identified several significant milestones they hope to help facilitate over the next three to five years, in service of that goal:

- Pantries will provide fewer cakes and junk food items; instead, they will have access to more fresh produce and less processed foods.
- More schools will plant gardens with produce being used in lunchrooms.
- Kids will eat more fruits and vegetables.
- People will safely engage in physical activity in public spaces.
- Communities will plant and sustain gardens; individuals will grow their own food.
- Neighborhood coalitions will work on critical issues to support health equity.
- Desert foods will become a thing of the past.

While creating the strategic plan last fall, SNAP-Ed looked at all of the areas impacted by food insecurity and used demographics provided by each county to prioritize the communities most in need. The team identified the most effective interventions — peer-to-peer education, environmental changes, and strategies — then collaborated with each community to deploy them.

In the spring of 2020, the SNAP-Ed team pivoted and responded to changing needs by creating virtual programs using the approved curriculum for OrganWise Guys in Waukegan, Round Lake, and Zion. Virtual outreach expanded in the summer to include McHenry County areas like Wonder Lake, Harvard, Woodstock, and Crystal Lake.

SNAP-Ed also helped implement gardening programs for diverse learners in the Waukegan School District over the summer. SNAP-Ed educators partnered with horticulture staff and created a workshop for 75 school district employees on basic container gardening, including a curriculum that teachers could use to educate students during their five-week summer program.



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

During a class at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Episcopal Church, a woman shared that after learning about healthy eating in past lessons, ‘I added more vegetables to my diet, reduced processed foods high in sugars, and exercised to lose weight.’
- Miguel Palacios Hidalgo, SNAP-Ed community worker

SNAP-Ed Community Partnerships

-  32 K-12 Schools
-  2 Stores or Markets
-  16 Early Childhood
-  28 Agencies or Community Centers
-  21 Emergency Food Sites



The Hyde Park Elementary School garden was created under the School Garden Workshops series, a partnership between Illinois Extension's SNAP-Ed and horticulture teams and Master Gardeners.

SNAP-Ed and School Gardening Success

Teaching kids about nutrition and how to grow fresh vegetables has become a passion for many local teachers. In 2020, school gardens became even more important as a way to increase fresh produce during the pandemic and educate youth in a safe, outdoor activity.

In support of these efforts, horticulture and SNAP-Ed partnered to provide the School Garden Workshop series. The series consisted of nine sessions that began in the fall and ran through late spring. In the spring of 2020, the in-person program transitioned to a virtual format for the last four sessions. Each session averaged nine school staff attendees with five participating sites receiving \$300 grants to start or maintain their gardens. Over the summer, three of those schools started new gardens. One middle school donated its produce to the local food pantry.

Teachers in the Waukegan School District thought a version of the School Garden Workshop series would be a valuable addition to their five-week summer program for learning diverse students. Extension staff presented the workshop's curriculum to 75 school district employees, in addition to information on container gardening, which did become part of the district's summer program. In fact, the family of each participating student received resources from the district to start a container garden of their own.

In August, the local food systems and small farms team discussed moving the School Gardening Workshop series to an online platform and decided to open it to a more regional audience. More than 55 participants from across the state registered for the online workshop.



For more information about the SNAP-Ed program, contact SNAP-Ed Educator Dale Kehr at dalekehr@illinois.edu.



DELIVERING FOOD & INSPIRATION SAFELY

Imagine not being confident that you can put food on the table for your family. This is a real concern for many. Food insecurity affects 6.3% of the population in the Round Lake area.

Avon Cares Food Pantry helps to fight food insecurity by allowing clients to attend the pantry twice a month. At the onset of COVID-19, the pantry moved to a drive-through format with pre-packed boxes to ensure clients' safety.

The pre-packed boxes often included foods that clients were not used to preparing, so Extension jumped in to help. Recipes are provided in each box

and on the pantry's Facebook page to help clients use the food items they receive. December's recipe was split pea soup and January's was chicken parmesan.

Extension also provided signs promoting healthy choices, like using beans and eating more whole grains, that were displayed while cars were in the pick-up line.

Avon Cares Food Pantry and Illinois Extension continue to work together and identify new methods to reach clients during a time of social distancing. Their shared goal is to make the healthy choice the easy choice for the Round Lake community.



MAKING THE MOST OF FRESH PRODUCE

SNAP-Ed worked with the Wonder Lake Food Pantry, a small-scale pantry in McHenry County, guiding them through changes to help them better serve the community. The pantry was giving guests one-gallon containers of vegetables made available to them through the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Some pantry guests were overwhelmed by the volume and unsure of what to do with that many vegetables, or how to make them last long enough to consume. Extension provided several recipes for

each ingredient, giving families multiple options for using each vegetable. They also provided instructions for freezing leftover vegetables, allowing guests to use what they could and preserve the remainder for future meals.

Extension also continued its efforts with the McHenry Policy Systems and Environmental changes. Staff practiced social distancing and wearing masks while continuing to reach out and assist program partners in making changes.

HELPING STUDENTS STAY HEALTHY AT HOME

In 2020, school administrators in Zion expressed concern that their remote-learning students were not getting enough exercise and were not eating healthy. SNAP-Ed staff were able to transition a popular classroom program called OrganWise Guys to a virtual program that they presented to more than 200 students in 11 classes at Zion's East Elementary School via Zoom and Google Classroom.

The virtual program allowed Extension staff to ask participants about their eating and exercise habits during the pandemic and to connect the stories in the lessons to positive changes students could make at home to stay healthy. Real and virtual hands shot up when students were asked about their favorite fruit, or their favorite activity for getting exercise. The positive and encouraging reactions from Extension staff made students feel good about making healthy choices. As with all of SNAP-Ed's in-person and virtual programs, the ultimate goal is for students to continue to learn, and adopt healthy habits that will stick with them into adulthood.



Although it was different this year not being in person, you came to each Zoom class with well researched and well-thought-out ideas for our students, and you made sure that they were talking about eating healthy and exercising. They really enjoyed the program and you!

MRS. LOBATO



Snap-Ed In Waukegan

Miguel Palacios, SNAP-Ed community worker, delivered the OrganWise Guys nutrition program at seven different schools in Waukegan Community Unit School District 60 during the 2019-20 school year. Participating schools included Andrew Cooke Magnet Elementary, Clearview Elementary, Glen Flora Elementary, Hyde Park Elementary, John S. Clark Elementary, Little Fort Elementary, Oakdale Elementary, and Whittier Elementary. Palacios provided 359 nutrition sessions in 60 classrooms reaching 1,233 children. In weekly sessions, kindergarten through second grade students engaged in fun, interactive lessons learning about the importance of our organs and their functions, making healthy food choices, drinking water, and regular physical activity. Palacios hosted activity stations at each school's fitness night, engaging students and their family members.

Palacios also delivered 59 sessions of the Illinois Junior Chef curriculum at four different sites in the Waukegan community over the summer. Locations included Andrew Cooke Magnet Elementary, Beacon Place, First Baptist Church of Waukegan, and Waukegan Housing Authority. The Illinois Junior Chef program is designed to teach children, ages 8 to 13, about basic food preparation skills, kitchen safety, and how to incorporate healthy eating into their lives. This effective and unique program provides kids with the opportunity to practice hands-on cooking skills, an important component of lifelong healthy eating habits making it possible for them to independently prepare healthy foods for themselves and their families.

Youth who participated in Illinois Junior Chef gained practical knowledge and skills while genuinely enjoying the learning experience. Many asked if the program would be offered next summer because they hoped to participate in the cooking classes again. Palacios engaged parents in the program, as well, providing them with nutrition information and the opportunity to sample the recipes prepared by their kids. Feedback on the program, from both parents and youth, was overwhelmingly positive.

The SNAP-Ed team works hard to have a positive impact on the health of individuals and families, inspiring and guiding changes in eating habits. Even in programs designed for youth participants, parents receive valuable nutrition information and tips for reducing the cost of meals, while improving their family's health.

Connecting Families with Resources

After the stay-at-home order, Community Worker Mary Jo Napolitano's focus quickly pivoted from in-person programming to maintaining contact with and support for existing SNAP-Ed community partners and program participants. However, the economic impact of the pandemic brought many new clients to the SNAP program. Constant outreach through live and recorded virtual programs, healthy recipes, and links to other community resources became essential to supporting those new participants. Napolitano focused on helping them navigate their new situation, letting them know that they were not invisible, and reassuring them that help was available. Participants had more questions than ever in 2020. Community partners were likewise overwhelmed by the pandemic and needed help connecting with the families they serve. SNAP-Ed was there through it all — connecting clients with the resources they needed to stay active, save money on nutritious food, and keep their families healthy.





Supporting Schools in the New Normal

The COVID-19 pandemic brought waves of change to local schools, with new regulations and processes sometimes coming overnight. Teachers adjusted again and again, and Extension worked in tandem with educators to support the new normal in their classrooms. The great partnership between Extension and local schools, built on years of service and trust, was never stronger or more productive than in these challenging times.

A key component of SNAP-Ed programming relies on face-to-face contact with students. When schools were forced to switch to remote learning in 2020, Extension Community Workers Ofelia Delgado and Vanessa Aguirre quickly pivoted to a new way of connecting.

The great partnership between Extension and local schools, built on years of service and trust, was never stronger or more productive than in these challenging times.

They adapted their curriculum to a virtual platform, staying connected with students who were now learning at home, providing them with familiar, friendly faces and a sense of consistency in a chaotic time. Teachers were relieved to have the continuing support of a trusted educational partner.

Students continued to gain knowledge and skills in nutrition and physical fitness, but more importantly, they learned how to grow and adapt in uncertain times. Instead of being isolated and bored at home, virtual programming allowed youth to learn and share weekly, reporting new activities and healthy foods that they tried at home with their families.

Online programming continued through the summer, offering students nutrition education and confidence in their choices. Students, teachers, and Extension staff quickly adapted to this new way of connecting. Students joined virtual sessions week after week, ready and eager to learn more.



Members of HCE sewed masks for all Extension staff members in Lake and McHenry counties. HCE members spent approximately 801 hours making masks for the community in 2020.

Lake County HCE President on a Year of Unprecedented Lows and Unexpected Highs

2020 began with high hopes. Lake County Association for Home and Community Education had a new unit and 22 new members. But, as we drove home from our statewide annual conference, we found out Illinois was now under a stay-at-home order. Our whole world changed in ways that none of us expected — we weren't allowed to leave our homes, much less meet in small groups. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our annual meeting three times. We had to cancel lessons for living. We had to cancel unit meetings and special events. We had to cancel fundraisers.

We could have just given up at this point, but the LCAHCE Board realized our membership still needed us. We began meeting by Zoom and devised a plan to make an old-fashioned calling list, which we called our "Zoom Tree." Each board member took a group to call. We rotated down this list each month. We vowed to keep calling our members until we could meet again. It doesn't seem like much, but our members appreciated our efforts and looked forward to our calls. We got creative in the fall and had an International Parade at the Extension office. At the same time, we also had a curbside drop-off for our Cultural Enrichment Contest. LCAHCE also managed to have a small fundraiser that we dubbed a "no bake, bake sale."

In the end, we lost 11 members, but we gained so much more! We learned so much more about our members. Even though many of them are of retirement age, they are resilient and willing to take on the challenges of the world as presented to them. We learned we need the social aspect of our organization, as well as receiving quality educational programming. ANGELA HICKS, PRESIDENT, LAKE COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR HOME AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Home and Community Education (HCE)

University of Illinois Extension has partnered with Lake and McHenry County Association for Home and Community Education for more than 100 years, providing its membership with research-based, educational lessons. The mission of HCE is to enhance the lives of individuals and families through quality educational programs and experiences, and to encourage responsible leadership and service to the community. HCE supports Extension in each county through annual financial donations that assist the overall local budget. Members also serve as 4-H volunteers and on Extension boards.



For more information about Lake or McHenry County's HCE program, email uie-lm@illinois.edu.



Environmental Education Sustaining Natural Resources in Home and Public Spaces

The natural wonder of Illinois is more than just its beautiful scenery. The land provides recreation for people, habitat for pollinators and wildlife, pasture for grazing livestock, water for communities, and fields for growing food. People everywhere enjoy improved health and well-being when they have access to nature, including parks, gardens, greenways, and natural resource areas. The threats to our land, air, and water can be managed with the identification, promotion, and adoption of environmentally-sustainable policies and practices.

Our Foundational Beliefs

To achieve important outcomes related to our environment, our work is guided by the following beliefs:

The inheritance we leave our children tomorrow is dictated by the care we provide our planet today.

The ultimate act of sustainability rests in the protection of our natural resources. Without clean water and healthy soil, life cannot thrive and grow.

Green spaces improve humanity by converting vacant lots into beautiful gathering spaces, elevating community pride, improving the economic value of properties, and providing new job opportunities.



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.



645
ANR Program Attendance



216
Master Gardener Volunteers



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



7,594
Pounds of Food Donated



17
Expert Consultations



298
Information Services
Provided by Master Gardeners

Access to Statewide Programs



285
Webinar Sessions Accessible Anywhere



182
New Videos and Podcast Episodes



Access in Unprecedented Times: Providing Research-Based Information to Clients at Home

The Horticulture Information Services Helpline is a keystone program for the Lake County Extension Master Gardener volunteers. While sheltering in place last spring, people were looking for new ways to spend quality time with their families, stay engaged, and ensure access to fresh food. Many were considering growing their own food for the first time and were looking for credible how-to information on vegetable gardening. With offices closed to the public, helpline volunteers were unable to provide the usual phone and in-person assistance, so volunteers shifted to email support.

A team of Master Gardener volunteers was formed to respond to the varied and numerous gardening questions, from how to start a new vegetable garden to how to keep produce thriving. Extension websites, documents, and instructions were shared with both new and experienced gardeners. The volunteers'

timely responses allowed for many Lake County residents to eat and share their home-grown produce in 2020. For some, undoubtedly, applying these research-based practices increased their yields and contributed to their overall success in the garden.

Lake County Extension Master Gardeners' Impact in 2020:



| | |
|--------|---------------------------|
| 417 | Program Attendance |
| 97 | MG Volunteers |
| 8 | Community Gardens |
| 11,350 | Pounds of Food Donated |
| 822 | Clients Served by MG Info |



For more information about Lake County's Master Gardener program, contact Kimberly Isaacson at kimisaac@illinois.edu.



Addressing Food Insecurity: McHenry Co. Master Gardeners Give Back

Many McHenry County residents suffer food insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic only increased that number. Many food pantries, manned by volunteers who often fall into the age bracket of the most susceptible, had to shut down until protocols were established to ensure everyone's safety. McHenry County Extension Master Gardeners, who had donated produce from community gardens in past years, no longer had access to those gardens and were encouraged to keep themselves safe and comply with the stay-at-home order. Master Gardeners rose to the challenge. They grew vegetables at their homes and donated over 700 pounds of vegetables to local food pantries that were open.

The McHenry VFW, an Eagle Scout, and Master Gardeners began plans for a new space dedicated to first responders and veterans suffering from PTSD. In 2020, an orchard was planted and the Peace Garden's hardscape was laid out.

Extension staff and Master Gardeners also spent a good deal of time in 2020 learning how to use the Zoom platform in order to present virtual programming to the general public.

In 2020, Master Gardeners served 338 clients; volunteers worked 2,390 hours supporting the community; they participated in 1,730 hours of continuing education; and distributed 7,293 pounds of produce to food pantries and churches.

Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

2020 saw a 40% increase in home gardens. Illinois Extension helped homeowners and communities create sustainable gardens and landscapes, which provided beauty, food, and property enhancements.




| | |
|-------|---|
| 130 | MG Volunteers |
| 8 | Community Gardens |
| 7,293 | Pounds of Food Donated |
| 729 | Pounds of Food Donated From our Homebound Volunteers through "Growing for Good" |
| 338 | Clients Served |



For more information about McHenry County's Master Gardener program, contact Brenda Dahlfors at dahlfors@illinois.edu.



Meeting Growers' Educational Needs with Research-Based Information

Food security through a transparent local food system became even more important in 2020. With the addition of new Local Food System and Small Farms Educator Sarah Farley in August 2020, Extension serving Lake and McHenry counties is poised to meet growers' educational needs with research-based information. The unit created an internal directory of more than 100 new and existing small farms with the goal of connection and direct dissemination of information and programs. The unit connected with local stakeholders to build relationships for future collaborations in food production and access.

A U.S. Department of Agriculture grant kickstarted a collaboration with Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, Lake County Farm Bureau, and 13 other partner organizations to divert organic food waste from Lake County landfills. Extension's role has been to develop a network of community gardens and to educate growers and garden coordinators on the environmental benefits of composting and using finished compost in food-producing gardens. Feedback from three prominent food-producing gardens in Lake County revealed the historical use of compost and informed the grant application. Planned workshops aim to inform community garden coordinators and growers, and increase acreage for the production of fresh, local foods.





Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant

Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, one of 34 Sea Grant programs nationwide, uses research, education, and outreach to bring the latest science to communities. A bi-state program, IISG is funded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Purdue University, and University of Illinois Extension.

Margaret Schneemann, IISG’s water resource economics specialist, is located at the McHenry County office. Margaret supports water supply planning across the greater Chicago region, including McHenry County. McHenry County is part of the Northwest Water Planning Alliance, a collaboration fostering water planning by groundwater-dependent communities. The NWP provides a forum for elected officials, utility and resource managers, and others to learn the latest water research and develop solutions to ensure water supply for future generations.

In 2020, IISG and partners — Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and Illinois State Water Survey — worked to develop the NWP Water Supply Sustainability Plan strategy. The strategy lays out analyses and steps to develop focused recommendations and identify implementation opportunities in the region. As a result, 80 NWP members now have a targeted plan for attaining water sustainability. Next steps will involve refining sustainable water withdrawal targets and developing water conservation recommendations to establish a path toward long-term water supply sustainability.



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

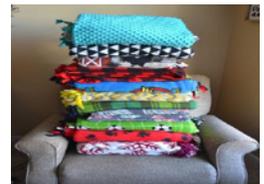


1,115
Reached in Community Resiliency Webinars

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>





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ewm.extension.illinois.edu/lm



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Cover photos: (Top left) SNAP-Ed staff teach residents how to make a colorful salad; (top right) Extension Master Gardeners in McHenry County tend a community garden plot; (bottom left) many SNAP-Ed and 4-H cooking classes were conducted virtually in 2020; (bottom right) McHenry County 4-H members congratulate their fellow 4-Hers at the drive-through recognition event.

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).

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