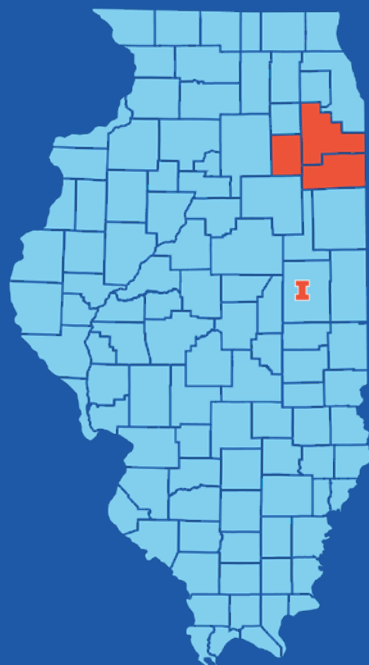




Illinois Extension

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

2020 was about many things, but one I think we can all agree on is that it was a year that forced us to change and adapt. Illinois Extension was no different; we spent the year changing and adapting to help the residents of Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties solve real world problems through research-based programming. I am proud to say that our staff did this quickly to make sure that our programs were meeting the ever evolving needs of our residents.

It is my honor to share with you the ways our staff adapted and changed to reach our residents. In the past, we focused on face-to-face programs; however, this year made that impossible. Our staff adapted quickly and worked with their teams to create learning opportunities that were available online for all residents of our counties and the state. The staff's willingness to change is a true reflection of their passion to educate the people of Illinois.

I am also proud of our volunteers and supporters. When this year pushed everyone to their limits, our volunteers and supporters made Illinois Extension a continued priority. They changed and adapted to our guidelines and made sure our programs had continued success. Their guidance and enthusiasm for our programs is appreciated and we know we could not do this work without them.

I am grateful for the opportunity to lead such an excellent team in Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties. They remind me every day how important Illinois Extension is to the residents of this state. I present this report on behalf of my staff, our volunteers and supporters and all residents of Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties.

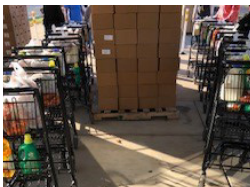
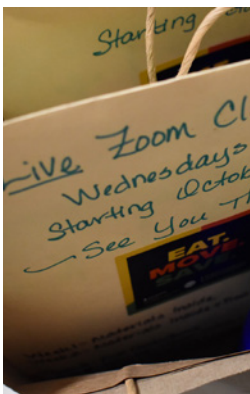
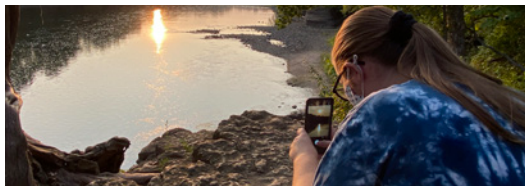
Megan Walsh
County Extension Director



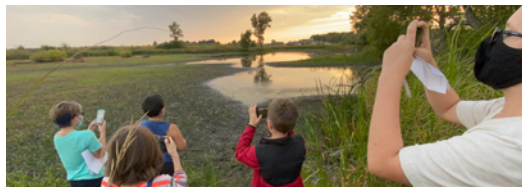
We are **RESILIENT**



We are impacting **COMMUNITIES**



We are **STRONGER TOGETHER**



We are **EXTENSION**



What we Do, Why it Matters

University of Illinois Extension serving Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties provides research-based resources and programming to the people of our communities. Local program areas include:

- Family and Consumer Economics
- Local Food Systems and Small Farms
- Home Horticulture and Natural Resources
- 4-H Youth Development
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)

Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills and build a better future.

Throughout this report, you will see numerous examples of how Extension has empowered the communities we serve to come together.

Illinois Extension serving Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties is serving YOU. Through research-based programming, caring staff and passionate stakeholders, we make a difference in the lives of our communities.

We bring **communities together**. We are **Extension**.





15,434
Volunteer Hours in the
Community¹



\$419,804
Value of Volunteer
Time²



1 in 50
People in our
Communities Reached
by Extension in 2020³



18,843
People Reached
by Extension
Programming³



35+
Partnerships Related
to Nutrition, Health, or
Emotional Wellbeing

¹ Includes self-reported hours from 4-H, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Master Composters, & Money Mentors

² Based on Independent Sector/University of Maryland 2019 estimated national value of volunteer time

³ Individuals participating in multiple program areas may be counted more than once

Financial Report

Federal funds include Illinois Nutrition Education Program grant monies. Local funds include donations from 4-H Foundations, 4-H Federations, United Way of Grundy County, United Way of Will County, and program fees.



- 49% Federal
- 22% County
- 1% Reserves
- 7% Local Sources
- 20% State

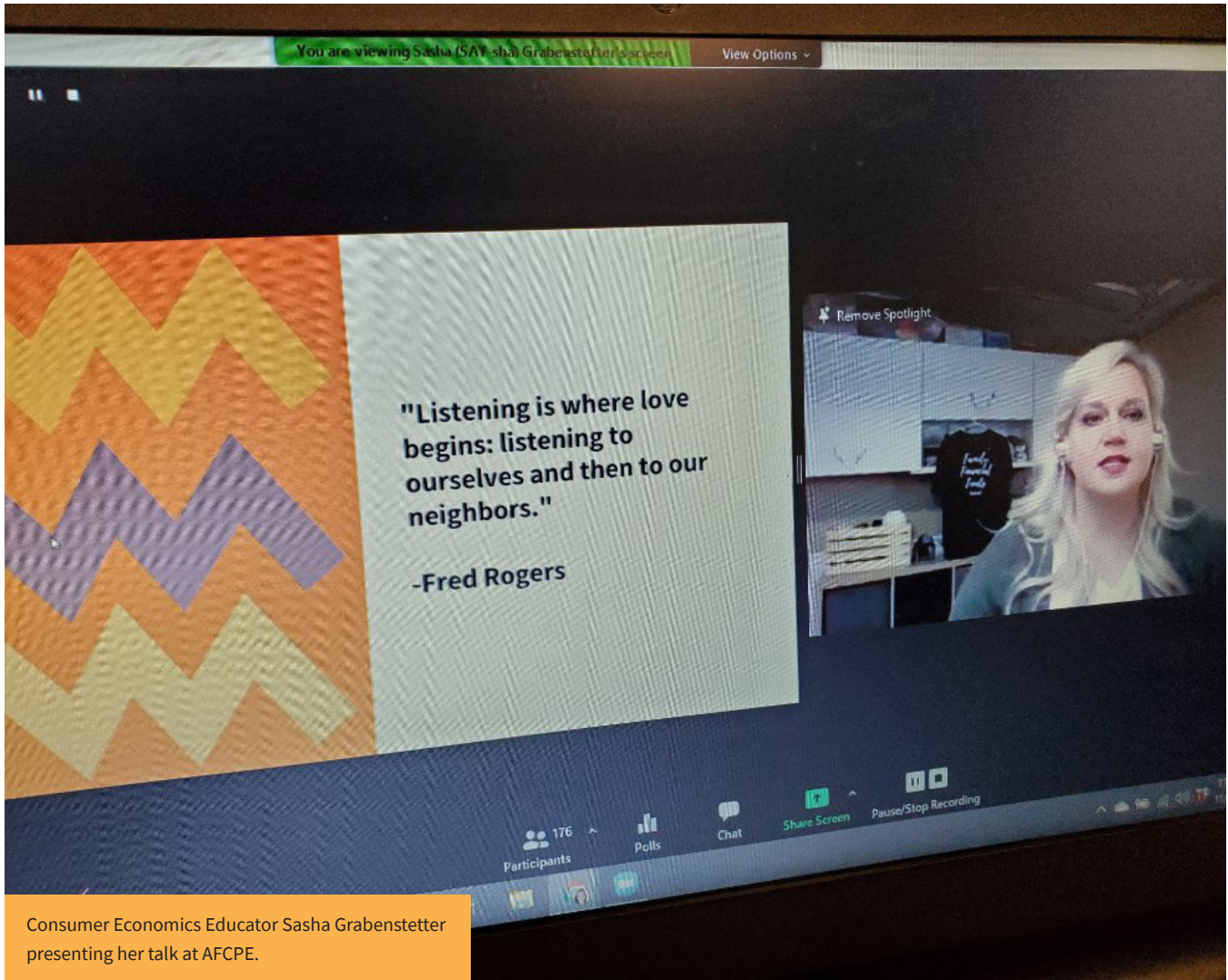


- 71% Personnel
- 22% Overhead
- 7% Programming



Investing In The Community: Showing The Value Of Investing In The Future Of Illinois Extension

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.



Consumer Economics Educator Sasha Grabenstetter presenting her talk at AFCPE.

Mister Rogers & Financial Counseling

What do Mister Rogers, beloved television personality and role model, and financial counseling have in common? Quite a bit according to Consumer Economics Educator Sasha Grabenstetter, who recently won the 2020 Outstanding Symposium Practitioners' Forum Award from the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education (AFCPE®) for her talk on that very topic.

"Fred Rogers and Financial Counseling: What do they have in common?" is a presentation that compares financial counseling and coaching concepts with the teachings of Fred Rogers during his run on "*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*."

Listening is where love begins: listening to ourselves and then to our neighbors.
FRED ROGERS

In recent popular culture, his teachings have reemerged with television shows, podcasts and movies, so a presentation about Fred seemed to fit. The presentation takes a deep dive into the concepts of empathy versus sympathy, sharpening listening skills, role play, and discussing uncomfortable financial topics with clients through the lens of Fred Rogers. It also considers how Mr. Rogers would help individuals with these concepts, then build and grow them.

Grabenstetter plans to record a version of this presentation to be made available to the public in the spring of 2021.



Follow @UIEUnit9 on Facebook to watch the talk when it becomes available.





Partnering with Local Libraries

Among the many programming changes during the pandemic were programs done in partnership with local libraries. In 2020, Extension worked collaboratively with several community libraries, including Manhattan-Elwood Public Library, Shorewood-Troy Public Library, Bourbonnais Public Library, and the Peotone Public Library to provide accessible, online personal finance programs tailored to local audiences.

Let's Talk Money Webinar Series

Over the summer, the consumer economics team developed Let's Talk Money, an 8-week webinar series offered to the public at no cost. Topics ranged from money personalities, borrowing, unequal access to credit, debt repayment strategies, credit scores, spending plans, behavioral economics, and savings.

In total, 587 individuals from all over the state registered for the series; 35 of those registrants were from Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties.



Listen to Let's Talk Money at go.illinois.edu/ListenLTM



Money Mentors Volunteer Program

The Money Mentors program is a network of trained volunteers who work one-on-one with individuals who request help with personal money management. Extension conducted online training for 21 new volunteers throughout the state of Illinois in 2020, including three from Kankakee. Our local Money Mentors have already hit the ground running, helping individuals in the community develop strategies for overcoming financial obstacles and achieving their personal finance goals.

Another round of training began in January 2021.



Check out the Money Mentors website at go.illinois.edu/MoneyMentorsGKW





#Thats4H

Local Youth Tell the 4-H Story

2020 will be remembered for many things, but for the 4-H staff in Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties, it was the year that 4-H members stood up, gave back and made us proud. We've seen 4-Hers rise to the occasion, learn new things, pursue passions, and serve their communities in amazing ways. Inspired by this, the 4-H staff team created a video titled, "The Why." Narrated by local youth, it reflects on what we do and why it matters.

The video, which is less than two minutes long, was posted on giving Tuesday and struck an emotional chord from the moment it went live. Staff received an outpouring of comments from 4-H parents, alumni and partners who had watched the video. The video was shared on stakeholder accounts across our unit and throughout the state. It was also highlighted by

And we say thank you for supporting us, for believing in us, for mentoring us and then letting us mentor you. Because together, we are changing the world.
MICAH G. IN "THE WHY"

national influencer and TikTok personality Perry Harlow, who credits 4-H for his confidence.

The heartfelt video and the strong reactions it has garnered prove a central tenet that we've always believed: amidst the turmoil of the world, 4-H is shaping the future leaders of tomorrow.

So, let's continue to give our youth a voice because we are in good hands!



Watch now at go.illinois.edu/TheWHY





1 in 4
Grundy County youth
have been impacted
by 4-H

2019 statistical reporting year data vs. total reachable youth



Ben and Jacob from Wesley 4-H Hustlers deliver cleaning products to the Wilmington ESDA.



Local 4-H Member Recognized Nationally for Mission: Opportunity

Grundy County 4-H member Nalia Warmack was recognized by the National 4-H Council for her impact on Illinois 4-H through Mission: Opportunity, a program that she created and runs with the help of her 4-H mentors and friends.

Warmack joined 4-H as a Cloverbud with the 4-H 4 Joy Club in Will County. When her family moved to Grundy County, she joined the Homes Cool Kids Club where she gained confidence through experiences like public speaking, which then led her to participate in Speaking for Illinois 4-H, Legislative Connection, Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF), and numerous other experiences.

“When I looked back to my starting point, I was able to recognize the opportunities that led me to where I am today, and I am so thankful to have had them,” Warmack said. “But it occurred to me that not everyone has opportunities like that.”

This realization led to the creation of Mission: Opportunity. Drawing on her own experience, Warmack has been able to teach participants how to extract DNA from a strawberry and use a 3-D printer; they’ve learned about genealogy, natural disaster preparedness, public speaking, and more. Through its various programs, Mission: Opportunity has already reached over 500 youth.

“I hope these opportunities allow others to discover new passions and find paths that will lead them to take even larger opportunities. Inspiration is contagious...,” said Warmack.

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, Warmack plans to be back stronger than ever in 2021.



Read the feature!
Visit 4-h.org/parents/youth-voices/





Cooking 101 Workshops

Two cooking workshops, led by 4-H Youth Development Educator Jamita Brown, were offered to youth across the region in early 2020. Over 30 youth, ages 8-12, participated in these three-week workshops, which were sponsored by the Illinois 4-H Foundation.

Each week, youth were given a hands-on lesson that taught a specific cooking skill. Then, they made two to three recipes that helped them strengthen that skill. The first lesson focused on reading recipes and learning measurements. The recipes in the first week were no-bake to help youth get comfortable before adding ovens to the mix. The second lesson introduced knife skills and offered lots of practice as youth made fresh salsa and vegetable soup. The third week taught meal planning and budgeting. Each team was given a budget between \$50 and \$150 and were challenged to successfully plan a meal for a large party within the budget they were assigned.

This highly successful program is a great example of hands-on learning that equips youth with practical life skills. Participants were able to invite their families in for samples of their cooking after each class and took home a custom cookbook with all of their favorite recipes.



Kenzie and Serenity learn knife skills by cutting strawberries in Cooking 101.



Teen Teachers in training use the skills they've learned to guide young 4-Hers through an activity during Mockshop.

Hands-On Training for Teen Teachers

The Teen Teachers program, funded by the Illinois 4-H Foundation, kicked off in February 2020. Twenty teenagers signed up to be trained as teachers for their 4-H peers throughout Grundy, Kankakee and Will counties. A Teen Teacher must dedicate at least six hours to teaching in a specific program area.

Teen Teachers go through more than eight hours of training where they learn about ages and stages of youth development, experiential learning, how to keep youth engaged, and fun activities to do with youth. After the first day of training, they participate in a hands-on training activity called Mockshop. More than 20 4-H youth were invited to participate in mini-lessons taught by the Teen Teachers. Mockshop creates an opportunity for young 4-Hers to provide constructive feedback to new Teen Teachers, while also allowing them to participate in the mini-lessons, which included sessions on environment, conservation, the outdoors, STEM, and cooking.

Our Teen Teachers completed over 20 hours of service before in-person programming was halted due to COVID-19. We're excited to navigate new ways to keep them connected in 2021.



Troy B., a Grundy 4-Her, holds up his painting created during the 2020 Virtual Fair workshops.

Virtual Fair Kits Keep Summer Fun

In the summer of 2020, our 4-H youth were facing several changes to their typical 4-H year. Extension Educator Jamita Brown wanted to find a way to keep youth connected during a very different fair season. She came up with an idea that would take the quintessential fairgrounds experience virtual.

More than 40 families registered for a virtual fair kit containing five, age-appropriate activities. For 4-H Cloverbuds, there was a bee bath kit, zoo adventure, simple robotics kit, and other craft supplies. For 4-H members, there were paint party supplies, an AR/VR experience, a lima bean growing kit, and cake decorating supplies.

We are very happy and blessed to have found the 4-H organization. Despite the unique demands of this year, the leaders in our county...have found fun ways to keep my boys engaged and excited about 4-H. I look forward to many more years of achievement, memories and challenges overcome.

JANENE, 4-H PARENT

We partnered with 4-H volunteers to lead workshop sessions via Zoom, providing a space for youth to connect as they turned in their projects for judging during our virtual fairs.

Youth were able to learn about animal science, robotics, cake decorating, germinating seeds, virtual reality, and visual arts while also getting a little bit of that fair season fun and community.



Seeing the World Through a Different Lens

Photography workshops often meet in natural areas throughout the counties, providing youth participants with fresh air and exercise while learning a new, lifelong skill. Along the way, they also develop a sense of appreciation for the natural world.

This year, youth were challenged to see the beauty in nature's tiniest details — from the pollen on a flower to sap dripping off a tree. They developed their awareness of light color, quality and direction in order to create beautiful nature photos of local areas.

To prepare for the possibility of virtual fairs, a possibility that became reality, an Introduction to Photography webinar was also conducted in the spring. Youth learned how to use lighting, point-of-view, lens, and a variety of other techniques to capture their projects successfully.

Participants said that they learned so much and were excited to continue learning and practicing photography. Several also expressed their desire to do photography as a 4-H project, or even possibly pursue photography as a career.

The skills acquired during these programs, which range from one day to four weeks long, not only help youth to see the world in a different way, but also to apply these lessons to other areas of their lives. Whether they remain a lifelong hobby photographer, capturing moments of joy and laughter with family and friends, or they become a professional nature photographer like Ansel Adams, or photo journalist like Margaret Bourke-White, the lessons last a lifetime.



Youth photograph nature at Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in Morris during a photography workshop series.



Youth from the Boys and Girls Club in Joliet participate in a Healthy Habits partnership Zoom lesson.

Nutrition, Fitness & Mindfulness

4-H and SNAP-Ed partnered to offer virtual, after school programming for the kids at G.W. Buck Boys & Girls Club in Joliet. With a mutual goal of keeping kids healthy, this partnership reached over 50 youth in the Will County area.

Activity kits, focusing on healthier habits for our brains, bodies and bellies, were distributed thanks to a sponsorship from Walmart and the Illinois 4-H Foundation. Each Healthy Habits kit contained six hands-on activities teaching nutrition, physical fitness and mindfulness.

In the live Zoom sessions, participants learned the importance of water, how much water to drink in order to stay healthy and how to flavor water without calories using fresh fruit. They also played sugar detective, finding hidden sugar in everyday drinks and foods, created taste profiles for fruits and veggies (Did you know that lettuce tastes green?) and created their own games with diagrams and rules involving light, moderate and vigorous exercises.

Youth were challenged throughout the six-week course by a curriculum that gave a better understanding of their nutritional and physical health, while also creating their own calming kit for use in times of emotional stress.



Learn more about SNAP-Ed and their programs at go.illinois.edu/gkwSNAP





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

For the Spanish Community Center in Will County, we provided recipes focusing on ingredients available in their pantry and online lessons. They thanked us for encouraging their clients to be more active, stating, 'your classes are so much fun!'
- Fernanda Ariza-Perez, SNAP-Ed community worker

SNAP-Ed Community Partnerships



13
K-12 Schools



2
Early Childhood



7
Agencies or Community Centers



6
Emergency Food Sites



A Productive Year for SNAP-Ed

For SNAP-Ed, this year has been all about partnerships and pivoting. The SNAP-Ed team set a goal in 2020 to expand the breadth and depth of its community partnerships. With three new community workers joining the team at the end of 2019, they were poised to expand their reach into the community, as well as strengthen current partnerships by adding the important direct education component that community workers offer. Within a few short months, they made big strides.

SNAP-Ed expanded its reach in the area of food access through partnerships with:

- The Spanish Community Center
- The Salvation Army – Joliet
- Merchant Street Pantry
- Rx Mobile Pantries through Amita St. Joseph Hospital and Northern Illinois Food Bank
- Governors State University Food Pantry

Through these partnerships, SNAP-Ed provides nutritional environment assessments and training for pantry volunteers in collaboration with Northern Illinois Food Bank for greater impact. They also provide messaging and recipes to increase healthy food choices and teach classes on making healthy choices and stretching food dollars through evidence-based curriculum. SNAP-Ed began expanding existing school partnerships with districts in Kankakee, Joliet and Laraway. The team was excited to gain traction with these partners when the pandemic struck and they quickly pivoted to new urgent issues.

As we all continue to adapt to our current environment, Extension's dedication to the SNAP-Ed population remains strong. Our unit is providing virtual education and outreach to our partners and will continue to find ways to be productive and serve our communities.



Partnering with Local Community Centers to Educate in Spanish

Understanding the community we serve and being able to learn, grow and communicate with each other is paramount to Extension’s mission. Working with the Spanish Community Center and the Salvation Army, incentives were offered for people who were curious about MyPlate classes.

MyPlate for My Family (MP4MF) supports SNAP-Ed nutrition education and obesity prevention efforts and is based on recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It is targeted to parents and caregivers who are SNAP participants, or are SNAP-eligible and play a key role in planning, purchasing and preparing food for their families.

The MP4MF concurrent sessions were offered in both Spanish and English an hour prior to pantry opening. As one participant noted, they could get two cooking demos and samples on the same day — one from class and one at the activity booth — and they got easy-to-follow recipes for items received in the food box.

Unfortunately, in mid-March, these in-person sessions were halted. SNAP-Ed community workers began the transition to virtual programming, which required instructions for downloading and using Zoom on different types of devices to be written in English and translated into Spanish so that all participants could be reached.

With the help of the Spanish Community Center, all past participants were contacted individually and invited to continue their journey safely from home.

Partner Success Story: Demonstrating the Value of Venison

During an observational tour of the Rx Food Bank, dietitians directed the SNAP-Ed community worker’s attention to a food item that pantry goers consistently passed over as they shopped. The item was venison. Pantry patrons were afraid to get something they weren’t familiar with, or had preconceived notions about. The venison was donated by Illinois hunters during deer season and sent to a participating meat processor that packaged and distributed the ground venison to local food pantries.

The SNAP-Ed community workers volunteered to make summer chili, a recipe from the Eat.Move.Save. website, using venison. They set up a cooking demo at the next pantry visit. The packaged venison was on display and opened to show onlookers what the meat looked like. Community workers showed the gathered crowd how to use the venison in the recipe and shared information about its nutrition profile:

- Venison is low in fat and calories, and high in protein.
- It can be used as a substitute for any ground meat.

More than 100 samples were given out and every printed copy of the summer chili recipe was taken before the pantry opened. People could not believe that what they were tasting was venison, not ground beef. That day, the food pantry ran out of venison for the first time ever.

And the success story doesn’t end there. Shortly after, the Salvation Army pantry manager reported that they had also run out venison and now she knew why. One recipe, one demonstration and one taste was all it took.



The Eat. Move. Save. booth ready for another food pantry visit.



The Magic of a Paper Pumpkin

For the past five years, students and Master Gardeners have worked together. This year, one of the fruits of that partnership was 450 students in 15 schools who participated in Pumpkin on a String. Always a favorite of teachers, the overview of how a pumpkin grows is pure magic to the students.

The lesson starts with the video *Pumpkin Circle*, portraying growing as a circle that starts with a seed and ends with a seed to grow next year. As students pull on the attached construction paper pumpkin, out drops the seed, leaf, flower, small pumpkin,

Although Master Gardeners couldn't be there for the grand reveal in person, the pumpkins maintained their magic.

and for the grand finale, the large pumpkin. Although, Master Gardeners couldn't be there in person for the grand reveal this year, the pumpkins maintained their magic.

Master Gardeners put together kits that teachers could order, then pick up outside the Extension office's door. The pre-made kits and curbside pickup method were so popular that they will probably continue for the foreseeable future.

This is a perfect example of how the pandemic necessitated change and inspired creativity.



Blooming Branches

It seems that Master Gardeners and libraries just go together. They both deal with “branches” and both are sources for expanding knowledge. This is certainly true of the Homer Township Library’s Youth Department. For the past five years, a team of Will County Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and Master Composters have been providing monthly programs to youth at the library on a wide variety of natural resource and agriculture topics.

Each month, a single nature-based concept is presented and paired with a hands-on activity, always emphasizing experiential learning. In the Grow Your Own Taco program, youth learned about the herbs that flavor food, then made their own container herb garden to take home and nurture. In the All About Rain program, participants learned about the water cycle and made a rain gauge to measure precipitation.

The make-and-take portion of the programs literally brings the educational concepts home, allowing the lessons and ideas to flourish beyond the duration of the program.

The more youth experience nature, the more likely they are to engage in nature-based activities as adults. Studies have shown that exposure to the natural world provides not only cognitive benefits by increasing STEM problem-solving abilities, but physical, mental and emotional benefits, as well.

Many of the youth and their parents have shared stories of families taking an interest in nature-based activities as a direct result of a child participating in these Extension-led programs.

The more youth experience nature, the more likely they are to engage in nature-based activities as adults.



Youth participate in horticulture activities at Homer Township Library.



Gardens-to-Go: Adapting to the Moment

One of the greatest qualities of Extension programming is the hands-on, learning-by-doing aspect. But in these times of pandemic restrictions, achieving that essential element required creative approaches. Fortunately, Extension shines in its ability to adapt programming to the needs of our communities.

Master Gardener Gardens-to-Go and Master Naturalist Nature Nuggets Learning Kit programs were part of this adaptation. Previously scheduled, in-person ag and natural resource programs were converted into contactless pick-up, all-supplies-included learning kits. Each program was paired with an online instructional presentation.

Fortunately, Extension shines in its ability to adapt programming to the needs of our communities.

In the Build Your Own Bee & Bug Bath Nature Nuggets kit, youth learned about pollinator habitat needs, insect behaviors and anatomy and the essential role pollinators play in our everyday lives. Kits included simple supplies for each child to build a watering/bath station for these essential insects. A party roll-out whistle was included to demonstrate the shape and function of the proboscis mouthpart. After learning about the habitat needs of bees and bugs, youth evaluated their own backyards for an appropriate location — not only for their newly created bee bath, but also for a good vantage point so their entire family could observe activity at the bath station. Birdhouse Building Nature Nugget kits, featuring wren houses and robin platforms, are planned for spring 2021.



In the Grow Your Own Garlic Garden-to-Go kits, participants learned that certain types of garlic grow well in the northern Illinois climate if they are planted in the fall. The kits included four distinctly different varieties of garlic, planting and care instructions, as well as recipes and preservation information. For participants' convenience and to accommodate pandemic-related scheduling challenges, the program was offered three ways: limited in-person, live online and recorded.

Grow Your Own Garlic is also part of the newly created Feed Your Family: Grow Your Own Groceries initiative. This initiative will resume in the late-winter through mid-spring with eight additional Garden-to-Go kits, each focusing on a different type of vegetable, herb, or fruit. Kits will include seeds of the featured plant with fact sheets and recipes. The programs will be presented live (if pandemic restrictions allow) and via Zoom; instruction will include information on selection, planting and care; pest troubleshooting; and tips for harvest, storage, preservation, and kitchen use.



Nature in the News: Will County Receives Dedicated Local News Column

What is old is new again... or rather, news again. In response to pandemic restrictions, the Will County Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and Master Composter programs quickly sought out new and creative ways to share research-based garden and nature-related information with our community.

Within two weeks of the shutdown, Will County Extension's agriculture and natural resources team had a new avenue to communicate with over 12,500 Will County residents through a partnership with the *Farmers Weekly Review* newspaper. This weekly publication has been providing all of Will County with local news and information since 1921.

The inaugural column addressed a very relevant topic at a time when many grocery store shelves were bare — the idea of a new victory garden. The column entitled, "Grow Your Own Groceries," addressed food insecurity and gave simple, clear instructions on which vegetables were the easiest to cultivate, particularly for those who might be trying to plant and grow for the first time.

Other columns addressed common issues from weeds ("Who Is That Charlie and Just Why Is He So Creepy?") to soil compaction ("Don't Be a Clod...Never Work Wet Soils") and provided up-to-date, research-based solutions to many home garden and landscape issues in an easy-to-understand format.



Providing Outreach When Everyone Is Staying Home

This year, outreach took on new forms for Illinois Extension.

The Kankakee Master Gardener program began a weekly article series on gardening with kids. Each article included seasonally-appropriate, hands-on activities, as well as book suggestions, and was appropriate for that week's weather. All activities could be done with materials on hand. These articles were published in two local newspapers and featured on the Bradley Library's website.

Grab & Go garden activities were instituted at two local libraries. Patrons signed up at the local library for the Grab & Go activity of the month. Extension provided the educational components and consumables.

For Winter Sow, patrons received an instruction sheet, clean milk cartons and seeds to plant a winter garden at home. These gardens spend the winter growing strong, healthy plants that can be re-planted in the spring.

2020 also saw the first Know Your Birds Walk. On a cool, crisp January night, 24 people walked the Hieland Road woods looking for owls. Local owl enthusiast, John Baxter, led the group. He demonstrated how to call owls and pointed out the best trees for owls to nest. Unfortunately, no owls were sighted on the inaugural excursion, but additional Know Your Birds Walks are scheduled for spring and summer.



Beekeepers Keep on in 2020

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, beekeepers continued to be active and engaged in beekeeping activities. Extension continued to provide education and facilitate meetings, and 10 new beekeepers started to raise honeybees. Our monthly meetings in Kankakee and Grundy counties provided vital information, especially on conducting regular bee hive inspections. Varroa mites continue to be a major scourge of honeybees and were responsible for bee colony weakness and eventual destruction. Nearly all (33/37) beekeepers reported that they tested for Varroa mite infestation, either by themselves or by using the services of state apiarists, and treated the mite infestations appropriately. Because of this, honeybee colonies had higher survival rates in 2020, compared to 2019.





Tapping Maple Trees Around Kankakee

Did you know that it takes a whopping 55 gallons of tapped sap to make one gallon of maple syrup? Homeowners and Master Gardeners gathered for a maple syrup tapping class that was followed by a live demonstration of the tapping procedure by Holly Froning, Master Gardener program coordinator in Kankakee. The class provided information about required equipment, the best time to tap a tree and the best types of tree to choose. Instructions for processing the collected sap to concentrate maple syrup were also provided.

Industrial Hemp: Empowering Small and Large Farmers

The signing of the Illinois hemp bill provided opportunities for the cultivation, distribution and processing of hemp. Hemp is a cannabis variety with near-zero content of the intoxicating compound tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) found in mature cannabis plants. This versatile crop can be grown for grain, fiber and cannabidiol (CBD), a medicinal product. It has the potential to empower large and small farmers and to revitalize farming communities.

Because of this new opportunity for Illinois farmers, a new hemp production and marketing class was held in Kankakee for 50 enthusiastic participants. It was the first program to address this emerging issue and it was a resounding success.

Participants learned many things, including basic information about CBD and THC; the logistics of planting, growing and harvesting hemp for various end users; hemp regulations; and information on seed germination and success rates.



Holly Froning, Master Gardener program coordinator, demonstrates how to tap a maple tree.





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2019-2020 EXTENSION COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Extension Council is a group of volunteers, who each represent facets of their communities, share their needs and concerns and serve as a catalyst and leader in shaping the vision of Extension.

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ONLINE



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University of Illinois Extension-GKW

Cover photos: (top left) Ronald holding his Clover Garden-to-Go kit; (top right) Nalia Warmack leads a virtual cake decorating workshop; (bottom left) Victoria Klimkiewicz passes out food samples and educates the public about SNAP-Ed and healthy eating; (bottom right) Emerson holds a snake as part of a workshop on wildlife.

Illinois Extension

College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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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.

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