



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

2021 Addressing Local Needs,
Solving Global Challenges
Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties



Margaret Larson
County Extension Director

Serving Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties

A Message from the County Director

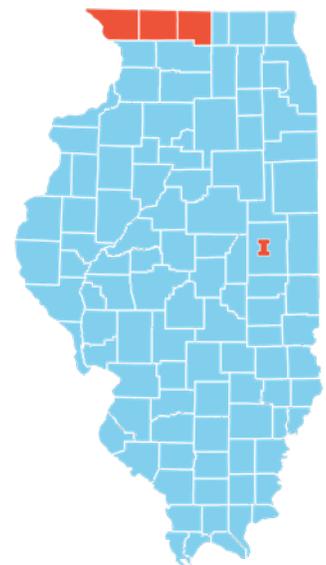
We entered 2021 knowing that our challenges would not go away, but would look different. The staff in Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties continued to approach our work with flexibility, innovation, and enthusiasm. As part of an organization with a mission to serve communities, respond to emerging issues, and provide resources and support as needed, it continued to be necessary to find new ways to reach our audiences and communicate with our families and volunteers and be present in communities. I am happy to report that we found the way, or should I say the ways, because of the commitment of the staff, volunteers, and supporters in Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago counties.

This unit is fortunate to have the unwavering support of the counties – Jo Daviess,

Stephenson and Winnebago. Their board members, with whom we met, listened to our stories of pivoting to virtual and slowly introducing in-person programming again, supporting virtual 4-H meetings as needed, but also encouraging in-person meetings when appropriate, and the constant communication with our volunteers in an effort to keep them engaged through the pandemic and ready to provide service when appropriate. We appreciate the unwavering financial support from our counties, as we could not do what we do without it.

Thank you for taking the time to read our stories. I hope you can see the impact Extension has on our local world.

Margaret Larson
County Extension Director
Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties



Think Global, Act Local

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

Community Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities

 Connectedness and Inclusion

 Involvement and Leadership

 Thriving Youth

Economy Grow a Prosperous Economy

 Economic Vitality

 Financial Wellbeing

 Workforce Preparedness/Advancement

Environment Sustain Natural Resources in Home and Public Spaces

 Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

 Engagement with Home and Community Landscape

Food Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

 Food Access

 Food Production

 Food Safety

Health Maximize Physical and Emotional Health for All

 Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

 Social and Emotional Health

 Healthy and Safe Environments

Look for these icons throughout this report to see how Illinois Extension is meeting these grand challenges at a local level.

Illinois Extension 2021 Statewide Highlights

Outreach Provided

565 Illinois Communities Served	335 Educational Sessions Per Week	84 Online Courses
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Partnerships Supported

6,445 Adult Volunteers	278 Community Gardens	1,000 School Partnerships
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Learners Engaged

8,000,000 Website Users	14,450 Online Course Users	500,000 Educational Program Attendees
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Resources Generated

\$14,000,000 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$242,000 Value of Donated Garden Produce
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Extension leaders meet with local stakeholders to define annual priorities that allow us to respond to evolving and emerging needs and make meaningful progress toward important long-term outcomes. This blend of long-range focus and local accountability is a powerful strategy that ensures we stay true to our mission as we serve communities across the state.



As COVID-19 continued to impact governments, businesses, and communities, Illinois Extension's Local Government Education program increased its outreach aimed at economic investment and community vitality, workforce development, leadership, policy, equity, and resiliency. By partnering with state leadership and organizations in Illinois, the Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development team has provided outreach aimed to help local governments and residents build capacity to strengthen their communities and organizations and improve public services.



Access past and future programs
<https://go.illinois.edu/LGE>

Statewide Webinar Reach



60
Webinars in 2021



2,003
Individuals Learned about Leadership, Public Service, and Community Involvement



1,094
Individuals Learned about Meeting Needs of Diverse or Vulnerable Populations



3,955
Individuals Reached in Economic and Financial Stability Webinars



1,043
Reached in Economic Vitality and Community Resiliency Webinars

Community-Driven Broadband Reach



1,228
Community Leaders Educated on Broadband Expansion Opportunities



714
Participants Educated on Obtaining Funding and Needs Assessment



416
Individuals Reached on Broadband Project Management

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.



Trainings lead to better communication and understanding of human behavior



University of Illinois Extension provides Real Colors® training to many organizations and groups of all ages. Real Colors® is a personality type assessment that focuses on understanding communication and human behavior. The training is useful to groups and teams, providing a look at why we do the things we do and why others do what they do.

In 2021, three trainings were held in Winnebago County at the request of several organizations. Certified NCTI Trainer Margaret Larson presented the training to two adult audiences and one youth audience.

Forty-five participants in the Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Rockford program and nine staff from the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois were trained in separate events in the fall. They gained a new perspective of their behaviors and had a chance to learn interactively through several activities.

Real Colors® was also presented during the Rockford Public Schools' Student Ambassador Program retreat for the five high schools. In addition, team-building sessions from the YMCA Camp Winnebago were held. In total, 120 high school juniors and seniors completed the training, along with their teacher chaperones.





Extension helps make Freeport known as an Illinois Bird City

In December, the City of Freeport was designated an official Bird City in Illinois. The Bird City Illinois program is a new initiative in the state developed by the Audubon Council of Illinois. Its mission is to encourage communities to implement sound bird-conservation practices by offering public recognition to those that succeed in enhancing the environment for birds and educating the public about the relationship between birds and people to contribute to a healthy community.

Extension provides several programs and events throughout the year that support bird conservation, including Master Gardener and Master Naturalist training programs and conservation-related educational programming for adults and youth, as well as partnering with other organizations that support bird conservation.



Young and beginning farmers grant will provide answers

Local Extension staff are working with Joseph Malual, community and economic development Extension specialist, to talk with young and beginning farmers in the area. This research project will provide a comprehensive assessment of the needs and opportunities facing young and beginning farmers. The project will examine farmers' experiences and strategies used to leverage critical startup assets such as farmland, equipment, financial capital, and agricultural technical assistance, as well as strategies for marketing agricultural products. This project will build relations and connect this new audience with Extension resources, which can help beginning farmers develop the knowledge and skills necessary for solving critical problems.

The knowledge and practices discovered and identified through this project will be shared with Extension across the state. Extension educators can build on this knowledge to plan and deliver educational programming that empowers farmers to develop financially viable and sustainable farms.



I-Rural project focuses on tourism in the Galena area

Local Extension staff are working with University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign researchers involving rural tourism in Illinois. Galena is one of four areas of focus for the grant.



In 2021, businesses and individuals in the Galena area who are involved in tourism were interviewed to determine current successes and opportunities for growth. In September, a workshop was held for interview participants to work collaboratively to develop a common vision for tourism development for Galena and its surrounding communities. The group built an understanding of strengths and opportunities for business collaborations and discussed actionable strategies to foster tourism collaborations across Jo Daviess County.

Looking forward, the hope is for Galena participants to use the recommendations on what can be done differently to help overcome the challenges they are seeing within tourism to attract more tourists to the area.

Still to come in the overall process are interviews targeting tourists, developing executive reports and infographics, provide clear evidence-informed tourism strategies, and help rural communities find grants and assist with planning for sustainable tourism development.





Youth learn about nutrition

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-Ed) community workers Barb Curry, Terre McGee, Rita Gillette, and Linda Ricker have continued educational classes in Stephenson and Winnebago counties to help limited income households focus on healthful diets and physical activity. Programs help families with tips to eating healthy while saving money and making the most out of their grocery dollars.



Extension creates new ways to connect with community partnerships

Gina Adams, SNAP-Ed program coordinator, has redirected her duties to finding new ways to reach out to community partners. Adams delivers promotional items including calendars and recipe cards for the various SNAP-Ed virtual programming, as well as updating the eat-move-save website. Adams has been able to find ways to continue her relationship with various program partners in the Rockford area, including Rosecrance Health Network, Remedies, Northern Illinois Food Bank, Salvation Army, and the Northwest Community Center.



For more information about SNAP-Ed, visit go.illinois.edu/EatMoveSave



River Bend Food Bank

Carol Erickson, SNAP-Ed educator, in collaboration with other SNAP-Ed educators, conducted the Food Bank Health and Nutrition Assessment with River Bend Food Bank in Davenport, Iowa and St. Stephens Food Bank in Dubuque, Iowa. The two food banks serve Jo Daviess County. In addition to conducting the pre- and post-assessments, Erickson serves on the food bank's nutrition committee. Erickson helped develop and implement a nutrition survey for food pantry volunteers/staff and another survey for food pantry guests. The results will guide the committee in developing a Nutrition Policy for River Bend Food Bank.

ABCs of School Nutrition

The start to 2021 was a busy one for Carol Erickson. Erickson, and Diane Reinhold, nutrition and wellness educator, created the ABCs of School Nutrition, a peer-reviewed school nutrition training program funded by the Illinois State Board of Education.



Erickson and Reinhold turned the in-person training into virtual events for 2021. Erickson led several of the newly created on-line courses between January and March, including: Meals in the Classroom, Meal Service for Remote Learners, Garden to Cafeteria, and ABC's Lunchroom Heroes.

Since we couldn't meet in person, we had to find new ways to address the need. School nutrition professionals still need continuing education courses to be compliant with the USDA's professional standards requirements for school nutrition staff.

CAROL ERICKSON, SNAP-ED EDUCATOR



go.illinois.edu/abc



Extension digs in to help students grow

A school garden was a brainstorm idea of a team of teachers at West Middle School in Rockford. They were looking for a project that would help students feel connected to each other and their community, especially after many of their students had been learning remotely. Erickson used her connections to create the school garden in a nearby lot. Over the summer, students and their families, along with the local YMCA's youth leadership camp, tended the garden. Harvested vegetables were donated to local church pop-up pantries. They donated over 215 pounds of food. The teachers have created future lesson plans to incorporate the garden more with the next growing season.





Making an impact in communities

Broadway Connects began as a collaboration with the City of Rockford, Miles Square Health Center, and Salem Lutheran Church to address the health needs of residents in the Broadway Street neighborhood. The group organized an outreach event in September that included a cookout and music. Nearly 100 people attended the event, held next to the SNAP-Ed Broadway garden. Extension provided garden tours and gave away collards and tomatoes. The group is planning continued outreach events for 2022 including giving food boxes from Northern Illinois Food Bank.



SNAP-Ed comes to Midtown Market

For the past two years, shoppers at the weekly farmers market have been asking about using SNAP benefits. Erickson worked alongside Reverend Mike Thomas, chairperson of the organizing committee, to make it possible for shoppers to use both SNAP and EBT cards at the market. While doing so, they also applied for the Link UP Illinois for the produce incentive program so that shoppers could get ‘double bucks’ to buy fresh produce at the market.



I Made That!

In January 2021, the “I Made That!” program was introduced to 4-H families across the area. This bi-monthly program was co-created by Nutrition and Wellness Educator Diane Reinhold. The goal is to introduce youth to 4-H while promoting healthy lifestyles. Families work together on the educational kits to give youth various cooking experiences while learning about food safety and healthy nutrition choices.

It’s important to develop a healthy lifestyle early in life. Learning about healthy eating, food safety, and healthy modifications when making your favorite recipe are essential skills that can help us live a long and healthy life.

DIANE REINHOLD,
NUTRITION & WELLNESS EDUCATOR



Certified Food Protection Manager course

Many businesses across the Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties require individuals working within the food service industry to obtain continuing education credit. Individuals obtaining their Certified Food Protection Manager certification are knowledgeable in day-to-day operations within their companies to provide consumers with safe food and prevent food-borne illness. Educator Diane Reinhold offered several classes throughout the year which meet the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Food Service Sanitation Code requirements.



Programming focused on what matters to you

Staying healthy is a goal everyone strives for. Diane Reinhold’s programming focuses on eating healthy foods on a limited budget, managing stress, physical activity, cooking for convenience, and more. One of Reinhold’s main areas of interest lies in programming devoted to preventing and managing diseases. Diabetes, heart health, and chronic inflammation are popular subjects.



Follow Reinhold’s blog as she focuses on health and wellness topics.
go.illinois.edu/WalkingtheLine



Reinhold earns national and state awards for her work

Diane Reinhold, along with Extension nutrition and wellness team members across the state, were recognized nationally and statewide in November for their work on creating the “Fill Your Pantry: Home Food Preservation” webinar series and “31 Days of Food Preservation” social media campaign.

The University of Illinois Extension Team Excellence Award was given for addressing critical focus areas around food access and safety during uncertain times. The team incorporated new strategies to engage consumers with Extension programming and safe home food preservation information.

The team also won the National Extension Association for Family and Consumer Sciences Marketing Package Award for outstanding marketing efforts addressing the concerns and needs of children, families or communities.

Pressure canner gauge testing

Improper canning gauge readings can lead to serious food safety issues. Improper gauges may lead to either over-processing or under processing, impacting the quality and safety of food. During the pressure canning testing clinics, Diane Reinhold identified five pressure canner gauges that needed to be replaced.





4-H staff guide full lineup of youth programs

Staff provide critical youth programming in the three-county unit. Becky Gocken transitioned from Stephenson County to Winnebago County 4-H program coordinator. Brenda Heimann serves Stephenson County. Angela Miller continues to guide youth in Jo Daviess County. Throughout the three counties, several events were held where youth had the ability to participate in activities, learn new skills, and have lots of fun!



<https://www.facebook.com/UnitOne4H/>

Youth make memories at camp

4-H camp for youth in Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties was held in Polo in June. Campers engaged in a variety of activities designed to challenge, educate, and entertain. 4-H camp allows youth to make good decisions, build their self-confidence, become independent, and gain the ability to work well with others. Activities include hiking, shooting sports, arts and crafts, crate stacking, team building challenges, zip-lining, swimming, and more. Together, the 4-H staff trained camp counselors for six months leading up to camp and staffed the camp.



59
Campers



9
Youth Counselors



Bass fishing club teaches youth new skills



Youth Leadership Team member Myles Nelson and volunteer Tony Grotto led a Bass Fishing SPIN Club at Winnebago County's Torstenson Property in June. After two days in the classroom building spinner-bait lures, practicing casting, and learning the importance of knot tying, the kids headed to the fishing pond and had some great catches.

Area youth become spellbound with 4-H fun

Magic filled the air as local youth explored the "Wizarding World of 4-H." Youth decorated hats and created ties to look the part of young witch and wizards. Youth moved through different stations where they got creative and explored hands-on STEM activities. In the potions class, students brewed up a fizzy, bubbly concoction of root beer, as well as created smelly bath salts and ooey-goey slime. In the herbology class, youth learned about various herbs, then painted flowerpots and planted herbs to take home. The wand making class had participants make their own magical wand, parchment paper, and quill.



65+
Youth participated in the 3-county events





What a Hoot Owl Club gets youth outside

The Owl Club began by learning about the Barred Owl. In it's second year, the focus was on wildlife and the water habitat. Youth dissected owl pellets and learned how to call owls. They went on nature hikes and learned about bats and made bat houses. They also participated in a stream ecology program.



Leaders named to Hall of Fame

Three volunteers were inducted into the Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame for their leadership and mentoring roles. These volunteers were honored for their dedication to the 4-H program during a virtual ceremony in August:

- Jo Daviess County: Valerie Brudi
- Stephenson County: Kristi Krahrmer
- Winnebago County: Neva Ramos



Winnebago County 4-H families give back

In October, youth and their families packaged meals for families in Zambia at the Kids Around the World Warehouse in Rockford. In two hours, volunteers packed 10,584 meals for families.



Stephenson county teen travels to National 4-H Congress

Michelle Marck was one of 10 Illinois 4-Her's to attend the 100th National Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The conference focuses on youth leadership and offers a variety of educational, service, and recreational opportunities for attendees. Michelle earned the trip in 2020 for being a State 4-H winner in Project Mastery for her foods and nutrition projects.



Youth show off their hard work at county 4-H shows

With over 60 different project selections for youth to choose from to exhibit at the 4-H Show, there's something for everyone. Most of the projects for 4-H were shown and judged in July and early August. Youth also competed at the Illinois State Fair.



Number of Youth in 4-H Shows:

Jo Daviess: 100 youth exhibited
 Stephenson: 214 youth exhibited
 Winnebago: 203 youth exhibited



Number of Entries Registered for 4-H Shows:

Jo Daviess: 460 projects
 Stephenson: 1,435 projects
 Winnebago: 971 projects



Number Selected to Compete at State Fair:

Jo Daviess: 18 entries
 Stephenson: 46 entries
 Winnebago: 39 entries





Youth learn about mental health

Local youth participated in an online series of mental health discussions in early 2021 with 4-H Youth Development program coordinators, Angela Miller, Becky Gocken, and Brenda Heimann as facilitators. Youth learned to navigate the subject of mental health. Youth learned how to define mental health, talk about it with family and friends, and help themselves and others. They discussed different mental health behaviors and disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and self-harm, as well as examined the ideology of mental health and how to properly seek help.



Take-home kits expand learning opportunities

Composting with Worms

Youth received a take home kit to explore vermicomposting, the process of composting food waste with worms. Youth learned how food waste can be recycled and how nutrients can be put back into the soil.



Kitchen scrap gardening with lettuce

Youth learned how to recycle different scrap vegetables and fruits in the kitchen that would otherwise be thrown away. In the kits, romaine lettuce scraps, along with supplies, were given to youth to re-grow the lettuce.



Extension brings STEM activities to the classroom

Creative thinking, hands-on problem solving, critical reasoning: these are just some of the skills seventh and eighth grade students at Pearl City Middle School used to complete five different STEM activities relating to science, technology, engineering and math. Students made geodesic domes out of gumdrops and toothpicks; learned about hydroponic gardening and planting vegetable seeds; crafted robotic arms out of cardboard, string, and straws; discovered ways to make plastic cup towers using only string and rubber bands to lift, move, and stack the cups; and studied how water moves up flower stems in the thirsty stem races.



Babysitting clinic helps youth prepare

Extension hosted babysitting clinics in June. Youth learned how to care for children while they expanded their leadership and decision-making skills. They learned how to choose age-appropriate activities, lead fun games, and understand behaviors to help them be successful babysitters.



Extension reaches out to youth in juvenile detention

Becky Gocken, 4-H youth development program coordinator, leads bi-monthly programs with art projects at the Winnebago County Juvenile Detention Center. Gocken leads youth in grades 8-12 through a variety of creative activities.

Teaming up with the Children's Museum

Brenda Heimann, 4-H youth development program coordinator for Stephenson County, has teamed up with the Children's Hands-On Museum to provide a fun-filled hour of arts and crafts for children ages 4-12. These after-school activities are provided monthly to engage in STEAM craft projects.





Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit

The virtual conference, Updates in Nutrient and Pest Management, was held in February and March. University of Illinois and University of Wisconsin-Madison specialists addressed production strategies including pest management, cover crop management, and grain safety.



Midwestern Hemp Database

Phillip Alberti, commercial agriculture educator, has been at the forefront of creating the Midwestern Hemp Database, a research project started in 2020. The project is a collaboration of Midwest Universities, testing laboratories, and growers creating a network to provide research-backed, regional insight into agronomic performance and cannabinoid development of industrial hemp varieties.



go.illinois.edu/hempdatabase

Soil health program leads to bountiful conversations

In December, Extension teamed up with the Jo Daviess Soil and Water Health Coalition for The Economics of Soil Health program. Extension specialists and experienced producers discussed both the financial and the long-term environmental costs and benefits of regenerative agriculture, such as organic matter, infiltration, and reduced erosion.

The coalition was created to support a farmer-led conversation on the effort to encourage education, experimentation, and workable solutions that improve soil health and water quality in a way that enhances profitable agriculture.



Midwest hemp study includes local college students



Freeport area college students worked with Phillip Alberti in April with a replicated research trial focusing on industrial hemp.

Alberti gave brief lectures about industrial hemp production practices and the current state of the industry followed by hands-on work in the greenhouse learning how to plant hemp seeds, transplant seedlings, make clones, and continue management to grow healthy plants. Alberti explained the benefits and disadvantages of various hemp production systems.

The industrial hemp project supplements the Midwestern Hemp Database, an extensive network of growers and collaborators to provide research-based information for one of the newest and most highly demanded crops in the Midwest.



Alberti shows students how to clone a hemp plant during one of his presentations. The plants are part of a study to provide information for the Midwestern Hemp Database.

This project gave students experience in one of the fastest growing agriculture industries, but most importantly, provided an educational experience about a plant that is quite misunderstood. While the plant and production practices may be similar, we are focusing on hemp, not marijuana-cannabis. It's a very small-scale and very restricted study that is being replicated across many sites in the Midwest.

**PHILLIP ALBERTI,
COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE EDUCATOR**





Supporting local environmental efforts

Supporting local environmental organizations and helping them navigate the virtual world during a global pandemic has been the main priority for Stanley “Jay” Solomon, natural resources, environment and energy educator. Solomon has been working with the Jo Daviess Soil and Water Health Coalition, Northwest Illinois Forage and Grassland Council, Northwest Illinois Forestry Association, and the Northern Illinois Land Stewardship Coalition.

The virtual transition for many of these groups has been difficult, but Solomon has guided them through this unique time by providing an online platform, offering technical assistance, participating, providing insight and helping plan virtual meetings. “A lot of these groups have struggled to go virtual,” says Solomon. “I’ve been able to advise them based on the university guidelines as examples.”

The key for each of these groups is looking at how to provide educational events virtually or limited in-person capacity within the next year.

**STANLEY “JAY” SOLOMON,
NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT &
ENERGY EDUCATOR**

2021 Electronics Recycling Collection

In August, University of Illinois Extension, in partnership with the City of Freeport and the Stephenson County Health Department, offered an electronics recycling collection to the residents of Stephenson County.



156 cars went through the collection filling three semi-trucks with unwanted electronics



25 volunteers from multiple organizations helped unload electronics and stack on pallets

Programming that counts

Jay Solomon led several in-person programs locally and statewide covering the core concepts of soil health, invasive and problematic weeds, radon, renewable energy, geothermal energy, and rainscaping.

Certified Livestock Management Training

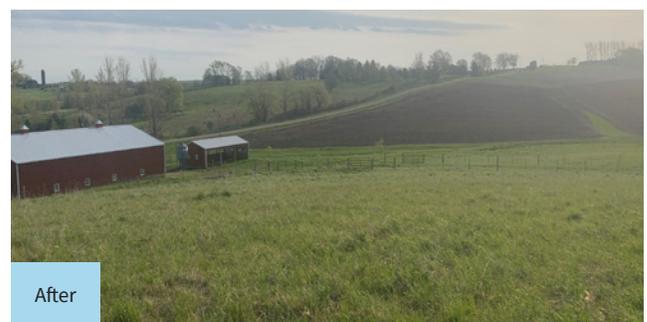
As one of the co-leads on this statewide training program, Solomon led several Certified Livestock Management Training webinars in early 2021. His background in nutrient management is pertinent to the training. Solomon and the state team also updated the training program and re-recorded the on-line series.

Driftless Region Beef Conference

Solomon plays a large role in organizing the tri-state beef cattle conference. This year included four webinars. Solomon co-lead several of the online meetings and worked directly with producers to help develop nutrient management plans.

Improving by doing

Over the last two years, a local resident turned low production crop land into productive pasture with collaborative help from Phillip Alberti and Jay Solomon. The project started in mid-2018 and has made significant progress in the past year. What started as odd-shaped end rows and sloped, eroding field borders has grown into a lush pasture with minimal runoff and the elimination of gullies. Together, Alberti and Solomon assessed the site and made recommendations for plant species, seeding strategies, and a grazing management plan, including fencing and water placement. A herd of Mini Herefords are now on the pasture, and future work will include refining the rotational grazing with mobile fencing.





Producing green thumbs and beauty in every community

Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers stayed active in the community. Activities were modified to fit the current pandemic mitigations. Master Gardeners worked in demonstration gardens and expanded those partnerships. Working with longtime partner Freeport Park District, the team offered perennial shade demonstration gardens. This year, some of their more visible gardens were adopted by Extension, keeping them in shape and working with the park district employees to make sure the plants are healthy. Master Naturalist volunteers work with the local Audubon and nature preserves gathering prairie seeds and working to eradicate invasive species. The volunteers also continue to be active at maintaining and strengthening community partnerships.



140

Active Master Gardeners



49

Active Master Naturalists



5,237

Volunteer hours from Master Gardeners



1,777

Volunteer hours from Master Naturalists



Visit Northwest Illinois Horticulture on Facebook
[facebook.com/NorthwestIllinoisHorticulture](https://www.facebook.com/NorthwestIllinoisHorticulture)

'Think Spring' gardening series brings joy to gardening fans

For 2021, a virtual program was created to replace the annual in-person spring programming held in Stephenson and Winnebago counties. Nikki Keltner and Alex Burbach, Extension program coordinators, designed the series to offer a range of gardening topics for all skill levels. The program included six webinars with top educators from across the state presenting.

Plant a row

Winnebago County Master Gardeners continue to coordinate the local Plant a Row for the Hungry program which encourages gardeners to plant an extra row in their gardens to donate. Master Gardeners coordinate drop off sites, deliver produce to pantries, and assist the Extension Office in promoting the program county. In 2021, 14,663 pounds of fresh, locally-grown produce was donated to food pantries in the area.



Stephenson County Master Gardener Greg Mokros does some spring cleaning at the native plants round about near Highland Community College.

Master Gardeners take to the communities

Master Gardeners volunteered numerous hours to improve various display gardens throughout the counties. The volunteers had a busy summer and fall schedule with hosting informational booths at various events as well as offering educational presentations for local community groups.



Educated advice is just a phone call away

The Master Gardener Helpline has stayed busy in all three counties. Master Gardeners from each county volunteer their time and knowledge to help solve garden issues with research-based information. Calls are logged to identify trends in disease issues or pest populations. This past year, some of the most common questions included drought impacts for lawn and trees, as well as diseases of maple trees.

Horticulture for the Holidays workshop gathers friends

Winnebago Master Gardeners hosted its annual holiday workshop in December. At this event, participants created two festive holiday projects to take home.





Educational programs offer a bounty of knowledge

Grant McCarty, local food systems and small farms educator, led three virtual series in 2021, including fruits, backyard garden production, and autumn vegetable garden series.



McCarty has several videos on YouTube, visit go.illinois.edu/JSWYouTube

Stateline Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference

Another project McCarty helped organize and presented at was the 25th Annual Stateline Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference. The previous day-long experience was split into five virtual sessions in February. The conference attracted commercial vegetable and fruit growers from Illinois and Wisconsin who sell to direct and/or wholesale markets.

McCarty awarded new strawberry research project

In the fall of 2021, McCarty was awarded a grant to research strawberries. The project is funded by an Illinois Department of Agriculture program through the USDA's Specialty Crops Block Grant. McCarty and his team will determine the suitability for growing day-neutral strawberries locally.

Most of the strawberry production in Northern Illinois is June-bearing which take two years to be harvested. Overwintering and wet springs can be problematic for the growth and harvest of the fruit. These berries yield mid-June to early July, which has seen issues of drought, rain, and heat. Since these berries depend on U-Pick (families coming out to the farm to pick), weather makes a huge impact.

Day-neutral strawberries are grown as an annual. They are planted in the spring with harvest beginning mid-August to Halloween. Day-neutrals research in Wisconsin and Minnesota has shown success.

This study begins summer of 2022 and will last two years. Extension hopes to make recommendations for specialty growers, both commercial and non-commercial, in the area when it comes to adopting this strawberry growing system. While they may not fully replace June-bearing strawberries, this tailored research could help complement strawberry production, add to apple and pumpkin production, and extend the growing season, reaching markets that are not able to be supplied.



In a trial run at McCarty's home, day-neutral strawberries were yielding into September.



Expert assistance throughout the summer growing season

With a focus on helping commercial and non-commercial fruit and vegetable growers, McCarty continued to provide answers throughout the 2021 growing season. Expert advice included drought impact, late ripening of tomatoes, cucurbit diseases and insects, cabbage worms, managing Japanese beetles, and many others. For commercial growers, McCarty visited farms and farmers markets to provide technical support.

The expert assistance I provide in the summer helps growers take immediate action in better managing a problem they are encountering. These consultations further help our unit understand the issues that are being faced in our community which can lead to more impactful educational programming, outreach, and even future research.

GRANT MCCARTY, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND SMALL FARMS EDUCATOR

While the core of expert assistance occurs during the summer, McCarty answers questions and provides support throughout the fall and winter.

U of I Extension Program Evaluation Excellence Award

Grant McCarty was recognized for his role on the International Committee during the University of Illinois Extension Annual Conference. McCarty and colleagues received the 2021 Program Evaluation Excellence Award. The committee revitalized



The International Experience Survey. This multi-year project identified international opportunities for educators and staff, as well as addressed Extension needs and resources locally. The survey identified the needs for English as second language providers and interpretation/translation skills within Extension.

"McCarty's active role keeps us at the forefront of delivering timely and relevant educational programming that fits our communities' needs and desires." explains Margaret Larson, county director.

STAFF

Margaret Larson County Extension Director	Nikki Keltner Program Coordinator, Stephenson County
Phillip Alberti Educator, Commercial Agriculture	Alex Burbach Program Coordinator, Jo Daviess County
Carol Erickson Educator, SNAP-ED	Jen Schultz Program Coordinator, Unit
Grant McCarty Educator, Local Foods & Small Farms	Gina Adams Program Coordinator, SNAP-ED, Rockford
Diane Reinhold Educator, Nutrition & Wellness	Barbara Curry Community Worker, SNAP-ED, Freeport
Stanley (Jay) Solomon Educator, Natural Resources, Environment & Energy	Theresa McGee Community Worker, SNAP-Ed, Rockford
Rebecca Gocken Program Coordinator, 4-H Winnebago County	Deb Koch Office Support Specialist, Unit
Brenda Heimann Program Coordinator, 4-H Stephenson County	Julie Miller Office Support Assistant, Stephenson County
Angela Miller Program Coordinator, 4-H Jo Daviess County	Tammy Bené Office Support Assistant, Winnebago County

Finances

We are fortunate to have financial support from five local entities with whom we partner: The Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau, the Jo Daviess County Extension and 4-H Foundation, the Stephenson County 4-H and Extension Foundation, the Winnebago County 4-H Showboard, and the Winnebago County 4-H and Extension Foundation.

The Showboard and the foundations are led by volunteers with a commitment to supporting 4-H and Extension activities, and, although their role on the boards is focused on fundraising in support of us, they are most often tireless champions of the work of Extension and 4-H in our communities, and many hold additional volunteer roles.



U of I Extension recognizes staff for years of service

Four staff members were recognized for their years of service with Extension. Acknowledged for five years of service were: Angela Miller, Jo Daviess County 4-H program coordinator; Gina Adams, Rockford SNAP-Ed program coordinator; and Tammy Bené, Winnebago County office support associate. Julie Miller, Stephenson County office support assistant, has been with Extension for 10 years.

We are fortunate to have dedicated staff that want to help make a difference in our local communities. Angela, Gina, Tammy, and Julie are great examples of our Extension team. Their willingness to help others and advocate for education are the very reasons Extension is successful.

MARGARET LARSON, COUNTY DIRECTOR



Angela Miller



Gina Adams



Tammy Bené



Julie Miller



EXTENSION COUNCIL

The Extension Council is an advisory group that meets four times a year and provides information and feedback to the Extension director. Council members are from each county and are invited to serve on multi-year terms. The composition of the Extension Council closely reflects the counties they represent. Our council members may be our biggest champions but more importantly serve as representatives of their communities and advocates for Extension success.

Jo Daviess County

Ray Massingill, Warren
Garnet Fee, Galena
Robert Heurmann,
Stockton
Cody Geisz, Elizabeth
Amy Hardwickey, Galena
Drew Groezinger, Stockton
Beth Baranski, Galena

Stephenson County

Deborah Lischwe, Freeport
Tom Scheider, Freeport
Ethan Trampel, Rock City
Chris Urish, Freeport
Sheila Keane, Lena
Monica Pierce, Freeport

Winnebago County

Angie Goral, Rockford
Jim Webster, Rockton
Aaron Booker, Winnebago
Lori Walsh, Rockford
Mia Chase, Loves Park
Sue Gallant, Leaf River
Jeff White, Kirkland
Bob DeSchepper, Rockford
Don Kowalski, Rockford

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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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