



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

2021 Addressing Local Needs,
Solving Global Challenges
Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union Counties



Jody Johnson
County Extension Director

Letter from our County Director

2021 proved to be another challenging year, but staff were able to overcome all the obstacles that we faced. We brought on another donation garden (The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden), provided Illinois Junior Chef cooking camps with several partners, and provided a secure opportunity for our 4-H'ers to show.

Looking forward to 2022, it appears we may face many of the same challenges as last year. Staff have proven time and time again the ability to adapt to challenges and provide high-impactful programming. You will see that we had a successful 2021 and look forward to more success in 2022.

We will continue to address food security in the region, working to provide both short-term and long-term solutions. Our efforts remain vigilant in 4-H to provide youth opportunities they might not otherwise receive. The unit staff do all this while remaining diligent to all audiences with the same efforts and determination. University of Illinois Extension continues to reach underserved audiences. One of my proudest accomplishments was receiving recognition from NAACP for our efforts to reach underserved audiences. Extension is for everyone! I am glad to be leading this unit another year.

Jody

Serving Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union Counties



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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	335	84
Illinois Communities Served	Educational Sessions Per Week	Online Courses

Partnerships Supported

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

Learners Engaged

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

Resources Generated

\$14,000,000	\$242,000
Value of Volunteer Contributions	Value of Donated Garden Produce

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.



Welcome from our staff

While 2020 might have been a bit different and programming offered virtually, 2021 was a great come back for the team as we were able to start providing in-person programming again by following the IDPH and CDC guidelines. We are comprised of 16 individuals who have a passion and strong desire to help meet the needs of our communities.

The unit team would like to welcome Lizz Cooley-Questelle (shared SNAP-Ed Extension Educator), John Shadowens (shared Visiting Community Economic Development Extension Educator), and Amy Shuck (Union County Office Support Assistant).

The AJMPU team is continuously seeking new partnerships and education opportunities to help provide the youth and adults in the five southern-most counties of Illinois.

The Extension Council is authorized by the University of Illinois Board of Trustees, in accordance with state law, to be actively involved in the operation of University of Illinois Extension. Extension councils cooperate with Extension staff in planning, promoting, developing, implementing, evaluating, and financing Extension programs designed to meet the needs, interests, and resources of the local communities served.

Unit Council Members

Alexander/Pulaski Counties: Ann Terry, Shawna Rhine, Derek Eurales, Josie Eason

Johnson County: Natalie Dougherty, Zach Garrett, Jonathan Voelz, Phyllis Webb

Massac County: Megan Henderson, Pearl Meadows, Cheryl Vanderford

Union County: Margarita Bartolo, Chris Boyd, Greg George



extension.illinois.edu/ajmpu

NAACP partnership

In 2021, INEP Community Worker and Alexander/Pulaski County NAACP Branch Secretary Sarita Sawyer presented the unit with an appreciation plaque for our continued partnership. This is a non-conventional media outlet to help advertise our programming and upcoming events within the community. Through this partnership, the counties have successfully been able to educate and help meet the needs of our community members to create a healthier lifestyle.



INEP Community Worker Sarita Sawyer accepting NAACP plaque



facebook.com/AJMPU.Unit



Creating Bridges: bringing people together to build businesses

Community development in Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union counties continues to expand.



CREATE BRIDGES is a process designed to help rural communities build capacity for strengthening the retail, tourism, hospitality, and entertainment sectors of communities, providing jobs and business opportunities that can boost rural economies. After the announcement of the project in September 2020, the work of building opportunities began.

A regional steering committee comprised of representatives from Shawnee Community College, the Illinois Small Business Development Center, Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission, Southernmost Illinois Tourism, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Shawnee Development Council, Southern 14 Workforce Investment Board, Shawnee National Forest, Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone, University of Illinois Extension, and a host of community leaders representing businesses, communities, and local organizations was created.

Extension specialist and CREATE BRIDGES Illinois Project team lead Susan Odum and the Southern Five Region co-chairs, Tiffany George with Southern Five Regional Planning and Greg Mason with Shawnee Community College, hosted a series of online Community Forum events to garner information from community leaders in the five-county region about the specific needs and issues they face.

From March through August, the CREATE BRIDGES Business Retention and Expansion Survey Team conducted a total of 77 interviews with business owners and managers to identify the most pressing issues. In addition, an anonymous online employee perspective survey was launched to gather information from employees on the issues most pressing to their future in the industry.

In July, Illinois Extension added Quin Colson to the project to assist the Southern Five Region with strategy development and implementation.

On October 26, the team hosted a CREATE Academy event to review secondary data and to roll out the results of the primary

data collection gathered through the business and employee survey processes. This information will be used by the regional steering committee members as they seek to implement new strategies in 2022 to support the CREATE sector businesses and their workforce.

In late November and early December, CREATE BRIDGES hosted a series of community workshops titled Reversing the Exodus. During the workshops, Extension Specialist Pam Schallhorn outlined research-based strategies that communities use to help reverse the trend of outmigration of young adults from rural communities. The meeting included a panel discussion of young adults.

“Reversing the Exodus needs to be a key component of the CREATE BRIDGES strategy,” Odum says. The 2020 Census reflects that the Southern Five counties had an overall population loss of 5,064, an 8.4% decrease from 2010. American Community Survey statistics suggest that the most significant loss was in the 20-54 age bracket, followed by a decrease in residents 19 years of age and under. These losses in our youth and working age adult populations are unsustainable. The time is now to develop strategies to reverse this trend for the CREATE BRIDGES region.”

As outlined by State Representative Patrick Windhorst prior to the Reversing the Exodus workshops, “Southern Illinois’ strength resides in the people who, like me, call it home. The recent Census numbers confirm that one of the most pressing issues we are facing as a region is the loss of our friends, neighbors, and family members to other states. I firmly believe that we can, and must, continue working to reverse this trend. I am very appreciative of the work being done by Pam Schallhorn and the Illinois Extension on these matters. The greatest opportunities are often found in the most challenging times.”

Odum spoke of the potential for the area.

“The Southern Five Region is known for its scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, historic sites, state parks, orchards, wineries, restaurants, and unique lodging facilities. CREATE BRIDGES offers an exciting opportunity to identify and implement strategies to support retail and hospitality as they are vital to the region’s future economic well-being, says Odum.



4-H youth development programs are changing lives



The 4-H organization takes pride in making the best better! As the largest positive youth development organization in the world, 4-H is more than participation. 4-H strives to reach all youth in our communities to build life skills and give them experiential learning opportunities. 4-H members belong to an organization that promotes independence and mastery skills in many project areas. The 4-H team in Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union counties provides schools and community clubs workshops to enhance communication, healthy lifestyles, nature stewardship, and visual arts skills. 4-H serves members ages 8-18, in addition to the Cloverbud program for ages 5-7. The Cloverbud program gives young youth a head start in skill development. In the 2020-2021 4-H year, despite the ongoing pandemic, our 4-H team enrolled 39 Cloverbud aged 5 to 7 and 235 members aged 8 to 18. Increasing 4-H membership is promising in 2022 as we revitalize many programs the pandemic halted.

4-H teen leaders = 4-H teen teachers

The 4-H Teen Teacher program is designed to have our teens mentor and teach younger youth and act as ambassadors for our program. 4-H staff work with schools to provide training on youth adult partnerships, ages-appropriate behaviors, community service, and multiple 4-H project areas. After the training, the teens mentor, lead, and teach younger youth on a 4-H program or project. The leadership program helps build public speaking skills while enhancing confidence and relationship-building. The 4-H Teen Leader program reached over 100 teens in our five counties in 2021.

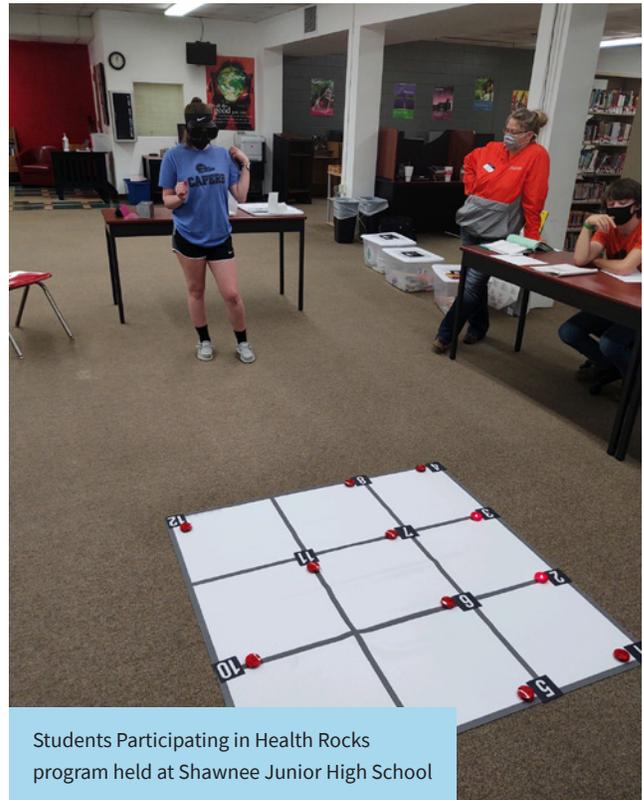


4-H Teen training held at Vienna High School



4-H Hall of Fame inductees

In 2021, Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union counties had some extraordinary leaders that were inducted into the 4-H Hall of Fame. These 4-H leaders bring years of experience and knowledge to the youth in our communities; they are truly exemplary individuals. Hundreds of volunteer hours were generated by this group of individuals! Alicia Goines, Johnson County; Brandy Meadows, Massac County; Christine Hogendobler, Pulaski County; Karen Collier, Union County



Students Participating in Health Rocks program held at Shawnee Junior High School

Health Rocks

Shawnee School District in Union County, partnered with our Extension unit, received a grant from National 4-H for the Health Rocks program. Eight teens were trained and mentored 45 younger youth participants. This youth-led program educates youth to make healthy lifestyle choices. The teens are trained using a series of games, scenarios, and hands-on interactive activities to help showcase the countless choices youth face in the real world. Topics include recreational drug and alcohol use, impaired driving, and understanding how to communicate with peers. This program focuses on the importance of healthy friendships and making informed decisions. The program was highly received by the school district, teens, and adult sponsors.

4-H healthy habits

4-H Cooking 101 is a hands-on program designed to help educate youth on kitchen safety, while cooking simple recipes. In 2021, Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union counties received a grant from National 4-H, in partnership with Wal-Mart, to provide 4-H Cooking 101 kits to our local schools. With these funds, the 4-H team reached nearly 400 youth and 100 teens at 14 different schools in our region. Given the ongoing pandemic, kits were assembled and provided to youth. Each kit included a 4-H cookbook, measuring cups, and an apron. Many delicious, simple recipes and basic kitchen lessons were combined to create a wonderful resource to accent classroom lessons or enhance at home remote learning! The teens are extending their training knowledge into more classrooms in 2022.



4-H MEMBERS SHOWCASE TALENT AT EXHIBITIONS

In-person events were back in 2021, including the annual 4-H project exhibition! Although many counties throughout the state remained virtual in 2021, our unit created an innovative and safe way to move forward in-person. General shows were held at all county offices with 180 exhibitors! During enrollment, youth select projects they would like to explore and display what they learned during the exhibition. The exhibitors showcased 614 projects. Our 4-H families were thrilled to be in-person to showcase their efforts and speak to a judge while maintaining social distancing and wearing masks. Individual time slots were provided for each child. The projects were amazing, and some were chosen to represent their county at the Illinois State Fair. At the state fair, the unit was well represented and brought home a grand and reserve champion in a few project areas.



4-H PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking is historically one of 4-H's flagship programs that many credit as they grow up! The 2021 local public speaking exhibition was held in-person with several exhibitors. Although extra safety measures were in place and face shields were a new accessory, the youth were resilient and adapted very well. Building communication skills and confidence are life skills that youth will use as they grow and develop into future leaders. The exhibitors were able to select a topic and type of speech to perform, including some who used props or notecards to make their speech a success! Pulaski, Massac, and Union counties had contestants advance to the state level competition. These exhibitors gained valuable experience and represented their respective county 4-H programs very well.

4-H LARGE ANIMAL FAIR

In 2021, our 4-H members partnered with the Massac County Youth Fair to hold one week of large animal exhibitions to ensure we were in person in 2021. Massac County Youth Fair navigated all pandemic protocols and worked with the health department successfully in 2020, so 2021 4-H shows were coordinated very early to guarantee an in-person exhibition opportunity for all youth! Youth from all five counties were able to show and display their projects, ribbons and champions were awarded, and all were delighted to be in person. Horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and goats were all displayed, and the youth showcased their hard work and dedication to animal science. Large animal projects are pillars of the 4-H program dating back decades. Two members of the University of Illinois Livestock judging team served as judges for all in-person and virtual 4-H animal exhibitions, a new partnership with the university.



4-H SMALL ANIMAL

We also partnered with the Massac County Youth Fair for the 4-H Small Animal Show. Youth can exhibit in both the youth fair and the 4-H show. Being able to showcase the hard work youth put into small animal projects, twice in the same day, is a unique opportunity! Feeding, watering, and exercising the small animals are just a few examples of daily experiential learning that youth gain from their project. The results include ribbons, trophies, and awards for the successful youth, in addition to the fun activities. Communicating with the judges is a very important piece of our exhibition experience, even within the animal shows. Due to the varying types of small animal projects, 4-H members could share their project work at the fair or during the general show by showcasing a PowerPoint or poster. Over 30 youth exhibited small animals in 2021.



National Shooting Sports Ambassador

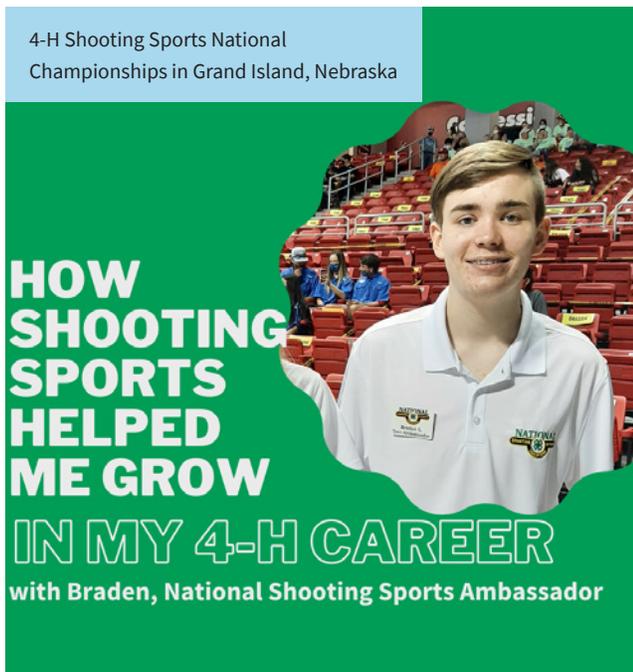
Being involved in 4-H is more than being a member, attending meetings, or participating in activities. 4-H is a program that allows youth opportunities to grow and develop skills to guide them into the future! Life skills, soft skills, financial literacy, public speaking and leadership skills help enrich each youth, making the best better one member at a time!



This year, Braden May from Massac County was chosen as a National Shooting Sports Ambassador. At the state competition, Braden placed second which qualified him to shoot at the 4-H National Shooting Sports Competition.

Throughout Braden's journey, he has thrived in shooting sports and gained the skill base to become a true leader. His role as ambassador has gained Braden many opportunities to develop and polish his communication skills. Public speaking and being able to help mentor and teach younger youth the skills and knowledge that he has gained from his time in 4-H shooting sports is grand achievement.

I've always been a quiet person that never speaks in front of large crowds. With the work of the other ambassadors and my coaches, I was able to break that habit and I am now able to speak in front of crowds and I am a lot more comfortable that I was before.



Collegiate Facilitator for National Healthy Living Summit

In November 2020, Kaitlyn May from Massac County was selected as a collegiate facilitator for the 2021 4-H Healthy Living National Summit. Due to the global pandemic, the summit was held virtually. The collegiate facilitators met frequently during the months leading up to the summit with one goal in mind: to provide the best possible experience and information on healthy living for the youth.

As a past Healthy Living Ambassador for the Extension unit, Kaitlyn knew this was an experience of a lifetime, and one that she says she will never forget! In 2021, Kaitlyn was again selected to be a collegiate facilitator for the 2022 National 4-H Healthy Living Summit in April. She will be traveling to Bethesda, Md. to meet with fellow collegiate facilitators from across the country for her first in-person meeting. Kaitlyn continues to excel in the area of leadership and is now a co-leader for a local 4-H club.

My time as a member may have come to a close but my journey as a volunteer has only begun!
KAITLYN MAY



Collegiate Facilitator Kaitlyn May for National 4-H Healthy Living Summit



Illinois Junior Chef partners with Vienna High School and Arrowleaf

The Illinois Nutrition Education Program offers a variety of programs to help educate our community members. One of the most popular and engaging programs we offer is Illinois Junior Chef. This program is designed to educate youth ages 8 - 13 about kitchen safety, reading recipes, and how to prepare and cook the recipes.

By making some modifications and providing individual workstations, the local INEP team was able to successfully conduct the program in 2021 reaching 40 youth in the five-county unit two different locations. In September of 2021, the community workers presented on the success of the Junior Chef program at the INEP Annual Conference.



Youth preparing recipe from Illinois Junior Chef cookbook while using skills they were taught.



Arrowleaf and Vienna High School partnership

2021 brought new opportunities, including new partnerships with Arrowleaf and the Vienna High School. The Extension INEP team coordinated learning for the Junior Chef program. This partnership addressed food insecurities in the region. Vienna High School provided sacked breakfasts and lunches for the participants. Arrowleaf provided each youth with the ingredients from the recipes they learned to take home and make for their family.



SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EDUCATION

SNAP-Education works with Illinois families in need to make the healthier choice an easier choice. Through classes, workshops and collaboration with community partners, SNAP-Education positively affect families and communities by using research-based solutions to encourage healthier nutrition and physical activity choices.

Reach and Impact of SNAP-Education



6,898

Total Estimated Reach



256

Number of Nutrition Education Classes Provided



56% Face-to-face

42% Virtual or online

SNAP-Ed assisted community partner, Arrowleaf, with a successful grant application. As a result, youth who attended Illinois Junior Chefs received groceries to make recipes at home they learned to prepare in class. Arrowleaf also used our recipes to make snacks for their summer youth program. "Your recipes are simple and more nutritious than what we provided last year," said an Arrowleaf staff member.

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships



20

K-12 Schools



7

Early Childhood



16

Other Agencies or Community Centers



6

Food Banks and Food Pantries



MyPlate for My Family

MyPlate for My Family helps families with children aged 2 to 18 learn about the dietary guidelines of MyPlate, plan meals, shop for food, and prepare healthy low-cost meals. It teaches ways to include children in the meal preparation. It also encourages families to eat the recommended number of fruits and vegetables in their daily meals and encourages physical activity for adults, including at least 2 1/2 hours of exercise a week for adults and 60 minutes each day for children. Two new partners were added to the project.



Pictured is INEP Community Worker Patsy Bishop showing the banana wheat quick bread served with this program.

Healthy Cents

Healthy Cents helps teach families how to make small changes to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The program encourages hands-on and interactive activities, provides participants with lessons on making healthy choices, decreasing food expenses, shopping on a budget, and preparing healthy recipes. The program also provides gardening tips for growing their own vegetables. Sarita Sawyer, INEP community worker, gave a Healthy Cents lesson at The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden, and one of our Growing Together Illinois gardens. She was able to provide the resources and tools so participants could start their own seeds to transplant into their personal gardens. Participants harvested the herbs to add to a salad.



The Organwise Guys

The Organwise Guys teaches youth in grades K through 2 the importance for nutritious food and physical activity for health organ function. As we transitioned to in-person learning, the INEP team provided programs to 15 schools and reached over 1,000 students. Featured in the photo is Tiffney Stewart, INEP community worker, teaching a lesson with the kindergarten class at Buncombe Grade School.



Eat. Move. Save. booths

One of the many ways Extension reaches those in our communities is through setting up Eat. Move. Save. booths. Staff provide brief, short lessons that help educate on creating healthy lifestyle choices. Participants sign-up for helpful texts and e-newsletters with fun, healthy tips, and recipes. They are given information on the Find Food Illinois app and the Eat. Move. Save. website. These booths are set up in various locations around the communities, including food pantries, grocery stores, school functions, and farmer's market.





Reaching Rural Veterans

Illinois Extension’s SNAP-Ed Team partnered with the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University to provide its Reaching Rural Veteran’s project with Shawnee Development Council’s Food Pantry in Anna. The MFRI team conducted surveys with veterans and shared a variety of community resources at monthly events. Shannon Pulliam, SNAP-Ed community outreach worker, regularly attends food distribution events to provide nutrition education, share recipes, and offer budget-friendly food ideas.



I want to say thank you to everyone who made our RRV a success! We fought through many obstacles along the way with weather and COVID, but met 94% of our goal for the program. We couldn’t have done that without our Illinois Extension partners.

RENA STERRETT, SENIOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH SPECIALIST, MILITARY FAMILY RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Building Resilient Inclusive Communities

The Building Resilient and Inclusive Communities project led by the Illinois Public Health Institute focused efforts in Alexander and Pulaski counties. The project focuses on three strategy areas: nutrition security, physical activity access, and social connectedness. The project brought many community partners together. Illinois Extension has been instrumental in supporting the nutrition security strategy. Extension worked with Tri-State Food Bank to conduct reliability testing for the Food Bank – Health and Nutrition Assessment tool and is engaging in creating a sustainable plan to support nutrition. Daystar Community Services and Bethel Temple Evangelistic Ministries food pantries are working with our SNAP-Ed team to finalize a nutrition policy to increase access and distribution of nutritious foods.

Increasing access to perishable foods by adding cold storage in area food pantries

Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network, with backbone support from Illinois Extension, partnered with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois and Aetna Better Health of Illinois to provide nearly \$170,000 worth of refrigerators and freezers to food pantries serving the southernmost 16 counties in Illinois. Food pantries in the five-county area receiving new equipment included: Bethany Village in Anna, Bethel Temple Evangelistic Ministries in Mounds, Christian Outreach Program Emergency (COPE) in Massac County, Daystar Community Services in Cairo, God’s House of Blessings in McClure, Goreville Senior Center in Goreville, Harvest Church SI in Anna, Loaves and Fishes/Anna United Methodist Church in Anna, Salem Lutheran Church Food Pantry in Jonesboro, Shawnee Development Council in Anna, St. John Praise & Worship Center in Pulaski, and The Table (Shawnee Worship Center) in Vienna. With increased cold storage, food pantries will be able to store and offer high quality healthier perishable foods to their communities.



Brandy Sevenski accepting cold storage unit for Shawnee Development Council Food Pantry. Photo provided by SNAP-Ed Extension Educator Toni Kay Wright.

Food Security Summit

Nearly 100 community partners participated in the first Food Security Summit held Aug. 11 at The Pavilion in Marion. Speakers from Feeding America, Feeding Illinois, and regional food banks focused on bringing together community partners to learn more about food access and gaps, learn about local projects supporting food access, identify opportunities for collaboration to improve food security, and network with agencies supporting food security. Tom and Shari Sweeny-Sadowski presented on the Union County Garden during one of the lightning sessions. They shared how they grow produce in the garden at Shawnee Development Council’s Anna food pantry and partner with the Anna Farmer’s Market to glean any unsold produce and take it to the food pantry. This project, established in 2017 with a handful of dedicated volunteers, has provided nearly 13,000 pounds of produce to the pantry.



Virtual learning connects our communities

Virtual programming continued in 2021, with webinars and pre-recorded lessons becoming the norm for reaching our audiences. Educator Erin Garrett continued to coordinate a statewide webinar series, while developing and delivering her own webinar series, and offering youth lessons paired with take-home kits.

Learning about your Everyday Environment

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy team developed a new statewide webinar series. The Everyday Environment webinars provide opportunities for learning about Illinois's natural resources and encourage Illinois residents to make changes in their lifestyle to positively impact their environment. National and international audiences have tuned in to learn from these monthly webinars. In 2021, 12 webinars were offered, with participants totaling 1,793. The recordings from the webinars received over 8,500 views this year. The series is continuing in 2022.



go.illinois.edu/EverydayEnvironmentWebinars

Which Grass is Which?

While some may think it takes a certain eye to tell one plant apart from another, Erin Garrett strives to show that it does not have to be the case. In world accustomed to plant blindness,

the lack of notice of plants growing around us, she strives to inform others about one of the most ignored group of plants – grasses. In her webinar series Which Grass is Which?, Garrett teaches how to tell one grass from another and why it is important to do so. Feedback on the webinars has been overwhelmingly positive, with numerous requests for more. Her live webinar and in-person grass identification had 420 participants this year, while her recorded webinars generated 8,590 views this year alone!

This has been really valuable as I work toward re-establishing the tallgrass, prairie grasses on my land in the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Exploring nature together – at home

Erin Garrett worked with the 4-H team in the southern five counties to offer a 6-part series of virtual programming for 4-H youth, paired with a take-home kit. Garrett developed and recorded short video lessons for participants of 4-H Nature Exploration Virtual Club. Sixty youth in the five counties participated in the monthly series. Youth learned about growing paperwhite bulbs indoors, creating and using insect collectors, and more.



Volunteers leave their mark

Trained Extension Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers are passionate individuals dedicated to giving back to their communities and leaving a positive impact. This year, our volunteers came together to remove trash and invasive species from our national forest and state parks, plant native trees and pollinator plants at restoration sites, and share their knowledge with others. Three new interns joined our current volunteers, bringing our number of active volunteers in the unit to 25.



25
Volunteers



1,188
Volunteer Hours Reported



\$33,906
Value of Volunteer Time

Combating the spread of invasive species

Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers removed invasive species this spring and fall. We targeted garlic mustard and autumn olive, but also removed queen Anne's lace and white and yellow sweet clover. We partnered with Illinois Department of Natural Resources to remove 1,715 pounds of garlic mustard from three of their sites. Working with the Forest Service, Friends of the Shawnee National Forest, River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, and U of I Extension Forestry, our volunteers were joined by members of the public for five workdays at Gardens of the Gods. Together, we removed 3,851 autumn olive trees with weed wrenches.

Cleaning up our forests

Trash buildup in parks and forests is often viewed as someone else's problem, but with continued littering and intentional dumping of large items, such as tires and couches, comes the need for cleanup. Our volunteers participated in trash blasts hosted year-round in partnership with Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service, Friends of the Shawnee National Forest, and Friends of the Cache River Watershed. Our volunteers collected 1,791 pounds of trash during eleven trash blasts across nine locations throughout the southern five counties.

Replacing what was lost

Our volunteers are familiar with working to solve issues in their communities, spending hundreds of hours removing undesirable items, whether plants or trash, from our natural areas. We recognize the importance of putting something back in place, and our volunteers had the opportunity to plant both pollinator plants and trees in restoration areas, as well as collect nuts for a tree restoration project. Volunteers planted 200 bareroot pollinator plants and 1,511 trees at Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge this year. In partnership with Illinois Department of Natural Resources, over 13,000 acorns and pecans were collected for planting at the Cache River Land and Water Reserve.



Gardens feed our neighbors

Food insecurity is a widespread issue throughout Illinois, and in the southernmost counties, it is the reality for many of our friends and neighbors. Lack of food in a community, especially healthy food, decreases the likelihood that residents will live healthy lives.

Because community food pantries often have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables to provide to families, Extension manages food donation gardens in Metropolis and Cairo.

Growing our capacity in Metropolis

The Plant a Row, Watch COPE Grow Garden in Metropolis entered its third year of growing in 2021. We continued our partnership with COPE Food Pantry and Max Russell to grow and deliver all produce grown at the garden site to the pantry for distribution. Local high school students built and installed new raised beds at the garden, while seven sponsors donated time, supplies, or funding to support the project.

Putting down roots in Cairo

Based on our garden model in Metropolis, Southern 7 Health Department approached us with interest in starting a similar garden in Cairo. We reached out to include Daystar Community Programs which operates a food pantry and soup kitchen. Together, we began The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden. Over the course of a few months, we transformed an empty gravel lot into a thriving garden.

Eight additional sponsors donated time, supplies, and funding to support the project. An enthusiastic group of volunteers dedicated many hours to growing this garden, growing our largest amount of produce in a single year to date.

Metropolis



Cairo



Follow progress at our gardens on Facebook
facebook.com/ThePilotGarden
facebook.com/PlantaRowWatchCOPEGrow

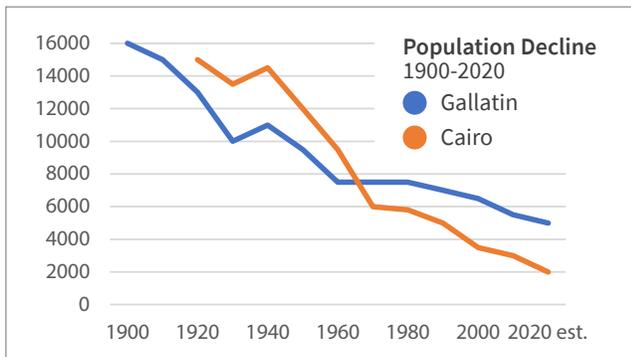
HEAT programs aims to improve healthy food options

Food Access



Research has drawn a strong connection between food insecurity and poor health and even academic outcomes of children. Food insecurity is not just about hunger. It's also about lacking access to the food options that provide adequate nutrition, particularly important for limited resourced individuals and families. Extension's network of volunteers and community partners create opportunities to address food insecurity in locally relevant ways.

In a unified effort to impact the lack of food access in the region, Extension units in southern and southeastern Illinois launched the Health Equity Achieved Together (HEAT) Project this fall. The project is designed to increase the availability of fresh and nutritious food in the impoverished areas of Gallatin County and Cairo, Ill.



These rural communities have seen significant population decline, losing up to 85% of their residents over the past century. This has resulted in the closure of grocery stores in these areas. Sixty-five to 70% of the remaining residents live under the SNAP poverty threshold. Over 15% of all residents are considered food insecure, meaning they lack of ready access to sufficient amounts of healthy, nutritious food. Households often travel 10 to 35 miles for access to grocery stores that have a full range of affordable fresh produce, non-processed meats, cheeses, milk, eggs, and other staples.

Although reintroducing viable, full-service grocery stores into these target communities is the ideal outcome, the HEAT team is also working to expand food access through increased food pantry operational capacity, exploring the introduction of mobile markets, improving coordination of farmers markets, and expansion of healthy food options at existing retail outlets.

The HEAT Project is a collaborative effort with local and state elected representatives, residents, and churches along with other partners including, Tri-State Food Bank, SI Food Pantry Network, Western Illinois University's Institute for Rural Affairs, Southern Illinois Healthcare, Southern Illinois Community Foundation, and Shawnee Community College Foundation.



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.

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Fax: (618) 524-3948

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All offices open
Monday - Friday
8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Closed 12 noon – 1 pm

ONLINE



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go.illinois.edu/unit27youtube

Cover photos: (Top Left) Harvest picked by Joan Floyd at The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden, (Top Right) Bishop Derek Eurales - Kim Rohling, Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy program coordinator at The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden; (Bottom Left) Caleb Pierce at 4-H Electricity Camp at Shawnee Community College, (Bottom Right) Kelli Stewart at Illinois Junior Chef held at Vienna High School

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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