



**Illinois Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

**2021** Addressing Local Needs,  
Solving Global Challenges  
Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside Counties

## A Message from the County Director

As I reflect on the past year in anticipation for the next, one word continues to come to mind: dedication. Despite the ongoing pandemic, we have consistently demonstrated our dedication to providing quality educational programming to help individuals, families, and youth live, learn, laugh, play, and work well in Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties.

Every day, our staff dedicate themselves to living out the Extension mission of putting learning and discovery into practice to benefit the health and well-being of all. Our staff have become experts in creatively responding to community needs while making gains on issues like food access, health and well-being, and workforce development. When I take a moment to think about the work we do and how it benefits the everyday lives of our friends and neighbors, it makes me beam with pride.

One thing is also abundantly clear: we do not do this work alone! With the help of our

dedicated 4-H volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists, our reach is maximized in Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties. Whether it's leading a 4-H club, providing education at a local farmers market, or working on special projects, our volunteers remain committed and engaged in our mission and walk alongside us for the benefit of our communities.

As you read this annual report, I hope you to discover the dedication, flexibility, creativity, and commitment of our Extension staff and volunteers. Witnessing their life-changing work has been my greatest honor and privilege as Acting County Director.

As we enter 2022, one thing is certain: we will remain dedicated to providing our communities with reliable, research-based education that has the power to change lives. Thank you for your continued support of University of Illinois Extension.

Karla Belzer  
Acting County Director



Karla Belzer  
Acting County Director

# Staff Serving Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside Counties



### WHITESIDE COUNTY STAFF

Janice McCoy  
Region 2 Interim Regional Director, County Director

Karla Belzer  
Acting County Director

Bruce Black  
Horticulture Educator

Martha Ebbesmeyer  
Youth Educator

Veronica Skaradzinski  
Extension Educator, SNAP-Ed

Mike Delany  
CED Educator

Allie Johnston  
4-H Program Coordinator

Mary Finney  
4-H Latino Program Coordinator

Mary Nelson  
Ag/Natural Resources Program Coordinator

Jane Shaw  
Office Support Assistant

Sheila Miller  
Community Worker, INEP

Marcia Cruse  
Program Coordinator, INEP

### CARROLL COUNTY STAFF

Susan O'Connor  
Marketing & Communications Program Coordinator

Molly Sedig  
4-H Program Coordinator

### LEE COUNTY STAFF

Kathy Book  
4-H Program Coordinator

Marilyn Kemmerer  
Ag/Natural Resources Program Coordinator

Mary Sheridan  
Office Support Specialist

# 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

<b>565</b> Illinois Communities Served	<b>335</b> Educational Sessions Per Week	<b>84</b> Online Courses
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### Partnerships Supported

<b>6,445</b> Adult Volunteers	<b>278</b> Community Gardens	<b>1,000</b> School Partnerships
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### Learners Engaged

<b>8,000,000</b> Website Users	<b>14,450</b> Online Course Users	<b>500,000</b> Educational Program Attendees
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### Resources Generated

<b>\$14,000,000</b> Value of Volunteer Contributions	<b>\$242,000</b> 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.



## 4-H Hall of Fame winners announced

Illinois 4-H volunteers empower and prepare youth for success as the program relies on its more than 15,000 volunteers to fill key leadership and mentoring roles. Longtime volunteers and former staff members were recently honored by the Illinois 4-H Foundation for their selfless dedication to the University of Illinois Extension 4-H youth development program. “These volunteers are a model of 4-H values,” says Angie Barnard, Illinois 4-H Foundation executive director. “All of our volunteers are valuable, but this award honors those that go above and beyond.” Local volunteers inducted into the 4-H Hall of Fame are Darci Francque, Chris Klein, and Nancy Dykstra.



### Carroll County

Darci Francque has been instrumental in creating experiential learning opportunities for the Lanark Lightning Bugs, has been an active member of the Carroll County 4-H Horse Committee, and a volunteer with the Boots ‘N Spurs 4-H Club. Darci was a 4-H member herself in the Lanark Larkers 4-H Club. She is always willing to lend a hand and help with anything and everything. Carroll County is thankful for all that she does!



### Lee County

Chris Klein has been an avid 4-H supporter in Lee County throughout her life. In 2002, Chris and her husband started the Maytown Comets 4-H Club. In the 18 years she served as a leader, she guided her 4-H members to do the best they can and learn new projects and leadership skills. Her role modeling led her five children and many nieces and nephews to be active 4-H members. She also has volunteered her time as fair superintendent and committee members in poultry and cat departments. Her dedication to the 4-H program has not gone unnoticed and has left a mark on countless 4-H families lives.



### Whiteside County

Nancy Dykstra was an 8-year member of the Cottonwood 4-H club of Morrison, Ill. in her youth. Years later, she became the leader of the very same club. She was a very hard-working leader for 10 years. Nancy led the club members to meet requirements and contributed to several services in the community. She was well known for encouraging the club members to be involved in everything they possibly could because, “It will look good on your award forms!” She not only had two children enrolled in 4-H, but she treated all members as her own. She is currently on the 4-H support fund committee and has been for 3 years.



[go.illinois.edu/CLWVolunteers](http://go.illinois.edu/CLWVolunteers)

## 2021 Outstanding Master Gardener Awards



The Master Gardener program trains volunteer individuals in the science and art of gardening. These individuals then pass on that information, as volunteers, in their communities, advising and educating the public on gardening and horticulture. The Outstanding State Award was established to honor the best of Illinois Master Gardeners, those whose breadth and depth of involvement in the program is exemplary. Three Carroll-Lee-Whiteside Master Gardeners were recognized this year as Outstanding Master Gardeners for 2021.

**Cheryl Christianson** has been an active and contributing member of the Whiteside County Master Gardener program since 2012. Cheryl’s contributions include, chair of the Demonstration Shade Garden and Tours, Adult Education Programs - speaker requests, Summer Children’s Garden presenter, and help desk mentor. Cheryl has assisted in a variety of community service educational projects, including Triangle Parks in Sterling and 78/30 in Morrison. Cheryl is an involved Master Gardener, happy to take on any role, leader or worker. She is often the first to volunteer for a project, program, or speaker request.



**Nancy Wadsworth** has been on the go ever since she joined the Lee County Master Gardeners in 2016. Nancy takes the lead in planning and presenting at many programs. She works with other Master Gardeners to develop lessons that are appropriate for the age groups and helps put together the needed supplies, visuals, or hands on materials for those programs, along with organizing Master Gardeners to present. Nancy’s favorite project is the Youth Garden she and another Master Gardener began in 2017. The Youth Garden runs throughout the spring and summer months with weekly lessons, and culminates in the youth showing their work at the 4 H Fair.



**Sherri Stauffer** has been a Master Gardener for five years with the Lee County Master Gardener program, and area citizens have benefited greatly from her knowledge and volunteer service. Sherri has given her time to many projects serving youth and adults. She was one of the initial planners for the Youth Garden in Dixon and the Preschool Garden Story Hour. She taught the Monarchs on the Move program at the local schools, staffed educational booths at events, answered help desk questions, recorded weekly radio spots, judged at the 4-H Fair, and brought her bin of worms to many events to teach about vermicomposting.





## 2021 Master Gardener Teamwork Awards

### Community Involvement and Leadership

*When people volunteer or advocate for a local issue, they see themselves as part of the solution and their community pride soars. Providing decision makers with practical, timely, and research-based information gives leaders the tools they need to strengthen their communities and improve the quality of life in rural and urban areas throughout Illinois.*

The Youth Summer Garden Program in Lee County is a collaborative effort between the disciplines of 4-H and Youth, and Horticulture. The program began in the spring of 2017 to address the needs of youth in Lee County for quality horticulture education. A committee of Master Gardeners worked to determine the best avenue to address the issue. Lee County had no gardening education available to youth. The program is structured to present in class time and garden time. Youth are exposed to hands-on education for part of their time and the other part of their visit is used to delve deeper into plants, plant varieties, care, uses, and growing options. Youth attend once a week throughout the late spring and summer months. They are there to plant, care for, and harvest the produce. Students that would like to may choose garden produce to show at the Lee County 4-H fair the last week of July.

The program has evolved from its beginnings of six raised beds and 10 youth to 10 beds and 50 youth served through the last four years. Master Gardener volunteers have contributed many hours to the garden. Produce from the garden has been used as 4-H projects, donated to food pantries and local hospitals, and provided tasting opportunities for all attendees. The Summer Youth Program is going strong and will continue to provide horticulture education to the youth of Lee County in the coming summers. It is an ever-changing program that adjusts and suits the needs of the attending students every year.

Working towards a goal like showing at the fair has been a wonderful bonus for youth who have not had a chance to experience what it is like to show.



Lee County Master Gardeners Inspire youth to garden.

## Heritage Canyon Project



The Heritage Canyon Project started as a request from the City of Fulton after the 2019 August derecho decimated the area between the chapel and mill pond sites. Whiteside County Master Gardeners were asked to provide expertise in restoring the landscape. Master Gardeners Judy Holesinger, Cheryl Christianson, and Colette Caffey-McMahon banded together with community members and partners to restore the site. Initial plantings of 50 different species were started in October 2020, with final plantings completed Spring 2021.

### Project Goals Attained:

- Restored landscaping in the area
- Each plant is clearly marked with common and scientific names
- Daily visitors to the area exposed to native and hybrid shade plants
- Yearly festivals with multiple visitors exposed to native and hybrid shade plants in a natural setting
- Developed a working relationship/partnership with community organizations, Extension partners



## Program support excellence

Mary Nelson is the agriculture and natural resource program coordinator for Whiteside County Extension. She works closely with extension staff, educators, and local partners to assess local programming needs. Mary is full of energy and passionate about helping and working closely with Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists volunteers to bring their wealth of knowledge to Whiteside County. She enjoys working with the community bringing fun, informational programs and offering learning opportunities.





(L to R) Téa Thomas (Whiteside Co), Olivia Charles (Carroll Co), Desiree Reid (Mercer Co.), Natalie Johnson (Ogle Co.)



## Hippology team named reserve champion



The Illinois 4-H State Hippology team's knowledge was tested at the Eastern National 4-H Roundup. They earned reserve champion honors. The team fielded a wide range of questions, ranging from breed identification, anatomy, tack identification, and feed samples to disease management, parasite identification, and quality assessment. The national reserve champion team includes Téa Thomas of Whiteside County, Olivia Charles of Carroll County, Desiree Reid of Mercer County, and Natalie Johnson of Ogle County.

Members also earned top billings in individual competition. Olivia Charles of Carroll County was named Hippology Overall High Point Individual. "Being a member of the team has given me study skills, teamwork abilities, and the knowledge to be successful in my college career and future occupation," says Olivia. "It has given me horse sense to give back to the industry and helped me be a well-spoken horse woman."

Being a member of the team has given me study skills, teamwork abilities, and the knowledge to be successful in my college career and future occupation.

**OLIVIA CHARLES**

In 4-H, learning about horses means much more than learning to ride. Through 4-H, young people with a passion for horses can participate in educational contests related to the equine industry regardless of whether they even own a horse. These educational programs enhance members' knowledge of horse health, breed characteristics, management, and feeding. To learn more, please visit the Illinois 4-H website. Illinois youth competing in the Eastern National 4-H Roundup are supported by the Illinois 4-H Foundation and its donors.



Olivia Charles  
Hippology Overall  
High Point Individual

## Lee County youth capitalizes on excess milk

14-year-old Brysen Full is a five-year member of the Maytown Comets 4-H Club. Being a 4-H member has given him the opportunity and self-confidence to raise and show Nigerian dwarf goats. His interest in goats was sparked after going to the 4-H fair as young child and visiting his favorite goat barn.

At age 10, Brysen bought his first goat. He decided to show goats at the fair because he liked the small breed of animal and their silly unique personalities. Three years ago, Brysen decided to breed his goats. As a result, he ended up having a surplus of goat milk. Capitalizing on this opportunity, Brysen tried his hand at making caramel, cheese, butter, ice cream, and soap.

Brysen's handmade soaps received rave reviews and had many people interested in buying them. To expand his offerings, Brysen experimented with making different fragrances and colors, and eventually decided to turn his soap making into a business, Soap-E-Goat. Brysen now sells his soaps at a local small business, Inspired Home Decor and Gifts, in Amboy, on Etsy, and at local craft and vendor shows. Goat soap has many benefits and is made of all natural ingredients. In the future, Brysen hopes to expand his business by making other specialty items with the goat milk.





## 4-H staff receive national awards for excellence

 Four University of Illinois Extension 4-H youth development staff received national recognition at the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals National Conference held in November in Memphis, Tenn. Service award honorees include Johnna Jennings, Jamie Boas, Alcha Corban, and Martha Ebbesmeyer.

The conference, a 75-year tradition, strengthens programming efforts and recognizes state and national 4-H youth development professionals. Service award winners are recognized for significant accomplishments in various stages of their career and for contributions to the 4-H youth development profession. Meritorious winners have 15 years or more service to Extension. Distinguished winners have seven or more years of service. Achievement in Service winners have tenure of three to seven years.

Local service award honoree Martha Ebbesmeyer provides positive youth development opportunities for youth in Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties. As Extension 4-H youth development educator, Ebbesmeyer trains 4-H volunteers and mentors four youth staff members. Her programming expertise includes youth gardening, teen leadership, 4-H camp counselor training, and healthy living programming.

The National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals is an internationally recognized non-profit, non-partisan association of professional youth development educators. NAE4-HYDP is one of the largest professional associations for youth development workers with a diverse membership of nearly 4,000 youth development professionals.

 [go.illinois.edu/CLW4H](http://go.illinois.edu/CLW4H)



## 4-H is Growing True Leaders

4-H youth programs are empowering and preparing Illinois youth for success both now and in the future.



## Opportunity4All

Advancing the mission for all youth in Illinois to be empowered and prepared for success.





## Teen counselors apply career development skills



4-H camp is more than zip lining, making new friends, and learning how to sing louder than others. For teen camp counselors, it is a chance to work as a member of a team, make decisions that impact program direction, and serve as a leader for participants, all skills that are traits of accomplished, future employees.

Successful positive youth development programs recognize the potential in youth and create a supportive and empowering environment, providing activities for youth to build their skills, and broaden their horizons.

KLISCH AND SOULE, 2021

Seventeen teens served as trained volunteer camp counselors over the course of three days during the 2021 northern Illinois 4-H day camp. When surveyed, 100% of respondents indicated they “worked in partnership with other teens and adults,” “made decisions that impacted the program,” and “taught lessons using hands-on activities with learning goals.” Providing an opportunity to plan and implement a day camp gives youth the chance to experience real-life job training that will benefit future employers. One camp counselor comments, “I’ll use the communication and compromising skills that I’ve learned at my future job.” Another notes, “I learned how to adapt to many different problems and situations.” Camp counselors worked with Extension staff from five counties, including Martha Ebbesmeyer, 4-H youth development educator, for Carroll, Lee and Whiteside counties.

## Extension meets Hispanic, Latino youth where they live



Mary Finney, Whiteside County Extension program coordinator, started working with the Latino community in 2019 by reaching out to Spanish speaking businesses and markets. Currently, Whiteside County has a 12.3% Hispanic/Latino population. One major barrier to Hispanic/Latino youth participation in community-based organizations is the fact that most adult caregivers have no prior experience with youth organizations. Adult caregivers often lack an understanding of the benefits of youth organizations and how to access them. Most importantly, they often feel no connection to youth organizations, which erodes trust.

Gaining trust is essential, and having a bilingual/bicultural 4-H outreach coordinator is key to successful programming. Unlike Hispanic/Latino youth, Hispanic/Latino adults typically have limited proficiency in English. Creating marketing material in both English and Spanish made 4-H opportunities more accessible to all families. Materials were disbursed at stores, schools, and community events to increase interest in 4-H opportunities. Interest increased in 2020 with the delivery of the first visual arts club and photography club held for Whiteside County.



In March of 2021, a 12-lesson cooking club welcomed youth who were coming back to in-person learning. The cooking club included exploring food science experiments, preparing recipes, practicing kitchen safety, and discovering information on healthy eating and herbs/spices. Learning new recipes, trying new vegetables, and experiencing different textures and flavors was exciting for all youth. One youth started the club with only liking broccoli. By the end of the club, the youth tried all the vegetables and reported to the club that he now loves cooking with onions and other herbs at home. Other youth shared how they started to help in the kitchen at home more after attending this club.

Eighty percent of the youth registered for the cooking club also participated in other club experiences in 2021. By cultivating relationships with the youth and their families, they develop a comfort level with 4-H which encourages continued engagement in the program. Trust is gained and understanding of the benefits of Extension programs grows. Building on shared experiences and mutual understanding, engagement with Latino youth continues to develop. Illinois Extension is committed to providing quality educational programming and opportunities for Hispanic/Latino youth while working to strengthen and enhance relationships that started two short years ago.



## Youth involvement in archery

### Thriving Youth

*Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Illinois Extension's mentorship-based youth development model focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive now and in the future.*

Youth thrive when they are engaged in activities and have opportunities to interact with their peers. Whiteside County 4-H recruited passionate volunteers to provide a special interest club focused on skill development, mastery, and friendship. Shooting sports volunteers Nathan Eggers, Teresa Galloway, Chris Yaun, and Lucas Bush started an archery special interest club in Whiteside County. They actively encouraged youth to join the club. Following all state safety guidelines, the club teaches responsibility and archery safety, as well as provides opportunities to make new friends. During club sessions, 4-H families stay and watch their child, truly making the archery club a family affair.

For the past two years, despite the pandemic, the archery club remained strong. The Whiteside Extension office in Sterling proved to be an excellent location for archery as it provides both indoor and outdoor shooting space. Participants shoot in both areas, making the club a year-round activity for youth ages 8 to 18. Many participants enjoyed the club so much that they put bow and arrows on their Christmas lists. Youth look forward to the archery club each month and learn something new at each session.

Youth report that shooting sports programs provide growth in decision making, teamwork, self-discipline, self-confidence, and problem solving while they learn the highest standards of safety, sportsmanship, and ethical behavior. The program also builds an understanding and appreciation of natural resources,

leadership abilities, and positive relationships with peers and adult mentors.

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, supportive families, and enthusiastic youth, the archery club not only develops archery skills, but also encourages and enhances friendships!



[go.illinois.edu/4HShootingSports](https://go.illinois.edu/4HShootingSports)

### *Cloverbuds Can* encourages learning for youth 5 to 7 years of age

Research states that 80% of lifespan learning occurs before the age of 8. Children ages 5-7 have a unique opportunity to engage in an exploratory 4-H program that meets kids' developmental needs through creativity and play in the 4-H Cloverbud program. Cloverbud clubs may be independent clubs or they may meet at the same time as a 4-H multi-project club with a special time set aside just for Cloverbuds. When the world was stuck at home, it was difficult for youth to connect with fun learning activities outside of school. In response to this need, Carroll-Lee-Whiteside Extension invited youth to participate in Cloverbuds Can, a virtual Cloverbud club.

Starting in January, nine families enrolled in the club and met seven times, exploring a new topic each time. Families received a supply kit with everything they needed to explore 4-H and interact with one another. Through games, scavenger hunts, and activities, youth were able to try on different hats, even becoming paleontologists by excavating dinosaur "fossils." By the end of the final club session, everyone knew the words to the 4-H Pledge and had a sense of camaraderie, community, curiosity to continue trying new things, including a love of scavenger hunts. Signing off of Zoom for the last time, families, youth, and Extension staff were sad the experience was over.

Through pivoting to a digital format, Cloverbuds **can** learn, play, experience, and grow!



## Helping Whiteside County youth, one bite at a time

Recently, countless studies have demonstrated a strong connection between food insecurity and poor health and academic outcomes of children. For many years, United Way of Whiteside County, through its “Let’s Feed Our Children” summer meal program, worked to address nutrition deficits in the local community. With the aim of providing free meals to all children during the summer, this program is completely reliant on volunteers and donations which differentiates it from other federal summer-meal programs. Even with these unique factors, there are still many concerns, including limitations in funding for quality food, storage, aging staffing/volunteers, and reaching all children in need in a large county.

As part of University of Illinois Extension’s “Health Equity Achieved Together” initiative, a cross-disciplinary team from Illinois Extension’s Whiteside office, including colleagues from SNAP-Ed, Community and Economic Development, and Marketing, saw an opportunity to launch and fund a planning project to assist in addressing a number of these concerns. The project is intended to foster collaboration among community partners while bringing partners together to develop strategies to improve access to food in the communities and to increase the nutritional value of the meal programs.

Although still early in the two-year timeline, the Extension team has succeeded in creating a broad-based regional committee which is working to collect community input to better define the region’s needs and to develop appropriate and viable solutions. The team is optimistic that, through this innovative and collaborative approach, potentially thousands of youth in Whiteside County will be better equipped to lead healthy, productive lives for generations to come. The project has the potential to be replicated in neighboring counties and positively impact the lives of even more children.



## 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.

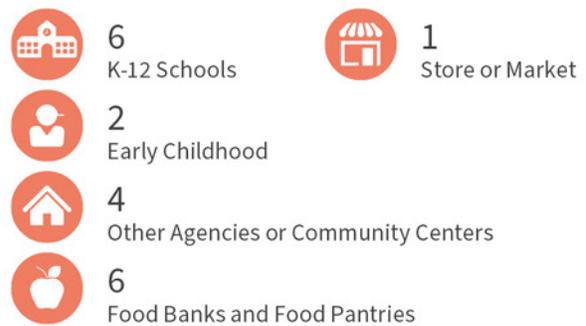
### Reach and Impact of SNAP-Education

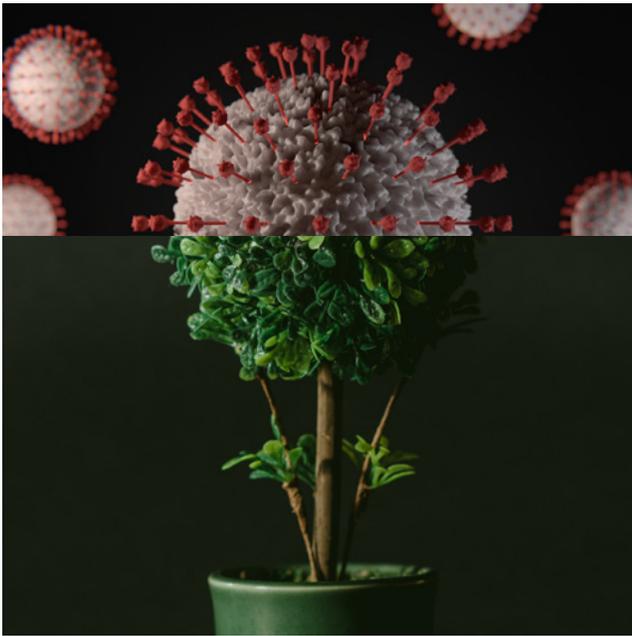


- 17% Face-to-face
- 83% Virtual or online

Parents who attended the Eat Play Grow virtual classes led by SNAP-Ed were encouraged to be active with their preschoolers. At one session, they make a musical instrument from a paper cup. They were instructed to do different activities while playing the instrument. Several parents commented how much fun it was and how good they felt! Several later shared they now have do this daily with their children using the instruments.

### SNAP-Education Community Partnerships





## Maximizing health for everyone

*Maintaining positive mental health is a growing area of concern across the life span and all walks of life. The global pandemic has magnified this crisis with additional social, economic, and life challenges. Illinois residents need to know where to turn for strategies and resources to help them and their families cope with the myriad of stressors that threaten mental health.*



To enhance mental and social wellness among older adults in Lee County, the Lee County Master Gardeners pressed on in providing horticulture lessons in 2021, despite the continuing pandemic. Partnering with Heritage Square Senior Living Facility in Dixon, Master Gardener volunteers created ways to connect and enrich the lives of residents of the facility.

Prior to the pandemic, Master Gardeners provided monthly horticulture lessons to residents at the living facility. Due to public health concerns related to the pandemic, the location was shut down, visitors were not allowed, and residents were not receiving any outside visitors or any supplemental services. Recognizing the resident needs for contact and stimulation, several Lee County Master Gardeners developed presentations with voice recordings for the center to reduce social isolation.

Jean Gornik, director of activities from Heritage Square, showed each educational program twice to limit the number of individuals in the room. Residents eagerly anticipated “seeing” someone every month during the presentations and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to leave their rooms. Through the hard work of dedicated volunteers, residents were able to view the recordings and enjoy fun-filled lessons. Through this small, but innovative approach, Master Gardeners provided research-based gardening information using Illinois Extension resources to enhance the well-being of others during a difficult time.

## Extension conducts food pantry assessment

Many Illinois families rely on assistance from food pantries to access nutritional foods and stretch their food budget. Local food pantries work diligently to meet the needs of the local community and work tirelessly to secure fresh, nutritional foods for local individuals and families. To help food pantries best serve their clientele, Illinois Extension’s SNAP-Ed team conducted a Nutrition Environment Food Pantry Assessment Tool (NEFPAT) assessment at several pantries to establish an initial baseline for improvement.



With the assistance of the team, the Prophetstown Food Pantry received Silver Status through the Nutrition Environment Tool in recognition of its efforts to improve the environment of the pantry. The team provided the pantry with guidance on establishing bundling options to showcase healthier food options in the pantry. As an example, the team provided resources featuring food items that can be served together, such as brown rice, canned tomatoes, ground beef, black pepper, and chili powder to make a Texas Hash recipe. Efforts also included introducing healthy message signage and placing unhealthy food items further out of sight. Through this work, the pantry learned that, to increase healthier options, they needed to offer more fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors and forms (can, fresh, and frozen). Encouraging intake of more fresh fruit and vegetables choices and providing access to a variety of fruit and vegetables curbs the likelihood of developing obesity and chronic diseases.





## Carroll County Master Gardeners raise awareness on cooking simple, nutritious recipes



Research has drawn a strong connection between food insecurity and poor health. 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.

Parents want to be able to serve their families nutritious meals, but having the knowledge on cooking or knowing what ingredients to use is sometimes hard. Master Gardeners in Carroll County have made it their mission to help battle this issue by holding classes on how to grow, harvest, and cook nutritious meals using herbs.

The first workshop, "Herb of the Month," was held in 2014 with just a few participants at a local library learning about 12 herbs and tasting them in simple recipes. Over the next few years, the workshop grew in participation and at other locations. The programs ranged from using a hot plate in the libraries to creating a full meal in a community commercial kitchen.

Over time, participants learned that cooking with herbs was not difficult. At every workshop, participants received nutritious recipes to share with family and friends, as well as education on how to grow and preserve herbs if they so desired. As each herb has a set of health-promoting properties, adding them to our daily recipes is very beneficial.

Master Gardeners take pride in the fact that this program has grown over time and raises awareness on cooking skills and cooking nutritious meals.



Cooking with Herbs



67  
Total Trained Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Volunteers



3,784  
Total Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Hours



\$111,129  
Value of Volunteer Work



## How to get ahead in gardening without really trying

If you'd love a steady supply of fresh vegetables, the tried-and-true gardening practice of succession planting is for you! What is succession gardening? It is simply the act of planting crops at different times so you have an uninterrupted supply of fresh produce. A big advantage to succession planting is to squeeze more production out of a limited space. Whiteside County Master Gardener Charlin Nolan introduced veteran and novice gardeners to succession planting.

Succession gardening techniques provides access to healthy, nutritious food options. Simple steps, such as planting every two to three weeks, allows for harvesting at peak ripeness. In addition, planting different families in succession significantly reduces pest problems, a key issue with backyard gardens. To encourage residents to adopt succession gardening. The Whiteside Master Gardeners held a Succession Garden Tour. The tour included a demonstration at the Sterling Garden site where participants observed the practices being used and walked the garden to see the techniques in progress.

Charlin shares, "The cooler weather really brings the flavor out in your greens and many root crops." Most participants admitted to putting their gardens to bed in the fall, unaware they could continue to grow in the cooler season. Half the participants said they will try continuous gardening next year.





## Issues facing food production

*Illinois needs a 70% increase in production to meet the global demand for food by 2050. Food production accounts for 6% of Illinois jobs.*

Four years ago, a group of concerned community members noted high rates of food insecurity in Lee County. To respond to this local need, residents created the Dixon Community Garden. Within one year of the project starting, 92% of available gardening beds were rented by individuals, families, and organizations wanting a place to grow their own fresh food or grow food for donation.

By 2021, as yearly expansions provided more gardening opportunities, the Dixon Community Gardens now consists of three gardens with a growing capacity of 42 garden beds. Some garden beds are reserved to incorporate pollinator pockets, creating pollinator habitats to help increase number of pollinators, establish perennial crops (asparagus, rhubarb and strawberries), and rent out for food donations to local organizations.

- Since 2018, 96 beds of food have been grown in these gardens.
- Lee County Master Gardeners and KSB Hospital use six beds as donation gardens.
- Lee County Master Gardeners and Dixon Community Gardens created a community space for growing, learning, and natural exploration.



Just want to thank you and the other members of the garden committee that planted the rhubarb and strawberries. Today I took some of the strawberries for our lunch, and they were absolutely delicious! I had never really gone through a strawberry patch before, and I was so surprised to find those beautiful bright red strawberries there! And the rhubarb was new for me, too, as I had never made pies with it before, but I was able to make two strawberry rhubarb pies this spring. It has quickly become my new favorite! So, thanks for all that thinking ahead you did a couple years ago planting those garden beds for us to enjoy.

COMMUNITY MEMBER



## Agriculture & Natural Resources Activities



180  
Educational Sessions



4,857  
Participants



7,956  
ANR Program Attendance

## I-Rural: Helping rural communities address tourism needs

Rural communities and rural community governments lack resources to develop planning on a host of issues. In one effort to help fill this resource gap, Illinois Extension's Community and Economic Development team is collaborating with on-campus professors from the university's Department of Recreation Sport and Tourism on a two-year project designed to help rural tourism communities, including Savanna in Carroll County, "examine the demand for rural tourism and assess rural tourists' preferences (e.g., motivations, expectations, decision-making, and travel behaviors) so as to develop rural tourism experiences that match their expectations and preferences." (Soulard et al. 2018; Zou, 2020).

The collaboration kicked off its work in Savanna in May 2021, when Extension organized a two-day site visit for Illinois professors working on the project, including a series of interviews with local stakeholders and community leaders. The team followed this up in July with a visioning session with community members held at the Savanna Museum and Cultural Center to explore Savanna's strengths and improvement opportunities and to envision Savanna's tourism future.

This work will be used to develop a survey targeting tourists in Illinois and surrounding states to understand their motivations and preferences. Finally, the team will report their findings to Savanna and the other communities in a series of webinars that include recommendations for tourism strategies.

The team's work has been well received by Savanna's residents. Participants are appreciative of the opportunity the visioning session presented, allowing them to have conversations with other community members with whom they might not otherwise have come into contact. From our perspective, this looks like a good example of the services and support that Extension can deliver to the communities of northwestern Illinois.



CED Educator Mike Delany chatting with Savanna Resident Ann Zink.



[go.illinois.edu/iRuralSavanna](https://go.illinois.edu/iRuralSavanna)



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.*



## Social and Emotional Health

Mental health has been a growing concern across the life span and all walks of life. The global pandemic has magnified this crisis with additional social, economic, and life challenges. Illinois residents need to know where to turn for strategies and resources to help them and their families cope with the myriad of stressors that threaten mental health.

## Illinois Couples: Stronger in 2021

Maintaining a healthy and supportive relationship is a trying endeavor for many couples. Researchers agree that unmitigated, chronic relationship distress can significantly impair the health and well-being of individuals, their families, and the broader community. The uncertainty and stressors of the present times can test even the strongest of relationships.

It has given us communication skills to build upon what we are already doing. We are going into a stressful time of year at work and these skills have helped us manage how that stress impacts our communication and relationships.  
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

With the aim of rapidly responding to distressed couples, as well as proactively supporting healthy relationships, the Illinois Strong Couples project was launched. Featuring an interdisciplinary team of university faculty and Extension educators, the project provided e-PREP, an online, evidence-based relationship education program. Couples complete the six-session program at their convenience in their own home and meet bi-weekly with a coach who reinforces the online material, guides structured exercises, and provides encouragement as the couple progresses through the program. Karla Belzer, family life educator, was one of three coaches who was first trained to deliver this innovative program in the state.

Couples have reported improved confidence in their relationship, an increased sense of being a team and working together. Additionally, evaluation outcomes demonstrated that couples experienced decreased anger, psychological distress, and perceived stress. The program is clearly working to make stronger couples in Illinois!



In the past year, since launching the program:

<b>375</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>80</b>
Individuals Completed the Program Interest Survey	Couples Enrolled	Couples Coached	Hours of Coaching through Video Calls

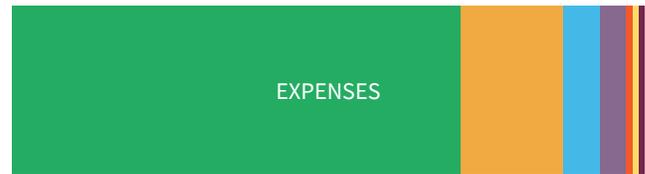


For more information on program dates, contact **Karla Belzer at [kbelzer@illinois.edu](mailto:kbelzer@illinois.edu) (815) 632-3611**

## Funding



- 40% County Government
- 34% Federal Funds (including SNAP)
- 23% State Match & Ag Premium
- 2% Gifts & Donations
- 1% Program Income



- 71% Salaries
- 16% Program Expenses
- 6% Leases
- 4% Benefits
- 1% Administrative Costs
- 1% Utilities
- 1% Equipment

## Extension Council members

Thank you to the individuals who serve on our CLW Extension Council. The Extension Council provides guidance to Extension staff when determining programming and outreach efforts.

### Carroll County

- Nikki Ebersole, Milledgeville
- Marcia Zell, Mt. Carroll
- Rachel Hill, Milledgeville
- Deeann Kramer, Thomson

### Lee County

- Teresa Smith, Dixon
- Melissa Feit, Dixon
- Ethel Richards, Amboy
- Jennifer Lang, Dixon
- Emily Zimmerman, Dixon
- Eileen Piper, Amboy

### Whiteside County

- Gordon Kelm, Tampico
- Pam Martinez, Rock Falls
- AJ Segneri, Sterling
- Mark Ward, Prophetstown
- Abbey DeShane, Erie

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## 2021 LOCAL SUPPORT

1st Gateway Credit Union • A.C. McCartney • Adolph Red Angus • Ackland Family • Albany Township • Amboy Township • Argo Acres Bayer-Ashton Soybean Production Site • Baylor Family • Boehle Family • Broers Family • Brothers Restaurant  
Carroll County Farm Bureau • Chadwick Lamplighters HCE • Chicago Road Shopper • Clark Carroll Insurance • Cobane Air Freight Community State Bank • Dickson Family • Dirks Auto Service • Dixon Township • Dollinger Tree Farm • Eastland Fabrication Elkhorn Grove Township • Farmer's National Bank • Fassig Family • Fenton Township • First National Bank in Amboy • Flowers Etc. Forth Family • Fulton Saddle Club / In memory of Herb Combs • Gentry Family • Gerken Farm • Gleissner Family  
Gorman Farms Trucking • Hahnman Township • Hall Family • Hand Family • Hoelzer Family • Hoffman Family • Hopkins Township Hoyles Just Right Feeds • In Memory of Allan Esgar • In Memory of Donald Ramsdell • In Memory of Otto & Thelma Oleson  
In Memory of Rory & Ryan Miller • In Memory of Norma Bushman • Janssen Family • Jensen Family • Jo-Carroll Energy • Johnson Family Jones Family • Kenney Family • Koster Family • Lake Carroll Women's Club • Lee County Extension Foundation  
Lee County Pork Producers • Leffelman & Associates • Lyndon Township • McCormick Nursery & Landscaping • McCoy Family Meusel's Dairy Delite • Morrison Veterinary Clinic • Northern IL Diesel • Northern Illinois Vet Services • Open Lotus Massage Palmyra Township • Peterson Farm • Pine Hill Goats • Pinkerton-Riegel Family • Rock River Lumber & Grain • Sawyer Family Scott's Electric • Selmi's Greenhouse • Sterling Kiwanis • Shank's Vet Equipment • Soaring Eagles 4H Club • State Farm Morrison Stenzel Family • Sub-Let Indians 4-H Club • Sullivan Foods • Swegle Family • The Special Touch • Treter Family • United Hairlines Vaessen Family • Vandermyde Family • Veterinary Clinic of Prophetstown • Whiteside Co Pork Producers • Willow Creek Township Woodland Township • Wyoming Indians 4-H Club • Young Family

Thank you to the individuals and businesses who locally supported our funding efforts in 2021.

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## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Whiteside Main Office

12923 Lawrence Rd.  
Sterling, IL 61081  
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Fax: (815) 716-8922

### Lee Branch Office

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(815) 857-3525  
Fax: (815) 857-3527

### Carroll Branch Office

642 S. East St.  
Mt. Carroll, IL 61053  
(815) 244-9444  
Fax: (815) 244-3708

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## ONLINE



/UofIExtensionCLW



[go.illinois.edu/clw](http://go.illinois.edu/clw)



[uie-clw@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-clw@illinois.edu)

Cover photos: (top left) Lee County 4-H Ambassador helping youth at Dixon Scarecrow Fest, (top right) Master Gardener showing off her floral design arrangement at volunteer banquet, (bottom left) Youth learning to sew at 4-H Sewing SPIN Club, (bottom right) Whiteside County 4-Her showing her cat at the 4-H Show.

**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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