



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

2021 Addressing Local Needs,
Solving Global Challenges
DuPage, Kane, and Kendall Counties



Deanna Roby-Vorgias
County Director

A Message from the County Director

Sometimes, it's hard not to look back, especially after two years full of challenges. We may examine the obstacles or contemplate choices, but we also should recognize efforts and celebrate successes.

At Extension, it is our mission to bring applied research and education to all Illinois counties, enhancing five essential areas – community, economy, environment, food, and health. Connected to a statewide network of educators and resources, our county-based framework allows us to better address local issues and needs.

Each day, our volunteers, participants, partners, and staff do great work in our communities. The difference these people and programs make can be hard to measure but easily felt through real stories, like those featured in this report.

Reflecting on the past is important, but we also want to keep moving ahead. We strive to respond to evolving and emerging needs with the goal of meaningful, positive outcomes. We look forward to continuing to serve our great communities in 2022 and beyond.

Deanna Roby-Vorgias
County Extension Director

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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.



Community garden feeds neighbors by the truckload

Photo contributed by Plano Community Garden.



Master Gardeners lead record donations

Master Gardeners Connie Hatter and Hillard Bryant did not intend to set records; yet each year, they reach a new milestone with their leadership at the Plano Community Garden. In 2021, that meant growing and donating 12,661 pounds of fresh produce to the Kendall County Community Food Pantry.

Since the duo has been at the helm, the garden has donated more than 59,000 pounds of produce. They may even tip over the 60,000-mark with the 2022 spring crops.

“The garden originally only planted tomatoes and peppers, and when we took over the garden, we put our heads together and decided we could increase our produce by adding cool weather crops,” said Hatter.

Today, they still grow and donate varieties of tomatoes and peppers, and they have added cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, kale, squash, and even pumpkins, all for the pantry.

Making it available here is a significant blessing to small and large families alike. There are thousands of children exposed to healthy, fresh produce each year who would have otherwise very likely been offered much less healthy items.

GREG WITEK, KCCFP CHAIRMAN

“There are thousands of children exposed to healthy, fresh produce each year who would have otherwise very likely been offered much less healthy items,” said Greg Witek, board chairman of the Kendall County Community Food Pantry, Inc. “At-risk and financially-challenged families are regularly faced with the dilemma of where to aim their limited funds. In these cases, fresh produce is rarely considered a must-have. Making it available here is a significant blessing to small and large families alike.”

“We can focus on what we do well, distribution, and trust the community garden and Master Gardeners to identify, grow, and harvest healthy food,” he said. “Each arrival on Thursday morning is a special time with Connie’s enthusiasm, in her regularly overloaded pick-up truck, with a big smile, ready to show us what she’s delivering.”

In 2021 alone, Bryant and Hatter put in 1,289 hours of volunteer time at the garden. They are helped by a small but mighty set of Master Gardeners, as well as community garden members.

“We have some awesome gardeners who have stepped up as volunteers in the pantry plots, and we even have a family that doesn’t garden, but they volunteer every summer,” said Hatter. “It is a lot of hard work, but well worth the enjoyment of knowing you are doing something good for the community. It’s a way to help neighbors, and you just never know when you might need some help.”



Rooted in community. Growing through connection.

County Extension offices now have the support of two new program areas — **Agriculture and Agribusiness** and **Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy** — to strengthen the economic viability and environmental sustainability of Illinois agriculture, natural resources, and community natural assets.



Access to Statewide Programs



Webinar series and online resources include:

- Master Gardener online training
- Four Seasons gardening webinars
- Small Farms webinar series
- Everyday Environment webinars
- Pesticide Safety Education program
- Certified Livestock Manager training
- Cropflix online CCA education
- Good Growing podcast and blog
- Nutrient Loss Reduction podcast
- farmdoc webinars and farmdoc daily posts
- Teacher resources on pollution prevention, weather & climate, and water quality

 Find webinars
<https://go.illinois.edu/AAB-NREE>

Naturalist program continues to grow



In 2009, University of Illinois Extension of DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties debuted the Master Naturalist program. A small but enthusiastic group of 12 made up the first class, and as of 2021, more than 182 local residents have been trained.

In fact, the tri-county Master Naturalist program now makes up more than 10% of the entire state’s Master Naturalists. In 2021, they also logged 6,563 volunteer hours.

“I love being a Master Naturalist. The experience has taught me so much, opened doors, and introduced me to a bunch of amazing people,” said Vicky Torgerson, who was trained in 2016. “Through knowledge comes appreciation and through that, conservation.”

Torgersen fondly recalls living and playing near a wooded property with a creek, pond, and swamp when she was a child. Now, that land is part of the Oswegoland Park District, and she was reintroduced to it on a Master Naturalist field project. “I have done most of my volunteer hours restoring the land that gave me so much growing up,” she said.

Following training, Master Naturalists share their knowledge and efforts by volunteering with a variety of organizations, including the Conservation Foundation, Fermilab Natural Areas, the Jurica-Suchy Nature Museum, Lyon Farm, Morton Arboretum, Scout programs, wildlife centers, and local forest preserves and park districts.

Work includes, but is not limited to, assisting in natural areas management, teaching adults or children about natural areas, giving presentations to local groups, acting as a liaison between natural resource agencies and the public, serving as a resource person to groups in need of natural resource assistance, and participating in citizen scientist activities.

2021 Master Naturalist intern Iris Overstreet Strupp has already cleared invasives and organized an educational presentation, a trash pick-up, and an e-waste collection. She also works closely with the Brookfield Conservation Commission.

“This time last year, I didn’t even know this program existed,” said Overstreet Strupp. “And now it’s become such a fulfilling part of my life.”

I love being a Master Naturalist. I have always loved nature, and I want to know everything I can about life. The experience has taught me so much, opened doors, and introduced me to a bunch of amazing people.

VICKY TORGERSON



Kane County Hunger Relief Network builds connections



SNAP-Education team spearheads community network

The challenges of 2020 led the way to collaboration and solutions in Kane County. The new Kane County Hunger Relief Network (KCHRN), facilitated by the University of Illinois Extension SNAP-Education team, connects county hunger relief agencies and resources to each other to better serve residents.

“This group includes essential stakeholders and decision makers that can improve the local hunger relief system,” said Kim Peterson, AOK Early Childhood Network coordinator at the Kane County Health Department. “It can help coordinate efforts, share resources when applicable, and implement new strategies around improving nutrition, delivery methods, access, programming, and cultural and linguistic competency.”

The goal of the KCHRN is to help residents understand the services available, what they need to access them, and what to expect when visiting a hunger relief organization.

“This is key when working with a large immigrant population,” added Peterson.

I genuinely love working with the Extension because they are very knowledgeable and offer specific expertise that is not found elsewhere.
KIM PETERSON, KANE CO. HEALTH DEPT.

The new group met throughout 2021, establishing a strategic plan with a mission, vision, and goals. KCHRN also became a partner in the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) to address hunger needs collaboratively.

“The network has impacted our local community by connecting us to the other agencies and organizations,” said Lynn Queen, resident service coordinator assistant with Mercy Housing, Batavia Apartments. “Because of KCHRN, we also have a refrigerator which has been a need for years. This will allow us to provide healthy cold items to our residents through our pantry.”

The network team helped Mercy Housing secure an AETNA Better Health Cold Storage Grant. Previously, there was no cooling system at the site, and now the pantry can offer options like dairy, eggs, and more fresh produce.

In addition to grant guidance, Extension staff play an important role in planning, leadership, and sharing education, resources, and professional development opportunities.

“I genuinely love working with Extension because they are very knowledgeable and offer specific expertise that is not found elsewhere,” Peterson said. “They are holistic, collaborative, and innovative in their thinking, so it is very easy and rewarding to work with them. They have a ‘can do’ attitude and are natural leaders and participants who are valuable to many groups.”



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



12,033
Total Estimated Reach



339
Number of Nutrition Education Classes Provided

TYPE OF CLASSES

- 3% Face-to-face
- 97% Virtual or online

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships



30
K-12 Schools



7
Early Childhood



7
Other Agencies or Community Centers



21
Food Banks and Food Pantries

Community outreach meets people where they live and learn

In addition to supporting food pantry sites, SNAP-Education staff work within the communities they serve through partnerships with schools, early childhood programs, community centers, residential groups, and other agencies.

Bilingual resources benefit families

SNAP-Education staff present about nutrition and budgeting in both English and Spanish for groups like Metropolitan Family Services in DuPage County. To supplement lessons, the team also provides bilingual resources and budget-friendly recipes.

“Our families are in need of nutrition education and ideas for healthful meal selection and preparation on a budget,” said Maureen Lamperis, Early Childhood Health and Nutrition manager, Metropolitan Family Services. “Parents asked questions and shared experiences regarding their children’s nutritional needs. The presenter does great answering them and giving tips on changes they could make.”

Programs teach all ages to reach generations

The SNAP-Education team works with a variety of ages, from adult lessons to youth camps and programs.

“The youth are always excited to try new food items. Many of them have never cracked an egg, used a whisk, or made their own meal,” said Lynn Queen of Mercy Housing’s Batavia Apartments. “The parents are thrilled to have their children participate with meals at home and share the knowledge they have learned with them. Personally, I made the apple nachos for my children, and they have created them for their friends who asked for other recipes. I think the programs have such a positive ripple effect on healthy eating habits when everyone shares this knowledge.”

Queen also said the adult nutrition program is the highest attended program they offer. “We are a very diverse property with many cultures represented. Regardless of culture, food brings residents together. I see how much they all enjoy preparing, cooking, and learning together.”

The property houses more than 600 residents, and while not every one attends an educational program, Extension reaches them. It may be through educational materials sent to each apartment, recipe cards at the food distribution events, signs in the garden, or a simple friendly exchange.

“They all take the time to conduct or visit the programs, talk, and listen to our needs and struggles, and help create a plan and obtain resources for our residents,” Queen said. “Our residents’ health is directly affected in a positive manner because of U of I Extension.”





SNAP-Education team layers lessons to connect students and staff

From apples and blackberries to yams and zucchini, there is a wide variety of fruits and vegetables to choose from, yet many of us make the same choices over and over. To expand their horizons, McCleery Elementary School students tried new foods during a Snack Smart Taste Test with SNAP-Education.

Students were encouraged to use their five senses and try various fruits and vegetables including blueberries, golden kiwi, papaya, beets, sugar snap peas, and white carrots. Some students tried foods for the first time, and others were surprised by what they liked.

“My students loved the fruit and vegetable tasting,” said Nikki Losiniecki, McCleery teacher and garden advisor. “Students had to describe and guess what they were tasting by using their senses. I loved watching them taste, feel, and smell each piece.”

The experience was featured on bulletin boards and discussed with all students during P.E. classes, highlighting the nutrition message to “eat a rainbow,” or a variety, fruits, and vegetables.

P.E. teacher Alex Shaw appreciates the connection the SNAP-Education lessons make across the school. He worked with Extension to promote hydration with a water bottle raffle.

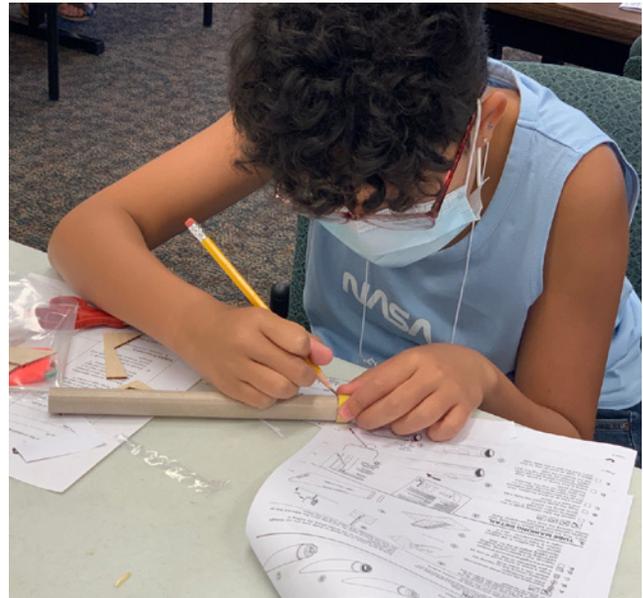
“Students were presented with pictures of staff water bottles and had to guess which water bottle belonged to which staff member,” he explained. “Not only did students gain information about hydration and nutrition, they were excited to play along with staff members and encouraged them to drink more water throughout the day. I like working with Extension because it brings an outside resource into the building to help validate the information I’ve been sharing with students.”



Students tried and reacted to new fruits and vegetables during a SNAP-Education program at McCleery School in Aurora.

Over the years, University of Illinois Extension has been a great resource. The team comes in with all the supplies needed to provide a wonderful and fun activity. Everything is prepared in advance and ready to go, which makes the lesson smooth and time efficient. I look forward to the future of our partnership.

NIKKI LOSINIECKI, GARDEN CLUB ADVISOR



4-H offered two summer STEM camps with Yorkville Public Library, and both filled quickly. Youth completed fun, hands-on, age-based activities. Older students even built and launched rockets.

Sold out STEM camp helps students launch into summer, retain skills



Over summer break, students can lose important math, reading, and science skills. With this in mind, 4-H partners with libraries, park districts, and other organizations to create fun, educational programs to keep kids engaged and learning.

4-H worked with Yorkville Public Library to offer an in-person STEM-themed camp. Both sessions of the three-day program filled, giving 50 youth the opportunity to have hands-on learning about environmental science, aerospace, entomology, and more, all with age-appropriate lessons.

Older youth even built and launched their own rockets! In addition to gaining STEM-related knowledge, they also practiced problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, and communication skills.

Participants learned how to be better environmental citizens, and were exposed to new topics and potential careers. Most also were introduced to 4-H for the first time, increasing awareness and interest for youth development programs.



4-H teens plan and plant garden to demonstrate conservation



Teen leaders focus attention on water quality and nitrogen run-off

4-H Teen Science Ambassadors put their knowledge to work creating a rain garden to raise awareness for this conservation practice, promote water quality, and fight against pollution.

In 2020, local 4-H teens learned about water quality and conservation through the Ag Innovators Experience: Water Connects Us All, sponsored by National 4-H Council and Bayer CropScience. They learned suburban areas, like Chicagoland, contribute to the problem, often with lawn care practices. In 2021, the group built on that learning experience and developed a presentation about how rain gardens improve water quality and went on to start a rain garden with a grant from Nutrien.

“These are complex issues with complex solutions,” said 4-H Teen Science Ambassador Matias Habib. “The Nutrien Rain Garden project has been very enlightening because it enables everyone – you, your neighbors, your community – to take action now in helping to protect our water. People want to help, but they often aren’t aware of the problem or the solution.”

In spring, the team chose a site in Kendall County. They researched and selected native plants based on growing conditions and availability. By July, the teens had prepped the area and planted 700 plants representing several species of native perennials. Local firm Pizzo and Associates provided technical assistance and plants at production cost, and Kendall

County Master Gardeners offered guidance and advice. The 4-H members learned the challenges of keeping a new garden watered and weeded throughout the summer and fall, as they also scripted, filmed, and edited an informational video about the project and the benefits of rain gardens.

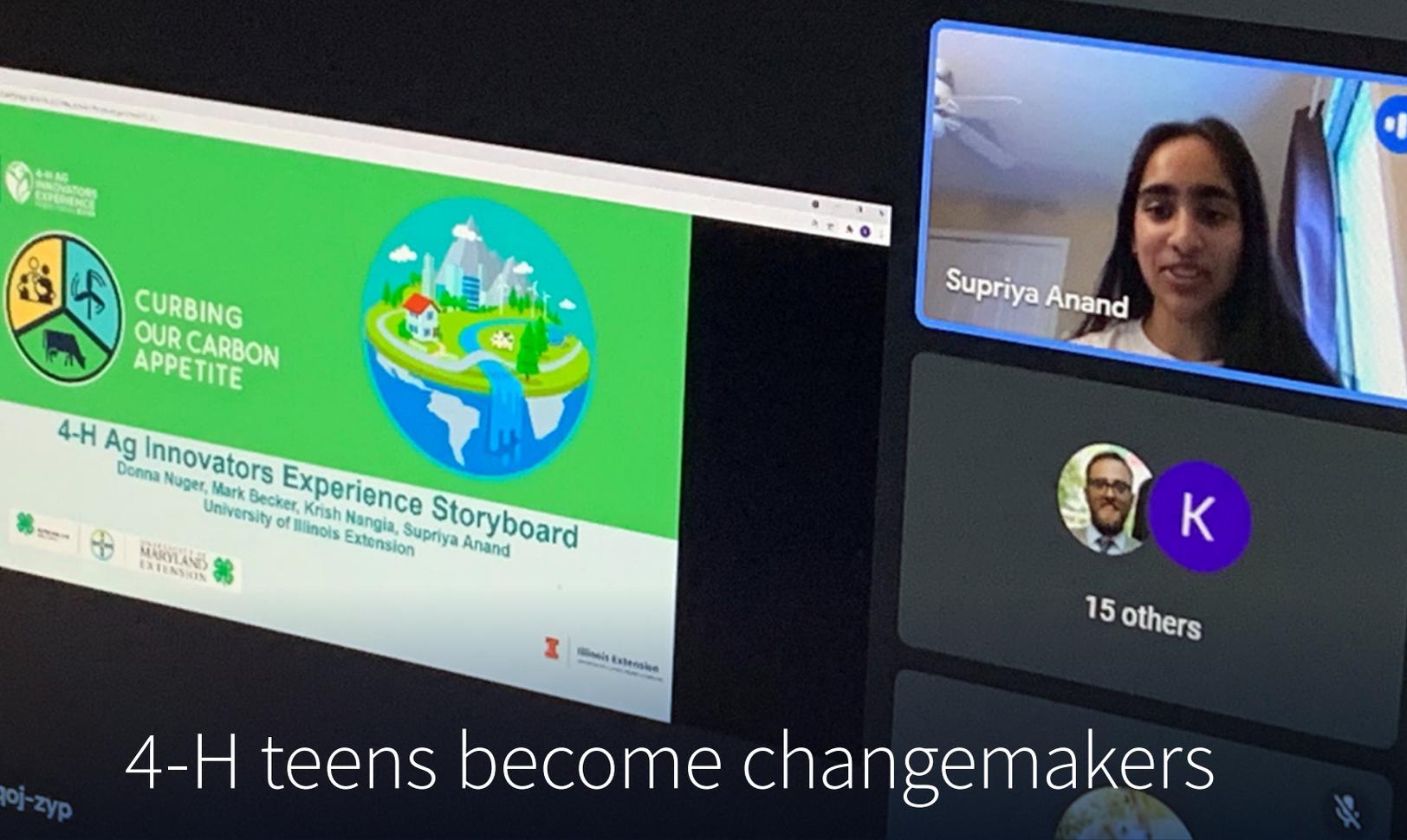
But, they were not done yet. With staff guidance, a handout and interactive sign are being developed for 2022. Both will include information about the featured plant species and how rain gardens improve water quality. The team plans to connect with the community by reaching out to county boards, media, schools, and other 4-H clubs.

“Through this experience, I discovered the positive impact on the environment and am designing and planting a rain garden at my home,” said longtime 4-H member Sofie Heidrich, who also served on the leadership team for the project. “Designing, planting, and promoting the rain garden was a great opportunity to bring together a lot of youth with many different interests.”

New 4-H Science Ambassador Aarav Shah, who helped edit the teen-produced video, agreed. “Overall, this project was a very fun experience that enhanced my knowledge in the fields of technology and agriculture, along with giving me a foundation to work with a team to help a project succeed.”



Learn more about this project
go.illinois.edu/STEM4Hdkk



4-H teens become changemakers



Youth teach others here and abroad about curbing carbon appetites

4-H Teen Science Ambassadors spent their summer teaching others about the causes of climate change, the science of the carbon cycle, and the impact our food choices can have on our environment. They shared their knowledge with youth across our three counties, but they also trained Illinois teens and Brazilian peers from the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul.

“To be aware of how your actions and the actions of those around you can impact the environment, and to know what steps we can take to improve our surroundings and reduce the rate of global warming is so important,” DuPage County 4-H member and presenter Supriya Anand.

It all was part of the 2021 Ag Innovators Experience “Curbing Our Carbon Appetite,” from Bayer CropScience and National 4-H Council.

The food choices were predominantly traditional American foods, and we knew most would not create a relatable meal for a Brazilian audience. I am from an immigrant family, so I understood this firsthand. We adjusted the program to ask the Brazilian students to assess the carbon footprint of their typical foods. It created a comprehensive and interesting discussion!

SUPRIYA ANAND, 4-H MEMBER

The goal is to share complex scientific ideas in an understandable way to help promote awareness of and influence solutions to real-world problems.

“My focus was how to make a carbon-friendly lunch with typical, everyday foods. But the food choices offered in the activity were predominantly traditional American foods, and we knew most would not create a relatable meal for a Brazilian audience,” Anand said. “I am from an immigrant family, so I understood this firsthand. We adjusted the program to also ask the Brazilian students to assess the carbon footprint of their typical foods. It created a comprehensive and interesting discussion!”

Fellow DuPage County 4-H'er Krish Nangia said the program helped the teens not only share their message but become stronger presenters. “From an audience who learned English as a second language to the challenges of facilitating an interactive activity like this in a virtual manner, we had to adapt and modify our activities to be both easy to understand and engaging.”

The presenters also gained a perspective of themselves as global citizens with shared issues and goals. For example, the Brazilian and U.S. students discussed the science of extreme wildfires in the Amazon and California and the role climate and environment played in them, said Anand. “This experience emphasized how the issues that this program is addressing are truly global.”



More than 131,000 youth participated in Illinois 4-H in 2021 (see below). Photo contributed by Lisa Kowalyszen.

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.



Local 4-H members earn state honors

Illinois 4-H challenges youth to try new things, experiment in project areas that interest them, and explore opportunities around the state and country.



The 4-H Experience Award, sponsored by the Illinois 4-H Foundation, recognizes youth for their learning experiences, leadership, and service. Local honorees for 2021 include: Abigail Munar of Kendall County - Diamond Level and at the Emerald Level - Krish Nangia of DuPage County and Julian Heidrich, Sofie Heidrich, Lydia Oker, Emily Reppy, and Sydney Reppy, all of Kendall County.

Nangia explained why he is so active in 4-H. “From a young age, I have had a deep passion for STEM, with a curiosity of why things work the way they do and a desire to teach and help others. I am grateful there is a program like 4-H Science Ambassadors where teens like myself cannot only advance our knowledge, but also enhance our leadership skills. I love learning activities and teaching younger youth in our community. That is how we build a better world through 4-H.”

In addition to awards, 4-H teens were awarded scholarships based on the area they excel in. Six local members earned \$1,000 scholarships: Civic Engagement and Global Living - Lydia Oker and Sydney Reppy of Kendall County; Food Systems - Emily Reppy of Kendall; Leadership - Justin Gergen of DuPage; Natural Resources and Environmental Science - Matias Habib of Kendall County; and Personal Growth - Elizabeth Melton of Kane. Habib also received one of ten Illinois 4-H Sustaining the Future Awards, sponsored by the Illinois Farm Bureau and Affiliates Youth Education in Agriculture Committee.

Kendall 4-H Member Attends National Congress

Ten teens from Illinois, including Kendall County’s Lydia Oker, attended the 2021 National 4-H Congress. Selected for her outstanding 4-H accomplishments, she attended workshops focused on diversity, cultural experiences, leadership, and team development, and networked with 4-H members from across the United States. Delegates also had the opportunity to listen to and learn from nationally recognized speakers.

“I was inspired by the speakers each day because they all have accomplished so much, even when setbacks occurred,” said Oker. “They inspired me to take risks and use my four Hs to get far in life, while serving individuals I encounter along the way.”

Opportunities like this one allow 4-H members to build leadership abilities and bring back new skills that will help them impact their club, community, country, and world. The Illinois 4-H Foundation and Nann Armstrong provided support for the award-recognition trip.



Master Gardeners feed the soul with blooms

Story and photo contributed by Master Gardener Julie Moore



Bloomington Garden serves community

American botanist Luther Burbank once said, “Flowers are sunshine, food, and medicine for the soul.” That is precisely why DuPage County Master Gardeners maintain a special cutting patch aptly named “Food for the Soul” at the Bloomington Community Garden.

For years, these Extension volunteers have grown and donated thousands of pounds of produce to food pantries in Roselle and Hanover Park. They also give fresh bouquets to brighten the day of families who shop there.

“Flowers trigger such positive emotions in people,” said Master Gardener Patti Chipman, who takes lead in preparing the hand-tied floral bouquets for donation. “It’s gratifying to know that folks coming in for fresh produce to feed their families also go home with a handful of happiness.”

Fellow Master Gardener Jan Hanson said, “Picking flowers and creating gorgeous bouquets for community donation gives me a warm, fuzzy feeling every visit.”

In 2014, Master Gardeners, local garden clubs, and the Bloomington Park District developed the Bloomington Community Gardens. The space now is home to an 85-foot strip for the cut flower garden, a rain garden, in-ground vegetable garden plots, six raised garden beds for accessibility needs, and a 400-square foot vegetable garden.

“Including that first year and through the end of 2021, we have donated almost 3,100 pounds of fresh vegetables to the pantries,” said Leslie Mabbott, who co-leads the Extension effort at the garden with fellow Master Gardener Lin Drogos.

In that time, Drogos also developed relationships with several companies that now annually donate “past due” seed packs for use in the garden, including Renee’s Garden Seeds, Hart Seeds for flowers and vegetables, and Livingston Seeds for vegetables.

The 2021 vegetable garden included tomatoes, beets, herbs, cucumbers, onions, gourds, and snap peas, while the “Food for the Soul” garden featured the showy, long magenta tassels of *Amaranthus caudatus* and the cool white and green leaves of *Euphorbia marginata*, also known as snow-on-the-mountain. The volunteers also grow annuals, such as zinnias and cosmos, specifically for bouquets, and supplement them with perennials in-bloom and greenery from the rain garden.

In 2020, the project received an Illinois Master Gardener grant which helped the volunteers install and improve vertical garden structures to increase crop yields.

“We really appreciate the volunteers who work at the Bloomington gardens,” said Drogos. “The Master Gardeners are always enthusiastic about everything we grow and maintain. We try to promote a fun atmosphere and are continually sharing and learning.”



LITTLE ROOTS LEAD TO BIG BRANCHES OF GROWTH

Budding 4-H members, also known as Cloverbuds, grew six types of flowers and vegetables as part of the tri-county Little Roots virtual club. The youth learned about planting seeds, caring for plants, and plant life cycles in the hands-on program designed for ages 5 to 7 by Illinois Extension horticulture educators. The members engaged with each other and 4-H staff during online weekly meetings. Together, they did age-appropriate lessons and activities, shared their progress, and discussed next steps to do at home. During the club, one parent shared, “She loved the meeting today, and I was surprised how much she already knew. One of her little sisters was spying on her the whole time! I love your patience and kindness with each of the kids.” When the club wrapped up, another parent shared, “My daughter loved the book, fun activities, and sharing progress pictures.” She added they plan to grow flowers and vegetables again.



Contributed by Michelle Ochs.



Contributed by Advocate Sherman Hospital.

MASTER GARDENERS GUIDE SHERMAN COMMUNITY GARDEN

Advocate Sherman Hospital, Elgin Community College, and Kane County Master Gardeners hosted Senator Cristina Castro at the hospital’s community garden in July. Together, they worked to harvest vegetables for the Spartan Food Pantry at ECC, which receives fresh produce from the garden. “Every student should have access to healthy food to help them succeed,” Castro said. “This partnership is a strong example of the ways our community can join together to help our vulnerable friends and neighbors live longer, healthier lives.” Master Gardeners and other community gardeners donated 640 pounds of fresh produce to ECC and the YWCA in 2021. This does not include what ECC harvested from its own garden bed where they grow pantry vegetables with guidance from the Master Gardeners. In all, tri-county Master Gardener projects donated 19,924 pounds of fresh produce to help fight local food insecurity. That’s a value of \$28,691.



VOLUNTEERS TEACH ABOUT NATIVE PLANTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

At the historic Graue Mill in DuPage County, Master Gardeners maintain the native perennial gardens, plant the grain garden to show what was processed at a grist mill, and build wattle fences to educate the public on this sustainable practice. Their work educates visitors about native plant options for their gardens, where flour and oatmeal come from, and how to reuse cut branches for garden structures. Master Gardeners also take questions while volunteering at the forest preserve. “Our work beautifies the surroundings at Graue Mill... and with any luck, our work also enhances the community because information goes with visitors and spreads to friends and neighbors,” said Carol Burck. “Volunteering with Extension gives me the opportunity to share the best research-based solutions to gardening issues, the benefits of integrating native plants into home landscapes, the importance of pollinators, and many other topics. The more I learn, the better gardener I can become and the better I can help others.”



EXTENSION TRAINING INSPIRES VOLUNTEER TO PRESERVE NATURAL RESOURCE

Master Naturalist Vicky Torgerson of Kendall County took her training and applied it to a real life challenge, which ultimately protected an Illinois Oak Savannah and a home to the endangered Blanding’s turtle. Torgerson learned about the importance of wetland preservation and preserving oak savannas, reminding her of family land in Lee County. “It is a wonderful piece of land that we had owned since the 40s, and we had never disturbed it much,” she said. “I came to learn through the class, and later confirmed by the Audubon Society, it contained not only an Old Oak Savannah, a wet land, and a small bit of prairie, but it also was part of the Green River Lowland, which is home to the Blanding’s turtle that needs the loamy sands to lay its eggs.” The property had been in a trust and being prepared for sale. When Torgerson shared this with her family, they worked with the Audubon Society so the group could purchase it for conservation.





RICHARD HENTSCHEL RETIRES IN 2022

For 45 years, Illinois homeowners, Master Gardeners, industry professionals, and professional growers have relied on the knowledge and skills of Richard Hentschel. His respected career includes nearly three decades serving as an Illinois Extension specialist and horticulture educator in northern Illinois, where he shared his expertise in gardening, lawn care, fruit trees, pest management, and more. He helped train Master Gardener volunteers around the state, allowing them to better serve their communities. In addition, Hentschel’s popular Green Side Up podcast, Over the Garden Fence blog, Down the Garden path column, and This Week in the Garden video series made seasonal guidance and practical tips readily available and accessible to thousands each year. “Richard’s wealth of experience and wide spectrum of knowledge will be missed not only here in our counties but all around the state,” said County Director Deanna Roby-Vorgias.



NEW STAFF MEMBERS JOIN TRI-COUNTY EXTENSION TEAM

In 2021, several new faces joined our Illinois Extension team, ready to serve the communities of DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties. Please help us welcome these great additions to the staff and programs:

- Shelley Booth, Kane County SNAP-Education Community Worker
- Carrie Hubbard, Unit Office Support Specialist
- Nancy Reppe, DuPage County 4-H Program Coordinator
- Lisa Mills, DuPage County SNAP-Education Community Worker
- Melissa Schumacher, DuPage County Office Support Associate
- Leilah Siegel, 4-H Youth Development Educator



SEARCH UNDERWAY FOR FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES EDUCATOR

Extension is adding a family and consumer sciences educator to serve northeastern Illinois. This position will develop and deliver high impact, relevant, and educational programs and materials for consumer financial planning, household decision making, financial literacy, and community financial education. The new educator will serve the tri-county area, as well as the neighboring counties of Grundy, Kankakee, and Will. Around the state, the family and consumer sciences team provides educational programs and resources for all stages and ages. “Financial literacy is crucial throughout life, whether you’re planning for your own education, buying a home, becoming a parent, helping save for college, planning for retirement, or enjoying retirement,” said County Director Deanna Roby-Vorgias. “We want to help build skills and provide guidance to our residents during all these milestones and everything in between.”



EXTENSION CELEBRATES AND THANKS RETIRING STAFF IN 2021

In 2021, Illinois Extension celebrated several retirees and honored their commitment to DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties. Please help us in thanking them for their years of service:

- Doris Braddock, Kane County 4-H Program Coordinator
- Jo Ann Britton, 4-H Education Enrichment Program Coordinator
- Julie Jarmusz, Unit Office Support Specialist
- Joan LeMay, DuPage County Office Support Associate
- Maria Trejo, Kane County SNAP-Education Community Worker





Contributed by Sherman Community Garden and Natural Prairie.

Illinois Extension 2021 Tri-County Highlights

Learners & Attendees Engaged

- 
10,765
Local Website Users
- 
853
Educational Sessions
- 
86
Local Blogs, Podcasts & Videos
- 
32,301
Educational Program Attendees

Service & Value Provided

- 
577
Extension Volunteers
- 
\$1,156,663
Value of Volunteer Contributions
- 
\$28,691
Value of Donated Garden Produce

People & Partners Supported

- 
242
Community Partnerships
- 
669
4-H Club Memberships
- 
12,033
Estimated Reach SNAP-Education

EXTENSION COUNCIL

DUPAGE COUNTY

Nancy Bell
Claire Gustis*
Steven Gustis
Julie Kulak
Cheryl McGarrity

KANE COUNTY

Mazher Ahmed
Liz Dorn
Wayne Gehrke
Colleen Haas
Anne Herrmann
Elizabeth Melton*
Donna Plonczynski

KENDALL COUNTY

Jeff Farren
Matias Habib*
Kathleen Janick
Rhonda Oker
Laura Reppy
Emily/Sydney Reppy*

**denotes youth member*

OFFICE INFORMATION

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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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