



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

**2021** Addressing Local Needs,  
Solving Global Challenges  
Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark Counties



## A Message from the County Director

Our good wishes to you from Illinois Extension serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties. 2021 proved to be another year of innovation and creative program delivery to meet the needs and serve the people and communities in our region. We are fortunate to have talented educators, staff, and volunteers who put in the work every day to create pathways for learning. We are thankful to the county boards, foundations, and individual donors who make our work possible.



Jenny Garner  
County Director

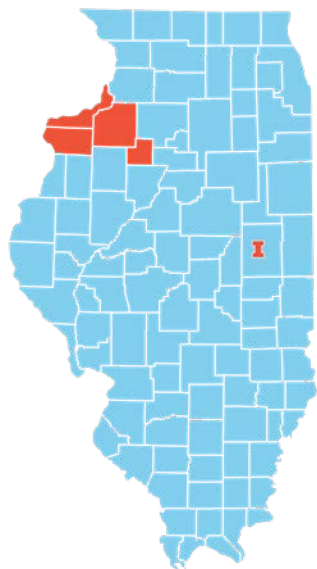
As I reflect on the past year, I am especially proud of our ongoing ability to adapt to changing circumstances to keep our clients and customers safe. This included the emergence of hybrid program opportunities, as well as specific access requirements of our partner agencies.

It was a joy to see our 4-H youth back and showing their projects in person this summer! Master Gardeners continued their efforts working in demonstration gardens and programming outreach.

Each year I am reminded of the expertise among our staff. Join me in congratulating Russell Medley, community and economic development educator, for his North Central regional award for the Local Government Education webinar series by the National Association of Community and Economic Development Professionals; and Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator, who received the Illinois Extension Team Excellence award for the Fill Your Pantry: Home Feed Preservation webinar series and 31 Days of Food Preservation social media campaign.

As you read this report, you will see the many ways people access all that Extension has to offer and will find many examples of the impact that our organization has made.

# Staff Serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark Counties



### STAFF

Jenny Garner  
County Director

Kristin Bogdonas  
Educator, Nutrition & Wellness

Rachel Curry  
Watershed Quality Outreach  
Associate, Commercial  
Ag & Natural Resources,  
Environment, and Energy

Russell Medley  
Educator, Community &  
Economic Development

Jennifer Peterson  
Educator, 4-H

Emily Swihart  
Educator, Horticulture

Tayler Louscher  
Educator, SNAP-Ed

Becky Buckrop  
Program Coordinator,  
Marketing & Local Fund  
Development

McCala Crawford  
Program Coordinator,  
Rock Island County 4-H

Tracy Fowler-Pestle  
Program Coordinator,  
Mercer County 4-H

Teresa Kirwan  
Program Coordinator, Henry  
County 4-H and Mercer County  
Ag Literacy

Tracy Jo Mulliken  
Program Coordinator,  
Horticulture & Agriculture

Colin Cushman  
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Darcy Eggimann  
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Mitchell Walker  
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Hannah Wright  
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Amy Spence  
Office Support Associate

Molly Foster  
Office Support Assistant

Elaine Kaple  
Office Support Assistant

# Think Global, Act Local

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



## Community

Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities

 Connectedness and Inclusion

 Involvement and Leadership

 Thriving Youth




## Economy

Grow a Prosperous Economy

 Economic Vitality

 Financial Wellbeing


 Workforce Preparedness/Advancement



## Environment

Sustain Natural Resources in Home and Public Spaces

 Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

 Engagement with Home and Community Landscape



## Food

Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

 Food Access

 Food Production

 Food Safety



## Health

Maximize Physical and Emotional Health for All

 Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

 Social and Emotional Health

 Healthy and Safe Environments

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

## Illinois Extension 2021

# Statewide Highlights

### Outreach Provided

565

Illinois  
Communities  
Served

335

Educational  
Sessions Per Week

84

Online Courses

### Partnerships Supported

6,445

Adult  
Volunteers

278

Community  
Gardens

1,000

School Partnerships

### Learners Engaged

8,000,000

Website Users

14,450

Online  
Course Users

500,000

Educational Program  
Attendees

### Resources Generated

\$14,000,000

Value of Volunteer  
Contributions

\$242,000

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.



## Grand Challenges

At University of Illinois Extension, we know that thriving families and communities are best supported when they are equipped with the skills and research-based information they require to make good decisions. Illinois Extension is here to help navigate these challenging times with expert care. Our programs are designed to help individuals, families, and communities deal with the wide range of priority issues facing our state and helping the people of Henry, Mercer, Rock Island and Stark Counties in these areas:

### Supporting strong and resilient youth, families and communities.

Our experiential learning-based 4-H youth development model applies a holistic development framework, focusing on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H club experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive, today and into the future. We are proud of our members and grateful to the 4-H volunteers who work with us to offer that guidance.

We take pride in working side by side with a host of community agencies, schools, non-profit organizations, and civic leaders to develop programs and solutions that are cohesive and inclusive. Extension is one of the leading organizations to give voice to community members who work with us to find solutions to address local issues. We are adept at training and organizing excellent volunteers to share their knowledge, talents, and time in support of our diverse educational mission.

### Maximize physical & emotional health for all.

Illinois Extension provides people of all ages with trusted and reliable research-based information and strategies to make healthy decisions that improve quality of life. Whether it's guidance on how to lower blood pressure or manage diabetes, offering parents expert nutrition advice on feeding their children, or helping couples develop a stronger relationship, Extension offers creative solutions for health and well-being.

### Sustaining our natural resources.

Our horticulture and natural resources programs give people the knowledge and tools they need to succeed in home and community gardens, landscape beautification, conservation practices, and assistance in sustaining our natural resources. Our programs are strengthened by the assistance of Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers who help others learn to grow.

### Growing a prosperous economy.

Illinois Extension programs continually seek ways to promote economic vitality for both rural and urban communities. Agricultural operations represent a critically important contributor to the economic vitality of Illinois. Extension is at the forefront in sharing the latest research and best practices to help farmers have prosperous, safe and sustainable operations. Growers and producers at all levels benefit from Extension resources showing them the most effective, efficient, and sustainable ways to cultivate produce, crops, and livestock to feed their families, communities, and the world.

The global pandemic has reinforced the need to develop innovative ways to nurture the Illinois workforce. Illinois Extension has always been at the cutting edge, doing its part by offering youth career exploration opportunities; continuing education; trainings and workshops for farmers, legislators and other professionals to meet regulatory and licensure requirements; and finding innovative solutions, like expanding broadband access so rural areas can compete in a growing tech world.

### Expanding Food Access.

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. Through our SNAP-Ed program and our network of volunteers and community partners, Extension is making a difference right here in our community, creating opportunities to address food insecurity in locally relevant ways.







President Killeen came to Moline, Ill to hear about our work with Disaster Ready Quad Cities. Pictured (left to right) are Carrie McKillip, Community and Economic Development educator for Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren Counties; Jenny Garner, county director for our unit; President Killeen; and Russell Medley, CED educator for our unit.



## U of I President Visit: Innovation Agenda and Disaster Ready Quad Cities

On Oct. 21, our unit welcomed University of Illinois President Timothy Killeen, along with Jay Walsh, interim VP of economic development and innovation; Paul Ellinger, interim CFO, comptroller; Susan Martins, vice chancellor of research and innovation; Jennifer Creasey, senior director of state relations; and other administrative and government affairs staff on a visit to the Quad Cities. Their visit was part of President Killeen's tour of select Extension units to learn more about projects with significant community impact, such as our Disaster Ready Quad Cities.

Disaster Ready Quad Cities serves both Rock Island County, Illinois and Scott County, Iowa. It enhances the community's ability to mitigate, prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, ensuring that human needs resulting from a disaster are evaluated and addressed. Russell Medley, community and economic development educator for our unit currently serves as chair of the organization.

President Killeen has a specific interest in economic development and community resiliency and wanted to learn more about how Extension projects like this one support the

University's innovation agenda and what other resources can be used to support these types of community outreach and engagement.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and through initial recovery, community resiliency has become an important focus for Extension systems across the U.S. The pandemic showed that communities need to prepare not only for natural disasters but also for major economic shocks that can impact local businesses, industries, and workforces.

The conversation between President Killeen, his administrative staff, and the community partners showed that Illinois communities have specific needs that the University can direct research and assets towards. Innovation and the support provided through the University of Illinois system and its research capabilities can provide the basis for pro-active community resiliency and economic development. Extension is the conduit by which that information can be shared as we have the outreach, programs, and connections to disseminate information throughout the state.

Our Extension unit was honored to host President Killeen and his staff. It is clear that President Killeen has a focus of using University of Illinois as an economic engine for the states and as a means of encouraging innovation and engagement at the community level.



As part of the dialogue, local community partners were invited to participate to share the impacts the program had on their organizations and their preparation for potential disasters.



These community partners have significant roles in disaster preparedness efforts in the Quad Cities region. They include Illinois State Representative Mike Halpin, 72nd District; Mike Miller, President & CEO, River Bend Food Bank; Jeff Nelson, CEO & Managing Director, MetroLINK; Jay Pearce, CEO & General Manager, WVIK NPR; Paul Rumler, President & CEO, Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce; Kelly Thompson, Vice President, Grantmaking & Community Initiatives, Quad Cities Community Foundation; and Jerry Shirk, Assistant Emergency Coordinator, Rock Island County Emergency Management Agency.



## Master Gardeners Grow from Home program provides fresh produce to community

Master Gardeners continued the Grow from Home program to help combat food insecurities in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties by raising, harvesting, and donating over 3,154 pounds of fresh produce to local food access sites. These donations provide nutritious, locally grown food options to our neighbors.

Master Gardeners also maintained demonstration gardens at Riverside, Moline, and the Rock Island County Extension offices. At these sites, community members can visit to witness garden growth and learn how to cultivate a wide variety of species.

The gifts of fresh produce, demonstration gardens, answering gardening questions through our horticulture hotline, and other community assistance were thanks to the dedication of our Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers and the offering of their talents and time. Specifically, these volunteers provided 3,808 hours of time in our service in 2021.

## Master Gardener Hybrid Training Pilot Program

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, Master Gardener training was reimagined as a hybrid training course. Hybrid training includes both the self-paced online classes in addition to weekly scheduled live sessions with Illinois Extension horticulture educators via Zoom. Some small local gatherings for hands on learning were also held. Both the fully online as well as the hybrid versions proved successful and four new Master Gardeners completed the training and volunteer requirements in 2021.

Online learning, a popular way to reach community members, continues to be a valuable tool for providing educational opportunities in an easily accessible format. The webinar, Planting and Caring for Trees, offered by Emily this fall provided community members resources for site analysis, tree selection tips, proper planting techniques, and tree care recommendations. Over 150 people have benefited from

this webinar, and the resource continues to be available for community members through our YouTube channel.

Another webinar series, Gardening in the Air, provides professional expertise to thousands of people each year. Horticulture educators from both Illinois and Iowa State Extension offer workshops on a wide range of subjects. The Winter 2021 two-day virtual gardening series reached over 1,300 participants who explored topics in the areas of garden design, houseplants, vegetables, herbs, and fruits. In October, we welcomed over 650 participants to explore pollinators, trees, fruits and vegetables. The popular program continues into 2022.



Master Gardener Channel  
[go.illinois.edu/ILExtensionhMrsYouTube](https://go.illinois.edu/ILExtensionhMrsYouTube)

## Horticulture educator transition

In June 2021, Martha Smith retired from University of Illinois Extension.

Martha served the people of Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark counties for 29 years as a well-respected horticulture educator. We wish her all the best in retirement and are fortunate that she graciously continues to be available as a speaker for some of our 2022 events.



Taking her place as horticulture educator is Emily Swihart. Emily comes to Extension with over 11 years of professional experience and expertise in arboriculture and tree care, landscape design and plant selection, home gardening, and native plant

ecosystems. She is thrilled to be able to continue her career as a horticulture educator and looks forward to building meaningful relationships with the people of our communities.







## The Outsider Newsletter

Created by horticulture educator Emily Swihart, *The Outsider* newsletter is a bimonthly publication covering a range of horticultural topics meant to challenge and inspire readers. According to Emily, the title has special double meaning, both to reach people who feel like an outsider to the world of growing things, as well as to invite them to become literal outside people. Each article aims to explore a timely topic in the world of horticulture while offering an invitation to take actions based on the shared information and to visit the outdoors. Topics range from a focus on plant materials to best management practices to a curious exploration of plants in our lives.



Subscribe to The Outsider Newsletter here!  
[go.illinois.edu/TheOutsider](https://go.illinois.edu/TheOutsider)

## In person horticulture workshops this fall explored vermicomposting and trees

As in person events begin to return, local events included a vermicompost workshop where participants discovered the benefits of composting with worms and were supported as they created their own worm bin to take home and use.

In October, Emily offered a tree walk at Chippainnock Cemetery where attendees engaged in conversations about tree care, identification, and species facts. She also guided youth, ages preschool through fifth grade, through a hands-on learning activity exploring tree growth patterns by analyzing tree cookies. In person programs are designed to engage and inspire community members with open dialogue, hands-on learning opportunities, and access to subject matter experts.



Horticulture Educator Emily Swinhart led a tree walk at Chippainnock Cemetery and its magnificent arboretum.

## Mercer County Ag Literacy Program

Illinois Extension, with funding support from the Mercer County Farm Bureau, the Mercer County Soil and Water Conservation District, and several Mercer County businesses, brings agriculture to life for hundreds of youth and families.



Teresa Kirwan, Extension program coordinator, adapted the program to continue to serve the county throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by developing agriculture education kits. Each month, she distributed hundreds of kits that included seasonal agriculture lessons, Ag Mags, as well the supplies necessary for participants to complete hands-on activities. Master Gardeners and Master Naturalist volunteers from our unit assisted in assembling the monthly kits. They were distributed to schools, day cares, home school groups, libraries, and other organizations serving youth across Mercer County.

During Ag Month in March 2021, Teresa held contests for youth to share their knowledge of agriculture and how it impacts our everyday lives. First graders had a coloring contest, second graders had a Flat Aggie contest; and third and fourth graders made placemats with the winning designed used at Happy Joe's in Aledo. She also distributed agriculture resources and snacks to grain elevators across the county in the fall to thank our hard-working farmers and to wish them a bountiful harvest.



Each month hundreds of agriculture education kits were distributed to schools and agencies across Mercer County offering hands-on lesson on the important role agriculture plays in our everyday lives.



## 'I Made That!' cooking kits distributed

Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator, partnered with 4-H to offer cooking education kits to youth in our service area to help them gain confidence in the kitchen, learn about safe food practices, and develop skills related to 4-H food projects. New kits were developed every other month and featured seasonal topics to expose them to a variety of cooking techniques and nutrition concepts. Topics included National Baking Month, National Nutrition Month, Mediterranean meals, hydration, physical activity, whole grains, and all about apples and spices. Kits included a booklet with activities, recipes, and a sensory evaluation for their creations. Three hundred and seventy-five youth participated during 2021, and we are looking forward to continuing the program in 2022.



Even if you think it isn't going to taste good, you should always try it. Healthy eating tastes good!

I MADE THAT PARTICIPANT

## Learn to manage, prevent chronic disease

Sixty percent of Americans live with at least one chronic disease. Locally, we see similar, if not higher, rates of disease and disability. In the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment, 79% of survey respondents indicated having one or more unhealthy behaviors, such as tobacco use, poor diet, and sedentary lifestyle. Research indicates that these three behaviors elevate risk for four chronic conditions: cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, and diabetes. Together, these illnesses cause more than 50% of deaths.

In the US, by 2030, all baby boomers will be at least 65 years old. The longer you live, the greater your risk of developing one or more chronic diseases. Many believe our longevity or life expectancy is determined by genetics; in reality, genetics only account for between 20–30%. The rest comes from our lifestyle. For this reason, Kristin provides education on healthy lifestyle behaviors to help people live longer and add more life to their years. She has provided programs on heart health, diabetes prevention and management, healthy aging workshops, and virtual wellness challenges both locally and statewide.

## Extension teaches preservation safety

Preserving food at home properly requires food safety knowledge and skill to ensure the long-term safety and quality of food. Educating Illinois residents about food safety and up-to-date home food preservation methods are a statewide priority programming area for Extension.



Kristin provided food preservation education to 238 people at local conferences and workshops. In addition, 40,000 people were reached through online webinars, news articles, blogs, and social media.

She also taught attendees at the 2021 Thru the Stones Conference about colonial-era food preservation techniques and current, research-based preservation practices and resources for home use. Attendees at the Becoming an Outdoorswoman event learned how to safely ferment their foods, as well as dehydrate fruits and vegetables. Online webinar participants learned about the pros and cons of canning, freezing, drying and fermenting, preferred preservation methods of locally grown food, and where to find tested recipes.



Through a combination of virtual and in-person classes, Kristin helped folks take charge of their health by sharing valuable tips and research-based information on topics ranging from heart health to healthy aging.





## SNAP-Ed Nutrition & Wellness Outreach

University of Illinois Extension's SNAP-Ed team focuses on improving diet quality and physical activity, increasing food access, and creating community collaborations to affect changes within the four counties we serve.

Our unit's SNAP-Ed team includes four community workers who provide nutrition and physical activity programming as well as a SNAP-Ed Extension Educator Tayler Louscher who collaborates with community partners and provides policy, systems, and environmental programs to make the healthy choice the easy choice for the SNAP eligible population.

### Direct Education

SNAP-Ed Community Workers aim to improve health outcomes by providing research based nutrition education. Throughout the pandemic, community workers communicated with community partners to host virtual programs and to provide newsletters and activity packets for children to enjoy. While virtual programs are still occurring, the team has begun hosting in person, socially distant programs as well.

Through planning and adapting to ensure safe programming, community workers provided Illinois Junior Chef to nine summer program partners to meet the needs of the community. The Illinois Junior Chef curriculum provides the opportunity for third to fifth graders to learn about MyPlate and physical activity. A large part of the curriculum is to teach basic cooking skills. While building these skills, students follow and prepare a recipe and sample their creation!



During the 2021 summer sessions of IL Jr. Chef, elementary summer school students learn cooking skills through hands-on classes. They often share their lessons at home by recreating the recipes learned in class for their family. Said one grandmother, "My grandson made the pumpkin pudding for his cousins and aunt while he was at my house. He made it all by himself and it turned out great."

## Improving access to culturally relevant foods through community partnerships

In partnership with the Illinois Public Health Institute and River Bend Food Bank, SNAP-Ed Extension Educator, Tayler Louscher has been working to assist in discerning which nutritious and culturally relevant foods are wanted in the charitable food systems throughout western Illinois and eastern Iowa. She helped create a nutrition committee to assist in gathering information from the community to see which foods they would like to see in food pantries to meet their dietary and cultural needs. The group has conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups to ensure all voices are heard throughout the service area. Another outcome from these information-gathering strategies is to pinpoint community education needs related to choosing, preparing, and eating nutritious foods. Ultimately, this information will increase the amount and availability of nutritious and culturally relevant foods within the community.

### Community Food Resource Guide

Tayler also worked to develop a guide to assist neighbors in identifying food sources within our community, working with local organizations to create a Quad Cities Food Resource Guide. With assistance from the All Our Kids Network, Augustana College, South Rock Island Township, and St. Ambrose University, the group created a community guide that features a list of pantries, meal sites and grocery stores. One thousand guides were printed for local organizations to pass out to their clients looking for food. The guides also provide information on money saving tips to utilize while shopping for food at the grocery store. Students at Augustana College adapted the guides into an online format so people looking for food can access it online as a map.



Visit the map  
[go.illinois.edu/QCFoodResource](https://go.illinois.edu/QCFoodResource)

Tayler also helped organize the Food Resource Coalition, in partnership with Every Child. Starting in January 2021 the coalition provides an opportunity for local emergency food partners to collaborate while providing relevant, evidence based training. A recent success of their partnership was the request for and the development of COVID-related safety signage to provide our local food pantries.



## Poverty simulation training raises awareness of the impacts of poverty on working families

A highly sought after workshop that Extension offers is the Poverty Simulation, an interactive training in which participants take on the role of an individual/family living in poverty.

The goal of the simulation is to stimulate community-driven conversations about local poverty and how it impacts families as well as how it impacts businesses and the organizations that work to alleviate poverty in the region.

The 2-hour simulation is a favorite program for school districts, non-profits, and government agencies to help their staff better understand their students, families, and clients they serve. University of Illinois Extension's community and economic development educator Russell Medley joined forces with the Moline Community Foundation, Moline Public Library, AOK/Child Abuse Council of the Quad Cities, and the River Bend Food Bank to offer the simulation in our service area. In 2021 the group hosted four poverty simulations with 175 participants.

Participants said they developed a better understanding about some of the coping strategies that individuals in poverty take and recognize that survival becomes a total focus for these individuals. Their experience allows for our typical audiences to better work with this clientele and to focus poverty elimination or response strategies accordingly.



Disaster Ready Quad Cities (DRQC) is a vital organization that is a collaboration of almost 50 emergency responders and non-profit agencies whose mission is to help our community prepare for and respond in the event of a disaster. Russell Medley serves as the DRQC chair. The local emergency agencies, law enforcement, fire departments, hospitals, and human services organizations are the first responders who can quickly start the recovery work well before FEMA can be activated.

Over the past year, Disaster Ready Quad Cities and its members have been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and securing resources to help in the economic recovery from the effects of lockdowns. The organization is also focused on helping

individuals, families, and organizations prepare for disasters, preemptively. Extension hosted a 2-part Nonprofit Disaster Preparedness Workshop in conjunction with DRQC on February 23 and March 2, helping seven local nonprofit organizations assess their risks and develop a disaster action plan. They also hosted a day-long training in August for disaster volunteers with 14 participants representing various Quad Cities agencies.

## Disaster planning for rural communities

In February 2021, Illinois Extension was awarded a \$35,000 grant through the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and USDA NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture). Russell Medley, community and economic development educator for our unit, is serving as principal investigator on the grant. It is focused on the integration of economic development planning and disaster preparedness for rural communities in Illinois.

The impacts of a disaster can affect all facets of a community and disrupt the local economy. Many communities, particularly those in rural areas, have limited capacity to engage in planning, and do not have the tools to easily incorporate disaster planning strategies into economic development planning efforts.

With this grant, Illinois Extension is developing a disaster planning toolkit that will focus on integrating a disaster preparedness planning model into community economic development plans. Communities will prepare for potential disasters and have the tools available to facilitate a physical and economic recovery.

Russell is leading the team in developing a topic-focused, searchable website that can be used by communities to access information. Plans also include developing a presentation format that can be facilitated by Extension Educators for rural communities. The grant funding was expanded by NIFA and EDEN to include a focus on mitigation infrastructure that communities could undertake to minimize the impact of disasters before they happen. With the increase in funding, the scope of the project expanded from Illinois to the other states in the Midwest.







## Remote and Ready: Implementing rural community strategies for attracting remote workers

Russell Medley and his Extension team members presented a webinar with Rural Partners that focused on the use of remote working as an up-and-coming economic development strategy. Approximately 70 economic developers, chamber executives, and county and city/town officials from rural communities in Illinois attended.

Attracting remote workers to rural communities has been a potential economic development strategy for rural communities since before the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many benefits for rural Illinois communities to pursue remote workers.

- State and federal governments are investing heavily in broadband infrastructure to make remote working a possibility in more areas.
- It is a lower cost alternative to attracting industry.
- It diversifies existing economic development strategies.
- It attracts new talent and helps retain existing residents and businesses.
- It builds economic resiliency for the community.

Remote working and digital inclusion is increasingly important for rural workforce development. According to Roberto Gallardo, director at the Purdue Center for Regional Development, “Digital exclusion is the #1 threat to 21st century community and economic development.”

It is imperative that rural communities assess their broadband infrastructures, pursue its expansions, and develop intentional remote working strategies to support their existing populations and to attract new residents over the coming years.



By 2025, 36.2M Americans will be working remotely. Being able to work from anywhere has many setting their sights on small towns, a trend that can boost dwindling rural areas. How can towns market themselves as remote-ready to potential new residents?



Learn more about marketing your town as remote-ready  
[go.illinois.edu/RemoteReady](https://go.illinois.edu/RemoteReady)



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.*



## 4-Hers pledge hands to larger service

Very little was normal about the 4-H program in the 2020-2021 year. Many clubs switched to virtual meetings. Others chose to meet in person when the weather allowed them to be outdoors. Despite unusual meeting structures, the commitment to community service never waned. The 4-H youth realized that giving to others was imperative in such unprecedented times.



Carter Tharp (left) of Rock Island 4-H in the City Club organized a card drive for seniors called “Hugs from the Heart.” He asked for all 4-H Clubs in our area to make holiday cards for seniors living in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. He also contacted many of

those locations and sent out a list of all facilities that would accept cards with the pandemic restrictions. Clubs in each county participated, and hundreds of cards were delivered to several different sites. Stark County added to the idea and made 427 cards for veterans in addition to cards they sent to the Courtyard Estates in Galva.

The Alexis All-Stars Club started a pen pal program that is still going. Each member writes periodic letters to seniors who live alone in the community. This project helps the kids connect with older adults and better empathize with the struggles of living alone during a pandemic. It also helps them build their written communication skills in an age where emojis and text message acronyms dominate conversation. The recipients say they always look forward to receiving their next letter because it makes them feel like people still care. They also enjoy the updates on the lives of the youth writing them.

The Mercer County Federation and Rock Island’s 4-H in the City learned about the importance of giving blood from the Mississippi Valley Blood Center. After hearing about the high demand, they jumped into action, organizing local drives. Maya Chavez of 4-H in the City organized Rock Island’s drive.



Cole and Sydney Perkins of Sherrard 4-H Club in Mercer County deliver cards to Hope Creek (left). Kinsley and Rylie Lough of Sherrard 4-H Club making cards for Hope Creek (right).

Youth and clubs continued to do drives for food, clothing, and products to donate. In Henry County, the Atkinson Boosters held its annual canned food drive to benefit the Geneseo Food Pantry. Stark County also held a canned food and pet food drive. They gathered over 190 pounds of food and gave several bags of food and other pet supplies to the A.R.K animal shelter in Peoria. The Mercer County Federation put together 10 laundry baskets containing cleaning supplies to the Crisis Center.

The Magical Muggles, from Rock Island, made food and valentine’s cards for the King’s Harvest Ministries as just one of their many service projects throughout the year. Members and clubs across all four counties pledged their hands to larger service and made their communities better.



Atkinson Boosters held its annual canned food drive to benefit the Geneseo Food Pantry.



Mercer County Federation with 3 of the 10 laundry baskets they collected that were filled with cleaning supplies they donated to the crisis center.



Magical Muggles made food and cards for King’s Harvest Ministries.





## 4-H members take top state awards

Several of our unit's 4-H members received high rankings and awards for their work at the state level.

Stark County member Jacob Nusz participated in the State Archery Shoot in September 2021. He won the contest with a score so high that it also put him third in the team contest. His win qualified him to join the state team that will compete at the national shoot in Nebraska in 2022. Jacob continues a family legacy of success in archery. His brother, Levi, won the state archery contest in 2019 and 2020.



Desiree Reid of Mercer County won the reasons division of the state horse judging competition, which qualified her for the state horse judging team. She also placed third overall in the senior division of the regional horsebowl competition and fourth in senior hippology, which earned her a spot on the state team. The team competed in Louisville in November during the Eastern National 4-H Roundup where they were named reserve grand champions. Desiree is a member of the Joy-Eliza Ag Club and has been an outstanding competitor in all horse-related competitions.



## 4-H clubs earn state awards

Several clubs received state awards for outstanding work in these areas: Leadership: 4-H in the City (Rock Island); Community Service: Magical Muggles (Rock Island), Hamlet Handy Helpers (Mercer), and Saddle Teens (Mercer). Each club received \$75.

## 4-H Hall of Fame recipients announced

In August, three outstanding 4-H volunteers from our unit were inducted into the Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame for donating their time and talent to better the program and lives of youth. Congratulations: (l to r) Melinda Simpson, Rock Island County; Al Curry, Stark County; and Jim Mayhew, Mercer County.



## 4-H goes virtual

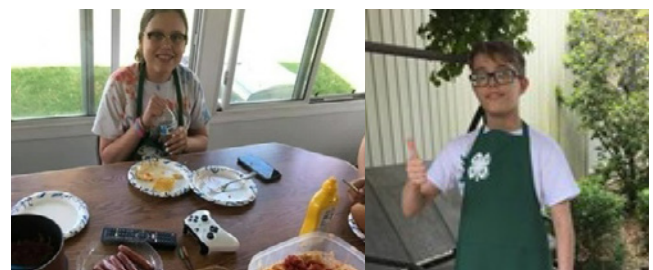
They say necessity is the mother of invention. For 4-H programs and clubs, necessity linked creativity with technology. Just like the schools, 4-H learned quickly how to use platforms like Zoom, Google Meets, and even Facebook to carry out meetings, programs, and workshops. Our leaders, volunteers, and staff figured out ways to impart knowledge and skills without being in the same physical space.

We also reimaged some of our larger in person events, such as 4-H Academy, by offering a series of virtual workshops throughout the month of February. Participants received a packet of supplies and a link to join a class taught by a knowledgeable volunteer. We had 75 youth participate in the workshops, which included animal nutrition, sewing, food decorating, floral design, jewelry making, doodle art, and electricity. We worked with two other units to offer a series of virtual workshop called "Find Your Spark." They were taught by 4-H educators and designed to introduce new and potential 4-H members to various projects. Workshops included: vet science, visual arts: clay, child development, herb gardening, and intercultural awareness.

### Rock Island Cooking Class

Our 4-H After School program for Rock Island students at Edison and Washington Junior High involved a weekly virtual cooking class taught by Extension staff. Each youth cooked from their own homes and came together in Google Classroom. The theme, "Cooking Around the World," included recipes from France, Italy, Germany, India, Ecuador, Mexico, and El Salvador. Several guest chefs showed everyone how to make dishes from their native countries.

The online format was a great way for kids to learn. Through the various lessons, they learned how to use their own kitchen appliances and, for many, it turned into a family event. By the end of the year, we had mothers, fathers, grandparents, and cousins cooking along with the youth. All food was supplied by the schools and delivered to homes the night before the lesson. It went so well that the class continued in fall of 2021 with the theme "Cooking Through the Decades," covering a new decade each month.



Kylie (left), from Washington Jr. High shows her "Cooking around the world" creations. Roland (right), from Edison Jr High is wearing his 4-H apron, part of an ending gift from U of I Extension.



## Increasing Illinois' water quality

Rachel Curry, watershed outreach associate, works in our unit to provide educational programs on the best practices for soil and water health as outlined in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. Here are ways she is helping Illinois Extension work toward that goal:

### Advanced Soil Health Training

The Bi-State Advanced Soil Health Training consists of six two-day trainings focused on multiple aspects of soil health. In 2021 Rachel and her colleague held three of the six trainings in June, August, and December covering topics such as soil health basics, cover crops, and the economics of soil health.



Bioreactors are one of the edge of field practices farmers can use to reduce nitrogen runoff into nearby water sources. Illinois Extension watershed outreach associate Rachel Curry worked with the Rock Island Soil and Water Conservation District to host an installation demonstration in September at a farm in Hillsdale.

### Educational Webinars:

#### Water Quality Solutions for Farmers and Landowners

On Aug. 12, Rachel led a webinar to share four "edge of field" conservation practices farmers and landowners could adopt to reduce nitrogen loss through tile drains and improve water quality. They also shared background information on the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The program was recorded and can be watched on the Illinois Extension YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/UIExtension](https://youtube.com/user/UIExtension).

#### Soil Health Field Day

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grant Soil Health Field Day was hosted in Milledgeville on Aug. 19. Rachel spoke about the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and the role of soil health within the NLRS. Those in attendance were also able to see the impact of cover crops on a field, as well as other impacts on soil health and see a rainfall simulator in action.



### Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Podcast

Rachel helps produce the INLRS podcast, which features interviews with experts and farmers about best practices. A new episode of the podcast is released once a month and covers a range of topics related to the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The primary topics relate to conservation practices recommended by the NLRS, but other timely topics are also covered such as farm safety at harvest. To date, 44 episodes have been produced with over 10,000 listens. Beginning in 2022, a blog to support the podcast will also be produced.



Hear real-world implementation of nutrient loss  
[go.illinois.edu/INLRSpodcast](https://go.illinois.edu/INLRSpodcast)

### University of Illinois Watershed Planning Course

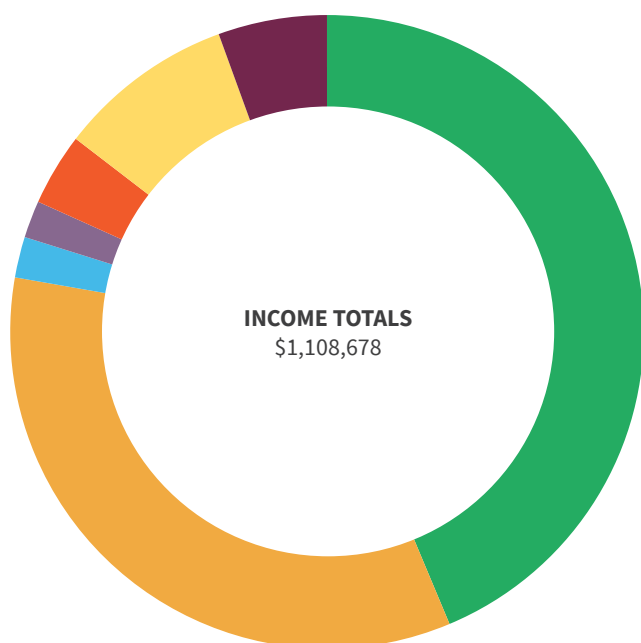
Over the past year, Rachel has helped with a University of Illinois Watershed Planning Course offered with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. During the Spring 2021 semester, the course focused on the Cedar Creek Watershed within the Flint-Henderson Watershed. The Fall 2021 semester looked at the Pine Creek Watershed in the Lower Rock River Watershed. Both the Flint-Henderson and the Lower Rock River Watershed are listed as Nitrogen Priority Watersheds within the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The goal is to take what each class has completed and use it as a foundation to create a watershed plan for each of the watersheds.

We are here to support farmers and agri business with cutting edge research and resources. Illinois Extension is renowned for conducting and sharing meaningful research to help farmers navigate modern agriculture. Our aim is for productive and profitable operations, with an eye on environmental sustainability and new and emerging opportunities. We provide a holistic approach with resources and trainings for not only the business end of farming, but to help Midwest farmers manage stress and find the support to thrive.



See agriculture resources on our website  
[extension.illinois.edu/hmrs/commercial-agriculture](https://extension.illinois.edu/hmrs/commercial-agriculture)





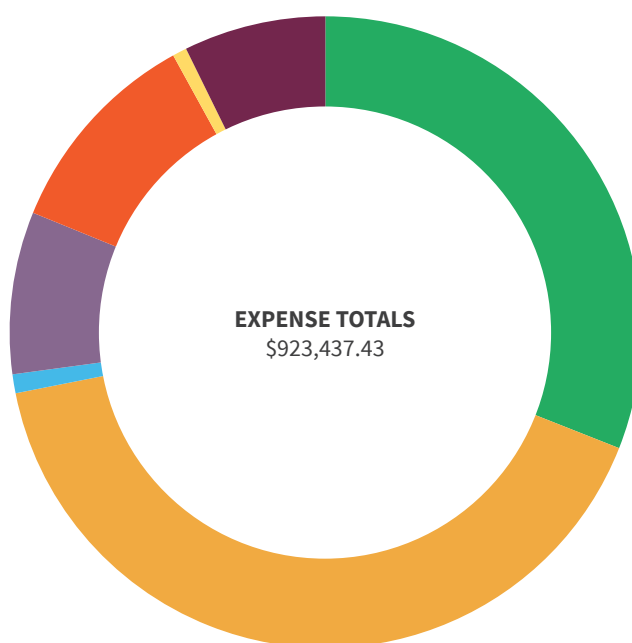
- \$484,271.54 County Board and State Match
- \$377,757.51 Federal SNAP Grant
- \$23,101.68 Grants
- \$21,029.97 Program Fees
- \$40,967.20 Foundations, Donations & Farm Bureau
- \$100,000.00 Smith Lever
- \$61,550.89 4-H Premiums

## Financial report

University of Illinois Extension is a three-way funding partnership among the State of Illinois, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the county boards in Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark. Our SNAP-Ed programs are funded by a federal grant from the USDA.

These partnerships bring hundreds of thousands of programming dollars into our four counties, matching local contributions with state, national, and federal support.

Many local business, foundations, and individuals provide additional support by donating through our local foundations, including to the Henry County 4-H Foundation, the Mercer County Extension & 4-H Foundation, and the Rock Island County Extension & 4-H Education Foundation. Support also comes from our local Extension Council and the Illinois 4-H Foundation. These resources are part of the local donation income that helps to sustain our programs.



- 286,157.20 Program Expenses and Salaries
- 377,757.51 Federal SNAP Program
- 8,934.49 Materials/Supplies
- 76,682.95 Utilities/Rent
- 100,000.00 Smith Lever
- 6,735.95 Transportation
- 67,169.33 4-H Awards

## Grants

Our unit receives a wide array of local programming grants each year. All of these sources are vital in helping us fulfill our educational mission.

### 2021 GRANTS & PROGRAM SPONSORSHIPS

- \$61,802: Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Grant for IL Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Programs
- \$35,000: Extension Disaster Education Network Grant
- \$7,918: Ag in the Classroom Grant for Mercer County
- In-kind Equipment and Ammunition: National Rifle Association for 4-H Shooting Sports in Rock Island County
- \$3,500: Mel McKay Charitable Trust for horticulture programs
- \$1,000: Exelon for horticulture programs
- \$500: Big River Resources for agriculture programs
- \$500: Gold Star FS, Cambridge for agriculture programs

---

## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Henry & Stark Counties Extension

358 Front Street  
Galva, IL 61434  
Phone: 309-932-3447  
Fax: 309-932-3454  
Mon, Wed, Fri., 8 am - 4 pm  
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: [uie-hmrs@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-hmrs@illinois.edu)

### Mercer County Extension

910 13th Street  
Viola IL 61486  
Phone: 309-513-3100  
FAX: 309-513-3101  
Tues, Wed, Thur., 8 am - 4 pm  
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: [uie-hmrs@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-hmrs@illinois.edu)

### Rock Island County Extension

321 W 2nd Avenue  
Milan, IL 61264  
Phone: 309-756-9978  
FAX: 309-756-9987  
Mon- Fri., 8 am - 4 pm  
(closed 12 pm - 12:30 pm)  
Email: [uie-hmrs@illinois.edu](mailto:uie-hmrs@illinois.edu)

---

## ONLINE



[www.facebook.com/uiextensionhmrs](https://www.facebook.com/uiextensionhmrs)



[@U\\_IL\\_Ext\\_HMRS](https://twitter.com/U_IL_Ext_HMRS)



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

Cover photos: (top left) Mercer County 4-H members at the 2021 Sheep Show; (top right) Rock Island County 4-H member at the 2021 General Projects show; (bottom left) farmers learn about edge of field practices at a bioreactor installation in Hillsdale, Ill; (bottom right) IL Extension nutrition and wellness educator, Kristin Bogdonas, leads a workshop on food preservation techniques.

**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).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.