



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

2021 Addressing Local Needs,
Solving Global Challenges
Grundy, Kankakee, and Will Counties

A Message from the County Director

When I think about Illinois Extension over the past year, two words come to mind: resilient and innovative.



Megan Walsh
County Director

Illinois Extension banded together to make sure we could meet the needs of our residents during the past year while the world around us continued to change. Staff in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties continued to take the information from the state and adapt it to fit the needs of you and our residents.

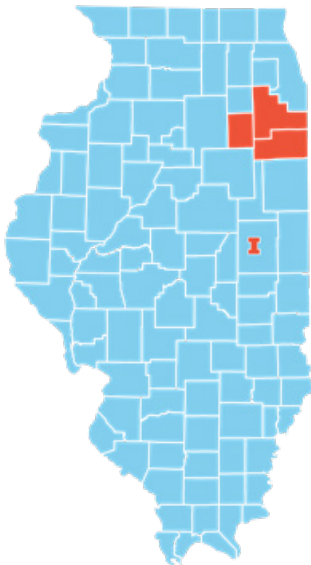
They continued to face the challenges we all are facing and create innovative solutions to everyday problems. We also thank our volunteers for helping us extend Extension knowledge to community members, youth, schools, and other community organizations. Our staff is excellent, but with the team alone, our reach would be limited. 4-H leaders, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Money Mentors, and other volunteers share their time educating

our community. They provide hands-on learning opportunities for individuals of all ages. They also help staff make connections and develop programs relevant to Grundy, Kankakee, and Will County residents. This year more than ever, we are thankful for our local county boards, businesses, and partners in the community. As we have adapted to the changing world, they have continued to work with us and offer their support. Without their help, we would not be able to expand our programs to reach more participants. We know this year has been difficult for these groups, and we appreciate them recognizing the importance of Extension programming and continuing to support our mission. As we move into 2022, I am happy to present this report that highlights just a few of the ways Extension staff in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties have impacted our neighbors.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Walsh".

Megan Walsh
County Extension Director

Staff Serving Grundy, Kankakee, and Will Counties



STAFF

Megan Walsh
County Director

Jamita Brown
Youth Development Educator

Jennifer Evangelista
SNAP-Ed Educator

Shannon Range
Youth Development Educator

James Theuri
Small Farms Educator
(Retired 2021)

Brooke Baker-Katcher
Program Coordinator, 4-H

Holly Froning
Program Coordinator, Master Gardeners

Nancy Kuhajda
Program Coordinator, Master Gardeners

Brittney Muschetto
Program Coordinator, 4-H

Anthony Warmack
Program Coordinator, 4-H

Debra Koch
Program Coordinator, 4-H
(Retired 2021)

Fernanda Ariza Perez
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Victoria Klimkiewicz
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Janet Moody
Community Worker, SNAP-Ed

Judy Lemenager
Office Support Associate

Mariana Maldonado
Office Support Associate


Debbie Gaffield
Office Support Associate
(Retired 2021)

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.



Making a difference with the Power of I

University of Illinois Extension is the outreach arm of the state's Land Grant university, University of Illinois.

With offices and staff in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties, we provide research-based resources and programming to the people of our communities. Local program areas include:

- Family and Consumer Economics
- Local Food Systems and Small Farms
- Home Horticulture and Natural Resources
- 4-H Youth Development
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)

Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.

We bring communities together. We are Extension.

Throughout this report, you will see numerous examples of how Extension has empowered the communities we serve to come together.

While harnessing the power of the University of Illinois, we serve our communities to educate and create innovative solutions to impact the people we serve. During difficult times or good times, we stick with our communities to innovate, educate, and create impact.

Inclusion. Innovation. Impact.
That's the Power of I





Financial Report: Our education impacts communities

University of Illinois Extension provides programming to communities in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties. Through our local, state, and federal funding streams, we are able to provide exceptional programming through our team of knowledgeable educators and program staff.

Federal funds include Illinois Nutrition Education Program grant monies. Local funds include donations from 4-H Foundations, 4-H Federations, United Way of Grundy County, United Way of Will County, and program fees.



- 49% Federal
- 22% County
- 1% Reserves
- 7% Local Sources
- 20% State



- 40.99% Program & Education
- 33.61% Office & Operation
- 19.54% Administration
- 5.87% Other Costs



12,186
People reached by Extension programming ¹



13,934
Volunteer hours in the community ²



\$409,232
Value of volunteer time ³

1. Individuals participating in multiple areas may be counted more than once
2. Includes self-reported hours for Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Master Composters, and Money Mentors. Total 4-H volunteer hours are based on an average of 96 hours per volunteer.
3. Based on Independent Sector Value of Volunteer Time (Illinois-2020)

FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Poor financial wellbeing can affect physical, mental, and social health which can result in poorer job performance, reduced ability to concentrate, and bankruptcy. Preventing bankruptcy and financial insecurity reduces the community need for support services. Extension supports financial wellbeing across ages and stages of life. Local programs serving Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties include consumer economics, 4-H, and other programs with content on financial wellbeing and literacy.



2,957
Podcast listens



1,063
Participants learning content on financial wellbeing¹



FOOD ACCESS & SECURITY: BECAUSE EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO FOOD

Research has drawn a strong connection between food insecurity and poor health and even academic outcomes of children. Food insecurity is not just about hunger. It's also about lacking access to the food options that provide adequate nutrition, particularly important for limited resourced individuals and families. Extension's network of volunteers and community partners creates opportunities to address food insecurity in locally relevant ways. Local programs serving Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties include SNAP-Ed, Master Gardeners, small farms, and more.



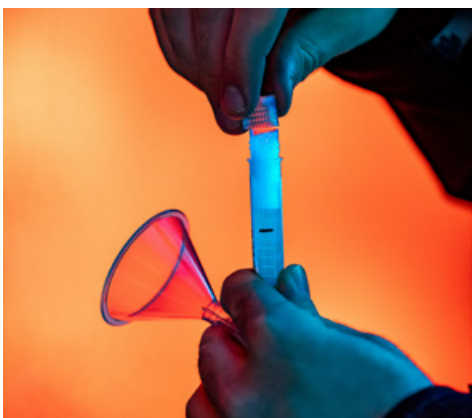
2,601
Program participants¹

THRIVING YOUTH

Thriving youth are at the core of healthy, robust communities. Our mentorship-based 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. Local programs serving Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties include 4-H, agriculture and natural resources, SNAP-Ed, and other programs directed toward youth participants.



6,497
Program participants¹



SPOTLIGHT: Stepping up to the plate when others fled

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for all. When trouble strikes, communities turn to Extension to provide sound information and programming:

- **15,186 people in 2021** in safe, social distancing fashion
- Extension is proud to safely provide programming throughout the COVID-19 pandemic - when others were stuck, Extension was there.

We are proud to lead outreach efforts for a land grant institution that innovates and impacts. Researchers at Illinois quickly developed an innovative rapid COVID-19 test which is as simple as spitting in a tube. This test has been deployed statewide, and one testing site is in Will County at Joliet Junior College.



Creaciones en la Cocina – First Illinois Spanish SNAP-Ed Curriculum

Illinois SNAP-Ed Translates NEW curriculum for local audiences

In Joliet, almost 50% of the population is composed of Hispanic individuals, many of who don't speak English, prompting a need to provide more educational materials in Spanish. In response, a team of SNAP-Ed staff members, led by bilingual community worker Fernanda Ariza, set out to create more resources in Spanish.

The project had a broad and ambitious scope: to translate current SNAP-Ed educational materials, review and adapt materials for cultural appropriateness, and find practical use as it relates to their cultural way of eating and living.

One of the new curriculum reviewed by this team was a *Creaciones en la Cocina*. This program was piloted for the Spanish Community Center's pantry clients in Joliet. It's the first entirely Spanish curricula offered by Illinois' SNAP-Ed and spans five weeks, with one lesson each week.

The program is tailored for Latinos. It includes health statistics relevant to this population and healthy recipes that use ingredients that Latinos typically use to cook. It also added has a lesson on food safety. By adjusting the content to be more relevant for Hispanic audiences, it enhances the ability to truly make an impact in helping these individuals lead a healthier lifestyle.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that Hispanic children lead the nation in childhood obesity. This effort to reach Hispanic families and provide culturally appropriate and sensitive nutrition educational programs is needed more than ever.

SNAP-Ed is excited to begin its third series of this in-person class SPC. The program has been expanded to Joliet Public Library three times a week virtually. As the Hispanic population in Joliet continues to grow, Extension is prepared to meet the needs of everyone in the community.





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



627
Total Estimated Reach



248
Number of Nutrition Education Classes Provided



- 39% Face-to-face
- 54% Virtual or online
- 7% Mix of online and face-to-face

After attending a virtual nutrition education class, a participant mentioned she is now constantly checking food labels for the products she buys for her family. She said, "I was surprised to see how much added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat are in our favorite snacks! Now, I'm checking all my children's snacks' labels and buying those that have no added sugar, less salt and more fiber."

SNAP-Education Community Partnerships



6
K-12 Schools



2
Stores or Markets



5
Early Childhood



5
Other Agencies or Community Centers



1
Food Banks and Food Pantries

SNAP-Ed fights food insecurity



The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was created to help people facing hunger by providing monetary assistance for food. Since 1992, SNAP has also received funds to provide free nutrition education under the SNAP-Ed program.

In the state of Illinois, SNAP-Ed programs are administered through the Illinois Nutrition Education Programs. The program works to enable both individual and system-level changes. The SNAP-Ed team works to build relationships with residents and organizations to understand their needs and build upon their knowledge and skills to encourage healthier changes they enjoy.

SNAP-Ed focuses on informing and empowering SNAP-eligible audiences to adopt healthier habits that meet their needs and lifestyles to reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

At a broader level, SNAP-Ed also reaches the general communities at large and works to make the concepts taught in classes accessible and enticing. One example of this is the use of nutritional signage in locations where families access food to promote fruits and vegetables.

Because of the ongoing pandemic, there has been a nationwide increase in the number of people facing food insecurity. (Feeding America 2021) Locally, many community members and partner organizations have also witnessed the same. It is now critical to connect our neighbors with the resources available to assist them during these times.

To help those in need find food, visit the Find Food Illinois webtool [Eat.Move.Save.](https://eat-move-save.extension.illinois.edu) to show nearby pantries, grocery stores, SNAP and WIC offices, senior food resources, as well as school and summer meal sites in this area.



Need food? Know someone who does?
Search a ZIP code for personalized resources
eat-move-save.extension.illinois.edu





Grow Your Own Groceries: Knowledge is needed now

Grow Your Own Groceries provides unique learning opportunity

The old adage “Give a person a fish, they eat for a day; teach a person to fish, they have fish for a lifetime” was the spark that ignited a new program series, Grow Your Own Groceries, presented by Master Gardener coordinators Nancy Kuhajda and Holly Froning in response to the pandemic. Nancy serves Will and Grundy counties, and Holly serves Kankakee County.

Empty shelves in grocery stores were a common sight as the pandemic raged on. In a twisted parallel, people quarantined at home started looking at their homes and landscapes in new ways, including a renewed interest in gardening, cooking, and food preservation. Since interest in these skills had waned in the last 10 years, many people found themselves with the desire to grow and cook their own food, but little or no knowledge or experience.

Enter Illinois Extension’s “We were made for this” attitude, linking the local community with research-based information from University of Illinois that allows Illinois families to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.



The future of a family’s food supply may rely on using evolving best practices to enhance food production capacity—even in backyard gardens and patio containers.

Beginning in March 2021, the Grow Your Own Groceries Program 10-part series offered weekly one-hour Master Gardener Power Hours focusing on one specific family of vegetables or fruits each session. The simple one-food-at-a-time plan helped new and experienced gardener alike, taking participants from seed selection through best practices of planting, growing to harvesting, storage, and preservation on a specific crop.

Since in-person programming ability was still restricted, the Grow Your Own Groceries series provided contactless pick up Garden to Go learning kits that contained educational materials and seeds for the featured crop. Learning materials provided participants with Extension fact sheets on growing; pest and disease problem solving; harvest, storage, and food preservation; and several recipes to try with the food they grew themselves. Programs were conducted virtually and recorded for participants convenience. The series will be repeated and enhance for 2022.



Building up Chefs in high school

Victoria Klimkiewicz, SNAP-Ed community worker, provided the Illinois Junior Chef program to three classes at Joliet Township High School for six weeks throughout June and July. The curriculum was developed by Illinois Nutrition Education Program staff.

Thirty-six Transitions students aged 15 to 21 participated. This curriculum covers general nutrition information to help students make better choices when accessing foods and provides students with hands-on cooking demonstrations as they follow the instructor and create a healthy recipe together.

This practice-based experience gave students the confidence and knowledge to cook nutritious meals for themselves.

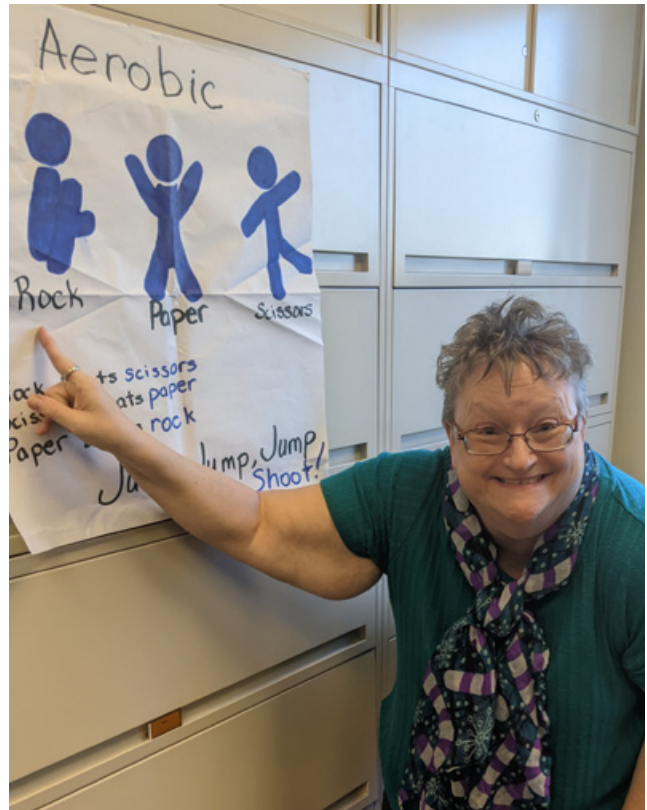
When the entire series was complete, the students received the title “Chef,” free cookbooks, and kitchen tools to allow them to continue using the recipes and concepts taught during the course. The program also empowered confidence to make healthy food choice they enjoy and the tools necessary to safely create the tasty recipes they made in their sessions.



Tiny chefs, big impact: Food preparation workshop builds nutrition skills

Local middle school students learned about healthy eating and were then given the tools to bring the knowledge home through the Illinois Junior Chef program. Fernanda Ariza, SNAP-Ed community worker, and Jamita Brown, 4-H youth development educator, conducted the program.

Five families received an air fryer. Each lesson, recipes were adapted so students could get comfortable with the appliance to be able to use it safely at home. By increasing their confidence and knowledge, youth can help busy parents during meal preparation. The program also encourages youth to try new foods. Parents in the program had already attended an adult nutrition class, so the whole family learned healthier food options and methods of cooking.



Janet Moody, SNAP-Ed community worker, shows pictures of an aerobic rock, paper, scissors game.

Rock, Paper, Scissors, HEALTH!

Healthy Kids Out of School encourages healthy choices that lead to a more healthy lifestyle for youth. Janet Moody, community worker, provided the program at the Kankakee YWCA with 15 youth at each class. The students learned about the dietary guidelines and how simple changes can impact their health. They also learned how physical activity can improve their physical and mental health. All activities were used to reinforce the importance of daily physical movement.

The physical activity component also connected to the concepts of the lesson and motivated students to move. Using activity cards that displayed energizing food for the whole body (fuel food) and foods that give minor spurts of energy (treat food), students created their own game of aerobic rock-paper-scissors. This curriculum reinforced the importance of moving daily with examples of how simple, unique, and fun 60 minutes of physical activity can be every day.

When it comes to being active, the most important factor for students is a willingness to move and a desire to positively impact their health. Students have endless options when it comes to the exercising that don't require equipment or organized sports. By incorporating physical activity in their lifestyle and making healthy choices every day, they can reduce their chances of developing chronic diseases.





Healthy Habits brings teamwork and fun to students with disabilities



Students at the Joliet Central High School Transition Center participated in the Health Habits program. The center serves students with disabilities. Jamita Brown, 4-H youth development educator, provided activities for 70 students this year. Will County Extension has expanded its partnership to reach more under served youth in the county. With funding from the Illinois 4-H Foundation and the Wal-Mart Foundation, Healthy Habits focuses on creating healthier nutritional, physical, mental, social, and emotional habits.

During the summer camp programs, students focused on being physically active. Throughout the school year, the focus shifts to healthier nutritional, mental, social and emotional habits. Some activities include fruit and vegetable taste tests, making fresh salsa, making water enhancers, and making first aid kits. The final sessions focus on mindfulness as the participants turn their classroom into a mindfulness paint studio. Youth learn how to manage their emotions and learn practical ways to give their brain breaks.

These lessons have served as a way to promote a healthier lifestyle, and also engages the youth to work as teams with their classmates. Their teachers are encouraged to continue with the theme of the lessons each week after the sessions are over and often challenge the youth to participate in challenges via Padlet.





 Award-winning partnership serves communities: “I Cook, I Care”

 Air fryers teach healthy living

Will County 4-H has built so many community relationships and partnerships throughout Will County and metropolitan areas of Joliet. These community partnerships help Extension serve diverse populations throughout the county. Leveraging these relationships allows Will County 4-H to be an important pillar in the community while joining together to provide youth programming to underserved populations.

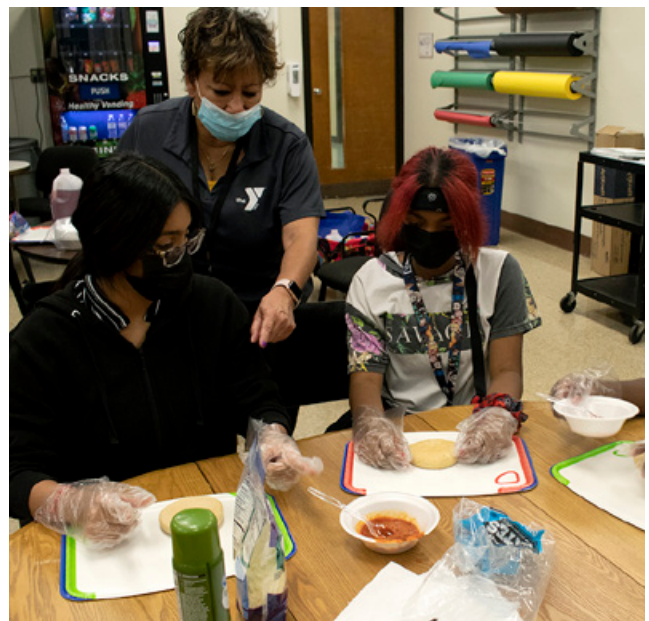
Underserved populations include Black, Brown, and other minority communities, youth with special needs, rural communities, and other communities in the margins. Often, youth programming is not accessible due to financial constraints. An Illinois 4-H Foundation grant supported the county’s efforts to increase programming efforts that boosted diversity, equitable access to youth programming, inclusive programming practices, and more accessible youth programming.

With the grant, Jamita Brown provided healthy habits programming to underserved youth organizations for free and purchased air fryers for youth that attended all classes.

These community partnerships are imperative to Will County 4-H because they help serve diverse populations throughout the county.

The I Cook, I Care youth program included four to six cooking classes. Youth learned how to measure, read recipes, use a knife, and choose healthy recipes they could make with air fryers. Youth who participated in all classes received a free air fryer to take home. Many youth care for younger siblings as a proxy caregiver after school or on the weekends.

This program was also offered by Will County SNAP-Ed community workers and won the University of Illinois Extension’s Interdisciplinary Award at the 2021 Annual Conference.





A family participates in a cultural activity safely at home.



Learning about cultures and the world

We live in a divided world where people are judged for being different: dressing different, eating different foods, celebrating different holidays, listening to different music. What looks different may instead be unknown to us. What if there was a safe space for youth to learn about different cultures and countries where they could ask questions about the different customs? Would such a space make the unusual seem more common and understandable?

That's exactly what 163 youth did in November 2021. From the comfort of their homes, youth participated in 30 days of activities, with each day focusing on a different country. Youth learned about the types of food eaten, art forms, music, dance, recreation activities, geography, culture and so much more from different countries around the world.

These youth learned what was important to residents in these countries. As a result, youth are now more knowledgeable about working with diverse audiences. The impact of this program may be felt for years. It could be as simple as making someone feel welcomed in a group setting or be as large as traveling the world to volunteer their time.

In a post survey, 50% of the youth indicated a high understanding of other country's culture; 38% have a very high understanding.

By teaching youth to celebrate each other's differences, the world becomes a more interesting and engaging place.

Thanks so much for offering such awesome activities. We had a ton of fun doing these as a family.

PARENT

Hatching a success story:

Classroom embryology is about life

Embryology is the study of how embryos grow and develop. Students see how a chicken develops in an egg through a series of activities. By candling the egg, students observe the growth and development of the chick. Then they record data, make predictions, and conclude what they think the outcome will be.

Typically, it takes 21 days for the embryos to fully develop and hatch. Posters and videos help explain what is happening throughout the incubation time. This helps the students understand what is going on inside the egg.

On day 25, the chicks are brought back to the Extension office and sent to their forever home on the farm. Goodbye letters from the students are sent with the farmer.



Youth show off newly hatched chicks safely at home.

Spotlight: Food Access

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





Go-Slow-Whoa frames types of food that are healthiest to eat



Eleven families in the Kankakee County Head Start program learned about healthy food options from Janet Moody, Extension community worker.

In a 4-session virtual series, Janet engaged preschool children and their parents in Eat Play Grow classes. This curriculum builds an understanding of what healthy foods are for families and gives kids the language to express their likes and dislikes as related to food.

Participating parents received free children's nutrition literature. The books promote the healthy concepts discussed in the class and allowed parents to reinforce the nutrition principles at home. The program allowed families to try new foods and reduce food waste.

Not only did this decrease family food waste, but it also created interest in trying new foods. Throughout the course, families were reminded of the importance of focusing on vegetables and healthy beverages when shopping.

Using the Go-Slow-Whoa framework, nutrition concepts were made simple, memorable, and applicable to everyday use. Parents were able to understand how simple switches could make a big impact in the health of their families. The Go-Slow-Whoa framework uses a traffic light model that categorizes foods as foods to encourage (green), foods to eat sometimes (yellow), and foods to limit (red). This tool is an easy tool for parents and students to use when eating and encourages them to pick healthy choices.

Eat Play Grow is an excellent example of teaching both the children and the parents to recognize good food choices throughout their daily lives and helping them feel empowered and affirmed in selecting nutritious options when accessing food.

Throughout the course families were reminded of the importance of focusing on vegetables and healthy beverages so parents were encouraged to select these options when accessing food.



Janet Moody holds up a Go-Slow-Whoa visual during a program



For more info on SNAP-ed in your county, visit extension.illinois.edu/gkw/illinois-nutrition-education-programs



Growing plants today, learning skills for life



“Us, grow things? And, sell them, too? The whole school?,” a wide-eyed third grader asked. Absolutely, and so much more. With all of its many challenges, 2021 also brought amazing opportunity, a new project and partnership for University of Illinois Extension Will County Master Gardeners and Union Elementary School in Joliet.

The goal was for students to learn the skills of growing and greenhouse management, culminating in a student-run plant sale for the local community. This program is an ideal fit for Illinois Extension, bringing the university to the community through the sharing of research-based information and implementing it through experiential learning. This is hands-on STEM learning-by-doing at its finest. For the Master Gardeners, the program is a true embodiment of the Illinois Master Gardener Program mission: Helping Others Learn to Grow.

Using the knowledge and skills they learned in Master Gardener training, volunteers and Illinois Extension staff worked together to develop simple, hands-on, age appropriate lessons that targeted a single subject on gardening, greenhouse management, agriculture, or natural resources for each session. Union School made a large, long-term investment into this program by building a professional grade 1,800 square foot greenhouse on the school campus. All 111 students of Union School, from pre-K through eighth grade, including many from under served families, attended 30-minute greenhouse sessions each week during the school year. The program is divided by classes with two classes in attendance per session, six sessions per week.

Most students had little to no experience with gardening, growing, or nature-based activities prior to this program. The program’s early focus was to orient and familiarize students with the basics of gardening and help them to focus in the easily distractable environment of the living learning lab greenhouse.

Within the first few weeks, it was evident that the program was producing positive impacts, not only directly by increasing knowledge and skill sets related to growing, but also in the development and strengthening of the essential soft skills needed for a lifetime—teamwork, independent problem-solving, attention to detail, ability to follow multi-step directions, altruism, and leadership.

These positive impacts have been quantified by research. Studies show that there is growing evidence that exposure to plants and green space provides many benefits, including improved health, quality of life, ability to concentrate, and relationships with others.

The amazing expert volunteers and staff from the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Program have introduced a predominantly low-income minority student population to the wonders of botany and greenhouse management. Our students look forward to their time in the greenhouse and rave about those experiences.

SUPERINTENDENT TIM BALDERMANN
UNION SCHOOL

The greenhouse program also builds skills across other curriculum areas while learning in the context of gardening—learning to measure soil, estimating time each plant needs to go from seed to sale, calculating the cost of a seed and supplies, and understanding where their food comes from are all interwoven into the greenhouse program.

In preparation for the plant sale, students at every grade level learn age appropriate entrepreneurship and workforce preparedness skills. All students help to choose which plants to grow. Seventh and eighth grade students learn to develop a simple business plan, sales forms, and some short marketing commercials to advertise their plant sale using technology. Grade levels third through eighth grade learn to make change and check inventory.

With these basic skills learned in this first year of the Union School Greenhouse Program, the Master Gardeners will be able to expand and enhance the botany, greenhouse, agriculture, and natural resources learning and activities each year in the business of growing, selling, and learning for a lifetime.



117
Students receiving education



6 sessions per week
Totaling 96 programming days in 2021



Kankakee Master Naturalists join in Illinois barn owl recovery efforts

In 2015, Kankakee County had no recorded barn owl nesting activity. Terry Esker is leading the Illinois Barn Owl Recovery effort statewide. He led a webinar that inspired Kankakee Master Naturalist to change this.

“He talked to us about the problems that the owls were having finding a place to nest and we did something,” one local Master Naturalist said. After the webinar, 11 boxes were built and erected around the county.

Youth got in on the action. University of Illinois, along with the Kankakee Valley Forest Preserve, hosted multiple trainings on dissection of owl pellets. The Master Naturalist led the investigation explaining how an owl gets rid of indigestible parts of an animal in a pellet and regurgitates it. The students were able to dissect the pellet and try to put the contents back together. Parts of mice and voles were found in the pellets.

Spotlight: Engagement with home and community landscapes

There is growing evidence that exposure to plants and green space provides many benefits, including improved health, quality of life, ability to concentrate, and relationships with others. Sustainable home landscapes can net both economic benefits to communities through increased property value and can create environmental benefits for all through supporting pollinators and other important contributors to ecosystems.





Vermicomposting teaches important skills for youth

It's easy to believe that changing one thing doesn't impact another; however, one change may have a major impact on others, especially when it comes to natural resources. It's vitally important for youth to understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of life from the smallest microbe to the largest of all beings and everything in between. Youth can do little things in their own homes to help preserve natural resources.

In the spring 2021, 4-H youth from University of Illinois Extension increased their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of ecosystems, decomposition, and vermicomposting during the Grundy County Ecosystems and Worms program. Although still in the COVID pandemic, Teen Teachers and Extension staff worked together to provide a fun and educational program for our youth.

Teen Teachers and youth learned about worm care, life cycles, decomposition, and conservation. They created their own tabletop vermicomposting bin with table scraps, soil, newspaper, and worms. They were able to describe and understand the importance of the different layers within their worm ecosystem and the needs of worms.

In addition, youth were challenged to complete a variety of experiments to determine how long it takes for worms to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. They had to create a way to measure how much food was eaten and did so by placing an equal amount of each food in different places in the bin, then recorded their results during weekly bin inspections. Youth continued to take care of their fish in the pop bottle ecosystem and worms in the compost bin for weeks after the program ended. Most of them expressed interest in taking additional natural resources programs through 4-H in the future.

On the way home yesterday, the kids talked about how much fun yesterday was. We added a snail each to their new ecosystems. Thanks again! We hope to be at more classes.

KELLY J





Smart Cents: Teaching financial literacy

Financial literacy is important to learn at any age, but it's even more important to learn at an early age. Will County 4-H Educator Jamita Brown teamed up with family and consumer science staff to bring financial literacy to Will County. The Smart Cents grant was given in partnership with Cook County 4-H and TD Ameritrade. There was a goal of 250 youth in underserved communities living in Cook County and Will County.

Youth attended virtual financial literacy sessions during the height of the pandemic and were awarded for their efforts with \$40 gift cards to practice their money management skills. Extension partnered with the G.W. Buck Boys and Girls Club and After the Peanut to provide over 50 youth with financial literacy programming. G.W. Buck Boys and Girls Club attended virtual sessions, while After the Peanut held a financial literacy themed week during its summer camp. Youth learned about budgeting, saving and investing, career choices, and more. Virtual sessions, as well as weekly challenges, were done online. Youth had 10 challenges to complete, and they video recorded their responses. Some of the challenges were mock interviews, wants and needs scavenger hunts, and budgeting. Each youth that participated received a bag full of financial literacy learning materials, including workbooks, a piggy bank, and financial literacy flashcards from a Black-owned local business.

Extension also completed programming with the Teen Achievers program of the YMCA in Joliet. Middle school students at Gompers Junior High completed four sessions. These students not only learned about financial wants and needs, but also participated in a real world simulation. Youth were grouped into households and were given different income amounts at random. They had to budget, pay bills, and learn how to write checks and balance checkbooks. These experiences helped youth have more insight on how their families work together to support them, but also have an understanding of how to manage finances in their now and in the future.





¡Hola, GKW 4-H!

Spanish translations for a more accessible program

With the support and leadership of state 4-H staff members Carissa Nelson and Roxie Cejeda, Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties pushed for systemic change to create a more equitable and accessible program for those whose first language is not English. This unit was one of the first in the state to adopt a fully translated “Welcome to 4-H!” sequence delivered completely in Spanish.

Parents being forced to make decisions in a language they are uncomfortable with harms the mission of DEIA efforts at the most basic level: **accessible & equitable** communications.

Parents who speak English as a second language (and especially those that do not speak English at all) are often placed in the situation of needing the help of their children to translate. This places an undue burden on families and parents, forcing families to either have children translate for parents, or forcing parents to make major decisions regarding their children in a language they may be uncomfortable with.

The 4-H team worked to improve the 4-H family experience at the most basic level: Equitable Communications.

Through a complete translation of all current marketing materials and the development of a welcome sequence written entirely in Spanish, the accessible nature of communications in this area no longer feel like an afterthought.

This project also led to many exciting developments, including the translation of the cornerstone family publication known as the “4-H Project Selection Guide.”



To receive information about 4-H in Spanish, fill out the form located at the link below!
go.illinois.edu/about4Hgw

Ag Olympics: not just for the big kids

The Ag Olympics is an exciting, action packed, and competitive event that many 4-H members look forward to each year. Members ages 5 to 7 have not been able to participate in this event in the past; instead they only dreamed of being able to do what the “big kids” do.



The Kankakee County 4-H Federation teen leaders jumped in and helped them feel included, supported, and most of all, helped them have fun!

With the help of Extension staff, the Kankakee County 4-H Federation put together a Cloverbud Ag Olympics. These teens developed advertisements, registrations, goodie bags, prizes, and events for Cloverbuds to compete in. Each registered Cloverbud got the opportunity to compete in Fishing for Our Future in Ag: Fishing Game, Hopping for a Happy End to Fair Week: Sack Race, Tossing to Foster Teamwork: Tossing Ears of Corn into a Hula Hoop, and Watering Our Well Being for Others: Water Relay.

This event was met with great response from our county. The older kids gathered around and filled the bleachers to cheer on the Cloverbuds. Sixty-six percent of the Cloverbuds enrolled in Kankakee County 4-H participated in this event.

Thriving youth leads to healthy adults and thriving communities. Teen leaders saw a need and worked to make the program more inclusive of a younger age group. This resulted in the Cloverbud members feeling a sense of belonging and Federation members learning invaluable skills to fix problems in their communities to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity.





Spotlight: Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are at the core of healthy, robust communities. Our mentorship-based 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.



From 'Grossology' to future scientist

Each year, the Grundy office offers summer STEM programs for youth to enjoy and try out new and fun activities and learn a little along the way. This past summer, our intern, Rhett Higgins, led a group of youth through four days of exciting, hands-on learning activities at the office and on his family farm.

Four different sessions for kids were held that explored science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This year, youth explored architecture by building skyscrapers and buildings out of food and kitchen supplies. Once they built the strongest building they could, it was their job to figure out how to keep them upright to avoid demolition.

My daughters went to the engineering workshops you all did last week. I just wanted to say thank you for doing these; they had the best time! They talked about everything the whole way home. It's been quite a year, and this was a big deal for both of them! We really appreciate it!

EMILY J



They also built race cars out of pasta. The kids looked at the engineering aspects of the vehicle and then raced them against other cars to see which design was the winner. They also built vortex cannons to see how much they could knock down at different distances.

The last two days of programs took place on the farm. Kids learned about soil, caught insects to study, learned about an expansive insect collection, and studied birds on the farm. They looked at birds that were hatched on the farm and the process it takes to hatch your own birds.

The last day of programs was the youth's favorite. It was called GROSSOLOGY! What is more fun than gross things found on the farm. The kids got the chance to learn about digestion in animals and then dissected owl pellets in order to see all the different things the owl had eaten in the last few days. According to the kids this was "the best part of camp."





Money Mentors: Growing financial competency in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties

Improving financial wellbeing and economic vitality starts at the most basic level: education. Surprisingly, many adults lack the skills necessary to make good financial decisions. University of Illinois Extension aims to change that through educational opportunities aimed at adults and youth.

The Money Mentors program trains volunteers with extensive financial information. Then, the volunteers help others navigate financial challenges. Locally, nine volunteers joined the program as mentors, teaching topics such as budgeting, debt repayment, and money management. Statewide, program participants say they experience an increase in emergency and longterm savings and an overall decrease in debt.



Learn more about Money Mentors at extension.illinois.edu/gkw/money-mentors



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.

EXTENSION COUNCIL ADVISORY BOARD

The Extension Council is a group of volunteers, who each represent facets of their communities, share their needs and concerns and serve as a catalyst and leader in shaping the vision of Extension

Christina Basham
Shelby Basham
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Rev. Herb Brooks
Christine Frederick

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Sara Mitchell
Sabrina McNeal
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ONLINE



/UIEUnit9



/University of Illinois Extension-GKW

Cover photos: (top left) Nancy works with Union Classroom, (top right) YMCA volunteer works with youth during “I Cook, I Care” program developed by Jamita, (bottom left) Fernanda works with a partner organization on cooking classes, (bottom right) 4-H member Ben takes care of a cat during an animal shelter service project

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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