

Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Impact.

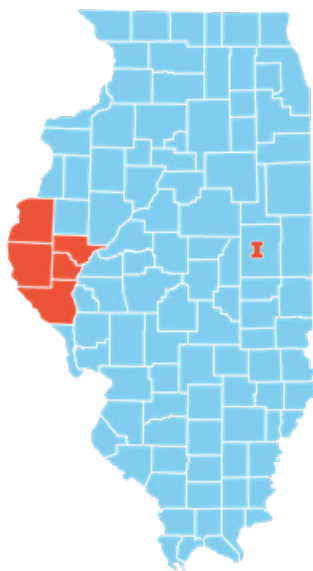


Serving Adams, Brown, Hancock, Pike, and Schuyler Counties
Illinois Extension Impact Report 2024





Shelby Crow
County Director



Message from the County Director

Welcome to our annual impact report. This report is a time of reflection for our team and an opportunity to share programming highlights with the communities we serve. In 2024, we expanded and enhanced many existing programs, saw participant numbers increase across all program areas, launched several new programs, and collaborated with both existing and new community partners to serve the residents of Adams, Brown, Hancock, Pike, and Schuyler counties.

In 2024, Illinois Extension unveiled a statewide strategic plan that will guide our efforts for the next 10 years. Through this planning process, staff and stakeholders were actively engaged to ensure our work and Mission align. For a comprehensive overview of our Mission and Strategic Priorities, please visit page 3.

Throughout this report, you will see how these priorities are integrated into our work. In our five counties, our dedicated staff is committed to these priorities, and we are excited to share the highlights with you.

We also want to express our sincere appreciation for our volunteers. While this report showcases some of their contributions, it cannot fully capture the countless hours they dedicate. Our volunteers are the backbone of our work, enhancing the lives of their neighbors through 4-H, Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists, agriculture, and nutrition. Without them, our impact would not be as significant or meaningful.

As we reflect on our accomplishments in 2024, we are already busy with our 2025 programs! Thank you for your continued support of Illinois Extension. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you and look forward to seeing you in 2025.

Shelby Crow
County Extension Director

Cover photo: 2024 Youth
Leadership Academy students
participate in a teambuilding
activity called helium stick.

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to eight strategic priorities:



Community



Economy



Environment



Food and Agriculture



Health



Partnerships



Technology and Discovery



Workforce Excellence

2024 Engagement

Extension leaders, staff, and stakeholders define priorities that create meaningful, mission-centered outcomes throughout the state:

730

Communities Served

805K+

Program Attendees

9.7M+

Webpage Views

22.4M+

Social Media Impressions

2.5M+

YouTube Impressions

547

Educational Sessions/Week
(28K+ Annually)

90

Online Courses Accessed by
12K+ People

12,484

Local Government Education
Webinar Reach

1,840

4-H Clubs

67,917

Fair Exhibits

20,339

Members

261,012

4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,563

Program Volunteers

266

Community Gardens

2,922

School and Community Partners

\$15,735,213

Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$514,316

Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4.7M+

External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners

Resource Generation



Strategic Priority: Community



Artist depiction of Frank McWorter



Facilitating New Philadelphia's historic transition

In the heart of Pike County lies New Philadelphia, a town founded in 1836 by Frank McWorter, a formerly enslaved man who purchased his own freedom and that of 16 family members. This remarkable town, the first in the United States to be founded, platted, and registered by an African American, has been designated a National Historic Site by the National Park Service.

For nearly three decades, the New Philadelphia Association has been the guardian of this historic site. Comprising local historians, community leaders, and descendants of Frank McWorter, the association has worked tirelessly to preserve the town's legacy. Their dedication paid off in December 2022 when New Philadelphia was officially recognized as a National Historic Site.

The Challenge Ahead

With this new designation, the association faced the significant task of transitioning the site's stewardship to the park service. To ensure a smooth transition, the association sought the expertise of Illinois Extension.

A Collaborative Effort

Beginning in September 2023, Anne Silvis, former Extension assistant dean and community and economic development program leader, and Shelby Crow, county director, from Illinois Extension collaborated with the association board to design a comprehensive planning process. Through interviews and multiple meetings with association leadership, they gathered crucial insights to shape the future role of the association in partnership with the park service.

In spring 2023, University of Illinois Professor Kathryn E. Holliday and her doctoral students from the Landscape Architecture, Cultural Heritage Class joined the project, researching various aspects of New Philadelphia's history,

including indigenous presence, agricultural innovation, and freedom seeking. Their findings, presented to the association, added depth to the narrative of New Philadelphia.

A Vision for the Future

In the summer of 2024, a pivotal planning retreat was held, bringing together 32 stakeholders, including historians, archaeologists, community leaders, and McWorter descendants. Facilitated by Silvis and Crow, the retreat focused on defining the site's meaning, visitor experience, and stakeholder engagement with the National Park Service. The retreat also captured oral histories from McWorter family members, resulting in invaluable historical documentation.

Outcomes and Impact

The collaboration resulted in a comprehensive report and valuable research recommendations. This project preserved New Philadelphia's legacy and engaged diverse stakeholders in shaping its future.

As the New Philadelphia Association transitions stewardship to the National Park Service, the town's rich history and Frank McWorter's legacy will continue to inspire future generations.



Stakeholders participate in a planning retreat covering specific aspects of the new National Historic Site and its transition.



4-H Foundations empower future leaders

4-H Foundations are more than just financial supporters; they are the backbone of countless enriching experiences for youth. By funding scholarships and grants, these foundations ensure that financial barriers do not prevent young people from participating in transformative 4-H opportunities such as camps, workshops, conferences, and competitions.

In Adams, Hancock, and Pike counties, 4-H Foundations work closely with Extension staff to promote the 4-H mission. Each foundation operates independently, guided by local volunteers who set the vision and goals for their county. The funds raised are directly invested back into the local 4-H members, making a tangible difference in their lives.

Adams County 4-H Foundation began in 2017 and continues to grow each year. In 2024, the Adams County 4-H Foundation provided financial support to 4-H members to attend local and state conferences and assisted with project support through the grant process. Several awards and scholarships are presented to chosen applicants at the annual achievement ceremony in the fall, including the 4-H Member of the Year and the Glen Tenhouse award.

Hancock County 4-H Foundation has been active for more than 20 years and continues to increase its financial support of 4-H members. The foundation supports 4-H members with assistance for program costs and enrollment. In 2024, the Hancock County 4-H Foundation provided financial support to 4-H members to attend local and state conferences and assisted with project support through the grant process. The Hancock County 4-H Foundation also awarded five scholarships to high school seniors who had shown through the application process how 4-H had impacted their lives.

Pike County 4-H Foundation was re-established in June 2024 and is actively seeking ways to support and grow the 4-H program in Pike County. 4-H members in Pike County now have the ability to apply for project funding and for financial assistance to attend local and state 4-H events.

These foundations are instrumental in nurturing the next generation of innovators, leaders, and community builders, making a lasting impact on the youth in our communities.



Learn more about 4-H Foundations
extension.illinois.edu/abhps/4-h-foundations

Harvesting insights at Gardener's Palette

Gardening continues to bloom in popularity. To celebrate a wide range of gardening and horticulture topics, share tried-and-true tips and tricks, and provide opportunities for beginners, the Adams County Master Gardeners hosted their 28th annual Gardener's Palette.

The annual event offered participants the chance to hear from gardening and horticulture experts about growing practices and other related topics, as well as an opportunity to network with fellow gardeners.

The highlight of the event was a keynote address by Jeff Vancil from Hart's Nursery. His presentation, titled "Time to Try a New Tree," underscored the importance of diversifying tree species to promote healthier and more resilient landscapes.

Breakout speakers included:

- Extension Educators: Chris Enroth, Jennifer Fishburne, Ken Johnson, and Emily Swihart
- Local Master Gardeners: Kerry Bergman, Brea Corrigan, and Deborah Lee
- Industry Experts: Richard Hancock and Carey Boehm-Corrie

Breakout topics covered a variety of interests:

- Trees & Disaster Preparedness
- Culinary Herbs & Pollinating Insects
- Gardens of Nauvoo
- Make Every Drop Count — Xeriscaping
- ReTHINK, ReIMAGINE, ReCREATE Your Landscape
- Bring More Flavor to Your Food
- Sustainable Pest Management
- Simple Gardening Tips and Tricks
- Preserving Your Garden's Beauty with Dried Flowers

Participants' evaluations shared how they plan to apply what they learned at Gardener's Palette:

- Many found the information immediately relevant and plan to apply it right away.
- Some are inspired to research and inventory their tree varieties.
- Others mentioned that the insights will influence their future garden planning and maintenance.

The Gardener's Palette once again proved to be a valuable resource for the gardening community, fostering a spirit of learning and collaboration among attendees.





Enhancing teams and building awareness through professional development programs

Effective communication and empathy are crucial for any organization's success. Two effective programs, Real Colors, and the Community Action Poverty Simulation, are making significant strides by enhancing team dynamics and increasing awareness about the challenges faced by those living in poverty.

Fostering Effective Communication and Collaboration

Real Colors, a personality assessment tool, helps individuals identify their dominant temperament — blue, gold, green, or orange — and understand how these traits influence their interactions with others. Kristin Huls and Shelby Crow, certified facilitators with Illinois Extension, have integrated Real Colors training into various programs, including the Youth Leadership Academy, and facilitated the training for other community organizations and schools. This training transforms team dynamics by fostering conversations that highlight the strengths of each individual's Real Color. Following the program, organizations reported improved communication, enhanced collaboration, and a greater appreciation for diverse perspectives within their team.

Building Empathy and Understanding

The Community Action Poverty Simulation is a powerful educational tool designed to help participants better understand the barriers and daily challenges of those living in poverty. In 2024, John Wood Community College staff, Quincy University students, and PACT Headstart staff participated,

gaining valuable insights and empathy through the simulation. Evaluation results showed that 100% of participants found the program worthwhile and would recommend it to others.

A Unified Approach

By combining the strengths of Real Colors and the Community Action Poverty Simulation, organizations can foster effective communication and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by those living in poverty. These programs not only enhance team dynamics but also build empathy and awareness, creating a more cohesive and effective workforce ready to tackle any challenge.



After completing the personality assessment, Bella Ease staff formed groups to discuss their personality colors. Each group then shared insights about their color with the rest of the team.



Building futures and bridging gaps with Youth Leadership Academy

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for youth leadership development outside the traditional classroom setting became more apparent than ever. Recognizing this, local partners, school principals, and guidance counselors voiced a strong desire to revive the Youth Leadership Academy, a program that had been on hiatus during the pandemic. Their discussions highlighted a critical gap: while some schools could offer leadership opportunities, many were constrained by limited resources and staffing.

The YLA program, designed for high school juniors from Adams, Brown, Hancock, Pike, and Schuyler counties, provides a unique platform for students to develop essential leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. Meeting monthly throughout the school year, students engage in a variety of activities, including the Real Colors personality assessment facilitated by Illinois Extension. This assessment helps students understand their communication preferences and leadership styles, which are referenced throughout the program.

One of the program's highlights is a session where students meet with state elected officials, gaining insights into leadership from those in public service. Future plans include a new focus on career exploration, allowing students to visit local businesses and interact with professionals in fields they aspire to join.

The impact of YLA is evident in the feedback from its participants. Following the 2023-2024 program, 85% of the students provided evaluations, sharing how the program had influenced them:

- “It gets you out of your comfort zone if you are not a social person and gives you a better perspective on how to be a good leader.”
- “I would encourage other students to participate in YLA because it opens up more doors for them, strengthens their leadership skills, and helps them learn to discuss ideas with others.”
- “It was a really awesome experience that helped me learn more about myself. It was just a good learning experience that helped me build leadership skills that schools don’t teach.”

In response to participant feedback, Illinois Extension continues to implement changes to enhance the program. These include adjustments to session logistics, expanded discussion topics, and more opportunities for students from all five counties to network as a unified group.

The revival of YLA is more than just a return to pre-pandemic programming; it is a testament to the community's commitment to nurturing the next generation of leaders. By providing these young individuals with the tools and experiences they need, YLA is helping to build a brighter future for all.



A comprehensive look at 4-H community impact



4-H reaching Adams, Brown, Hancock, Pike, and Schuyler counties

315

Youth Reached: One-Day Programs

- Cake Decorating
- Cloverbud Camp
- Electricity School
- Family Ice Skating
- Federation Fun Day
- Food Challenge
- Green Trees
- Rabbit Clinic
- Super Saturday

599

Youth Reached: Extended Programs,
65% increase from 2023

- Cooking 101 School
- Dog Obedience
- Embryology
- Financial Readiness
- Mindful Me
- Welcome to the Real World
- Youth Leadership Academy

82

Adults Reached: One-Day Programs

94

Adults Reached: Extended Programs,
213% increase from 2023

3,964

Total youth reached through 4-H programming



At 4-H Super Saturday, members explored the fascinating world of drones, learning to fly them themselves.

2942

Total number of fair entries | ↑ 12% from 2023

214

Total number of members turning in project records

223

Total number of permanent records turned in

135

Total number of state fair exhibitors

268

Total number of volunteers assisting clubs or serving at the fair (superintendents, judges, and judges assistants)



749

Total 4-H members



58

Total number of 4-H clubs



Sparkling curiosity and connection through summer programs

As the school year ends and summer begins, children seek new adventures and activities to spark their interests. Recognizing this need, Illinois Extension stepped up, offering a variety of programs designed to engage young minds and foster a love for learning. By partnering with multiple program areas, they successfully met the diverse needs of the community.

Jdub Academy Engages Young Learners

JDUB Academy, in collaboration with John Wood Community College Agriculture department, provided an enriching educational experience for ten students from Adams and Pike counties. The academy ensured transportation to the JWCC Ag Center, where students delved into essential fishing skills, including fish identification and handling. They also explored archery, focusing on safety and shooting techniques, culminating in a friendly tournament.

The program's highlight was a hands-on creek walk, where students studied stream ecology, identified organisms, and learned about stream geology. Additionally, they gained valuable insights into agriculture, covering topics such as livestock, soils, and crops. These activities not only sparked curiosity but also encouraged a deep love for learning among the young participants.

Field Trips Bridge Nature and Education

Illinois Extension hosted almost 300 youth and adults for end-of-the-school-year nature field trips. In partnership with 4-H, Agriculture in the Classroom, and Master Naturalists, the program offered immersive, hands-on learning experiences in nature.

Program quick stats:

- Served four schools from three counties
- Utilized four different locations
- Engaging activities included: pollinator lessons, sensory nature walks, creek walks, mammal furs, bird adaptations, soils exploration, livestock basics, fishing, and drone demonstrations

These trips inspired curiosity and a love for the environment, promoting a deeper connection with nature and agriculture.

Library Program Promotes Water Conservation

During June and July, Illinois Extension staff visited libraries in Augusta, Bowen, Carthage, Hamilton, and Plymouth as part of the Summer Reading Programs, "Read, Renew, Repeat." In all, 62 youth, accompanied by 27 adults, participated in activities focused on water conservation.

After reading "Follow the Water from Brook to Ocean" by Arthur Dorros, each group discussed ways to use and conserve water. The program included making an "Enviro snack" and taking home a "Water Cycle in a Bag" to observe as a science experiment.

Through these diverse and engaging programs, Illinois Extension successfully sparked curiosity, fostered a love for learning, and strengthened the community's connection to nature and agriculture. These initiatives not only provided valuable educational experiences but also inspired a new generation of environmentally conscious and curious learners.





Strategic Priority: Economy



Empowering youth through financial literacy

In today's rapidly evolving world, equipping young people with essential life skills is more crucial than ever. The "Welcome to the Real World" program, one of the Illinois 4-H signature initiatives, addresses the growing demand from school administrators for comprehensive education in financial responsibility, college and career readiness, and decision-making, particularly at the junior high level.

The program spans multiple sessions and engages students in hands-on activities such as writing checks, balancing checkbooks (provided by Marine Bank and Trust), completing career preference worksheets, and participating in financial decision-making exercises. A highlight of the program is the "real world" simulation, where students select careers that align with their interests, make decisions through a personalized lifestyle survey, and learn to budget for everyday expenses based on their choices. This immersive experience culminates in a written evaluation, allowing students to reflect on their learning.

The recently revised program has reached an impressive number of students:

- 2022-2023: 1 county, 1 school, 57 students
- 2023-2024: 3 counties, 5 schools, 236 students
- 2024-2025: 4 counties, 6 schools, 277 students

The impact of the program is evident in the feedback received. During the 2023-2024 school year, 115 students (a 49% response rate) completed evaluations, revealing significant knowledge and skills gained:

- 71% learned how to write a check
- 71% learned how to open a savings account
- 66% learned how to balance income and expenses



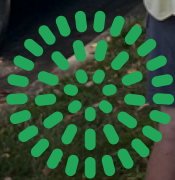
Students also shared how the program has reshaped their perspectives on the future:

- "It has changed my view on the future by making me more aware of how expensive things are and how I should budget better."
- "I learned that it was hard to be able to afford the things that are necessary."
- "My view of life changed in the future by learning how to write checks and keep track of my savings. I think this has helped me a lot."

The "Welcome to the Real World" program not only imparts critical financial literacy skills but also empowers students to make informed decisions about their futures. Through this initiative, countless young individuals are now better prepared to navigate the complexities of adult life with confidence and competence.

My experience with Welcome to the Real World has been awesome! The program and facilitators do an excellent job in helping the students understand how their career choice and their life choices determine their financial stability as an adult. The students really enjoy this experience, also!

Amy Hildebrand - Camp Point Central



Strategic Priority: Environment



City of Quincy tree inventory: a community triumph

In the fall, the city of Quincy witnessed a remarkable community effort that not only assessed urban trees but also nurtured a sense of collective achievement. Over 200 volunteer hours were dedicated by a passionate team comprising of 11 Master Naturalists and 1 Master Gardener, resulting in a community benefit valued at over \$5,000.

The team, having completed the Extension Mastering Tree Health and Identification course, embarked on a mission to inventory tree species, assess tree health, and identify potential maintenance or removal needs within a 37-block pilot area covering 196 acres. Their meticulous work resulted in significant cost savings for the city, demonstrating the profound impact of volunteerism and specialized training.

This initiative not only provided immediate financial relief but also laid the groundwork for a healthier, more sustainable urban forest. The data collected will guide future tree maintenance and planting efforts, ensuring that Quincy's green spaces continue to thrive for generations to come.

The success of this project underscores the power of community collaboration and the tangible benefits of investing in environmental education and stewardship. Quincy's residents can take pride in their contribution to a greener, more resilient city.



\$5,000

Community Benefit



200+

Volunteer hours



196

Acres covered

The Illinois Extension Master Naturalist volunteers provided such valuable information for the city through their Downtown Street Tree Inventory report. Multiple city departments will be able to use the data provided to make more informed decisions regarding the management of our downtown street trees.

Jason Parrott, director of planning & development



Learn more about Master Naturalists
go.illinois.edu/abhpsMN



Caring for nature: generational stewardship

From picking up trash to taking courses on natural resources, there are opportunities for all generations to grow as environmental stewards. By teaching conservation, sustainability, and community engagement, Illinois Extension ensures a lasting impact on our environment and society. This year, various programs demonstrated the power of collective action in encouraging a healthier, more sustainable world.

4-H Nature Day Challenge

When 4-H members put their pledge into action, great things happen. Pledging their hands to larger service and impacting their community's environment, seven clubs from Adams and Hancock counties came together to make a significant difference. With 106 members and 13 dedicated club leaders participating, these clubs managed to collect nearly 650 pounds of garbage from their local areas.

The effort was supported by the Living Lands and Waters, which generously donated swag items for the top clubs. This initiative beautified the local environment and fostered teamwork and responsibility. The success of this event highlights the power of community action in making a positive change.



Shooting Sports Members Excel at 2024 Illinois State Shoot

The 4-H Shooting Sports program, which teaches youth safe firearm use and marksmanship, showcased its impact at the

2024 Illinois State Shotgun Shoot. Nine participants from Adams, Brown, and Hancock counties demonstrated exceptional skill and sportsmanship.

In the senior division, Reid Henry (Adams County) placed fourth,

Jake Glasgow (Brown County) seventh, and Natalie Blackorby (Adams County) eighth. In the junior division, Kaden Knight (Adams County) took first place and Riggins Mock (Adams County) placed seventh.

Adams County's team was named top team overall, earning the honor of representing Illinois at the National Shoot in 2025. These achievements highlight the dedication and skill of the participants and the positive impact of the 4-H program.

Celebrating Arbor Day: A Community Effort in Hancock County

To celebrate Arbor Day, Illinois Extension and Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District collaborated to make a

lasting impact on local students. Dawn Weinberg, ag in the classroom coordinator, visited third grade classrooms, giving each student a white pine seedling donated by the Soil and Water Conservation District. Illini West agriculture students prepared the trees.

Weinberg's engaging presentations included reading "I Can Name 50 Trees Today!" by Bonnie Worth, sparking interest in trees and conservation. Each student received a handout on planting and caring for their tree. This initiative reached 185 students in 12 classrooms, fostering responsibility and contributing to the greening of Hancock County.

Empowering Landowners With Your Land | Your Legacy Series

Recognizing the need for local landowners to have reliable resources for land management and to leave a lasting legacy for future generations, Natural Resource Educator Amy Lefringhouse established the "Your Land | Your Legacy" workshop series.

This initiative provided three comprehensive workshops covering prescribed burning, forest stand improvement and chainsaw safety, and conservation assistance programs.



The program successfully impacted over 3,300 acres and reached 40 participants from surrounding counties. Through these workshops, landowners gained valuable knowledge and skills, empowering them to manage their land sustainably and effectively, ensuring a positive environmental legacy for years to come.

Master Naturalist Program: Growing Impact on Communities and Environment

Since the first graduation class in 2023, the Master Naturalist course and its dedicated volunteers have made a significant impact on our communities and environment. This year, eight

new graduates joined the ranks, bringing the total number of Master Naturalists to 32.



The Master Naturalist Course has been instrumental in fostering environmental stewardship and community engagement.

In 2024 alone, the program saw:

- Eight new Master Naturalist graduates
- 1,500 volunteer hours contributed
- \$42,204 in community benefit

These efforts have not only enhanced local ecosystems but also strengthened community bonds, demonstrating the profound and lasting influence of the Master Naturalist program.



Strategic Priority: Food and Agriculture

Students compare the texture of flour to silt in soil.



Hancock County Ag in the Classroom

The Hancock County Ag in the Classroom program, a cornerstone of elementary education in the county, continues to make remarkable strides in promoting agricultural literacy among students. Here are some key highlights from 2024:



\$9,263 awarded in grants

Illinois AITC Grant



1,609 students

Average number of students taught per month



101 classrooms

Classrooms visited each month in 2023-2024



670 lessons

Total number of lessons completed in 2024



68% of students

Pre-K-12 students receiving AITC programming

The program's impact was highlighted in an RFD Radio interview discussing the benefits of the AITC grant. Dawn Weinberg, ag in the classroom coordinator, also assisted as a judge for the Section 11 FFA Public Speaking Career Development Event, showcasing the program's commitment to future agricultural leaders.

The second grade Ag Week coloring contest saw 100% classroom participation. The sixth grade poster contest, sponsored by the Hancock County Soil & Water Conservation District, engaged students in creative expression related to agriculture.

Through these initiatives, the Hancock County AITC program continues to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of agriculture among students, preparing them to be informed and engaged citizens in the future. For more details, see other program highlights on Page 13 (Arbor Day) and Page 23 (Summer Ag Institute).

Adams County Ag in the Classroom

With Kinsey Tiemann, Adams County AITC coordinator, having a full year under her belt, 2024 saw incredible growth in her programming. Agriculture literacy is reaping the benefits of her experience. Here are some key highlights from 2024:

The 2024 Adams County Fair ag tent provided an excellent opportunity for agriculture advocacy. The tent featured activities for all ages, including an interactive scavenger hunt, crafts, and games. Overall, 390 youth and 206 adults engaged with the ag tent.

Thanks to Tiemann's efforts and the networks she established, Adams County AITC has seen a significant increase in classroom visits. She created a "menu" of lesson topics, allowing teachers to select sessions that align with curriculum. Tiemann also collaborated with teachers from the previous year to create schedules and met with new curriculum directors to gain approval for classroom visits.

Additionally, Tiemann initiated Fun Fact Fridays on the new Adams County AITC Facebook page, featuring monthly agriculture facts from the Illinois AITC school calendar. Visit the page to share these facts with your classroom or friends.

For more details and other program highlights, including school field trips, see Page 10.



6,523 students

Number of individual students reached in 2024



332 classrooms

Classrooms visited in 2024

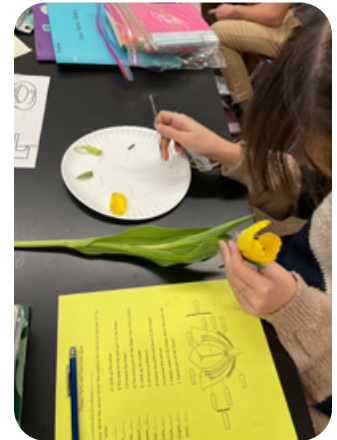


636 lessons

Total number of lessons completed in 2024



Check out our Facebook page!
www.facebook.com/AITCAdams





Strategic Priority: Health



Eat. Move. Save. builds healthy choices

In today's fast-paced world, individuals and families often find themselves eating on the go and struggling to make healthy food choices on a budget. To address this issue, Illinois Extension and SNAP-Ed offer community-based nutrition education for those eligible for the Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP-Ed collaborates with communities and local partners to prevent obesity and reduce the risk of chronic diseases by making nutritious foods and active living opportunities more accessible.

In Illinois, the SNAP-Ed program is known as Eat. Move. Save. This initiative has shown positive results, encouraging steps toward health and wellness among Illinois residents.

Illinois Extension in Hancock, Pike, and Schuyler counties are represented by two excellent SNAP-Ed community workers, Cynthia Colvin and Jenna Yelliott.

Jenna Yelliott completed her first full year of programming in 2024. During the summer, she worked with Pleasant Hill Elementary's Catch Kids Club, engaging 27 kindergarten through fifth grade students in six sessions. Yelliott focused on teaching healthy eating behaviors and promoting physical activity. The youth learned about Go Activities and the Go, Slow, and Whoa foods, as well as maintaining a healthy energy balance.



Cynthia Colvin joined Illinois Extension in April 2024 and quickly made an impact. After completing her training, she began visiting classrooms providing Eat. Move. Save. resources during food pantry hours, and establishing new partnerships. Colvin is also working to expand and strengthen relationships with the Hancock County Health Department and Rushville Fitness and Community Center for future programming.

Yelliott expanded her reach by visiting four schools and starting programs in 17 kindergarten through second grade classrooms. She used the OrganWise Guys curriculum to teach the basics of MyPlate USDA food guidance through interactive stories and engaging organ characters. Hardy Heart and Madame Muscle encouraged kids to eat fruits and vegetables, choose calcium-rich dairy foods for bone health, and enjoy daily physical activities.

In Hancock County, Colvin also implemented the OrganWise Guys curriculum in three schools, reaching a total of 184 students. Additionally, she launched a Teen Cuisine series with five seniors at ROYALS Academy in Carthage. Teen Cuisine is a six-lesson cooking and nutrition series for teenagers, covering MyPlate nutritional guidelines, nutrition label reading, food safety practices, knife skills, and recipe reading.

To reach adults and families, Colvin and Yelliott offer numerous outreach opportunities. In Pike County, SNAP-Ed participates in the Helping Hands Hygiene Pantry, providing information on healthy ingredient substitutions, such as using applesauce instead of oil. Yelliott has also attended events like the Griggsville Pre-School Family Night, PACT Head Start Family Night, and the Horizons Food Pantry in Quincy. Colvin has visited three food distribution sites in Hancock and Schuyler counties, offering Eat. Move. Save. resources on healthy eating, budgeting for healthy food, and sharing recipes.

In 2024, these two SNAP-Ed programs combined to serve 467 youth and over 100 families.

- 278 Pike County youth
- 189 Hancock County youth
- 65 adults reached in Pike County
- 40 adults reached in Hancock and Schuyler counties

These efforts are empowering individuals and families to make healthier food choices, improve their overall well-being, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.



Learn more about Illinois Extension
extension.illinois.edu/abhps



Culinary Education: The success of 4-H Cooking 101

In response to a growing need for community cooking classes and a desire to boost 4-H enrollment in the Foods project area, Illinois Extension and Memorial Hospital in Carthage collaborated to create the 4-H Cooking 101 summer program. This initiative aimed to educate area youth through hands-on activities about food preparation, kitchen safety, and making healthy food choices.

The program was launched in June 2023, targeting third and fourth grade 4-H members. Initially, it was promoted internally to current 4-H members and families of Memorial Hospital staff. By 2024, the program expanded its reach to third and fourth grade students throughout Hancock County.

Participants received the 4-H Cooking 101 curriculum and personalized aprons. Each two-hour session included instructional time, hands-on food preparation in the teaching kitchen, and a shared mealtime for reflection and discussion. On the final day, students prepared a meal for their family members and residents from a local assisted living facility, showcasing their new skills.

To date, 21 students have participated in the program. Evaluations revealed significant impacts:

- 88% of students learned to use MyPlate for a balanced diet
- 88% understood how to avoid spreading germs while cooking
- 100% gained skills in safely using kitchen appliances and tools

The program also led to a notable increase in Cooking 101 and Foods exhibits at the county 4-H fair, with a 233% increase in Cooking 101 exhibits and a 173% increase in Foods and Nutrition exhibits from 2022 to 2024. Additionally, the partnership with Memorial Hospital resulted in three Health and Wellness staff members becoming screened 4-H volunteers, with plans to establish a Healthy Living Special Interest (SPIN) Club.

The 4-H Cooking 101 program has successfully fostered a love for cooking and healthy living among young participants while strengthening community ties and expanding 4-H involvement in the county.



233%

increase in Cooking 101 exhibits
at the 2024 Hancock County 4-H Fair



A one year follow-up survey with parents of 2023 attendees reported:



100%

practiced safe food preparation skills at home



100%

were more engaged in cooking and baking meals



83%

continued to demonstrate proper nutrition and
healthy eating habits



Strategic Priority: Partnerships



Empowering future conservationists

When John Wood Community College and the Orr Research Center Corporation started planning the new Agricultural Sciences Complex, they wanted Illinois Extension to be involved but weren't sure what that would look like. For over 45 years, University of Illinois, JWCC, and the Corporation shared, and continue to share, research and development results with row crop and beef producers, benefiting the agricultural community. With discussion, a vision quickly formed where JWCC could expand its offerings in natural resources and conservation.

In 2022, JWCC started a conservation management certificate program utilizing current Illinois Extension staff. This allowed JWCC and Illinois Extension to share expertise and knowledge, amplifying the program's impact on students and the broader community.

Students now have the opportunity to take additional conservation courses. These courses can either fulfill agricultural elective requirements or count toward earning the conservation management certificate. Conservation courses have consistently enrolled over 20 students each year. In 2024, Amy Lefringhouse, natural resources, environment, and energy educator, led courses such as:

- Natural Resource Management
- Wildlife Management
- Sustainable and Renewable Energy Resources
- Conservation Issues

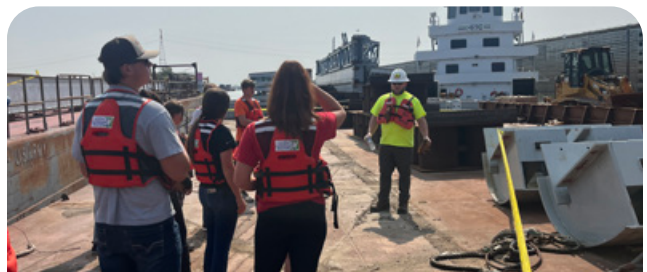
Students emerged from these courses with practical skills and certifications that they could immediately apply in their careers and daily lives. Achievements included:

- Illinois Trapper Safety Certification
- S-190 Intro to Wildland Fire Behavior Certificate
- Chainsaw Orientation

Beyond classroom learning, students engaged in enriching field experiences. Students toured the Illinois Rural Electric Co-op solar array in Winchester, explored the Adams Electric Co-op Pigeon Creek wind turbine near Payson, and even had the chance to drive Adams Electric's electric vehicle.

In the fall of 2024, the Natural Resource Management students took a deeper dive into river conservation and career opportunities. Thanks to the Mississippi River Institute by Living Lands & Waters, the class embarked on an educational field trip to the Melvin Price Lock and Dam in Alton. Aboard the floating classroom, students received insights from experts, including conservation professionals from the Army Corps of Engineers and a wildlife biologist from the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. They also toured an ADM towboat, discussing career paths with the captain and crew.

The partnership between JWCC, University of Illinois, Illinois Extension, and the Orr Research Center Corporation continues to thrive, helping to train the next generation of conservationists with the knowledge and skills to make a significant, well-rounded impact on their communities and the environment.



Natural Resource Management students listen to a speaker from the Living Lands and Waters Institute discuss careers related to rivers and natural resources.



Preserving nature's beauty

Many not-for-profit organizations and local communities benefit from volunteer efforts to keep areas looking nice for visitors. Without routine maintenance, nature takes over paths, timber lines, and waterways, causing overgrown trees and shrubs, introduction of invasive species, and eroding walkways.

In 2024, the Master Naturalist volunteers initiated the Habitat Help Team. Organizations were contacted, sharing information on projects in which the Habitat Help Team could assist. Four sites benefited from the team's efforts: Carthage Lake trail, Camp Eastman, Hamilton Park District, and Jensen Woods Camp.

The Habitat Help Team performed regular volunteer activities at natural sites, including invasive plant removal, trail clearing, and educational material development. Thanks to their efforts, visitors can now enjoy clear, safe trails and learn about local ecosystems through new educational materials.



Habitat Help Team Example Work: Camp Eastman - Before



Habitat Help Team Example Work: Camp Eastman - After



Leah Erke, Illinois Extension staff with ABCs of School Nutrition, leads a workshop titled "Incorporating Scratch Cooking into Your School Meal Program" to a group of 63 Quincy school district food service staff.

ABCs of School Nutrition prepares school staff across Illinois

School nutrition staff have a professional development requirement like many other careers, ranging from four to twelve hours needed yearly. To meet this need, Illinois Extension's ABCs of School Nutrition program provides free training opportunities in multiple formats.

In the summer, 12 in-person regional learning institutes took place across the state. Leah Erke, an Extension staff member with ABCs of School Nutrition, led three of these institutes, teaching her self-created course on Speed-Scratch Cooking.

Virtual events were held in the fall months on food allergies, food handler training, and culinary math, resulting in a total of 478 online educational contacts. In addition to other periodically scheduled live virtual events, Erke also provided in-person scratch cooking training for large districts like Quincy High School. In total, Erke's training reached 794 school staff.

The program's success and impact were further recognized at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Conference. Erke and her peer, Diane Reinhold, received accolades for their training curriculum on Food Allergies in Schools, placing second in the Central Region.

ABCs of School Nutrition is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education and USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Erke said, "It's rewarding to see the positive impact our training has on school nutrition staff and, ultimately, on students."



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extension.illinois.edu/abhps



At the Adams Cooperative Electricity School, volunteers guided youth in learning essential electrical skills, from creating extension cords to wiring basic household outlets and switches. These hands-on experiences not only prepare them for simple home maintenance but also spark interest in potential electrical careers.





"Down on the Farm" inspires youth

Even in rural communities, more youth are growing generations apart from production agriculture. To bring awareness to farm safety, an understanding of tractors, combines, and farm equipment, the importance of pollinators, and other agriculture-related topics, the Hancock County Farm Bureau hosts an annual event, "Down on the Farm."

One hundred seventy-five first-grade students from Hancock County schools participated in the 18th annual event. While learning about topics, students enjoyed running through a chore course, riding a horse-drawn wagon, and creating a farm-themed art project. Students also enjoyed interacting with farm animals provided by Illini West FFA Chapter members.

This event occurred thanks to partnerships from different agencies and almost 30 volunteers. Illinois Extension staff taught lessons on farm safety while Master Gardener volunteers taught about greenhouses and planting. Other partners included Hancock County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, Hancock County Farm Bureau Women's Committee, Hancock County Farm Service Agency staff, NRCS staff, staff from Marine Bank, First Bankers Trust Services, and Carthage Veterinary Service/Professional Swine Management. Prairie Farms donated cartons of milk for the students, and machinery was provided by A.C. McCartney and Martin John Deere. Jonathan Rose assisted with the horse-drawn wagon rides.



An oak tree community collaboration

Wildcat Springs Park in Hamilton was revitalized into an oak tree savannah thanks to the efforts of local youth and community volunteers. This transformation was part of the 4-H Green Communities Tree Program, which aimed to address global environmental issues at a local level.



A group of 21 enthusiastic youth, guided by Master Naturalist volunteer Chris Talley, planted 25 oak trees in the park. Talley educated the participants on the significance of oak trees and the differences between various oak species. This initiative was crucial as oak savannahs are increasingly threatened by invasive species and more shade-tolerant trees like maples.

Curt Sinclair, a 4-H specialist from Illinois Extension, emphasized the importance of this project, stating, "The natural world is talking to us, and Illinois 4-H is primed to listen, learn, and act."

Madeline Davis, the 4-H coordinator for Hancock County, highlighted the community spirit and long-term impact of the project. "It was so great seeing kids and families spending time outside together. The weather was perfect, and I can only imagine how rewarding it will be for these kids to come back to the park in 20, 30, 50 years and tell future generations about the memories they made through 4-H."

Throughout the spring, youth in 43 counties across Illinois planted a total of 1,075 oak trees on public properties, contributing to a grand total of 2,800 new trees planted over the past three years. This initiative not only enhanced local ecosystems but also cultivated a sense of environmental stewardship among the younger generation.



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Strategic Priority: Technology and Discovery



New beginnings with "Everyday Environment"

To build awareness about environmental issues and provide practical solutions, the Everyday Environment series, a multimedia program, was launched in August 2024. Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy Educators Amy Lefringhouse, Erin Garrett, and Abigail Garofalo started the series to offer accessible learning opportunities for all Illinois residents.

The first season featured a diverse range of content, including 12 podcasts, 12 blogs, two webinars, and five short reel videos. This comprehensive approach ensured that residents could engage with the material in various formats, catering to different interests, time investments, and learning styles.

The impact of the series was significant, reaching over 40,000 residents in its first season. The 2024 fall season focused on the fundamentals of climate change, exploring its basics, impacts, and empowering individuals to take meaningful action. Looking ahead, the 2025 spring season will dive into the critical topic of water.

With plans to produce two seasons each year moving forward, the new Everyday Environment series is set to become a valuable foundation of environmental education in Illinois, developing a more informed and proactive community.



To access all our multimedia content, visit:
go.illinois.edu/Everyday_Environment

4-H pathways to discovery



When 4-H members lack access to the resources necessary to pursue their interests, they often miss out on discovering fulfilling careers or hobbies. To bridge this gap, Illinois Extension organized multiple workshop events, connecting youth with professionals in fields like weather, crops, natural resources, drone technology, food and cake decorating, floriculture, babysitting, and more. These workshops enabled 182 participants to explore and create in areas they were passionate about.

Cloverbud Camps: A one-day event for 4-H and youth ages 5 to 8 took place in Hancock and Adams counties. In Hancock County, participants enjoyed a nature walk, created their own games and exercises, discussed dairy from farm to table, and decorated their own 4-H t-shirts. In Adams County, activities included planting grass-head characters, making dirt pudding cups, decorating 4-H t-shirts and picture frames, and competing in a paper airplane contest.

Super Saturday: This event allowed 4-H members to choose from a variety of workshops and attend their favorites. Options included decorating cookies, agronomy and crop production, weather, drone technology, flower arranging, watershed functions and water quality, caring for children, competing at their first fair, and Cloverbud fun.

Special Interest Workshops: These workshops focused on skills or interests that members had already established. They included making brownies from scratch, cake decorating, a clinic on showing rabbits, and the Adams Electric Cooperative annual Electricity School.

Through these opportunities, 4-H members and youth were able to connect with volunteers and discover new knowledge and skills, potentially sparking future career paths.



Summer Ag Institute creates a “Splash into Ag” for Hancock County teachers

In the heart of summer, 24 dedicated teachers from Hancock and McDonough counties embarked on an enlightening journey to deepen their understanding of water’s pivotal role in agriculture. This immersive experience, aptly named “Splash into Agriculture,” was more than just a professional development opportunity; it was a transformative adventure that bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

Day 1: Exploring Quincy’s Water Systems

The first day began with a series of eye-opening tours in Quincy. Teachers visited the water treatment facility, where they witnessed the intricate, multi-step process of purifying water for consumer use. This visit underscored the complexity and importance of ensuring clean water for the community. The next stop was the wastewater treatment facility, where educators learned how used water and stormwater are treated and safely returned to the environment. These tours provided invaluable insights into the critical infrastructure that supports daily life and agricultural practices.



After a morning of technical exploration, the group met with Joe Zumwalt, Hancock County Farm Bureau director and Hunt-Lima Drainage District commissioner. Joe shared the rich history and vital role of drainage districts in agriculture, emphasizing their importance in managing water resources. The teachers then visited the pump station, walked along the levee, and explored the historic ferry landing at Meyer, gaining a deeper appreciation for the region’s agricultural heritage.



Day 2: A Journey to Keokuk, Iowa

The second day took the teachers across the state line to Keokuk, Iowa, where they toured Lock and Dam 19. Here, they had the rare opportunity to observe a three-barge tow navigating the lock, with detailed explanations provided by the Army Corps

of Engineers. The tour included a fascinating walk through the tunnels beneath the Mississippi River, offering a unique perspective on this monumental structure.

The day continued with a visit to the Ameren Missouri Keokuk Renewable Energy Center. Teachers learned about the history of the plant and the innovative process of generating electricity from river water. Walking out on the dam, they experienced firsthand the power and potential of renewable energy.

Afternoon Workshops: Bringing Knowledge Back To The Classroom

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to practical applications and resources. Education Director Kevin Daugherty, with Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom, introduced the teachers to new materials and activities, including the newly released “Awesome Agriculture” series. These resources are designed to engage students with science concepts through the lens of agriculture, making learning both fun and relevant. Each teacher left with a wealth of ideas and tools to inspire their students and integrate agricultural education into their curricula.



A Lasting Impact

The “Splash into Agriculture” program was more than a series of tours and workshops; it was a catalyst for change. By connecting teachers with the vital systems that sustain agriculture and providing them with practical resources,

the program empowered educators to bring a richer, more informed perspective to their classrooms. The knowledge and experiences gained will ripple out, influencing countless students and fostering a deeper understanding of agriculture’s role in our world.

This initiative highlights the power of hands-on learning and the importance of continuous professional development. It also underscores the critical role of water in agriculture and the need for sustainable practices. As these teachers return to their schools, they carry with them not just new knowledge but a renewed passion for teaching and a commitment to nurturing the next generation of informed, environmentally conscious citizens.



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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.

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