



2020

# Addressing Local Needs, Solving Global Challenges



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

DuPage, Kane,  
& Kendall Counties



# Applying a Local Lens to Statewide issues

University of Illinois was established as part of the land grant system to provide world-class education, pioneer research, and put learning and discovery into practice to benefit the health and wellbeing of the state's residents and communities.

Extension is built on a local community framework, but our educators and specialists are part of a statewide network of Extension professionals. They work every day to improve the lives of Illinois residents and bring stability and innovation to businesses and communities.

This statewide network of educators, faculty experts, and staff are dedicated to the mission of aligning research to needs and translating that research into action plans. Their work allows Illinois youth, families, businesses, producers, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities. Educators in local units contribute to statewide efforts in their expert content area. In turn, local units benefit from these collaborative efforts and high-quality resources.

Through input from internal and external stakeholders, Extension focuses on statewide priorities in five core areas: community, economy, environment, food, and health. This blend of long-range focus, shared expertise, and local accountability is a powerful strategy that ensures we stay true to our mission while we tailor our programming to meet local community needs.

## Illinois Extension's Grand Challenge Framework

- Community**  
Support Strong and Resilient Youth, Families, and Communities
  - 👤 Thriving Youth
  - 🤝 Connectedness and Inclusion
  - 👥 Involvement and Leadership
- Economy**  
Grow a Prosperous Economy
  - 📈 Economic Vitality
  - ⌚ Financial Well-being
  - 📅 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

Hallmarks of strong, resilient communities include residents who feel connected, have a strong sense of belonging, and appreciate the diversity represented in their neighborhoods. These communities often experience lower rates of violence and offer a higher quality of life. Research has shown that civically engaged youth are more likely to contribute to their communities as adults. Illinois Extension activities play a pivotal role in designing strategies to sustain a leadership pipeline, discovering opportunities for volunteers to actively engage in meeting local needs, and supporting development of robust community networks.

# COMMUNITY

1,532

Program  
Attendance

59

Educational  
Sessions  
and Videos

974

4-H Club  
Memberships

547

Total  
Volunteers  
Engaged\*

\$1.15M

Volunteer Value  
\*\*

\* Total Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, and 4-H volunteers.

\*\* Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.

Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as the foundation of strong and resilient youth, families, and communities.



## Connectedness and Inclusion

A sense of community brings people together to support each other and overcome threats to survival and growth. Accepting and celebrating our differences is essential for creating environments where all voices are important and heard. Thriving families and communities are supported by a diverse and deep pool of community members and organizations.



## Involvement and Leadership

Community pride soars when residents who volunteer, advocate, contribute, or lead see themselves as part of the solutions to local issues. Decision-makers can best enhance community vitality and improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas when equipped with the skills and research-based information.



## Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Our mentorship-based youth development model applies a holistic development framework. It focuses 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 tomorrow.



Local and state economies depend on recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce and sound economic planning and development. Agricultural operations, large and small, make a foundational contribution to local and state economic vitality. Population projections suggest that metro and rural Illinois communities will experience demographic shifts thanks to the exit of younger workers and a growing retiree population. These shifts are expected to produce serious economic issues. To compound the situation, many communities are already grappling with short- and long-term economic implications of COVID-19.

# ECONOMY

6,075

Program  
Attendance

62

Educational  
Sessions

20

Online Learning  
Sessions

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Illinois Extension focuses on the following priorities as effective supports for economic stability and prosperity.



## Workforce Preparedness and Advancement

The global pandemic has reinforced the need to develop innovative ways to nurture the Illinois workforce. These include career exploration, formal training and re-training programs for economically vulnerable populations, management training, and opportunities for professionals to meet regulatory and licensure requirements for continuing education. Ultimately, a prepared, skilled workforce increases tax revenues.



## Financial Wellbeing

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.



## Economic Vitality

Rural and urban communities must be built on solid foundations. They must plan for growth, prepare for emergencies, and share responsibility for continually seeking ways to promote economic vitality. Agricultural operations, both large and small, are critically important contributors to the economic vitality of Illinois' local and state economy.

The natural wonder of Illinois is more than just its beautiful scenery. The land provides recreation for residents and visitors, habitat for pollinators and wildlife, pastures for grazing livestock, fields for growing food, and the safe water that is essential for all living things. Threats to our land, air, and water can be managed with the identification, promotion, and adoption of environmentally sustainable policies and practices. Carefully developed green spaces and natural assets help youth and adults improve learning and enhance physical and mental wellness. Sound environmental and agricultural policies contribute to a sustainable and diverse environment, increase comfort, reduce government costs, and enhance property values.

# ENVIRONMENT



2,532

Program  
Attendance

216

Educational  
Sessions and  
Episodes

326

Trained  
Volunteers  
\*

\$378K

Volunteer  
Value  
\*\*

1,304

Expert  
Consultations  
\*\*\*

\* Total Master Gardener and Master Naturalist volunteers.

\*\* Based on the Independent Sector 2019 rate of \$27.98 per hour.

\*\*\* Supporting home and natural environment inquiries.

Illinois Extension sustains natural resources in home and public spaces by focusing on these educational priorities.



## Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

Water, land, and air quality have significant implications for our survival. These shared resources must be managed through ecological balance and sustainable practices. Our future depends on our ability to effectively steward these resources for generations to come.



## Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

There is growing evidence that exposure to plants and green spaces provides many benefits, like improved health, quality of life, concentration, and relationships. Sustainable home landscapes can net economic benefits to communities through increased property value. They also can create environmental benefits for all by supporting pollinators and other important contributors to ecosystems.

Advances in agricultural practice driven by research and technology have the dual benefit of improving production efficiency and reducing the environmental impact caused by the food production system. While our production is high, one in every nine Illinois households experience food insecurity, and its rise over the past 10 years significantly impacts the health and wellbeing of Illinois residents. Over 2 million Illinois residents rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food assistance according to May 2020 totals from Illinois Department of Human Services, with a 14% spike in the latter half of the year associated with the effects of COVID-19.

# FOOD



706	20	7	14,234	\$20,496
Program Attendance	Educational Sessions	Community Gardens*	Pounds of Produce Donated **	Value of Donated Food ***

\* Supported by Extension staff and volunteers.

\*\* Volume of produce donated to local communities.

\*\*\* Based on average value of \$1.44 per pound.

Illinois Extension supports a safe and accessible food supply by developing knowledge and educational programs in these areas.



## Food Access

Issues with access and affordability of healthy food options can perpetuate chronic illness. Healthy people and communities require safe, nutritious, and abundant food and the education to make every food choice and every food dollar count.



## Food Production

COVID-19 presented challenges never before realized: supply shortages from the closure of food and meat processing plants, shifted demand from the closure of restaurants and schools, and consumer fear over uncertain transmission of the virus.



## Food Safety

COVID-19 created new areas of concern for consumers on food safety from eating and storing carryout foods and potential transmission on food packages to safely preserving foods grown in home gardens.

Nationally, about 86% of annual health care spending is related to chronic disease with research suggesting that up to 80% of premature heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes diagnoses could be prevented. There is clear evidence from health, nutrition, and behavioral research demonstrating the positive impact of research-based communication and outreach to promote physical, emotional, and mental health. With health disparities felt unevenly across Illinois communities, education and outreach efforts need to pay special attention toward surfacing and understanding trends impacting limited-resource populations.

# HEALTH



12,527  
Program Attendance

647  
Educational Sessions

## SNAP-Education Community Partnerships

34  
K-12 Schools

9  
Early Childhood Centers

18  
Agencies or Community Centers

25  
Emergency Food Sites

Illinois Extension works to maximize physical and emotional health for all Illinois residents by focusing on these priorities.



### Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

Chronic diseases prevention has collective benefits to all residents of Illinois, such as lower health care costs, increase employee productivity and morale, and decrease absenteeism.



### Social and Emotional Health

COVID elevated a growing mental health crisis in the country. Extension has added resources and staff to address the growing need to provide hope and care for struggling individuals and families in the state.



### Health and Safety Environments

From school lunchrooms and home-based settings, to 4-H club meetings and day care facilities, Extension is building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environments.

# Serving Illinois During a Global Pandemic

When early signs of COVID-19 arrived in Illinois, families and businesses across the state were forced to confront a reality unlike anything they could have imagined. With schools transitioning to virtual learning, parents were hungry for information about managing the physical and emotional health of their at-home learners. Families suddenly found themselves together at home more, where they explored new hobbies, such as gardening and food preservation. Farmers needed to navigate the numerous challenges facing both local and global food supply chains. Almost overnight, restaurants and retail stores had to rethink their business models or risk becoming irrelevant in a suddenly virtual world.

As the challenges mounted, the Illinois Extension network emerged as an effective method for creating and sharing timely, research-backed solutions to many of the most pressing issues we were grappling with. Extension's educators led the way forward during a time of uncertainty for many. We are proud to share some of our highlights from the past year.

## Illinois Extension provided applied research and education to address statewide challenges and local issues.

**We nurtured local talent.** Extension supported 7,207 Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Money Mentor, and 4-H volunteers. They devoted nearly 570,000 hours of community services and support, valued at \$16 million.

**We met learners where they lived.** During the past 12 months, Extension websites garnered more than 12.8 million visits. Our social media strategy generated more than 200 million impressions, highlighting Illinois news, events, and research.

**We partnered to create synergy.** Our impact is magnified through more than 2,000 local, state, and national partnerships. Extension helped partner organizations secure more than \$7 million in grant funds, enabling Illinois communities to address local challenges in areas such as food access, rural economic infrastructure, and workforce development.

An independent research firm valued Extension's annual impact on the State of Illinois at \$603 million, about ten times its 2019 budget of \$60.9 million.

**Illinois Extension created positive economic benefit for the state of Illinois.** The positive economic outcomes of Extension's programs were estimated as at least \$477 million in 2019.

**Extension programs stimulated local and state economies through employment and program expenditures.** Economic output in Illinois related to Extension expenditures was \$126 million for 2019. Illinois Extension directly employs 655 FTE personnel, and generates an additional 403 FTE jobs through indirect and induced impact effects.

**Extension helped residents, businesses, and local governments adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Educators and faculty specialists dove deeply into unique needs related to the pandemic.** Farmdoc's Coronavirus and Ag seminar series attracted more than 7,400 live participants over 20 seminars, covering topics such as retail food prices, livestock markets, trade, and ethanol.

**Program partnerships helped Illinois families connect with local food resources.** Extension's Illinois Nutrition Education program published Find Food IL, showing the location of free and subsidized meals and food access points in a searchable, mobile-friendly mapping application.

**Our staff learned to create rich, meaningful online learning experiences.** With in-person meetings restricted, we hosted nearly 25,000 online and in-person educational sessions, benefiting more than 600,000 attendees. Illinois 4-H embraced an online format for summer exhibitions in every county, showcasing the work of 2,200 members at the virtual Illinois State Fair.

**Our technology supported connectivity for online learners and remote work employees.** Five county Extension offices piloted "drive-up" WiFi sites to make internet accessible to those with needs for schoolwork, online businesses, and social connection.