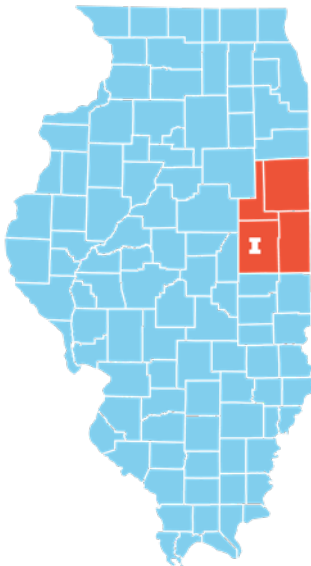


**EXTENSION**  
**IN ACTION**

Serving Champaign, Ford,  
Iroquois, and Vermilion Counties



Ginger Boas  
County Director



# Bringing hands-on experience to thrive in tomorrow's workplace

We are delighted to bring the research and innovation of University of Illinois in a practical and usable form to members of the communities in Champaign, Ford, Iroquois, and Vermilion counties. We work to form strong partnerships with local leaders, businesses, schools, and residents to solve challenges and problems together.

Our mission to offer education that is relevant, inclusive, and accessible continues to be our number one goal, with programs reaching all ages and backgrounds. Through education and outreach efforts, individuals have opportunities to improve their finances, live healthier lives, raise resilient families, enjoy and protect

natural areas, and have more productive farms. Local youth gain relevant hands-on experience using innovative technology, essential skills to thrive in tomorrow's workplace.

We are proud to provide positive change in our community. We thank you for the support you have provided to our organization. Together, we can continue to make a positive difference for those we serve while extending knowledge and changing lives.

Ginger Boas  
County Extension Director



# 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 five grand challenge themes:



Community:  
Support Strong and Resilient Residents



Economy:  
Grow a Prosperous Economy



Environment:  
Sustain Natural Resources at Home and in Public Spaces



Food:  
Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply



Health:  
Maximize Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health

## 2022 Engagement

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

643 Communities Served	720K+ Program Attendees	14.5M+ Webpage Views	22.9M+ Social Media Impressions	900K+ YouTube Views
488 Educational Sessions/Week (25K+ Annually)	95 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	7,062 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,807 4-H Clubs	178,341 4-H Affiliations

## Partnerships

## Resource Generation

5,941 Program Volunteers	269 Community Gardens	1,030 School Partners	\$15,732,391 Value of Volunteer Contributions	\$223,639 Value of Donated Garden Produce
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## Flying into the Future

As new technologies emerge, the nature of work is rapidly changing and so are the skills needed in many local industries, especially in Champaign, Ford, Iroquois, and Vermilion counties. Employers are struggling with a workforce lacking entry-level skills needed for employment. These skill gaps significantly impact local businesses by contributing to many unfilled positions, lower productivity, lower workplace morale, high staff turnover, lower quality of work, and inability to expand. These gaps not only significantly affect local employers, but also have contributed to the depressed economy within the area. The unemployment rate in Vermilion County (12%) is more than double the state's rate, and nearly 19% of residents live below the poverty line.

To address the skills gap of future employees, a community agricultural advisory committee was formed that included local businesses, educational institutions, and community stakeholders. Members of this committee were able to outline the current and emerging needs of the workforce.

As a result of the expressed need for skilled laborers in precision agriculture who can operate drones and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), a drone certification program was created at nearby Danville Area Community College.



Students learning how to operate a drone in preparation for the drone flying contest.

This curriculum and event exemplify Extension work, from identifying a need to developing a solution to a challenge.

Todd Gleason, Illinois Extension News and WILL



Extension staff working in 4-H youth development and ag and natural resources surveyed local high school teachers to assess the need and interest in a drone unit and discovered strong interests in this type of resource within several educational departments, including career and technical education, more specifically, the agriculture and industrial education departments and science departments. Extension staff created a three-week unit, "4-H Drones in Agriculture."

In addition to teaching how drones and unmanned aircraft systems operate, students explored careers using this technology. After the unit, the participating high schools competed in a drone flying competition. The students connected with local businesses and industry professionals and met with representatives from colleges and universities. This created an opportunity to connect classroom education to real-world careers and the additional education needed to obtain those careers.

### Survey Respondents:

100% of students reported increased knowledge about how drones are used after completing the unit.

- 98% of students stated they learned about a new career opportunity from the 4-H Drones in Agriculture program.
- 73% of the participating students are interested in a career in precision agriculture; 63% are interested in drones, specifically.
- 80% of students found one or more careers that might be a good fit for them as a result of the 4-H Drones in Agriculture program.



## Youth learn animal science skills to prepare for Superior Young Producer Contest

Molly Kipfer and Extension staff worked with Dr. Josh McCann, University of Illinois animal sciences professor, to organize a regional skillathon for 4-H and FFA youth to prepare them for the Superior Young Producer Contest. Seventy-two youth across Illinois were split into junior and senior categories and competed individually. They rotated through different stations, including a livestock knowledge quiz, feed identification, meat retail cut identification, breed identification, equipment identification, hay judging, and wool judging. The top five of each group received banners. Evaluation data showed a general increase in knowledge and a greater understanding across all the topics presented at the contest.



Find out more about similar programs at [go.illinois.edu/cfiv4H](https://go.illinois.edu/cfiv4H)

## 4-H summer programs focus on academic enrichment, social and emotional learning, and exposure to new experiences and career paths



4-H partnered with the YMCA, the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation, Unit 4 School District, and various park districts to offer educational summer programming that provided young people with opportunities to learn, grow, and have fun in a supportive and engaging environment, prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity.

Teen Teachers completed a 7-hour training and taught programs and workshops throughout the summer. At the training, teens gained skills, such as creating an inclusive environment and fostering student engagement. They practiced teaching, reflected what they taught as a group, and discussed ways to apply new skills to enhance learning and engagement.

Jackie Joyner-Kersey's Winning in Life program champions tomorrow's role models, citizens, and community leaders by empowering children and youth to succeed through character and leadership development. Youth build character and leadership skills through exposure to challenges and learning to overcome them by assuming responsibility for tasks, taking on leadership roles, participating in planned physical activities, and persisting in all activities even if they are difficult.

The Junior Master Gardener program teaches youth about gardening, ecology, and environmental stewardship. This program is designed for children in grades K-12 and provides hands-on learning opportunities covering plant growth and development, soil science, insect and pest management, and sustainable gardening practices.





## Champaign County Master Gardeners respond to increased interest in gardening brought on by the pandemic.

One hundred fifty Champaign County Master Gardeners volunteered to help others learn to grow their green spaces for health, wellness, food production, and food access in 2022. Gardens in Champaign County, managed and maintained by volunteers, provided respite areas, connected youth and adults with nature and gardening, and taught others how to replicate green spaces in their yards and community gardens.

Champaign County Master Gardeners responded creatively to the local demand for horticulture education and extended beyond our county lines. A volunteer social media team pushed timely research-based information through Facebook.

- Posts educating about natives and invasives reached 36,053 people.
- Information about planting and caring for trees and shrubs reached 40,915 people.
- Posts about how to save seeds, conserve water on lawns and gardens, and be aware of pollinators and how homeowner activities can harm them reached 45,742 people.
- They encouraged planting perennials which require less maintenance and care than annuals and reached 87,734.



Volunteers harvest more than 100 pounds of produce to donate to local organizations.

This past year, a volunteer-led program committee reached over 500 people through online programming. When it was safe to be together again in person, they adapted even further by implementing hy-flex programming, inviting participants to join in person and online. They coordinated with expert speakers within the University of Illinois Extension system and other credible partners, teaching about xeriscaping or water-wise homeowner practices, how to winter sow natives, why bug-free gardens are a bad idea, and ideas from the Chicago Botanic Gardens' perennial trials program.



The Idea Garden experienced more visitors than in recent years. Volunteers reached hundreds of people, providing horticulture education both directly and indirectly. A docent program was developed in response to group tours. Tour efforts will be expanded on certain Saturdays throughout the growing season in 2023. One volunteer commented that they need docents in the garden daily due to the increase of visitors and the high demand for questions as visitors stroll the grounds.

There were four in-the-garden presentations last year, reaching diverse populations. Topics included bees, pollinators, vegetables, and best performers in the annuals section. Volunteers posted signs about delaying spring clean up to benefit overwintering insects and pollinators, how to properly mulch, how to deadhead and prune, and mechanical as opposed to chemical controls for dealing with pests.

Junior Master Gardener programming connected children with gardening and nature and taught youth about the importance of plants and how they contribute to health and wellness. Volunteers offered spring and fall after-school programs through Mahomet-Seymour Community Unit School District 3 and partnered with the Stephens Family YMCA for a week-long camp and participation in Y on the Fly programming. Y on the Fly delivers programming to underserved audiences throughout Champaign and Urbana. Approximately 160 youths were reached this last year.



136

Pounds of Produce Donated to a Local Soup Kitchen



712

Pounds of Produce Grown and Donated to Various Community Sgencies



9,700

Number of Master Gardener Volunteer Hours



Find out more about similar programs at [extension.illinois.edu/cfiv/gardening](https://extension.illinois.edu/cfiv/gardening)



## Master Gardeners get creative to extend programs to veterans.

The Vermilion County Master Gardeners have offered programs at the Danville VA for more than 20 years, but for the last two years, COVID has had a significant impact on in-person programs with veterans.

During COVID, Master Gardener Debbie Edwards worked with fellow Master Gardeners and VA therapists. They created lesson plans and handouts for veterans. Materials were dropped off, and therapists delivered the lesson. Veterans were still able to start seeds using the grow light station.

In 2022, programs resumed, first with out-patient veterans, then in late summer with residents. Master Gardeners started working with outpatient veterans in the VA greenhouse and raised beds outside the greenhouse. VA therapists brought veterans to the greenhouse weekly for a horticulture lesson. Master Gardeners gave veterans lessons on soil preparation before planting a garden in spring, growing plants from seed, and the importance of weeding, mulching, deadheading, watering, and monitoring for plant diseases in the vegetable garden. Master Gardener John Grygiel was a teacher before retirement and enjoys teaching veterans about succulents.

Veterans chose what crops they were most interested in planting and harvested a large number of cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, zucchini, and greens, such as kale and mustard. In fall, lessons continued with propagation, potting soil, and vermiculture. Master Gardener Cathy Bolser wrote another grant and purchased a vermiculture/worm composter for the VA greenhouse. Randy Edwards gave a presentation on using kitchen scraps to create a rich soil amendment with worms. Many veterans are avid fishermen and very interested in using kitchen vegetable and fruit scraps along with coffee grounds and eggshells to feed the worms. They also learned how composting is good for the environment. In the colder months, they propagated plants, planted bulbs like paperwhites, and made terrariums or bird feeders.

Some veterans come into the program with ample gardening experience; others do not. The therapists want the residents to take pride and ownership in their courtyards, greenhouse, and raised beds. One veteran, Chuck, spoke to Master Gardener interns about how much they enjoy the horticulture therapy projects. He said residents do not often have family in the area, and the Master Gardeners have become part of their family. The programs make the VA feel more like home, he said.

## VA Projects:

- Succulent Container Gardening
- Life Cycle of the Monarch Butterfly
- Patriotic Planters
- Herb Containers
- Using Herbs for Mashed Potatoes or Flavored Vinegar
- Fall Decorative Containers
- Tomato Growing and Tasting
- Melon Tasting
- Terrariums
- Seed Starting, Thinning, and Transplanting
- Harvested Vegetable Cooking Class
- Anatomy of a Pizza
- Hummingbirds

All those involved in the collaboration, the Veteran's Administration, Illinois Extension, and Vermilion County Master Gardeners, agree on the program's success and are excited about future projects.





## Vermilion County Master Gardeners help at Douglas Discovery Memorial Garden

The east area of Danville near Douglas Discovery Garden is economically challenged and has a high crime rate. In October 2020, a terrible tragedy occurred on the street in front of Douglas Discovery Garden, devastating the family and leaving the local community searching for a way to heal.

The tragedy at DDG sparked a new collaboration between Kenneth D. Baily Academy Alternative School (KDBA), Vermilion County Master Gardeners, and 4-H. Libby Schnepel, Master Gardener and teacher at KDBA, started a garden club for the students. At the same time, Mynda Tracey, 4-H educator, and Amanda Bryant-Brown, program coordinator, collaborated with KDBA to create a special Interest club at the new garden. The students were encouraged to take an active role in designing



and planting the garden, hoping that the collaboration would promote awareness, inclusion, and healing. The Memorial Garden teaches the students gardening skills while showing them the healing benefits of horticulture for themselves and others.

## Ford-Iroquois Master Gardeners honored for work at Onarga library



The Ford-Iroquois Master Gardeners are a small, dedicated group of volunteers. Master Gardeners have partnered with the local library for many years, creating a beautiful community garden at the back of the property.

In 2020, a storm caused significant damage to the trees and shrubs in front of the Onarga library, changing the once shade garden to a sun garden. In 2021, the library director asked Extension to create a low maintenance, environmentally friendly front entrance, with the potential for educational programs as the plants grew.

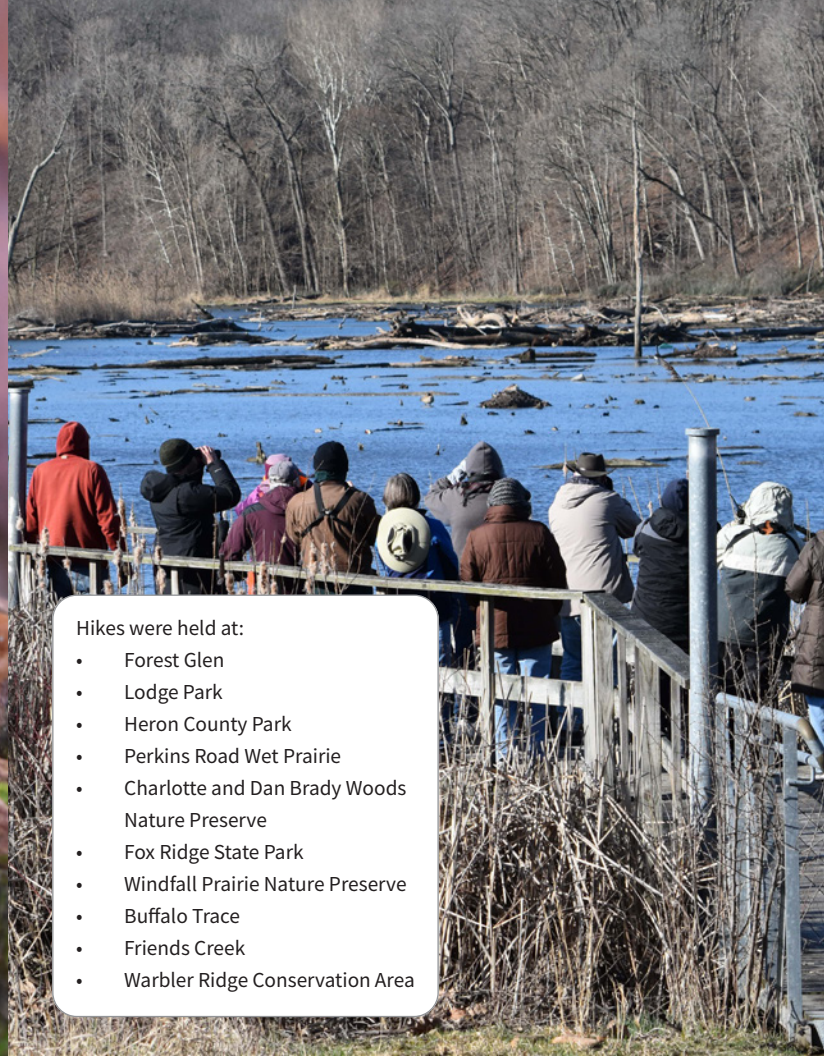
Master Gardeners measured the area, researched possible trees and perennials, and created a plant list. They met with the library board several times. The board approved the plan and purchased the plants. The Master Gardener volunteers helped the staff and local cub scouts plant and transform the front of the library. Plants were labeled to educate visitors.

The project demonstrated Extension collaboration with local organizations providing knowledge, involving youth, and making the community a better place to live. The group received the Teamwork Award at the 2022 State Master Gardener Conference.



Find out more about similar programs at [go.illinois.edu/ecimn](https://go.illinois.edu/ecimn)



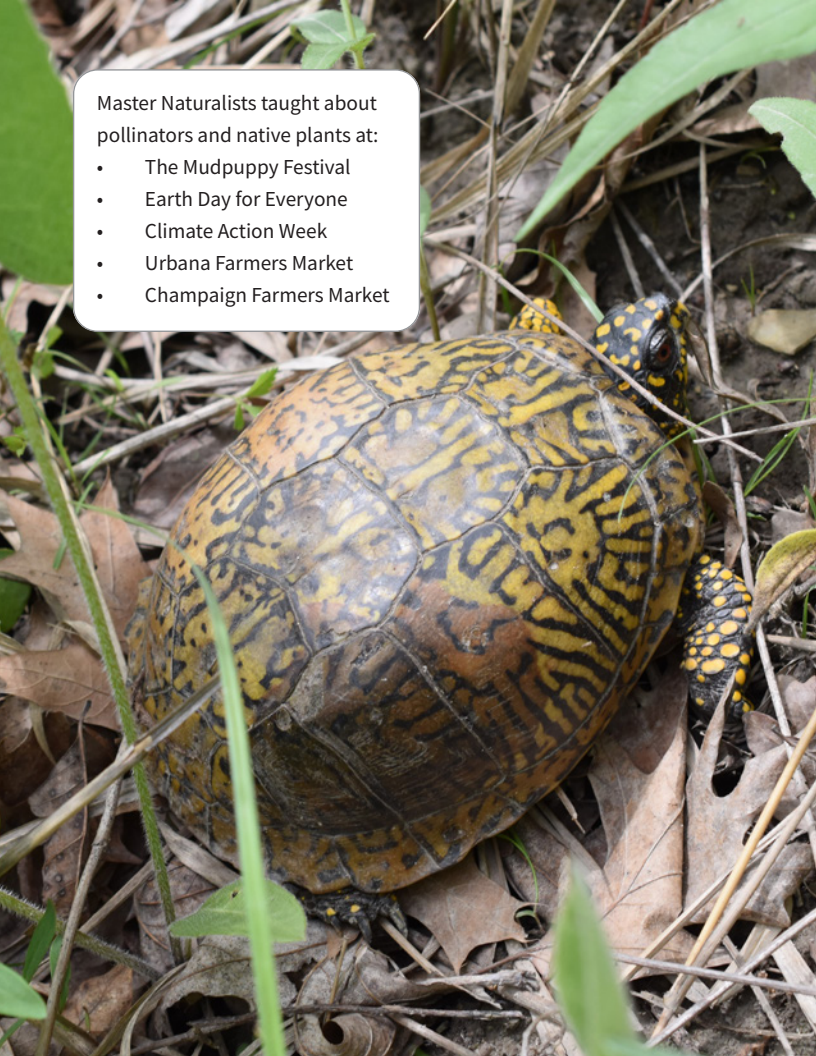


Nearly 2000 participants took advantage of seminars, hikes, conferences and volunteer opportunities organized by the East Central Illinois Master Naturalists

- Hikes were held at:
- Forest Glen
  - Lodge Park
  - Heron County Park
  - Perkins Road Wet Prairie
  - Charlotte and Dan Brady Woods Nature Preserve
  - Fox Ridge State Park
  - Windfall Prairie Nature Preserve
  - Buffalo Trace
  - Friends Creek
  - Warbler Ridge Conservation Area



Twenty-seven new volunteers participated in the first summer training session.



- Master Naturalists taught about pollinators and native plants at:
- The Mudpuppy Festival
  - Earth Day for Everyone
  - Climate Action Week
  - Urbana Farmers Market
  - Champaign Farmers Market





## Culturally relevant gardening, cooking programs held at Booker T. Washington School

Racial inequities with access to nature and gardening are significant issues in many societies. People of color and low-income communities often have limited access to green spaces and gardening opportunities that can have negative impacts on their physical and mental health, as well as their overall well-being. Additionally, racial inequities and disparities can create barriers to feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness for individuals and communities who are marginalized and oppressed.

To address these inequities, 4-H partnered with Booker T. Washington Elementary School to create a school community garden and culturally relevant cooking programs. These programs promoted cultural awareness and understanding, improved access to healthy food options, and provided educational opportunities that can improve academic outcomes and boost student engagement.

By incorporating culturally relevant menus and gardening activities into Booker T. Washington's Fab Friday enrichment

day, students learned about different traditions and foods of the African diaspora which can foster greater understanding and appreciation for diverse communities. This can help break down stereotypes and biases and promote a more inclusive school environment.

Additionally, the gardening program helped increase access to fresh and healthy foods, hopefully helping improve overall health outcomes and addressing gaps in food access. Students learned about sustainable food practices, such as vermicomposting and water conservation, and developed skills in growing and harvesting fruits and vegetables. The cooking program built on the gardening program by teaching students how to prepare healthy and diverse dishes, promoting healthy eating habits and reducing the prevalence of diet-related health issues.

As a result of the programs at Booker T. Washington, there was an increase in academic outcomes, student engagement and interest in learning through the hands-on, experiential learning lessons. There was also an increase in student self-esteem, cultural awareness, and connection to nature.



## Improving brain health leads family life programming efforts

Brain health is the most requested family life Extension program. People don't often worry about cognition and memory until they age. That is often when people start to worry whether their experiences are typical or of concern.

Brain health programs discuss what could be considered normal cognitive changes regarding recall speed and accuracy, different types of memory, what contributes to cognitive decline, and what we can do across the lifespan to contribute to our brain health. There is also a program on understanding Alzheimer's and related dementias and how to improve communication when a loved one has a form of dementia.

Research has proven, and experience tells us, that cognitive decline, including memory loss and dementia, increases with age. Although some factors that affect brain health cannot be changed, research indicates lifestyle changes, including regular physical activity, staying socially engaged, and a heart-healthy diet, can delay or reduce cognitive decline.

### Wits Workout

Drawing from existing research, Illinois Extension family life educators developed Wits Workout, a workshop series designed to enhance brain health among people age 50 and older. Wits Workout is holistic, addressing multiple factors that affect cognitive health, such as physical activity, stress, sleep, and social isolation. The program can be lay-leader-led, interactive, and experiential.

Each themed session has four activities and a training component that features educational topics:

- eating a heart/brain-healthy diet
- exercising regularly
- engaging the brain with intellectually stimulating challenges
- being socially engaged
- getting enough restful sleep
- managing stress.

The facilitator guide includes 24 units, each accommodating a 60- to 90-minute session. The program is flexible; length can be adjusted; sessions can be offered weekly, biweekly, or monthly; and sessions can stand alone or be presented as a series.

Wits Workout was piloted with more than 1,000 direct contacts in urban and rural communities. Educators made adjustments based on valuable feedback, and the program was published in 2019.



Find out more at:  
[go.illinois.edu/Family-Life](http://go.illinois.edu/Family-Life)



With grant support from the Midwest Roybal Center for Health Promotion and Translation, a multidisciplinary team of researchers is currently implementing a two-arm randomized clinical trial to determine Wits Workout's feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy. The project started in June 2021 with 216 participants. Eight locations were offered, including Champaign, Franklin Park, Mattoon, Mayslake, St. Joseph, Sterling, and Westchester.

Last year, several brain health programs were held:

- 36 Wits Workout Sessions (Wits Wellness)
- 9 programs on brain health
- 3 programs on Alzheimer's: *Extension has partnered with the Alzheimer's Association for over ten years.*
- 1 four-part brain health series
- 4 Wits Workout Train-the-Trainer programs
- 3 professional conference presentations

### Brain Health at the Caitlin Public Library

Brain health programming was held at the Caitlin Public Library. Sessions were held outside in the pavilion to accommodate more than 30 participants. Participants reported an increase of knowledge about brain health.

- 84% of the participants came to three out of four sessions
- More than 50% attended all four sessions



22

States Currently Deliver Wits Workout



14

Other Land-Grant Extensions Offer Wits Workout



83

Family Life Educational Sessions Offered



5,253

Participants Were Reached with Family Life Programs



## Text reminders give helpful tips for staying healthy, physically and financially

Extension educators send out educational tips via texts related to financial wellness, nutrition, personal and family health, and wellness, as well as research on the latest health topics from University of Illinois. Educational texts are sent to participants once a week, never more than twice a week.

Research indicates that short message service interventions can impact individual health (Suffoletto, 2016). According to the Pew Research Center (2021), 97% of Americans own a cell phone. Text messaging is a quick and convenient way to receive health information.

In 2022, the Extending Wellness texting program had 528 participants (from 253 zip codes). Collectively, the group received 37,546 texts with health messaging throughout the past three years.

The Extending Wellness program meets people where they are with educational information they can access when it is most convenient for them. The short health-themed texts often links to additional information via blogs, videos, articles, podcasts, and websites.



528

Extending Wellness Participants Were Reached from 253 Different Zipcodes



Register to receive healthy texts:  
[go.illinois.edu/wellnesstips](https://go.illinois.edu/wellnesstips)



## Money Mentors teach financial education to middle school students



As young adults enter the workforce and begin earning their own paychecks, they may have questions about what to do with their money. Extension educators and Money Mentor volunteers helped more than 200 eighth graders at Champaign’s Franklin Middle School learn how to save their money, understand sources of income, and explore strategies to decide how to use their money.

The lessons were created by the consumer economics staff who trained the volunteers and provided teaching materials. Volunteers provided more than 30 hours of instruction. The students also received handouts to guide them in future money-making decisions. The booklets included conversation starters they could use to talk about finances with friends or family.

## CU Wise TV helps older adults thrive



Illinois Extension has been integral in launching the CU Wise TV effort. This grassroots project by the Champaign County Senior Task Force targets socially isolated older adults who may be unable to attend in-person programming. This aligns with Extension’s goal of meeting people where they are.

Leadership from Family Service, the Champaign library, Parkland TV, and Urbana Public TV collaborated with Extension to develop logos for the Senior Taskforce and CU Wise TV. At present, much of the programming features Extension programs which allows for the added benefit of advertising for future events at no cost.





## Extension SNAP-Ed team develops adult programs that engage thousands

By teaming with various Extension program teams, staff working in SNAP-Ed expanded Extension’s adult and family programming efforts in Vermilion County.

- Using the Eat Play Grow curriculum, the Extension SNAP-Ed team collaborated with the Vermilion County Master Gardeners to provide a garden kit to each class participant at the Community Development Institute Head Start.
- At Centennial Manor, the team taught a container gardening lesson from the Healthy Cents curriculum, partnering with the Master Gardener team. Claudia, a Master Gardener volunteer, showed participants how to use containers for planting tomatoes, green peppers, herbs, and onions.
- SNAP-Ed partnered with Sheri from EFNEP and Jenney from Master Gardeners on an Illinois Junior Chef class at the YMCA. Master Gardeners planted vegetables and herbs in front of the office for use in the cooking class.

The Champaign County team increased community outreach in Rantoul, holding five classes at the public library. SNAP-Ed also taught three classes to 47 adult staff and cadres at Lincoln’s Challenge Academy.

The SNAP-Ed Policy System and Environment team focused on community collaborations with new projects and agency partnerships. The team focused on reconnecting with principals and food service directors to begin work in three school districts. SNAP-Ed partnered with the Champaign Park District, Champaign Farmers Market, and Sola Gratia Farms to bring Parks and Market to the community. This project gets children active, raises awareness of the double and triple SNAP benefit days at the Champaign Farmers Market, and encourages people to try new fresh produce.

The SNAP-Ed team partnered with Promise Healthcare to host the Champaign Community Health Fair, with 27 vendors attending.

### SNAP-Education Efforts



67  
Total Partnering Agencies



394  
New Adult Participants



2862  
Total Program Participants



Find out more at:  
[go.illinois.edu/cfivINEP](http://go.illinois.edu/cfivINEP)





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**Illinois Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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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