## Community: Support strong and resilient youth, families, and communities.

### Connectedness and Inclusion

A strong sense of community brings people together to develop shared goals, support one another in times of need and growth, and work together for the good of the whole. Accepting and celebrating differences creates an environment where all voices are recognized and respected. When strong networks of peers and organizations support youth and families, even the most vulnerable community members feel they belong and are valued.

### Involvement and Leadership

When people volunteer or advocate for a local issue, they see themselves as part of the solution. Providing decision-makers with practical, timely, and research-based information gives leaders the tools they need to strengthen their communities and improve the quality of life in rural and urban areas throughout Illinois.

### Thriving Youth

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Illinois Extension’s mentorship-based youth development model focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive now and in the future.

## Economy: Grow a prosperous economy

### Workforce Preparedness and Advancement

The global pandemic has reinforced that there is an ongoing need for Illinois to develop innovative ways to nurture its workforce through career exploration, training and re-training programs, and other opportunities for refining skills of the current workforce and the workforce of the future. Career exploration begins during early childhood and extends into adulthood. The earlier that an individual can begin this process, the sooner they are able to establish their sense of identity in the world of work. Having a prepared, skilled, and resilient workforce in place ultimately increases tax revenue for the state.

### Financial Wellbeing

Financial instability can negatively affect physical, mental, and social health and can ultimately lead to bankruptcy. Illinois Extension provides financial wellbeing resources for all ages and life stages which helps improve self-sufficiency, reduces the need for communities to provide support services, and creates opportunities for individuals to protect and build wealth.

### Economic Vitality

Economically resilient communities are built on a solid foundation with plans for improvement, plans for responding to emergencies and disasters, and innovative approaches to promote economic vitality. With 75% of the state’s total land area classified as farmland, agricultural operations, both large and small, are a critically important contributor to the economic vitality of Illinois’ local and state economy.

## Environment: Sustain natural resources in home and public spaces

### Enhancing and Preserving Natural Resources

The survival of our planet depends on the quality of our water, land, energy, and air. These shared resources must be managed through sustainable practices that support ecological balance. In a changing climate, Illinois Extension helps Illinois residents make informed choices on stewardship of these natural resources to ensure sustainable environment and ecosystems supporting healthy living and climate resilient communities.

### Engagement with Home and Community Landscapes

There is growing evidence that time spent around plants and in green spaces has many benefits, including improved health, better interpersonal relationships, and a higher quality of life. Sustainable home landscapes also increase property values and build stronger ecosystems for plants and wildlife.

## Food: Maintain a safe and accessible food supply

### Food Access

Research shows a strong link between food insecurity, poor physical and mental health, and even poor academic outcomes for children. Food insecurity is not just about hunger. It also indicates a decrease in access to food that is culturally relevant and nutritionally robust. Food insecurity affects every community in Illinois. Illinois Extension connects youth, volunteers, and partners, working together to address the needs of communities most impacted by food insecurity through research, community service and advocacy.

### Food Production

Whether large commercial agriculture operations, small farms, or community and backyard gardens, the future of our food supply relies on use of practices that boost production and capacity. Growers at all levels benefit from effective, efficient, and sustainable approaches to cultivating produce, crops, and livestock that feed their families, communities, and the world.

### Food Safety

Foodborne illnesses cost society an estimated $36 billion annually, with an average cost of $3,630 per illness. Food safety is challenged everywhere from the field to the kitchen. Safe growing, handling, and preservation practices can help reduce the social and economic impact of foodborne illness and is an important aspect to the thriving food system.

## Health: Maximize physical and emotional health for all

### Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

More than half of Illinois adults have a known chronic health condition, with many facing inequities that make improving their health more challenging. People of all ages need trusted and reliable research-based information to make health decisions that improve their quality of life. With our community partners, we deliver creative and sustainable solutions to assure that these supports are available when and where people need them.

### Social and Emotional Health

Even before the global pandemic’s new social, economic, and life challenges, mental health was a growing concern. Illinois residents of all ages and walks of life need to know where to turn for resources to better manage the daily stressors that impact mental health and well-being.

### Healthy and Safe Community Environments

Personal health decisions are influenced by the broader community and environment where we live. By working together, we can create environments where healthy choices are the easy choices. Classrooms, school cafeterias, food pantries, workplaces, and other built environments play an important role in promoting health and wellbeing.