Tourism dollars today - Decatur jobs tomorrow

Led by University of Illinois Extension in Macon County, Decatur constructed an outdoor convention center that has become the permanent biennial home of the Farm Progress Show. This event brought $10-12 million in tourism revenue to Central Illinois late this summer. A global audience attended the gathering, which is the world’s largest trade show for production agriculture.

Extension helped create a community vision that resulted in widespread support to host the event and many other events can be held even in adverse weather. Bolstered by a $3.8 million grant from the IL General Assembly, Decatur constructed a $6.5 million facility featuring paved streets, underground utilities, permanent restrooms, and an all-weather drainage plan to ensure the Farm Progress Show and many other events can be held in adverse weather.

Extension has also spurred the community to recognize the economic potential from the creation of an agro-technology development park anchored by the new “Progress City,” which will bring needed jobs to the area.

Nourishing Kid’s Tummies and Minds

Peoria County had more than 500 limited income youth participating in a 4-H youth gardening program during the summer of 2005.

EFNEP, FNP staff and Extension Master Gardeners provided education and “hands on” gardening experience at 35 garden sites twice a week. After each gardening session, the young gardeners were served a nutritious snack, funded by the Illinois State Board of Education’s Summer Food Service Program.

It was a difficult gardening year with almost no rain, but these young people watered and weeded faithfully. In the end, the harvest was abundant and the vegetables went home to their families and their neighbors.

A 4-H Youth Garden Harvest Festival culminated the summer when vegetables, herbs and flowers were exhibited for ribbons and 4-H premium money. A harvest meal was also served using the vegetables grown in the gardens.

Superior Young Producers Award Celebrates 10 Years

More than 100 Illinois 4-H and FFA members took part in the 2005 Superior Young Producer Award program held at the Illinois State Fair. The competition, developed and conducted by University of Illinois Extension Animal Systems Team, awarded each of the top five dairy, beef, swine, sheep and horse participants a $1,000 scholarship.

Archer Daniels Midland Co., Decatur, IL, with assistance from the Illinois Department of Agriculture, sponsored the $25,000 in scholarships, while the Land of Lincoln Purebred Livestock Breeders Association sponsored individual plaques.

This educational activity is designed to promote youth development and personal growth through increased knowledge of the livestock industry.

A total of $230,000 in scholarships has been presented to Illinois 4-H and FFA members since the program’s inception in 1996.
Victory Garden Teaches Sound Gardening Practices

To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Evergreen Park Library in south suburban Chicago, University of Illinois Extension staff and volunteer Master Gardeners planted a victory garden, reminiscent of those commemorating the end of World War II.

Designed in a V-shape, the left side featured heirloom plants in rows, common to gardens in 1944. In contrast, modern hybrid vegetables, herbs, and flowers were planted in drifts on the right side of the “V”.

This project involved library staff, high school students, businesses, and various volunteer groups. The cooperative effort added excitement and increased volunteerism to the community.

University of Illinois Extension also helped the library staff and high school youth utilize sound garden management practices.

The Evergreen Park Victory Garden was recently named the Illinois Library Association’s 2005 Highsmith Innovation Award winner for urban programming. The stipend received is being used to start a Junior Master Gardener Program for fourth through sixth grade students.

Teacher Smarts Promotes Financial Education

Research indicates that the dramatic growth of credit card use by college students has put them at risk for a number of financial challenges. This trend has led teachers to look for unbiased, effective financial education resources to help students make informed financial decisions.

Through a grant secured from the National Council on Economic Education and the United States Department of Education, University of Illinois Extension Consumer and Family Life Educators were able to hold a series of teacher training conferences addressing this issue.

More than 40 teachers have been trained in the two Teacher Smarts curricula: Financial Fitness for Life and Learning, Earning, and Investing. It is estimated that approximately 2000 students now have a financial action plan they can put to use.

UI Extension Sponsors First Organic Production Conference

Faced with a growing number of inquiries from farmers interested in organic production, University of Illinois Extension staff took the lead in planning the first state-wide organic farming conference.

This conference provided producers with practical, research-based information on organic production and certification.

More than 170 participants attended the two-day event, which included presentations on organic field crops, specialty crops, livestock, marketing, and certification.

The audience consisted of beginning farmers, established organic producers, and conventional farmers exploring the possibilities of organic crop production.

As a result of this conference, University of Illinois Extension established itself as a viable source of information for organic growers.

“Celebrate Youth” Conference Builds Self Esteem

University of Illinois Extension recently coordinated a conference targeting 7th grade students in the five southern Illinois counties of Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, and Union.

The Celebrate Youth Conference encouraged 488 students from 13 schools to have fun, build self-esteem, and learn something new.

Student evaluations indicate that:
- 88.5% feel they have a better understanding of the importance of being healthy.
- 92% feel they have a better understanding of what it takes to be successful.
- 86.6% feel better about themselves after attending the conference.
- 97.4% recommended that next year’s 7th graders attend Celebrate Youth.

One student said, “This conference made me realize that I need to respect myself, follow my dreams, and not do drugs.”

For more information on these and other University of Illinois Extension programs, contact your local extension office or visit our website: www.extension.uiuc.edu