



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Extension in ACTION

The Joint Council of Extension Professionals is a collaboration of University of Illinois Extension employee associations. These associations are working to enable people to improve their lives and communities through learning partnerships that put knowledge to work.

Launching the Next Generation of Farmers

Central Illinois Farm Beginnings® (CIFB) is a year-long farmer training and support program designed to help people plan and launch farm businesses that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

CIFB begins with a series of eight Business Planning Seminars that take place through the fall and winter. CIFB then offers on-farm field days and workshops to provide students with the practical knowledge and training required to begin farming sustainably. Finally, every CIFB student has an opportunity to develop a relationship with an experienced local farmer in a customized one-on-one mentorship. This unique program is a collaborative partnership between U of I Extension and The Land Connection.

Since 2004, CIFB has provided training and support to 107 beginning farmers. Marty and Crystal Gray of Gray Farms Produce, Donovan (Iroquois County), graduated from Farm Beginnings in 2008. Their favorite part of the class was the opportunity to intern with an experienced farmer-mentor. "My mentor at Blue Moon Farm in Urbana allowed me a lot of freedom in the field, and the responsibility of managing the harvest crew," says Marty. "This helped build my skills to run my own farm. I wouldn't have had this opportunity without Central Illinois Farm Beginnings." In a 2009 survey of CIFB graduates, 78 percent of the respondents indicated they are farming, and 76 percent of those are farming own their land. These new farmers produced and sold vegetables, fruits, beef, pork, chicken, fiber, eggs, honey, flowers and hay.



Extension Programs Benefit the Disabled

Since 2006, U of I Extension has been working in cooperation with the Moultrie County Beacon to initiate and maintain the Lighthouse Beacons 4-H Club. What makes this club unique is that its membership consists of developmentally disabled adults.

In working with these adults, Extension's goal is to foster a sense of belonging and improve socialization. They realize that they are part



of a special group that is local, statewide and national.

Extension staff go in once a month to help lead the meeting and assist on one pre-chosen project per year in which all 60 of the members participate. Past projects have included visual arts, gardening and entomology. The day that Extension staff visit, clients can be heard to say "I just love 4-H!"

This year's project focused on Latino Cultural Arts, which gave the participants insights into a different culture. The staff put on a special fair to display and award the projects.

The Beacon staff report that they feel the program has been very beneficial for the clients—a source of enjoyment, a sense of belonging, and educational.

Extension staff has begun to observe changes when they go in each time such as: "I really noticed this past week when we visited, how much better they were at reciting the pledge of allegiance and the 4-H pledge." When asked what they liked best about the club, clients would commonly respond with "everything" or "Angie" (the 4-H Community Worker).

Youth Learn New Skills—the Fun Way

Kids all over Illinois are having fun learning new skills. SPIN (SPecial INterest) Clubs target a kid's specific hobby or interest in a way that works around today's busy schedules.

Evaluations conducted after one year of implementation find that SPIN clubs are reaching underserved audiences through knowledgeable volunteers and having a positive impact on participant's life skills.

In DuPage County, 20 youth, ages 8 to 14,

participated in "Science of Engineering." This hands-on, minds-on SPIN Club had youth engaged in a variety of activities using the "mechanical advantage" of torque and pulleys—delving into chemistry, wind power, aeronautics and communications.

Statewide, 12 groups learned video skills by producing 3 to 5 minute documentaries on their chosen topics, including bullying, homelessness, immigration and online social networking.



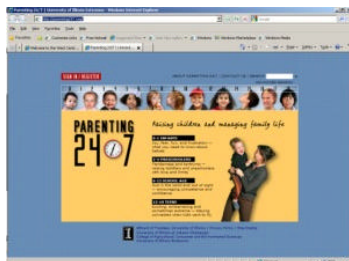
Other SPIN projects teach about cooking, community gardens, healthy lifestyles, small engines and much more. Comments from youth include: "I learned how to make a DVD product," "I will teach my mom how to cook vegetables!" and "I will build a wind farm as my career!"

Partners in Parenting

Parents who live in high-poverty communities are more likely to experience conditions that put their children at risk for a variety of developmental challenges.

Through delivery of “just-in-time” parenting newsletters, parents in such communities located in four counties in northern and southern Illinois are successfully learning and implementing practices to handle these challenges. The monthly newsletters describe the development characteristics of children from birth through age two and have been distributed to over 700 registered parents to coincide with the age of their babies.

In surveys after one year, over 90 percent of the parents agreed that they know what to expect babies might do and the challenges that are normal at different ages. They also indicated feeling more confident in their parenting skills, including their ability to feed their baby safe and healthy foods, to try different ways to calm their crying babies and to provide opportunities for their babies to learn.



<http://parenting247.org>

Protecting the Environment and Maximizing Crop Production

In Livingston County, 298 farmers participated in U of I Extension’s Private Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) and completed the Illinois Department of Agriculture testing to recertify them to purchase and use “restricted-use pesticides.”

The most popular practice change noted (91.7 percent) was adhering to the letter of the law by reading and following label directions. Proper application protects farmers and others from potentially harmful effects of pesticides.

Over 89 percent of the farmers reported scouting their fields for various pests before

deciding to apply pesticides. This resulted in a reduction in the costs associated with unnecessary application of pesticides.

Over 82 percent reported implementing safety practices, including wearing proper protective equipment, mixing and loading pesticides in a well lit and open area, storing pesticides in a secure location and taking precautions to minimize spray drift to nearby property.

Sixty-six farmers, or 32 percent, reported a total estimated savings of \$886,170, which is an average of \$13,426 per individual who responded to the survey.

Encouraging Youth to Be Healthy and Fit

University of Illinois Extension 4-H received a \$50,000 Healthy Living grant from WalMart Foundation for 2009-10. The grant supported 4-H Health Jam, which is also a National 4-H Program of Distinction.

Over 250 fifth grade students from eight counties participated in two-day camps and an eight-week Walk Across Illinois. During the camps, the youth learned how to keep their bodies healthy and fit and explored health professions.

For the walk, students supported each other to complete 30 minutes of daily physical activity and to track the number of miles they walked. By working together, 100 percent of the students achieved that goal and “walked” the equivalent of the length of Illinois (448miles).

Evaluation results showed that Health Jam has a statistically significant impact on the

students’ knowledge of health, physical activity, and body systems. For example, end of camp evaluations at one site indicated that over half of the students were unaware and learned that being overweight is a factor causing the development of Type 2 Diabetes.



Health Jam also had a highly significant impact in expanding students’ knowledge of health professions. The grant will support additional 4-H Health Jams in 2010.

Educating the Community on Living with Wildlife

Changing roles from student to teacher, University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine students from the Wildlife Medical Clinic volunteer their time educating the central Illinois community about the environment and the wildlife they share it with. In 2009, approximately 3200 people were reached through the clinics’ public education program. Events take on many formats, including meet-and-greet booth-style programs, presentations with four live birds (great-horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk) and interactive labs at which participants can dissect owl pellets and examine skeletal specimens.

The Clinic also posts a blog, “It’s a Wild Life at the Wildlife Medical Clinic,” at: www.uiwmc.blogspot.com.

