Cerro Gordo County

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach connects the needs of Iowans with Iowa State University research and resources. We are working with the people of Cerro Gordo County for what we all want: a strong Iowa.

Cerro Gordo County Extension Council

Every Iowa county has an elected extension council that guides local educational programming by partnering with staff. From needs assessment through program implementation and evaluation of outcomes, the council represents the issues and people of the county.

New Facility

In 2016, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) Cerro Gordo County celebrated 100 years of Extension Services in Cerro Gordo County. We continued that celebration this year with our move to our location.

Through many discussions starting Fall of 2016 with Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa (GSGI), both of our organizations developed a proposal for our office to acquire the GSGI location while keeping the operation and full functionality of each intact. ISUEO moved to the building in early April after residing at 2023 S. Federal Avenue for nearly 50 years.

This move provides facility, financial, and other resources that will benefit both organizations, strengthen our programs, and extend access to even more of our youth in Cerro Gordo County and the north Iowa Region. Our organization’s missions, values, and ethics align well and through our collaboration, we hope to secure and strengthen our future and expand our outreach to make Cerro Gordo County, and the state of Iowa a better place.

Economic Development

Cerro Gordo office hosted three Rising Star Interns that provided assistance in Region 3 on a variety of economic development-related projects. Our interns for the summer were Josephina Matteson, Rui Xie, and Erin McDonald. While making their “home” in Mason City for the summer, they worked on landscape design

Extension Council Members

We want communities and farmers to thrive, and families and children to be healthy. And eventually we want to turn the world over to the next generation better than we found it.

Dean Weber
Extension Council Chair
Linda Schluter
Council Member
Tina Benjegerdes
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Donovan Olson
Regional Director
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Brenda Harris
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Eric Arthur
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William Cody
Council Member
Renee Frelund
Council Member

IN 2017
for the Worth County Fairgrounds, hotel renovation project planning, downtown revitalization projects for two area small towns, and a region-wide 5-year local foods producer professional development plan. We wanted to provide these young people with an intern experience that truly was “real world” with an end product they can share with potential employers after they graduate. These Rising Stars rose to the occasion, doing an exceptional job in our communities.

Health and Well-Being

During the past couple of years, our office has strived to have a particular focus on health and well-being in our county. Examples of how we do this is through programs like “Pick a Better Snack”, which provides second-graders the opportunity once a month to learn about and try new foods during the school day. That program has expanded to include Clear Lake this year. We are currently reaching 331 youth through this program.

Starting in early 2016, our office partnered with the Wellmark Match Grant program, Blue Zones Project Mason City, and the Mason City Community School district to provide improved water access to community gardens and an educational greenhouse at Lincoln Intermediate School. These projects further promote healthy eating and lifestyle habits for all ages. The greenhouse was completed fall of 2017 and classes are beginning to get organized to utilize the facility. The “Green Thumb Club” at Lincoln Intermediate has been using the greenhouse after school during the fall semester and has been excited to grow plants in the warmth of the greenhouse while temperatures outside dip into the teens!

Food and Environment

Other areas for concern in Cerro Gordo County has been food security, nutrition, and caring for our food resources in a sustainable way. Toward that end, programs like “Pick a Better Snack” and the Community gardens projects have helped to promote and educate people on differences they can make in their own lives as well as the lives of others through better choices for eating and sharing the produce they grow. Through the community gardens, more organizations are using this venue as volunteer projects to raise food for local food banks,

For more information about the Women, Land, and Legacy program or to find a local chapter near you, contact:

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community kitchens, and individuals in need. Our office provides educational opportunities for these groups to learn how to grow vegetables, care for the soil, and optimize their harvest.

Kids in the Kitchen

Utilizing a $2800 grant from Ag Ventures Alliance, Region 3 counties have held “Kids in the Kitchen” camps this summer, teaching K-6 kids about preparing nutritious foods for themselves and their families. With food safety lessons built in throughout the camp, 94% of kids recognized the importance of hand washing before handling food or eating and 74% recognized the importance of refrigerating foods once you have finished eating.

Regionally, our collective extension offices are working on offering the Master Conservation program summer of 2018 that will provide participants hands-on experiences to learn more about the environment we live in, how to care for our natural resources, making Iowa an even greater place to live and grow.

K-12 Youth Outreach

New programming efforts are providing our county youth with great opportunities to expand their knowledge, experience, and confidence.

Horse Judging Workshops

Former 4-H member (now volunteer) Spencer Orr held 4 horse judging workshops for members who were going to be participating in horse judging at Equine Extravaganza. The workshops consisted of juniors and seniors who had not participated in horse-judging before. As a result, they placed 2-6 at Equine Extravaganza and all seniors placed in the top 30.

Greenhouse Gardening

Cerro Gordo 4-H is partnering with Lincoln Intermediate School in Mason City to start greenhouse garden programming. Twenty-five youth are planting plants in containers they can take home with them and continue the plants growth. It is important to the school and teachers involved that the youth gain a knowledge of where their food comes from. The youth are from an urban area and only think of buying their food at the grocery store. Youth have already made comments about how much they did not know about the gardening process. Next school the youth will be able to plant, harvest, and eat the produce they grow.

Mini 4-H introduced 4-H to youth who are not familiar with it. Parents were excited to get into contact with the CYC and the youth were engaged in the learning each day During October. The program included three 2-hour workshops to learn about 4-H project areas, teach basic parliamentary procedure, what goals are, and the 4-H pledge and 4-H motto. Of the 26 youth that participated in Mini 4-H, half of them responded “Everything!” when asked what they like best about Mini 4-H. While talking with the youth, they said that they loved Mini 4-H because they could be themselves while learning and asking questions. What a great way to learn about 4-H!
The 2017 growing season was marked by a number of significant events. A cool wet spring slowed planting in many areas of the state. Yet, by May, planting picked up markedly with corn completion by the second week of June and soybeans soon after. For many areas of the state, June through the end of September brought drought conditions that were severe in some spots. Our area saw significant hail damage from remarkable storms that crossed Iowa. Corn and soybean harvest began later than average. But by the end of November only a few areas of the State had reports of crops remaining to be harvested. Pests tended to be minimally problematic. However, issues with herbicide applications, drift, and related issues persisted. Palmar Amaranth had become a prominent weed issue.

Our extension offices has hosted or supported a number of workshops and events to discuss remedies to these issues and more. Our research farm located near Nashua hosted weed workshops to help farmers understand the significance of the highly invasive Palmar Amaranth and how to manage it. In Hancock County, a hail recovery workshop was held primarily for farmers and farm agencies hit hardest by damage from early summer storms in that region. This fall, our Crop Clinic included presentations about the issues surrounding Dicamba, its usage, associated challenges, and state policy. Conservation tillage, cover crops, and other nutrient loss prevention strategies continue to be addressed throughout the state. Our office does this either directly through programs like our Crop Clinics, the Crop Advantage Series, various applicator certification programs, and other workshops that specifically address these issues.

Earlier this year, our office partnered with Ag Ventures Alliance and Farm Bureau to host a number of young and beginning farmer programs to help these folks be successful in one of the most challenging careers and economic climates. As commodity prices continue to be lack luster, land values remain high, and access to farmland is scarce, young and beginning farmers take advantage of tools and skills that will help them negotiate finances, leases, markets, and family life. This is at the heart of sustainable agriculture.