

BUILDING A #STRONGIOWA

MAHASKA COUNTY

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach connects the needs of Iowans with Iowa State research and resources. We listen, learn, and work with the people of Mahaska County for a #STRONGIOWA.

Mahaska 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.

We have identified these local issues as priority topics for current and future programming:

- Economic Development
- Food and the Environment
- Health and Well-being
- K-12 Youth Outreach

Extension Council Members

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

Joy Prothero

*Extension
Council Chair*

Eileen Blom

Council Member

Phil Hol

Council Member

Amanda Lusk

Council Member

Sherrie Moore

Council Member

Andy Padgett

Council Member

Sherry Ford

Regional Director

Stacey Scott

Council Member

Mike Sytsma

Council Member

Seth Van Zante

Council Member

Human Sciences

Human Sciences strives to build a “STRONGIOWA” one person at a time. We provide research-based information and education to help Iowans make



decisions that improve their lives.

ServSafe is an eight hour food safety training for foodservice managers and workers.

The course was offered four times (January, April, July, and October) with a total of 52 participants attending in 2019. During the course, participants learn current best practices related to safe food handling and cleaning and sanitizing as well as tips on how to implement essential food safety practices and create a culture of food safety. The trainings were delivered by Human Sciences Nutrition and Wellness Specialist, Sara Sprouse.

K-12 Youth Outreach

4-H in Mahaska County provides countless opportunities for youth members and adult volunteers to learn and grow together. The Maker Monday workshop series is an opportunity for youth in 4th-12th grade to learn about



IN 2019

Master Conservationist Program



In May of 2019, Marion, Mahaska, Jasper, and Poweshiek Counties came together to offer a regional Master Conservationist Program. Participants were individuals who shared an interest in the sustainability of Iowa's natural resources and in becoming better stewards of those resources. To complete the program, participants completed online lectures, read articles, and attended the weekly in-person sessions. An engaged group of 20 traveled to seven different locations to learn about conservation and the Iowa landscape through hands-on experiences. Local experts gave lectures and tours of the local natural areas in each county.

The program was divided into four modules. Module 1 'sets the stage' for the course, exploring the history and current structure of conservation in Iowa and also exploring the landforms and waterways that make up the state's land area. Module 2 digs deep into the structure, function, and challenges facing Iowa's natural prairie, forest, and aquatic ecosystems. Module 3 explored the wide range of conservation practices developed and implemented to address conservation challenges in Iowa. The final and fourth module then examined the human elements of conservation and explores how to communicate the importance of conservation to Iowa and Iowans.

Sites visited in Mahaska county included Quercus County Park for forest ecosystem topic in module 2 and the Environmental Learning Center for the final module. Upon completion, attendees were encouraged to get engaged locally to apply the information they learned and continue to build their local connections to conservation professionals and other passionate

various STEM principles through hands-on activities in a Makerspace. Maker Monday has provided science education for local homeschooled students and provided a fun time to socialize with new friends.

Another wonderful opportunity for youth is the Ricochet Leadership Club which



was implemented in the Oskaloosa Middle School. Ricochet was a partnership between Mahaska County 4-H, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Oskaloosa Middle School, William Penn University, & United Way of Mahaska County. Participants in 6th-7th grade worked together with their mentors from William Penn University to solve problems, communicate, and plan and implement a community service project. Participants completed a food basket service project serving over 100 families in the county on April 17. They learned about the importance of volunteerism, communication, teamwork, and leadership.

Mahaska County 4-H provides all youth with opportunities to learn and grow through an experiential learning process. The Southern Iowa Fair is a time for youth to showcase their learning and efforts. 4-H'ers of all abilities are welcome to participate in the county fair. This year, a few youth had accommodations forms on file and through those requests we were able to work as a team to create the accommodations necessary for the youth to participate in the county fair. They were provided with an opportunity to visit with their judges, interact with their peers, exhibit and



care for their animal projects, and have a great time experiencing the county fair and all that 4-H has to offer. It warms our hearts that 4-H is able to provide accommodations to young people and we are able to work as a team with the families, volunteers, and staff to create an opportunity the children would otherwise not have.

During 2019, we had 120 K-3rd grade students enroll in Clover Kids and 44 students participate in our new K-3rd grade Robotics program, Wonder League. Wonder League Robotics Competition is an international competition hosted by Wonder Workshop, with Iowa 4-H Youth Development encouraging counties to dive in! 44 students and 13 coaches made up nine teams, allowing Mahaska County to have the largest number of teams for the state under Iowa 4-H Youth Development.



Wonder League encourages students to build teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills while working through missions on a computer tablet to code and control a real robot named Dash. Each year, Wonder League Robotics Competition chooses a theme to supplement the mission challenges, encouraging students to enter into the missions. This year's theme was oceanography, leading teams through

five, story-based missions under the sea. While learning the basic concepts behind computer programming, students were introduced to topics of marine ecology, ocean floor mapping, and more.



In early May, once Mahaska County teams had completed their five missions, we hosted a Wonder League Robotics Expo at the Musco Tech Center at William Penn University. This allowed families to observe the teams sorting through a final challenge, and to give students a chance to demonstrate their computer programming skills.

Amy Brainard, County Youth Coordinator
Ashtin Harris, Youth Program Assistant

Horticulture Nutrition Lessons at Preschools

In 2004, the Mahaska County Extension personnel began providing monthly Pick a Better Snack lessons to the students in Mahaska County Headstart. USDA funding made it possible to conduct the program in eligible elementary classrooms across the county. The program focuses on nutrition education, and introduces young people to fresh fruits and vegetables while encouraging them to develop lifelong healthy eating habits.

Although grant funding for the program ended after two years, the need for nutrition education was very evident. Mahaska County ranks in the bottom 50% in Iowa for overall health, and adult obesity continues to be an issue. Due to the efforts of Mahaska County Extension, nutrition education has continued to be implemented in pre-K classrooms for the past 15 years. Preschool and Head Start students in Oskaloosa begin to learn healthy eating habits from the lessons that are taught by the Mahaska County Extension Horticulturist.

In addition to learning the nutritional benefits of foods, students also begin to understand where and how their food is grown.

The monthly Nutrition Lessons are approximately 20 minutes long. A



children's story is read which features a fruit or vegetable. If how the item grows is not included in the book, that

information is discussed. The fruit or vegetable is sampled. Students are encouraged to touch, smell and taste the food item, (some students elect for just a taster bite).

A coloring page of the food item is sent home with the students in a packet which includes information about the book read, other books related to it available at the local library, and Extension approved nutritional information about the fruit or vegetable item.

Some of the fruits and vegetables included in the lessons are cucumbers/pickles, peppers, popcorn, apples, bananas, grapes/raisins, carrots, beans, and broccoli.



Suzette Striegel
Mahaska County Horticulturist

Farmland Leasing

In the State of Iowa, 53 percent of the farmland is leased, and that number is increasing. Because of the larger proportion of leased farmland, a strong landlord/tenant relationship is important for the efficient, long-term allocation of Iowa's valuable resources. Though the legal changes were minimal during this last year, "best practices" are for regular communication between the informed property owner and the manager/tenant. Because more landowners may not have ever farmed, or they may be retired from active farming, it is important to be engaged in regular ongoing communication and education concerning changes to crop technology, production costs, etc. ISU Extension and Outreach provided education to landlords and tenants of Mahaska County through a Farmland Leasing meeting facilitated by Charles Brown, ISU Extension Farm Management Specialist.

When asked why participants attend Extension and Outreach farmland leasing meetings, a follow-up survey found almost one-third participated to gain knowledge specifically on rental markets and trends. Twenty-one percent indicated they wanted to learn information for communicating with the other parties involved in the rental agreement. Ninety-five percent of those surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the effectiveness of the leasing program.

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