



**#STRONGIOWA**

## 2021 IN CASS 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 Cass County for a #STRONGIOWA.



**Sustainable  
ENVIRONMENTS**



**Thriving  
COMMUNITIES**



**Resilient  
PEOPLE**



**Future  
LEADERS**



**The Cass County Extension Council** has been elected by the people of the county to guide local educational programming by partnering with extension staff. From needs assessment through program implementation and evaluation of outcomes, the council represents you and your issues. We are always serving Iowans and we are here for you. Now. Always.

**Thank you for your support.**

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## Serving the People of Cass County

As Iowans adjusted to life during the COVID-19 pandemic, ISU Extension and Outreach continued to prioritize health and safety as we delivered research-based education to the people of Cass County. During 2021 we focused on the following efforts.

- Supporting ag producers and small businesses in accessing resources and training to survive and grow. Throughout the year, three different ServSafe trainings were offered, helping over 30 local food service professionals gain needed training and certification.



## Master Gardeners Educate, Engage and Nourish Cass County



Despite limitations on many things as the pandemic recovery unfolded, the Cass County Master Gardener group found ways to innovate and continue to support and “grow” resources in Cass County.

As it became apparent that food insecurity remained a challenge for many local residents, Master Gardener volunteers stepped up to donate produce, time and talent for many local projects. The Grow Another Row program in Cass County was expanded in 2021 with the assistance of a local AmeriCorps staff member. Master Gardeners donated garden vegetables and time to this program that created produce exchange sites across Cass County, and helped transport the extras to local pantries or other distribution sites. Many group members also stepped up to lend a helping hand by volunteering to pack and transport for mobile food pantry events.

Master Gardeners also provided education and entertainment to families and gardeners throughout the summer—hosting weekly information booths at farmers markets, and installing two storywalk story boards in public garden spaces, including activities for families to complete throughout the walk. Their annual bus tour was offered as a “guided driving tour” in June, featuring many educational stops for garden enthusiasts.

The group’s annual plant sales also continued in the spring and fall, raising funds for scholarships and community grants while offering buyers advice and tips on planting to go with their newfound garden plants and treasures.



Local ag and government agencies attended commercial pesticide trainings to learn the latest information on safely and effectively applying pesticides to ag and public lands, and over 100 local ag producers attended Private Pesticide Applicator training to learn safe application methods for their own farming operations. In addition, seven local childcare providers attended a hands-on food safety training, learning to provide safe meals to children in their care, and many local providers also attended trainings offered online statewide to gain skills in caring for children and managing their businesses.

- Working with partner organizations to assist community members in need. Cass County Extension joined forces with the Cass County Local Food Policy Council to leverage Community Development Block Grant for COVID response into a weekly mobile food pantry—serving over 100 families per week across the county for over three months. Partnering with regional nutrition staff and the Iowa Department of Health as a program delivery site for the Fresh Conversations program, delivering nutrition and wellness education to low income seniors during monthly education sessions. Working with the Healthy Cass County Coalition and local food pantries to host quarterly drive through mobile pantries from Food Bank of the Heartland, and hosting a kitchen supply drive to collect and distribute needed cooking utensils to pantry clients during the holidays.
- Engaging youth in hands-on education sessions both in and out of school. A workshop at a local welding business was held to teach the basics of welding safety and design in March. Winter daycamps in partnership with Cass County Conservation taught wildlife and outdoor skills to youth in grades K-5. Six local youth completed the day-long Babysitting Basics training class to become safe and smart babysitters. Staff visited local elementary schools in Atlantic and Griswold to provide ag-focused sessions in the classroom during the fall harvest season.



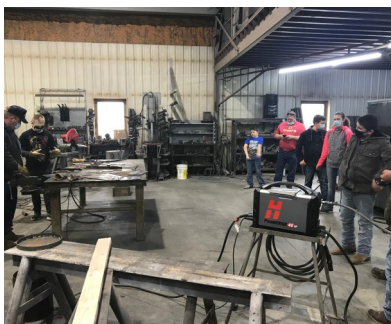
## Focus on Youth Outreach

The Summer of 2021 was full of educational offerings for youth of all ages.

Our annual summer daycamps, presented in partnership with Cass County Conservation, reached 88 youth, with seven sessions offered in three different locations across Cass County. Youth in K-2nd grade learned about dinosaurs and digging for fossils, youth in 3-5th grade explored water and water creatures, and 6-8th graders learned outdoor hiking, cooking and survival skills.

Extension staff and Master Gardener volunteers were excited to bring back our summer youth gardening program in 2021! In seven sessions throughout the summer, over 50 members of the “Summer Y-ers” youth group in grades K-3 spent time planting, weeding, watering and harvesting in a raised garden bed at the local elementary school. Participants learned about parts of plants, how they grow, and were able to sample a variety of garden-fresh produce!

Cass county Extension also provided several leadership development and career exploration opportunities for high-school aged youth. The 2021 SOFA (Speak Out for Agriculture) workshop and bus tour provided leadership opportunity for the local youth planning team, and also allowed for exploration of careers in ag for participants in the day-long workshop, and overnight bus trip held in mid- June.



Southwest Iowa youth participate in a group activity to kickoff the 2021 SOFA “All About Ag” workshop (above top). Welding project members get hands-on experience at the spring welding workshop, held at Weirich Welding Plus in Lewis (above, left). Extension hosted a table full of resources for families and youth at the Youth Mental Health Symposium, held in October at Atlantic High School (above, right).

## Working toward Recovery

As our state works toward recovery, Cass County Extension has been engaging community partners and local residents in addressing mental health issues in our rural communities.

Cass County Extension partnered with local Public Health officials to conduct the local Community Health Needs Assessment, which clearly identified mental health as a concern across all ages and populations in the county. We have continue this partnership as we work to develop a Health Improvement Plan to address this need in partnership with the Healthy Cass County Coalition. We continue to stay engaged with both the Healthy Cass County Coalition, and other local groups working on mental health and substance abuse prevention.

In April, to recognize Extension and Outreach week, Cass County Extension assembled and distributed nearly 100 resource boxes to local program partners and ag retailers around the county. These boxes featured a variety of mental health and wellness resources for use and distribution.



Extension helped plan and also had a presence at several mental health outreach events throughout the year. Our local PROSPER grant team partnered with Cass Health Senior Life Solutions to host a community walk and resource fair for Mental Health Awareness Month in May. We teamed up again to provide resources at a local FFA field day in August and host a suicide prevention walk in September. We also participated in a planning team to host a Youth Mental Health Symposium with the Atlantic High School- featuring a meal, speakers and resource fair that was open to all schools in Cass County.

Cass County Extension has also trained staff intensively in several mental health response sessions, and is now working to make these programs available to local partners and the public. Trainings were held in the fall featuring the Question. Persuade. Refer. Program, Make it OK partnership, and Mental Health First Aid. Youth staff are trained to deliver the Mindful Teen program, which was delivered virtually in the early part of the year, and will be offered again over

winter break in a live setting, to help local youth in middle school and high school to learn mindfulness and mental wellness skills.

Looking ahead to 2022, ISU Extension and Outreach in Cass County will continue to grow these partnerships and build additional partnership to provide resources and support. We plan to continue offering a variety of mental health programs to partners and community members, and building awareness of both need and resources. We will also continue to incorporate mental health resources and outreach materials into programs delivered in other focus areas for families, ag audiences and youth, to further reduce the stigma and normalize discussion and outreach for this important topic.

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