



#STRONGIOWA

2021 IN HAMILTON 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 Hamilton County for a #STRONGIOWA.



**Sustainable
ENVIRONMENTS**



**Thriving
COMMUNITIES**



**Resilient
PEOPLE**



**Future
LEADERS**



Serving the People of Hamilton 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 Hamilton County. During 2021 we focused on the following efforts.

- Sustainable environments through Master Conservationist and Tree Stewardship programs.
- Future leaders through our many 4-H and youth program opportunities.

The Hamilton 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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Iowa Community Tree Steward

Partnering counties included Hamilton, Humboldt, Webster, and Pocahontas. The program was presented by Jeff Iles, horticulture specialist, professor and department chair at Iowa State University. Each week's session started outside getting hands-on experience in assessing, planting, and pruning trees before learning more in a classroom setting.

Twenty participants were given the opportunity to learn about basic tree biology, proper soils, post plant care, plant problems, tree identification, pruning, and best practices for planting and selecting locations for trees. Comments from the participants were encouraging and supportive of the program. Participants shared the class was "more practical and not over their head." Other participants mentioned they liked that Iles mixed in humor with important information. Many participants talked about how much they learned and are better able to serve their community as a volunteer. Others said they were eager to use their knowledge to choose healthy trees and plant properly when volunteering and at home. They will raise healthy trees in their home landscape. "When planting a tree, I know how to help it live more than three or four years."



Master Conservationist Program

Region 8 counties (Hamilton, Pocahontas, Humboldt, and Webster) held a Master Conservationist seven-week program in late spring with 20 participants. This program created a community of passionate conservationists that will be engaged in their local communities advocating for conservation practices and policies to ensure a sustainable future for Iowa's landscape.

"Planting the seeds of conservation" was done in a flipped classroom style. Participants viewed conservation self-paced lessons from ISU Extension and Outreach online before experiencing them in-person with local conservation leaders, natural resource professionals, extension educators, and fellow conservationists.

One participant noted, "Conservation matters to me because I feel that it is important to be sure that we can pass an environment that is healthy and diverse. To have soils that continue to be productive for generations." Another said, "Land is fundamental to life as a human. It is also fundamental to my profession as a farmer and farm manager. It gives everything to us, and we must respect it."

Participants viewed different conservation practices and methods at diverse urban and rural locations within Region 8 counties. Each location provided participants with hands-on interaction showcasing the diversity of Iowa's natural resources.

All graduates shared that after completing the learning and hands-on sessions, they can make informed choices and felt enabled with knowledge to continue to build their local connections. Each participant ended with a project idea they can volunteer for conservation professionals and other passionate conservationists to improve conservation in Iowa.

4-H and Youth Development

The 4-H Youth Development program had 495 participants in the 2020-21 4-H year. This number is significantly lower than years past due to COVID-19 restrictions. We had 163 members between eight 4-H clubs in the county. 263 participants took part in day camps and workshops. We also had 69 participants that were involved in school enrichment programming.

So far in the 2021-22 4-H year, in-school programming and club member numbers are on the rise. Recent in-school programming includes:

- Mindful Teens Workshop Series at Webster City High School – six-week course teaching stress management and mindfulness techniques.
- Clover Kids meetings once a month throughout the school year, held at two locations – youth in kindergarten through third grade learn STEM, literacy, and art concepts.
- Watch Me Grow! held at South Hamilton Elementary – a six-week course for students to learn about plants and gardening.
- Ricochet at Northeast Hamilton, South Hamilton, and Stratford schools – a six-week course to teach the five pillars of leadership: attitude, leadership information, stress management,



communication, and decision making.

- Chicken Hatching at South Hamilton and Stratford Elementary – students learn about the development of a chicken and see an actual egg hatch in real time.
- SWITCH at Stratford, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Northeast Hamilton – 12-week program to teach students how to switch what they do, view, and chew and make healthy choices every day.

Beginning Beekeeping Workshop

According to research, bees play an important role in Iowa's agroecosystem, contributing an estimated \$92 million annually as plant pollinators. However, over the past two decades both scientists and beekeepers have observed drastic declines in bee populations. On average, beekeepers lose significantly more honeybee colonies each year and fewer native bee species are spotted in the wild. This is especially apparent in the Midwest, where research conducted at Iowa State University observes multiple factors that contribute to the decline in bees and other pollinators. According to an annual Bee Informed Partnership Survey, Iowa beekeepers typically lose between 40 and 60% of their hives each year. Iowa only has around 5,000 beekeepers, so these levels of hive loss are astounding.



ISU Extension and Outreach in Hamilton County partnered with Roy Kraft, president of the Iowa Honeybee Association, and Dick Ostercamp, apiarist, to hold a five-session virtual course called Beginning Beekeeping. Sessions included more than caring for bees. Learning to handle the frames, marking the queen, checking for mites, identifying signs bees do not have enough to forage for food, and handling the smoker were some of topics the 35 participants learned. A sixth session was scheduled in March for participants to ask questions after preparing and picking up their first brood.

The bees can be endangered if the frames are not placed back together completely. The frames and bottom of the charger should be checked for any signs of mites, lack of food for good honey production, and continued brood health. Andy Joseph, Iowa Department of Ag Land Stewardship apiarist, spoke during one session about disease and mites that can kill an entire brood of bees. Randall Cass, bee specialist for ISU Extension and Outreach, spoke about how much honey to harvest, and methods for harvesting honey.

Participants reported that 98% of the group was just beginning the process of gathering their equipment and ordering their first bee brood. Others learned ways to help keep their broods alive over the winter and how to identify additional methods for responding to any health issues.

“This was such a good class. I know how to feed my bees when picking them up at the Post Office and I think I can keep them healthy over the winter.”

“I’ve struggled with my hive before. I know the signs to check that my bees have enough to feed on and produce honey during the season now.”

Working toward Recovery

As our state works toward recovery, ISU Extension and Outreach in Hamilton County has been engaging Iowans in addressing mental health.

- Our county youth coordinator has held Mindful Teens workshops, which seek to help foster mindfulness skill development and thoughtful reflection and aim to reduce stress and risk of mental illness in youth.
- Participated in a mental health conference that was held locally and offered to the public nationally.
- Local and statewide mental health resources have been shared at local programming as well as online to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and reinforce the message that it is okay to seek help when you need it.

Looking ahead to 2022, ISU Extension and Outreach in Hamilton County will continue to support the mental health initiative by offering Question. Persuade. Refer training and continuing mental health youth programming. We will also be looking to our efforts to include another recovery initiative. Staff have identified a need for more programming in the areas of financial security, food supply, safety, and access as well as continuing our work in the mental health initiative.

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