



**#STRONGIOWA**

## 2021 IN POLK COUNTY

For over 100 years Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach in Polk County has served Iowans by connecting them to the research and resources developed by the University. Polk County Extension offers educational programming and experiential learning opportunities designed to reflect the diverse needs of our community. At Polk County Extension we listen, learn, and work with the people in Polk County to build a **#STRONGIOWA**.



Sustainable  
**ENVIRONMENTS**



Thriving  
**COMMUNITIES**



Resilient  
**PEOPLE**



Future  
**LEADERS**

### Polk County Extension supports residents with recovery

As Iowans adjusted to life during the COVID-19 pandemic, ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County continued to prioritize health and safety as we delivered research-based education to area residents. Throughout 2021 we elevated programs that supported residents with recovery – with a special emphasis on **helping Iowans address mental health** and **improve financial security**.

In Polk County, we dedicated our time to better understand these initiatives, wove their themes into existing programs, and expanded offerings to focus on mental health and financial security. First, it was important for **ALL** Polk County staff to be trained in either adult or youth *Mental Health First Aid* and *Question. Persuade. Refer.* to create a culture of empathy and equip staff with tools to better serve all audiences. Staff implemented programs like the *Mindful Teen: From Surviving to Thriving* and *Mental Health First Aid* training for outside groups and individuals. We also incorporated financial lessons into 4-H and worked with state specialists to promote financial wellness programs.

Turning towards 2022, Polk County will continue to offer programs to aid recovery and carry Iowans into the future. We will review and reevaluate what works and make the necessary changes to ensure our programs remain available, accessible, and diverse. And most importantly, we will be **here for you now. Always.**



ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County supported residents with recovery throughout 2021. From inspiring youth during summer programming (top) to providing ISU Extension information and resources to residents at events (bottom photos), we continue to make sure our work is available, accessible, and diverse.

### Always Serving Polk County

Youth and adults of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds in Polk County are engaged through a variety of educational opportunities that fall under our four program areas:

- Community & Economic Development
- Health & Wellbeing
- 4-H & Youth Development
- Agriculture & Natural Resources

## Event Spotlight: StoryWalks® encourage cooperation, conversation, and literacy

As part of recovering from the pandemic, ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County made a concerted effort to offer programs, information, and resources to help address the specific needs of Iowans. In Polk County, program staff focused their efforts in supporting mental health and financial security. Staff cooperated across program areas, to share stories and lessons of mental health and financial literacy through two StoryWalks®.

### The Color Monster StoryWalk®

ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County and the Altoona Enabling Garden hosted **320 participants** at the annual *Children's Art in the Garden* held late July. The event featured arts, crafts, and music stations along with a story called *The Color Monster* by Anna Llenas.



"The StoryWalk® allowed families to incorporate literacy practices in a fun way and encouraged adults to have a kid-friendly conversation about mental health," said Michelle Schott, family life extension educator with ISU Extension in Polk County. "Since *The Color Monster* was about emotions, it helped kids better understand and sort through their feelings."



*The Children's Art in the Garden event and Color Monster StoryWalk® held July 20 was a success because of the Polk County Master Gardener volunteers. They created life-sized Color Monster characters (top) for the StoryWalk® and staffed several hands-on art and crafts stations (bottom).*

"This event highlighted the hard work of the Master Gardener volunteers and their dedication to making the Enabling Garden an approachable place for everyone," said Kalsa Parker Browning, natural resources program coordinator at ISU Extension in Polk County. The event demonstrated innovative gardening practices like paved paths, raised beds, and vertical plantings.

A cooperative effort between the Polk County Master Gardeners and the Polk County family life team, the event was made

possible by **50 dedicated Master Gardener volunteers** and staff, and 100 bags filled with books and resources were given to families who participated.

### Tia Isa Wants A Car (Tia Isa Quiere Un Carro) StoryWalk®

During Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival held in late September, Polk County 4-H and the ISU Extension in Polk County family life team featured a bilingual StoryWalk®. Attendees walked and read *Tia Isa Wants A Car (Tia Isa Quiere Un Carro)* by Meg Medina. The bilingual story shared the importance of family and the rewards of working towards a financial goal.

Incorporating a StoryWalk® into the Festival allowed ISU Extension in Polk County to engage both English and Spanish-speaking audiences while integrating a financial security lesson. Over 100 bags were handed out which included ISU Extension and Outreach resources in English or Spanish, a reading guide, and a children's book about feelings and mental health.

To learn more about how to implement Storywalks® reach out!

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## HEALTH & WELLBEING

The pandemic impacted the health and daily life of nearly every Iowan, and at ISU Extension in Polk County it was critical we offer programs and information focused on keeping people healthy. Through research-based education, our team covered many aspects of physical and mental health, financial wellness, nutrition, and strong relationship development. Here's a sample of the programs offered this past year.

### Family & Relationships

Programs designed to enhance relationships, strengthen networks, and develop resilient Iowans.

- Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14
- Our Bookshelf in English and Spanish
- Healthy Baby Showers in English and Spanish
- Small Talk
- Early Childhood Education and Training
- ACT Raising Safe Kids in Spanish
- What About Me? My Wellbeing
- Question. Persuade. Refer in English and Spanish

### Financial Wellness

Financial wellness education helps participants to take control of their financial security.

- IPERS: Creating a Secure Retirement
- Financial Literacy Basics
- Your Money, Your Future: Making Ends Meet
- Money Smart: Prioritizing Bills, Debt, and Credit

### Food & Nutrition

Health starts from the inside out. Education on food and nutrition set the tone for overall health.

- Kids in the Kitchen
- Buy. Eat. Live. Healthy.
- ServSafe® Certification in Spanish and English
- Preserve the Taste of Summer



*During Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival, Sept. 25-26, ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County shared Tia Isa Wants a Car (Tia Isa Quiere un Carro) by Meg Medina. This StoryWalk® allowed Festival attendees to read the story in Spanish or English and engage children in literacy and a simple financial lesson.*



## 4-H & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Polk County 4-H programs give youth opportunities to explore their passions, learn life skills, and helps them prepare for their future. Lessons and projects focus on healthy living, STEM, leadership, civic engagement, communications, and the arts.

### Polk County 4-H 2021\* Programming

- Impacted over **1,500** area youth!
- Depended on nearly **120** caring and passionate adult volunteers.
- Showed **3,268** static and livestock projects at the in-person 2021 Polk County Fair.
- Supported **40** 4-H Clubs and **18** Clover Kids Clubs.
- Conducted **8** weeks of virtual summer programs engaging **550** youth for the summer.
- Raised nearly **\$2,000** for Polk County 4-H during *Give. Grow. Iowa 4-H*, the Iowa 4-H foundation annual fundraiser.
- Relaunched the 4-H Urban Youth Leadership Academy for the 2021-2022 school year with nearly **20 participants** representing **eight** Des Moines public middle and high schools!



\*4-H program stats are measured Sept. 1, 2020-Aug. 31, 2021



The 2021 Polk County Fair themed, *Back to the Fair*, was held July 17-23. (top) New to the Polk County Fair this year was the *Bacon Buddies* event. (bottom) 4-H and FFA members were paired with special needs youth to show pigs. The experience included a practice session in June with the partners joining forces to show their pig during the Polk County Fair in July.

### Virtual Spotlight: Polk County 4-H hosted virtual career exploration series

Polk County 4-H hosted “*Oh the Places You Could Go*”, an eight-part virtual career exploration series for youth in grades 4-12 from January through May of 2021. This career exploration series allowed youth to learn from **15 local professionals and community leaders** about their career and what youth need to do to prepare for their future.

“A key component of 4-H is to challenge young people by actively preparing them for their future,” said Megan Freel, 4-H and family life educator for ISU Extension in Polk County.

“One way we do this is through organized 4-H Clubs led by caring adult volunteers. But another critical way 4-H prepares young people is by offering opportunities like this virtual career exploration series. Polk County 4-H was excited to introduce young people to a diverse group of local professionals from all backgrounds and disciplines, and we hope they walked away inspired for what their future holds.”

Polk County 4-H recruited professionals from varying fields and occupations, and each hour-long session featured two-three different speakers. The 2021 “*Oh the Places You Could Go*” speaker line-up included individuals with experience in therapy, architecture, nutrition, law, journalism, criminal justice, real estate, social work, agriculture, manufacturing, medicine, and dentistry.

**Ask us about other ways 4-H prepares youth for their future!**

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## AG & NATURAL RESOURCES

Agriculture and Natural Resources programs offered by ISU Extension in Polk County target both consumer and commercial agriculture. Our participants range from the home horticulturist to farm owners and ag professionals. The Polk County office supports our signature horticulture program, the Polk County Master Gardeners; the Master Conservationist program; farm management education; and technical expertise for crops, livestock, and pests.

### Polk County Master Gardeners

Polk County Master Gardeners is a volunteer service organization where advanced horticulture education and training is provided in exchange for volunteer service within the community. This year, our **280 active** Master Gardener volunteers served the community by:

- Donating **over 3,600 pounds** of fresh produce to local food pantries.
- Providing community spaces for education and respite through **three community gardens**.
  - Demonstration Garden, Urbandale
  - Discovery Garden, Iowa State Fairgrounds
  - Enabling Garden, Altoona
- Serving nearly **12,000 service hours!**



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Each year Polk County Master Gardener volunteers share gardening techniques, best practices, and unique plants with state fairgoers at the Discovery Garden on the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines. Volunteers and special visitors to the Garden included (left to right) Cathie Law, Master Gardener volunteer; Dr. Wendy Wintersteen, ISU President; Dr. John Lawrence, ISU Vice President for Extension and Outreach; Patrick Schmitt, Master Gardener volunteer; Andrea Nelson, ISU Assistant Vice President for County Services; and Mark Riggs, Master Gardener volunteer.

## AG & NATURAL RESOURCES

(Continued)

### Polk County Master Conservationists

The Master Conservationist program is a seven-week intensive education program designed to create a community of knowledgeable and passionate conservationists. Participants learn about Iowa's native ecosystems, local conservation challenges and opportunities, and connect with other conservation enthusiasts and organizations in Polk County. In 2021 the program partnered with **five** other organizations and graduated **17 participants**.



### Pesticide Applicator Trainings

Through our partnership with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County provides continuing instruction courses for pesticide applicators. In late 2020, given the ever-changing dynamic of the pandemic, ISU Extension in Polk County adapted how we offered pesticide training to meet the needs of applicators and ensure a safe environment. The Polk County office leased a space at Park Fair Mall in Des Moines to accommodate social distancing, as well as offered trainings virtually which had never been done before. This extra effort allowed us to reach even more participants than previous years. In 2021, ISU Extension in Polk County carried over the virtual option for pesticide applicators, allowing us to **reach over 322 applicators virtually and nearly 430 in-person for a total of 752!**

### Farm Management & Education

Workshops are held throughout the year to educate farmers, landowners, and, agribusiness professionals about farm business management, fair cash rent lease practices, farmland ownership issues, and crop marketing planning. Ag professionals met with **138 residents** to help educate individuals, families, and businesses on best practices to create a strong Iowa through a healthy ag economy.

### Polk County 2021 Extension Council

ISU Extension and Outreach in Polk County is unique among its county peers where it serves Iowa's largest combined population of urban, suburban, and rural residents. To better serve Polk County's diverse population the Polk County Extension Council, an elected body that guides program decisions and implementation, evaluates the needs of the county annually to prioritize and localize programming.



**Dennis Goering**  
Extension Council  
Chair



**Joe Gonzalez**  
Council Member



**Julie McGonegle**  
Council Vice-Chair



**Emma Runde**  
Council Member



**Rich Degner**  
Council Treasurer



**Kasey Peters**  
Council Member



**Denise McAfee**  
Council Secretary



**Bart Weldon**  
Council Member



**Deb Brewer-Cotlar**  
Council Member



**Paul Gibbins**  
Regional Director

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