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

Innovative Conservation and Agriculture Programs

As traditional agriculture programming, such as pesticide and manure applicator training, was offered virtually and in small groups this year, ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County stepped outside the box to offer some innovative and unique, yet needed, ag programming.

The highlight of the year for many staff members was the success of the Master Conservationist program offered in the Fall. The Master Conservationist program teaches about Iowa’s natural ecosystems and the diversity of conservation challenges and opportunities that exist in the region. Dickinson County’s program, which was capped at 30 people and even had a waiting list, was the largest Master Conservationist program offered in the state of Iowa in 2021. At the end of the seven-week program, the impacts were obvious. From cover crops to watershed projects, participants were looking for ways to serve their communities with innovative conservation practices which they had discovered throughout the program and field trips.

Thank you for your support.

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Power of Produce Club: A New Way of Promoting Healthy Eating to Local Youth

Power of Produce (PoP) Club empowers youth ages 4-12 to make healthful food choices as they participate in fun educational activities.

As part of her high school J-Term (internship) project this spring, 4-H member Claire Tillotson planned a summer-long PoP Club for youth at the Lakes Area Farmers Market on the Dickinson County Fairgrounds.

Youth developed healthy habits through hands-on learning, taste-testing produce and herbs, and receiving a $2 token to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables at the market.

The program, which impacted local youth, also impacted the families and our communities as a whole.

Youth were more excited to attend the farmers market with their parent(s) and sought out new and different fruits and vegetables to eat at home with their family. Vendors were excited for the opportunity for more first-hand communication with local youth, and a chance to explain where their produce and food actually comes from.

In addition to Master Conservationist, our staff also hosted Mushroom Foraging, Emerald Ash Borer and Burr Oak Blight workshops that saw record numbers of participants, a testament to our staffs willingness to step outside of the box and offer programs that are popular now and that community members requested and showed interest in attending.

STEM & the Arts Festival, A Creative New Local Youth Learning Opportunity

Thirty-five youth attended Dickinson County’s first-ever STEM and the Arts Festival and adventured into hands-on science, technology, engineering, math and art learning outside of the classroom on a Saturday at Iowa Lakeside Lab. Youth engaged in sessions exploring animal adaptations, drone flight, cow eye dissection, soldering, polymer clay bead design, archery, water quality management practices and alternative protein production with taste testing. This one-day event exposed youth to a variety of careers and skills.

Horticulture Outreach and Hands-on Education

Seeing a growing interest in gardening and growing your own food in Dickinson County, our staff collaborated to really take advantage of educational opportunities this summer.

For the third year, our local Master Gardeners continued the donation garden, donating 2,069 pounds of produce to those in need in Dickinson County. Horticulture learning continued as Master Gardeners provided youth gardening education at Camp Foster. Our ISU Extension and Outreach staff teamed up to provide multiple youth garden learning programs to the Y-Kids at the local YMCA and to other area youth at the weekly Junior Master Gardener Camp at the Fairgrounds. In total, approximately 1,250 youth participants helped to plant, care for and harvest a garden while learning about where food comes from, the needs of plants, and the importance of healthy eating.

Left: A Junior Master Gardener shows off her freshly harvested radish.
Right: A STEM & the Arts participant solders her own lighted 4-H clover pin.
Providing Innovative Hands-On Summer Youth Programs

Summer garden camps were just the beginning of ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County’s summer youth programs. Our staff knew it was going to be an eventful summer when camps almost completely sold out within an hour of registration opening in April. In total, 25 hands-on camps were held beginning in June and continuing through August, seeing a total of 409 youth who developed their interests and participated in hands-on learning throughout the summer.

From Box City Camp where youth learned about the inner workings of communities and community government to Wild About Wind where campers explored the physics of moving air, the impacts of these summer camps are felt community-wide. The partnerships that make these camps happen come from across the community, according to K-12 Educator Hannah Dibble.

The Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club, for example, helped our staff host three summer camps and saw over 50 youth. Club members taught campers how to fish, shared their love of the catch, and educated youth about the underwater food chain, fish anatomy, different species of fish and much more.

Showcasing 4-H at the Dickinson County Fair

The Dickinson County Fair returned in 2021, providing the opportunity for youth to demonstrate what they have learned through their 4-H project work over the past year.

Dickinson County is home to 123 4-H members and 51 Clover Kids with many of them participating at the Dickinson County Fair, by showing livestock, performing in a communications event or exhibiting non-livestock projects. In all areas of fair, youth, families and volunteers were excited for the opportunity to showcase the hard work of local 4-H members, Clover Kids and FFA members, and return to a more normal fair.

Some new things fair participants enjoyed this year were the 4-H Fashion Show and Communications Showcase, the Food Truck Roundup Wednesday night of the fair, and youth agriculture education tours for local YMCA Summer Y-Kids. K-12 Educator Hannah Dibble led groups of youth around the fairgrounds learning about each animal species and where food and other by-products come from.
Working toward Recovery

As our state works toward recovery, ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County has been supporting Iowans in reviving the Iowa economy, including the farm economy.

The Master Conservationist program mentioned earlier was an extremely successful undertaking related to supporting Iowans in reviving the economy. After completing the program, participants were quickly finding conservation projects in their local communities that they wanted to put their time, talents and volunteerism towards.

The Power of Produce youth program encouraged local families to get out and visit Farmers Markets this summer; thereby encouraging people to shop local and purchase farm fresh produce and meats while visiting with other community members.

Additionally, in another effort to support local businesses, we teamed up with three other counties to create the “Sip & See” summer-long program which encouraged people to visit local restaurants, wineries and breweries across a four-county area.

In the Fall, we hosted a Customer Service Workshop for frontline employees. Those participating explored best practices for attracting and retaining customers using the “Five Steps of Excellent Customer Service.”

Looking ahead to 2022, ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County will continue our efforts to support Iowans in reviving the Iowa economy, including the farm economy.

A key goal for ISU Extension and Outreach Dickinson County moving into 2022 is to continue building our efforts to provide adult educational programs.

Knowing that there are several local residents interested in participating in the Master Conservationist program, we look forward to hosting that program again in the spring of 2022. Additional adult programs are currently being planned with the focus being to promote the local economy.