Calhoun 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
- K12 Youth Outreach

Economic Development

In March 2019, Christa Hartsook, Small Farm Program Coordinator for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, met with the newly developed Beginning Farmer group in Calhoun County to help individuals and couples desiring to get into farming identify resources to help develop a business plan to assist in securing grants and other funding.

The group, consisting of couples and individuals ranging in age from 20-45 years, were given information on types of grants available to meet their diverse agricultural goals. Goals included traditional corn and soybean, organic and/or alternative crop production, livestock production or a combination of crop and livestock production.

This peer group has set a goal of meeting 3 times per year to discuss emerging issues, as well as the latest trends in technology and farming practices.

When asked about the benefit of having a Beginning Farmer group in the county, one participant stated, “Knowing that others have the same questions I have, gives me a sense of not being alone. And sometimes, someone will ask a question I haven’t thought of yet. That is a great asset.”

Extension Council Members

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

Darcy Murley
Extension Council Chair

Terry Janssen
Regional Director

Dennis Hammen
Council Member

Linda Hammen
Council Member

James Hepp
Council Member

Hillaree Meyer
Council Member

Kris Nicholson
Council Member

Sarah Jo Reynolds
Council Member

Marcus Vogel
Council Member

Cheryl Wuebker
Council Member
Health and Well-Being

Eight 5th-8th grade students made a three month commitment to learn about gardening and growing their own food during the Junior Master Gardener program. Students planted tomatoes, peppers, onions and herbs for a salsa garden. They met every other week to take care of the garden, learn about different types of gardens and watering systems, weeds, pests, pollinators, and more. They participated in a community beautification effort by weeding and building two Leopold benches that sit outside the Extension office. The experience wrapped up by harvesting their produce and preserving 6 jars of diced tomatoes and 18 jars of salsa.

All participants reported a greater understanding of gardening skills as well as preserving their harvest. 75% of youth participants expressed they preferred the opportunity to spend time outside with new friends to staying inside on electronics.

Food and the Environment

We rely on bees to pollinate 71 of the 100 crops that provide 90% of most of the world’s food. Honey bees, bumble bees, and native solitary bees are important pollinators for crops such as apples, blueberries, squash, and melons. Interestingly, though not required for pollination in soybean and corn, ISU researchers have monitored over 25 bee species in soybean and corn fields.

In recent years, beekeepers around the state reported they’re losing on average 30% of all honeybee colonies each winter — twice the loss considered economically tolerable. Apiarists from Calhoun and surrounding counties attended an Advanced Beekeeping presentation, led by hobby beekeeper and ISU Extension and Outreach Agriculture Engineer, Kris Kohl. During the event, Kohl discussed how to overwinter a hive for the least amount of population loss and demonstrated how to make a queen.

Attendees expressed a greater confidence and understanding of high mortality prevention during winter months. Though they were very interested in how to make a queen, many indicated they would not be trying to do so in the coming year.

K-12 Youth Outreach

Six different Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) camp opportunities were made available to youth in Calhoun County during the summer of 2019. Topics included cooking, computer programming, robotics, and art. Of the 51 youth attending, 94% indicated an increase in knowledge in the topic area of the camp they attended.

One youth attending the Science of BBQ camp stated “I learned that the percentage of fat in hamburger has an effect on the taste as well as how much the burger shrinks when cooking.” Youth attending the Scratch Your Video Game Itch camp stated “Making a video game required much more time and patience than I thought. When programming, you are the one who makes a mistake so the game doesn’t react the way you want, not the computer.”

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