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 Tama County. During 2021 we focused on the following efforts:

- Master Gardener education
- Client consultations
- Youth and 4-H
- Pesticide safety education

The Tama 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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Program Spotlight: Kids in the Kitchen

What is there for kids to do on early dismissal days from school?

In October and November, 39 youth in grades K-5 from the communities of Garwin, Gladbrook, and Traer met on three Wednesday afternoons to learn about healthy choices, food safety, and active living. A series of interactive games, activities, recipes, stories, and worksheets taught lessons on kitchen sense and safety, fruits and vegetables, protein, grain, and dairy.

During each 2-hour session, participants made their own snacks using the information presented and skills learned during the lessons. Youth had the opportunity to taste new foods and found some new favorite foods they hadn’t tried before. They discussed the differences between fruits and vegetables one week and determined whether a food was safe to eat during another session. Five bracelets in different colors were distributed as a reminder of the number of servings of fruits and vegetables to eat each day by moving them from one arm to the other.

This program was done in partnership with two churches and a library.

Showcasing 4-H at the County Fair

The Tama County Fair returned in 2021, providing the opportunity for youth to demonstrate what they had learned through their 4-H project work over the past year. Exhibits by youth in grades K-12 showcased learning in topics such as photography, clothing, woodworking, veterinary science, foods, and livestock. County Clover Kids in grades K-3 had the opportunity to share exhibits showing something they learned during the year, with previous 4-H members in a one-on-one setting. They received ribbons and then displayed the exhibits for the duration of the fair. This experience helped younger children with communication skills and critical thinking as they discussed their exhibits. Clover Kids also exhibited small animals they cared for.

Older youth exhibited a variety of items showcasing the work they have done in the past year. Interviews were held for those participating in some livestock projects and presentations shared learning with an audience. Clothing project youth were able to model exhibits during a fashion show. A popular exhibit challenged them to purchase an outfit, spending just $15.

County 4-H Council youth planned competitions and awards presentations for Fun Night. The evening ended with carnival games provided through a partnership with a local bank. By participating in the planning of the event, youth learned organizational, financial, and communication skills.

Serving All Youth

The Outdoor Adventure Camp for grades 4-8 was so popular this summer that an extra day was added to accommodate all who were interested. Two fun days were spent outdoors learning about nature photography, kayaking, fishing, art, and archery. New friends were made and new skills were learned during the all-day camps held in partnership with Tama County Conservation and Marshalltown Community College.
Two other camps, Critter Camp and Fishing Camp, provided more opportunities for youth to learn about animals and nature around them.

Grades 5-12 were introduced to the responsibilities of babysitting, learned age appropriate toys for young children, how to handle emergencies, and basic first aid during the Babysitting Basics class in June.

**Working toward Recovery**

As our state works toward recovery, ISU Extension and Outreach in Tama County has been

- Supporting Iowans in improving financial security.
- Engaging Iowans in improving food supply, safety, and access.

**Financial Security**

Through expansion of the free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in 2021, five volunteers were able to help prepare 51 returns. This resulted in federal refunds totaling more than $71,000. Nearly one-fourth of those served were able to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit. This additional income provides an extremely valuable boost to families who often have little in the way of savings or emergency reserves. In addition, approximately $7,500 in tax preparation fees were saved by not having their returns prepared by a commercial preparer. Just as importantly, clients avoid the even higher costs and the risks of refund anticipation loans.

Financial education outreach was offered for all stages of life through online educational offerings for those working with the public, StoryWalks for youth, one-on-one consultations for farmers and others, and “Real Money Real World,” a life simulation day for teens. Teens participating in the simulation reported increased awareness of the portion of each paycheck that goes toward payroll deductions and other fixed costs. Some were also exploring new career path possibilities after attending the training.

**Food Supply, Safety, and Access**

The office donation garden was expanded to include containers and assistance from volunteers who grew produce at home and brought it to the office to be weighed, packaged, and delivered to food pantries. This Grow A Row endeavor resulted in 1,680 pounds of donated vegetables, which is enough to provide five servings a day for nearly 1,000 people. A companion project distributed tomato plants, soil, grow bags, and growing information to food pantry clients at four locations in May.

More than 35 food service professionals were trained on safe methods of preparing, storing, and serving food during
ServSafe classes.

Opportunities to learn safe methods of food preservation were held online and during a hands-on canning workshop. Attendees learned that recipe adjustments for altitude may be needed locally. Of those attending, 93% indicated they were likely to preserve food at home after taking the class.

"Your growers can be applauded for providing nutritious meals for many! Thanks for channeling their bounty to our facility."

- Rebecca Chyma, South Tama Food Pantry

Looking to the Future

Looking ahead to 2022, ISU Extension and Outreach in Tama County will continue to look for ways to expand the VITA program with additional volunteers. Financial programming will be included in 4-H meetings and during other opportunities to serve youth. StoryWalks continue to educate in a fun way and more simulations for teens will be arranged. As more groups are opening back up to programming, education for senior citizens and those nearing retirement will be expanded. The Ag Marketing Club and Farmland Leasing programs will help share information with farmers.

ServSafe classes are planned to be delivered quarterly for those in food service professions. Ways to continue to expand the donation gardening program will be explored. Nutrition and meal planning programs are planned with partners serving target audiences. Several Little Free Pantries are slated for construction and placement throughout the county to increase food access in communities without food pantries.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach takes the university’s education and research to Iowans, into the communities where they live and work. That is the land-grant mission.

We engage Iowans in solving today’s problems and preparing for a thriving future. Engage with us as a learner, partner, volunteer or advocate. Together we can achieve what we all want: a strong Iowa.

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