Serving the People of Monona County: Over 4,000 USDA Farmer Food Boxes Distributed

As part of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program announced in April 2020, USDA exercised authority under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to purchase and distribute agricultural products to those in need. Through this program, USDA partnered with national, regional and local distributors, whose workforces have been significantly impacted by the closure of restaurants, hotels and other food service businesses, to purchase up to $6 billion in fresh produce, dairy and meat products from American producers of all sizes.

ISU Extension and Outreach Monona County worked with local churches, City governments, food banks, local USDA staff, 4-H and a wide network of volunteers to distribute several rounds of fresh food to residents in need. Boxes were distributed in Sloan, Moorhead, Soldier, Moorhead, Decatur, Onawa, Missouri Valley and Mapleton.

Spend Smart, Eat Smart recipes, healthy living resources, and promotional items for 4-H and county programming were distributed to each box recipient.

4-H’er Marlee Pittet loading fresh food and milk in Onawa (top left); 4-H’ers Steele Beermann, Evan Lander and Aiden Holverson distribute boxes door-to-door at Center Heights (bottom left); Craig and Harry Riesberg load boxes for distribution across the county (bottom right)

The Monona 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.

Laura Neldeberg  
Council Member

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Council Member

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IN MONONA 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 Monona County for a #STRONGIOWA:

Sustainable ENVIRONMENTS  Thriving COMMUNITIES  Resilient PEOPLE  Future LEADERS

2021
Western Iowa Research Farm 75th Anniversary

The 75th anniversary of the Western Iowa Experimental Association field day was held September 14 and 15. The field days highlighted current and historic agricultural research important to western Iowa agricultural interests. The public day included a steak lunch provided by Tyson Fresh Meats and the Monona County Cattlemen. A brief keynote address was provided by Jay Harmon, associate dean in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University and director for agriculture and natural resources with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Joel DeJong and Mike Witt, field agronomists with ISU Extension and Outreach, gave an overview of the corn and soybean genetic demonstration plots. Other offerings included technology in agriculture, (including drones and GIS tools), livestock production, understanding and using soil information including a soil demonstration pit with Lee Burras, Morrill professor of agronomy at Iowa State, weather and climate data, and a look at equipment through the decades. High School students from Monona, Harrison, Woodbury and Crawford Counties, with interest in agriculture attended the one-day youth educational event on Sept. 14. Youth participated in all educational offerings including learning about potential agricultural careers. They were treated to lunch by Niman Ranch and a keynote address by College of Ag and Life Sciences Dean, Daniel Robison.

The experimental association was founded in 1946 by local farmers from the four-county area to collaborate with Iowa State University (then college) on locally relevant research for west-central Iowa. An elected board of directors manages the association, with Iowa State staff coordinating research and demonstrations on the farm.

Rural Housing Readiness Assessment

The Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA) is a tool that helps communities self-assess their housing needs and guides them in the decision-making process when addressing those needs. It guides communities in considering options that ensure existing and potential residents are able to find safe, secure, and quality housing that meets their needs and fits within their budgets. The RHRA helps communities know what kinds of housing-related information they should gather and review to make informed decisions. The assessment checklists aid in the creation of local housing policy that is appropriate for the needs and desires of a community.

The City of Onawa has been working through the process in the Fall of 2021. An online community-wide survey was administered. The local housing leadership committee meetings have helped to narrow down the community needs. The team will target 3 areas and create a strategic plan for each. ISU Community Development Specialist Abbie Gaffey has led the way through the assessment.
4-H Story Walks Foster Healthy Living & Literacy

The Story Walk program is designed for families to engage in literacy activities while also getting exercise, learning about content areas (STEM, art, social studies) and enjoying the outdoors. It is most appropriate for preschool to early elementary aged children but older children may enjoy reading to younger children and modeling the activities along the way. Monona County offered Story Walks several times this year. In April to May, Story boards were put up at the libraries in Whiting, Onawa and Mapleton. Forty-seven participants completed questionnaires following each story walk at the libraries. The Mapleton Rotary hosts a “First Saturday” shopping promotion each month. A Story Walk was displayed in various businesses in September with 14 participants. During National 4-H Week in October, staff hosted a Live Healthy Iowa walk at Lewis and Clark State Park. Thirty youth and adults completed the 1.2 mile walk and accompanying book. A total of 148 Maple Valley Elementary students participated in a Story Walk the first week of November. Nancy McGrain, County Youth Coordinator received a grant from the Iowa 4-H Foundation to purchase books. Those books were distributed to all youth that completed the walks.

Pick-A-Better Snack

Pick a Better Snack is a direct education and social marketing intervention that aims to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and promotes daily physical activity among children. The program is designed to influence children’s preference for fruits and vegetables and the snacks they request at home. Students in Kindergarten through 6th grade in Whiting and Onawa Schools were able to sample produce, encouraging them to try something they might not have eaten before and doing exercises after taste testing. Monona County Extension staff reached 188 students introducing spinach, lettuce, tomatoes and eggplant.

Franklin Go-Getters 4-H Club Impacts Onawa with Thousands of Volunteer Hours and $550,000 in Projects and Since 1998

4-H Clubs in Monona County have contributed to their communities since their origin. This year we are featuring the Franklin Go-Getters Club, led by Jill Hausman, Brenda Miller and Lisa Meadows.

In 2021, club members took the lead in volunteer work at the ISU Donation Garden. They spent 74 hours planting, weeding and harvesting. Their work helped to distribute over 1,300 pounds of fresh produce to low-income residents in Monona County. Members received a 4-H mini-grant to purchase and plant four fruit trees at Gaukel Park. They invested 48 hours in 2021. The fruit from the trees will be donated to residents in need for several years to come.

The Go-Getters have led the way in tens-of-thousands of dollars of improvements and new equipment for Onawa City Parks. Most recently, the club spearheaded the $158,000 new playground equipment project at Lewis & Clark State Park. They estimate an average of 30 kids worked approximately 400 hours over 3 years of fundraising and work towards that project. Other projects have included: playground equipment at Liberty Park, Gaukel Park and Ropes Park; Picnic shelter and sand volleyball; $59,000 Skate Park, new pool slide and lounge chairs for the Onawa pool; batting cage, parking improvements at Onawa Little League Fields; basketball court at Blue Lake campground; park picnic tables and rubber mulch. The Go-Getters have proven tremendous grant-writing, fundraising and partnership building since 1998. In addition to the incredible parks and recreation accomplishments, the club fundraises for Magic Depot Daycare Center; does driveway painting in partnership with the West Monona Spirit Club; creates table décor for Senior Citizens and

Photos: (above) One section of the $158,000 playground project at Blue Lake. (left) Members worked to harvest over 1,300 pounds of produce to donate at the ISU Demonstration Garden.
built snowmen at Elmwood Care Center during COVID for residents to enjoy. The community of Onawa and 4-H program are forever grateful for the amazing improvements the 4-H Go-Getters have made.

Engaging Iowans in Addressing Mental Health

Monona County wrote a strategic plan to engage Iowans in addressing mental health as part of the state-wide COVID recovery action plan in 2021. 4-H leaders and volunteers were trained in Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR). QPR gives an understanding on how to recognize warning signs of suicide, offer assistance and refer the individual to proper resources for help. The training included a presentation, “Ending the Silence” by National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Des Moines. “Extension Cares” bags were distributed to 325 teachers, administration and staff at West Monona, Maple-Valley, Whiting and Danbury schools during Extension Week. Schools experienced a stressful year due to the pandemic. The bags provided self-care items along with mental health and healthy living resources from Iowa State. “Extension Cares” bags were distributed to over 100 farmers at private pesticide trainings that provided self-care items and mental health resources. Emphasis was placed on healthy living programming for youth including outdoor family activities and piloting Mindful Teen with County 4-H Council.

Planning for 2022

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship has been awarded a $500,000 grant to expand farmer mental health support programs in Iowa. The Department will partner with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to help raise awareness about mental health and wellness resources, and help make them more accessible to farmers and rural communities. The initiative builds upon recent Iowa State University Extension and Outreach efforts in this area, including:

- expanding Mental Health First Aid and Question. Persuade. Refer (QPR) facilitators and training,
- providing Mental Health First Aid and QPR to those involved in agriculture, their advocates and youth professionals serving rural areas of the state,
- developing a web-based presence to support resource and information sharing, and developing a “culture of agriculture” training program directed to mental health and healthcare providers.

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