Since 1916 Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach, Polk County has served its residents by connecting them to research and resources developed by Iowa State University.

Programs offered through Polk County Extension and Outreach have been tailored to represent, enhance and meet the diverse needs of Polk County residents. Staff implement targeted and tailored programs that fall under four specific and interdisciplinary program areas:

- 4-H and K-12 youth development
- Health and well-being
- Community and economic development
- Agriculture and natural resources

4-H & K-12 YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County offers K-12 youth development programs aimed at preparing young people for the future. Polk County youth can participate in 4-H and Clover Kids clubs, afterschool and summer programs, and leadership conferences and retreats. Through 4-H and its programs, youth are empowered to reach their full potential through youth-adult partnerships and research-based experiences. Over the course of the last program year*, Polk County 4-H impacted 2,030 youth with help from 116 caring, adult volunteers.

4-H Grows Passions
4-H clubs provide opportunities for youth to discover and explore their passions. Youth demonstrated mastery in various skills and project areas by entering 2,979 static and livestock projects in the 2018 Polk County Fair.

4-H Cultivates Compassion
In a continued and conscious effort to serve Polk County’s diverse youth, Polk County 4-H reached 124 multicultural, underserved and underrepresented youth through Culturally-based Youth Leadership Accelerators like Ujima/AAPI (Asian American, Pacific Islander) and the Maize Retreat, and the RISE College Access Conference.

POLK COUNTY EXTENSION COUNCIL
ELECTED NOVEMBER 2018

ISU Extension and Outreach, 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 residents 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. In November 2018, Polk County elected the following members to the Extension Council:

- Dennis Goering
  Extension Council Chair
- Denise McAfee
  Council Secretary
- Kayla Vandehaar
  Council Treasurer
- Emma Christianson
  Council Member
- Rich Degner
  Council Member
- Julie McGonegle
  Council Member
- Kasey Peters
  Council Member
- Bart Weldon
  Council Member

4-H Builds Leaders

35 youth represented Polk County at the 4-H State Conference where they participated in workshops, socials and community service projects. Five Polk County 4-Hers continue to serve as ambassadors for the State 4-H Council where they focus on leadership initiatives and assist with the planning and execution of the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County focuses on individual and family health and well-being through research-based programs that cover financial wellness, physical and mental health, nutrition, and family relationships. A few programs offered in 2018 included:

Buy, Eat, Live, Healthy, & Kids in the Kitchen
Polk County Extension and Outreach provides youth and adult nutrition education programs, teaching families how to choose nutritious foods while saving money at the grocery store. This program year, 721* household members were reached through the Buy. Eat. Live. Healthy program and 322* youth participated in high-energy nutrition education through Kids in the Kitchen.

Strengthening Families Program
Targeted to families and youth ages 10-14, this program teaches effective communication skills, strategies for conflict resolution and tactics for youth to resist peer pressure. In 2018, 17 adults and 17 youth participated in the program.

Raising School Ready Readers
Families of pre-school aged children, ages 3-6, build literacy skills through everyday learning opportunities. Ten adults and 15 children participated in the first year of the program in Polk County with expanded programming coming in 2019.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT 4-H RISE COLLEGE ACCESS CONFERENCE

In fall of 2018, nearly 80 multicultural youth participated in the first Polk County 4-H RISE College Access Conference held in Des Moines. This event introduced 4-H to underrepresented youth and engaged youth in breakout sessions focused on leadership development, team-building, and college and career exploration.

“The RISE Conference provided the opportunity for young people to feel empowered to be leaders in their schools and communities, explore higher education and understand that 4-H is for everyone,” said Tiffany Berkenes, 4-H youth program specialist for ISU Extension and Outreach. “We hope the students who attended the Conference have discovered how 4-H can foster their talents, passions and skills in such a way that will support their future endeavors whether it be career or college.”

Since the success of the 4-H RISE Conference, similar conferences are being planned in 2019 for Polk and surrounding counties. The goal is to engage youth across the region and encourage 4-H participation and in career exploration.

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NEW PROGRAMS FOR 2019

A family or individual’s financial circumstances also contribute to their overall well-being. New programs designed to support participants in taking control of their financial security include:

Cent$ible
Educates families and individuals on how to plan for retirement despite tight budgets and other constraints.

The Finances of Caregiving
Provides planning tools for the changing needs of aging family members.

Your Money, Your Goals
Guides social service providers in how to assist clients in meeting their financial objectives.

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* Kids in the Kitchen program statistic measured from April 1, 2018—Sept. 30, 2018.
PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT JUNTOS: TOGETHER FOR A BETTER EDUCATION

Juntos: Together for a Better Education, brings together youth, families, school staff, and community partners to empower Latinx youth to graduate from high school and explore opportunities for higher education. The program consists of family workshops, youth academic coaching, and connects families to strengthen life skills and build relationships with one another.

Since its start in 2015, the Valenzuela family has participated in the Juntos program at Harding Middle School in Des Moines.

“The Juntos program is not just a program that will help with grades and school, it will also help you improve your relationship with your children, be a better parent to your children, understand how important education is, and (helps youth) search for the right path in their lives,” said Claudia Valenzuela, mother and Juntos participant.

Many Juntos youth find themselves as one of the first in their families with the opportunity to attend college and the program shows that higher education is within their reach. Youth gain study skills, time management abilities, and confidence to make higher education a reality.

Benefits of the Juntos program are enhanced through an emphasis on the entire family. “Juntos brings families together to make decisions, set goals, and strengthen bonds with their community,” said Michelle Schott, family life educator with ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County. “Families come together to support one another, share what challenges they are facing, and what successes their children have accomplished.”

Juntos helps families create a strong support base at home, which contributes to positive impacts in school and throughout their lives. It helps families pursue a better education: together. Arlene Valenzuela, Juntos youth participant summarized her experience, “Without Juntos, I wouldn’t have had a relationship with my mom or my brother, or anybody else at school. I feel like it has changed me in so many different ways.”

Special thanks to the Valenzuela family for sharing their story, and for their involvement in the Juntos program.

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COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CED)

ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County supports the community and local businesses through programs that highlight five critical issues: housing; changing demographics; local economies; built environment; and civic engagement and leadership capacity.

In 2018, ISU Community and Economic Development Extension initiatives in Polk County included the following programs:

One Economy Work Groups
Ongoing conversations to address the disparities in the African and African American communities in regards to housing, education, employment, health, financial inclusion and small business ownership.

Master Business Bootcamp and Nonprofit Bootcamp
These camps help strengthen skills necessary to own and operate a small business or nonprofit organization. In 2018, 22 small business owners graduated from the Master Business Bootcamp and 31 participants from the Nonprofit Bootcamp.

Shop Healthy Iowa/Compre Saludable Iowa
This program collaborates with Latinx owned grocery and corner stores to increase sales of fresh produce to the Latinx community through store redesign and advertising assistance.
ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County offers programming aimed to help Iowans make educated decisions through innovative, research-based ag education. Programs offered in Polk county target both consumer and commercial ag.

Polk County Master Gardeners
A signature program, the Polk County Master Gardeners are a volunteer service organization where adults receive advanced horticulture training in exchange for community service. Volunteers coordinate three public gardens providing opportunities for Polk residents to experience research-based horticulture education.

Demonstration Garden: This garden in Urbandale provides a working model for the care of various annuals, perennials, vegetables, berries and orchard fruit, and displays many gardening techniques.

Discovery Garden: A renowned attraction at the Iowa State Fair, Polk County Master Gardeners are on site each day to provide research-based horticulture information to fairgoers.

Enabling Garden: Located in Altoona, this garden demonstrates barrier-free gardening using raised beds and vertical walls to provide access regardless of age or ability.

Master Gardeners serve the community through educational workshops and events and serve as mentors for community and school gardens. Over 20,000 hours from 220 active volunteers were recorded in 2018.

Additionally, Polk County Master Gardeners donate produce grown to local food pantries. This past year over 2,000 pounds of fresh produce was donated to Polk County residents in need.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT WOMEN MARKETING GRAIN
Navigating unpredictable crop prices and tight margins can create a challenge for farmers. In February of 2018, women who own, operate or manage farms learned marketing strategies through the Women Marketing Grain educational series. This series offered knowledge and skills they can use to stay on track for long-term marketing success.

The educational impact resulting from participation in this series was an additional net return of $8 per tillable row crop acre from pre-harvest marketing. The total impact was estimated at $18,000 for the 20 women participating in this program.

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Farm Management
Polk County Extension and Outreach hosts workshops throughout the year to educate farmers, landowners and agribusiness professionals about farm business management, fair cash rent lease practices, farmland ownership issues, crop market planning, tools and strategies. Our agriculture specialists also travel throughout the county and surrounding region to expand the reach of ISU Extension research and resources.

This year, Polk County Extension Ag Professionals met with over 700 residents to help educate individuals, families, and businesses on best practices to create a strong Iowa through a healthy agricultural economy.

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