Being Indiana’s educational partner for life challenges Purdue Extension to adapt. That flexibility was never more necessary and evident than during the past 18 months. As we always do, we knew right where to turn to for assistance: Hoosiers in every county in our state.

You showed us how to engage with you in the different ways that circumstances required. We produced numerous virtual events and learned from you that there is a need to offer, expand and improve upon these efforts moving forward. Virtual events offer critical accessibility to our stakeholders. They also support our strategic goal to serve a contemporary land-grant mission by contributing to societal progress in Indiana and expanding it to global levels.

We also listened when you asked us to focus on the in-person events that have been at the heart of the role Extension has played for the past century. They will remain essential to our core vision as we grow a sustainable future. I am grateful to report the great success that resulted from all the work that went into producing in-person county fairs in all 92 counties, the Indiana State Fair, pesticide-training programs, field days at Purdue Agriculture Centers and other activities throughout the state.

The 2021 impact report spotlights a year where, together, we made a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers as we continue to realize the great potential the future of Purdue Extension holds.

Jason Henderson
Director, Purdue Extension
Senior Associate Dean, Purdue College of Agriculture
From whether to keep the courthouse open to where to source masks, local governments were scrambling in the initial pandemic upheaval. So officials across Indiana turned to a source they already relied on for unbiased, research-based and timely information. Purdue Extension’s On Local Government is a resource for elected officials and community leaders in large cities and small towns alike. Through its website, webinars and regional programs, the program focuses on legislative and financial issues that impact local government.

On Local Government also quickly became a clearinghouse for materials to help local governments function during the pandemic. “We realized pretty early on our local governments were hungry for information on how the pandemic would impact their operations and economics,” says Tamara Ogle, Purdue Extension Community Development Regional Educator.

With the help of five organizational partners — Driskell’s ITA, the Indiana Library Federation, Indiana School Boards Association, Accelerate Indiana Municipalities and Association of Indiana Counties — On Local Government became a hub of educational resources for local governments working to keep their communities healthy, safe and well-informed.

“Purdue Extension has the infrastructure to do a whole lot of things that units of government couldn’t do on their own,” Driskell notes. One of those was to facilitate virtual regional roundtables that brought together local officials — mayors, school superintendents, city council members, county commissioners and others — to share problems and solutions. As many as 30 people from eastern counties accepted invitations to attend discussions co-led by Cheri Brown, Blackford County Extension Director and Area 7 Director Molly Hunt.

“Extension is education, number one, and that was a time when our communities desperately wanted to learn,” Brown says.

“We brought information to each of those conversations from On Local Government; then came the sharing,” she adds. “Everyone had questions, but some people were finding answers. It took on a life of its own because everyone there was a resource.”

“We really used the power of community.”

Pictured above: The historic Hamilton County Courthouse.
If you drive the busy road that fronts the Charter School of the Dunes in Gary, Indiana, you won’t see a grocery store nearby; the kindergarten through 8th grade school is located in a food desert, where residents cannot access affordable or good-quality fresh food. But the school’s garden, with its raised beds painted in bright colors and compost pile, might catch your eye.

Through the Growing Together program, Purdue Extension in Lake County partnered with the school to build a garden that provides fruits and vegetables to students and their families and raises awareness of the benefits of healthier eating. The former principal and current superintendent, Justin Stok, also hopes that over time the garden can even help students acquire basic business skills.

Lake County is among 12 county Extension offices that received Growing Together mini-grants in 2021 to fund partnerships among Master Gardeners, Extension Educators, and Community Wellness Coordinators (CWCs) with the Purdue Extension Nutrition Education Program (NEP) — a U.S. Department of Agriculture SNAP-Education agency in Indiana. Purdue Extension has participated in this collaborative, multistate project since 2016.

In Indiana the grants have funded local Purdue Extension projects in urban and rural settings to build and maintain community donation gardens whose harvests benefit food pantries and service agencies.

Growing Together is implemented in different ways statewide, thanks to the CWCs’ cultural sensitivity and creativity, says Marcia Sweet, Marketing and Communication Specialist for the Purdue Extension NEP. “People have great ideas, but sometimes it’s difficult to know how to get started or where to find the resources. We help people find clever ways to make their dreams come true — and there’s no standard way of doing that.”

Lake County CWCs Erin Sherrow-Hayse and Veronica Jalomo have facilitated new gardens as well as the adaptation of existing ones for community members to grow together.
people with disabilities. They agree that having specialists in health and wellness, nutrition and urban agriculture uniquely positions Purdue Extension to partner with a wide range of organizations.

"Community partners help a school garden to be successful," says Sherrow-Hayse, who worked with Charter School of the Dunes. "That’s what sustains it — that, and desire and intent from faculty and staff. For a school to do that during a pandemic would be difficult anyplace, but in a marginalized community like Gary, that is a huge piece."

The Katherine House Boys and Girls Club in the Harbor area of East Chicago, Indiana, reached out to Purdue Extension for grant-writing help to fund a community garden. Their goal was to provide fresh produce to children who attend the club and families in the area. The Harbor is a food desert with limited fresh produce.

Once it had the grant in hand, Jalomo coordinated additional Extension resources to help the Boys and Girls Club build their garden. Children now learn about gardening and nutrition as they tend the plants during their summer camp. Jalomo says her own labor pays off in the joy of watching a child taste a vegetable that’s completely new to them, or even a familiar one that tastes quite different from what their parent buys at the market.

The garden behind Boys and Girls Club has four raised beds about 12 inches high plus a newer accessible bed 30 inches high. ADA-compliant high beds were added to Lake County’s community gardens this year, tapping the expertise of a Lake County Master Gardener who uses a wheelchair.

Community gardening toolkits often leave out an accessibility piece, the CWCs note. “We’ve added accessible beds as part of these three gardens, but there’s so much that needs to be done around accessible gardening,” Sherrow-Hayse says. “Our hope is that this continues and is part of every garden.”

Sherrow-Hayse and Jalomo's former Extension colleague, Theresa Mince, facilitated the transformation of a vacant lot in Hammond, Indiana, into the InnerMission Neighborhood Farm, where bilingual signage welcomes diverse would-be gardeners. Neighbors became friends while weeding and, with their families, celebrated its harvest together in late September. Community members enjoyed the produce they reaped throughout the summer, and the garden also benefited a church’s food pantry, homeless shelter and domestic abuse shelter.

Through the Growing Together program, Extension-supported gardens are growing healthy produce, interest in nutrition, STEM education, entrepreneurship, and local environment and sustainability practices.

Nick Homans donated the materials and labor to build and install the welcome sign and landscaping for the Inner Mission Neighborhood Farm in Hammond.
4-H leader Iveth Vasquez knows first-hand that launching a Latino 4-H club requires a different approach. “We are introducing the kids to something new that does not exist in our culture,” she explains.

So Vasquez, program coordinator of Juntos 4-H in Jackson County, tapped members of the first all-Latino club in Indiana — the Working for Our Dreams 4-H Club that Purdue Extension helped her co-found in Seymour in 2011 — to teach students at Seymour Middle School about 4-H.

Vasquez’s strategy attracted 25 members to a new after-school group, The Achievers 4-H Club, in spring 2021. “This year, they feel more confident to walk into the club alone with the leader without depending on the other Latino club to grow,” she says. “¡Ellos están listos para recibir al nuevo grupo de Juntos 4-H! They are ready to welcome the new group of Juntos 4-H!”

The purpose of Juntos, which means “together” in Spanish, is to raise Latino students’ graduation rates and college attendance. Vasquez is part of a Purdue Extension-supported team working to expand the program in Indiana.

Xiomara Diaz-Vargas, 4-H Youth Development Extension Specialist for new audiences, saw in Juntos an opportunity to bring programming to the state tailored for multicultural students and their families. While the program was designed with Latino families in mind, it also serves students from other ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

With a USDA grant to start school programs in three Indiana counties, Diaz-Vargas partnered with Heather VonDielingen, Jackson County Extension Director and 4-H Youth Development Educator, to introduce Juntos 4-H at Seymour Middle School.

The program, which starts with a cohort of eighth grade youth, has three parts: workshops in which parents learn to navigate the educational system from middle school to college; the in-school club through which students develop academic and life skills; and individual academic coaching. Students can continue these relationships through high school.

Building on a foundation of new leadership skills and camaraderie, Vasquez says her 4-H members at Seymour Middle School will next set their sights on developing a sense of community service.

“¡Ellos están listos para recibir al nuevo grupo de Juntos 4-H!”

Achievers 4-H Club, the first specialized club for academic success in Indiana.
Linda Bieker's husband John handled their finances, and that was fine with her. “I wasn't really paying attention,” admits the 73-year-old. “The one thing I learned from him was to pay off my credit cards every month.”

Widowhood and retirement have since tested Bieker’s resolve to avoid credit card debt. “When I retired, my income dropped, but my spending didn’t,” says the former hospital chaplain. “I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life terrified that I won’t have enough money to live on.”

So Bieker signed up for a Purdue Extension program called Where Does Your Money Go? The research-based curriculum helps people take control of their personal finances, says Naomi Bechtold, Financial Resource Management Specialist. It's for consumers “who feel they can’t save or invest because they don’t have any money to spare,” she explains.

“A $5 latte twice a week might not seem like much until the coffee drinker recognizes it as a $520 annual expenditure,” Bechtold notes. The two-session program helps consumers understand their spending habits, set SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound), and create a spending–savings plan.

Bieker says tracking her online purchases was especially eye-opening. She hasn’t given up shopping online, but she has removed the app for her favorite site from her phone, tried to limit her orders to one day a week and resisted shopping out of boredom.

She also better understands the difference between wants and needs: “Now I’m getting more cognizant of utilities going up this winter, so I’m better focused on needs rather than wants.”

Jo Gilreath, Warrick County Health and Human Sciences Extension Educator, and Meagan Brothers, Vanderburgh County Extension Director and Health and Human Sciences Extension Educator, taught Bieker's class via Zoom. “They were very clear and simple, and there was no condemnation,” she says.

Educators from 42 counties presented Where Does Your Money Go? either virtually or in person in 2020–2021. Participants identified a median average of $1,700 a year in “spending leaks” (spending without thinking).

They also come to realize they’re not alone, Bechtold adds. “People across all social strata don’t like to admit they have financial difficulties. We try to make the program fun and nonjudgmental.”

“People learn they can save.”

**Program Impact**

448 people in 42 counties participated in the Where Does Your Money Go? program in 2020-2021.

95 percent of participants surveyed realized they could have more money if they made different spending choices.
A client came to the Grace Learning Center, a nonprofit educational center in Michigan City, Indiana, with no work history whatsoever. “He took Mary’s Work Ready classes and is now successfully employed 40 hours a week. He is not alone.”

Morse is referring to Mary Foell, LaPorte County Community Development Extension Educator, whose success rate in preparing her Grace Learning Center adult students to secure and maintain employment is 100 percent.

The center relies on 35 community partner agencies to offer a full calendar of instruction that addresses barriers contributing to homelessness. Purdue Extension is among them, providing classes in nutrition as well as the Work Ready curriculum.
Purdue Extension's Work Ready program teaches skills necessary to increase the number of qualified applicants for U.S. job openings. “Employer input was important,” says Monica Nagele, Montgomery County Extension Director and part of the Purdue Extension team that developed the curriculum. “Businesses will teach the skills to do that job, but they wanted employees to come in with soft skills.”

Nagele tapped into her own experience leading job preparedness classes for individuals in her county’s probation system. “They couldn’t get off probation until they paid their fees, so they needed a job to do that,” she explains. The topics she covered, from skills assessment to mock interviews to personal accountability, are woven into Work Ready.

Extension educators statewide teach the Work Ready curriculum to both high school students and adults. Educators are encouraged to choose the topics that best serve their populations. The curriculum adheres to the Cooperative Extension Service’s practice of teaching only research-based information in a hands-on format.

Nagele says her Work Ready students learn the most from the module on writing resumes and cover letters. “Many have a limited education, and learning to use power verbs is new for them,” she says. When she teaches high school students, they’re often shocked to learn that prospective employers may look at their social media accounts, she adds.

In both populations, Nagele says, Work Ready offers a different avenue for people who don’t attend college, while building a more skilled workforce and assisting employers having a hard time finding quality employees.

“Many clients come into our program never having worked a job that provides a W-2 statement,” Morse says of people seeking help at Grace Learning Center. “They may have worked for cash just to get by. They’ve never been taught how to fill out a tax form or file a tax return. They don’t understand benefits paperwork. They have never had their own bank accounts to provide a routing number for direct deposit.”

But on “Working Wednesdays” at the center, clients can spend the afternoon learning computer and critical thinking skills in addition to writing a resume or practicing for interviews in Foell’s Work Ready class.

In addition to her weekly classes at Grace Learning Center, Foell teaches Work Ready lessons at a women’s shelter. Her students, she says, “are just looking for a better life. We try to build upon what they have and inspire confidence in their abilities.” Building people up is Foell’s forte, Morse says. “Mary has the ability to sit one-on-one with individuals who have been beaten down and devalued and feel they are not deserving of a job. She does this in a judgment-free way to build their confidence and motivate them. She coaches, but she’s also the cheerleader who is high-fiving her participants the moment they get a job offer.”

“Suddenly a class they were intimidated to attend is full of laughter.”

Foell says her students benefit most from the curriculum’s Plan for Life module, because they can apply its lessons — understanding the role of setting goals in career planning and in forming working connections between self-discovery, career exploration and planning for life — outside of class.

Purdue Extension is well positioned to be a collaborative partner, Foell adds. “We are good with education. We are good with connecting and networking. As part of the workforce development scene, we have found our niche.”

“If I can affect one person, I think I’ve done my job,” she adds. “I’m passionate about this program and how it has changed people’s lives.”
Ask 17-year-old Eddie Craig (pictured left) if he enjoys his 4-H meetings, and his grin says it all. Eddie, who has Down syndrome, has been active in 4-H since kindergarten, often at the side of his first cousin and former club president, Ben Heidenreich (pictured right).

Eddie and Ben, both of Princeton, Indiana, have had a strong connection their entire lives. Ben is two years older, but with birthdays only four days apart, they have always celebrated together. They’ve shared 4-H as well.

“We are very much a 4-H family,” says Ben’s older sister, Abby Heidenreich, Orange County Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator. Abby and Ben are both 10-year members, and their parents, Chris and Laura Heidenreich, lead the Country Boys & Girls 4-H Club in Gibson County, which meets in their barn.

“He’s just another member, just like everyone else is,” Ben says of his cousin, whose positive attitude and love of music and dance quickly broke the ice with his peers. Ben is now in his first year as an agribusiness major at Vincennes University, while Eddie serves as the club’s song leader, participates in group activities, takes his projects to the fair, and shares his crafts and collections.

Eddie’s engagement with 4-H illustrates how inclusivity serves not only youth with disabilities but also their fellow club members, says Steve McKinley, 4-H Youth Development Specialist – Leadership and Volunteerism. “We know that we have young people who would like to participate, and they have different levels of ability,” he says.

“An inclusive 4-H club is a place where young people feel welcomed, and their parents feel it’s a safe place for their children to participate.”

To help make 4-H accessible to all youth and their parents, Purdue Extension this year compiled wide-ranging Inclusive 4-H resources online. The site offers practical information for 4-H volunteers and youth leaders as well as Extension professionals in county offices.

It includes a webinar on “Welcoming Youth with a Wide Range of Abilities into Your 4-H Program” and fact sheets on visual, hearing and speech disabilities; autism; Down syndrome; various medical conditions; and behavioral disorders, among others.

Guidelines encourage 4-H leaders to learn about a child’s disability and understand how the disability affects that individual. With input from the child and their family and support from Extension, the leaders can then work through accommodations the child may need to best participate in 4-H.

A common theme is that “adaptation is acceptable.” Adaptation can be as simple as allowing a parent to be more actively involved in an event, or as sensible as providing a plywood surface, rather than sawdust, so a 4-H member in a wheelchair can show livestock, if that’s their interest area. “Every situation is different,” McKinley says.

Purdue studied similar inclusion programs from University of Wyoming Extension and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach as a basis for its own, using Purdue’s on-campus Disability Resource Center as another source for information and review. “We can now share these resources across the Extension system, and others can utilize them too,” McKinley says.
An inclusive 4-H club is a place where young people feel welcomed, and their parents feel it's safe for their children to participate."
— STEVE MCKINLEY, 4-H Youth Development Specialist - Leadership and Volunteerism

When Indiana youth at a recent Teen Leadership Conference discussed what 4-H might look like in the future, one participant brought up a program that matches their members who have a hearing or learning disability with a “buddy” who supports them throughout their 4-H experience. "That’s an example of what can happen," McKinley says. "I think our young people get it. They are teaching the adults."

Ben Heidenreich says having his cousin at his side in 4-H was good for Eddie, good for him and good for their fellow club members. Seeing how hard kids like Eddie work to adapt to different situations and complete their projects can "bring a little humbleness" to the other club members, he adds.

Eddie listens, then leans onto Ben’s shoulder. "He’s my best cousin," he says.
THE NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM SERVESA LIMITED-RESOURCE COMMUNITIES LOOKING FOR ACCESS TO PROPER NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES.

IN SOUTH INDIANAPOLIS, A LARGE REFUGEE CHIN COMMUNITY CULTIVATES A COMMUNITY GARDEN, GROWS FOOD FROM THEIR HOME COUNTRY AND LEARNS THE CLIMATE AND AGRICULTURE OF INDIANA.

With the rising Indianapolis skyline to the north, community members chat as they harvest colorful garden vegetables. Bright red tomatoes and green beans rise from the ground alongside green spiky produce and a variety of peppers traditionally grown in Burma (Myanmar).

Fleeing from military dictatorship and religious persecution in the Chin State of Burma, many Chin refugees have made Perry Township, on the far south side of Indianapolis, their new home. Since 2000, the Chin community has grown to more than 20,000 people.

Linda Adams, Purdue Extension – Marion County Community Wellness Coordinator for the Nutrition Education Program, serves limited-resource communities looking for access to proper nutrition and opportunities for physical activities. Adams identified the large refugee Chin community in south Indianapolis as a population in need based on census data showing high poverty.
The Chin Training Garden was built in April 2020 and ready for planting in May. Purdue Extension hosted small work parties following COVID safety guidelines to teach community members about planting, timing, plant selection, irrigation, weed control and more. Workshops and support from Extension continued into 2021 as the training garden transitioned to an allotment garden with 13 Chin families managing their own plots.

Pastor Hre Mang of the Falam Christian Church of Indianapolis, was instrumental in bringing Purdue Extension and the Chin community together to begin the training garden.

“Most of the Chin people come from farming backgrounds, including myself. When we do the farming and touch the ground, it puts me back to my history. In the place I grew up, we had no store; we had to grow and eat our own products,” says Hre Mang. “Gardening is good because people can come together, share history and connect with one another. It helps with isolation and we can save money too.”

The Chin Training Garden is full of produce traditionally grown in Burma, like sour leaf, alongside produce common to Indiana. The community gardeners intend to continue working with Extension to increase production by learning about cool-season crop planting and successive planting through the summer for a consistent produce harvest.

Adams and her Extension colleagues worked with members of the community and partnered with The Chin Center to identify ethnically preferred foods, many of which weren’t available locally.

“This led us to ask if there is a way to make their preferred produce more available. One way to help people feel comfortable in a new community is to have the food from their home country. These discussions also showed a strong community desire to create a community garden,” Adams says. “They were interested in learning about the Indiana climate, timing of planting and harvesting, compost and pruning of trees for fruit growth.”

The community garden property has over 100 fruit trees that weren’t producing because they hadn’t been pruned properly. In early 2020, the Marion County office held two workshops demonstrating how to care for the trees so community members can harvest fruit to eat and share with a local food pantry. Adams and Brooke Alford, Marion County Extension Educator for urban agriculture, also introduced the community to pawpaw, an Indiana native fruit tree.

Many of the vegetables preferred by the Chin community need to be started indoors in March to ensure successful growth in Indiana’s climate. To begin the garden, Purdue Extension’s first workshop taught community members how to start and care for seedlings to transplant.

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In his role as Jasper County’s Extension Director and Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator, Bryan Overstreet sometimes has the opportunity to teach fourth graders about water – from water quality and water conservation to the complete water cycle. Through these lessons, he shares how climate change affects not only the water cycle, but also agriculture.

“The timing of the rains in our county is an issue. This year, we’ve had parts of our county that suffered from drought this summer but now farmers can’t harvest because it’s too wet,” Overstreet says.

Overstreet and other Extension educators are a part of the North Central Climate Collaborative (NC3), a group of Extension professionals across the region who are working to increase the adoption of climate-smart practices and provide bias-free climate information to Extension professionals, natural resource managers and communities.

Hans Schmitz, Posey County Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator, serves on the NC3 team. Schmitz disseminates climate information to his colleagues and helps coordinate webinars. Over 400 people from multiple nations, including 14 educators from Purdue Extension, attended a NC3 virtual conference in June 2021. Featured sessions included climate modeling, climate’s impact on communities and the intersection of climate, agriculture and water. The keynote speaker for the conference also covered climate justice, acknowledging how climate change can have different impacts on underprivileged populations.

“NC3’s first set of webinars were created to make extension educators in the North Central region feel comfortable talking about climate change and agriculture,” Schmitz says. “Since then, we’ve adjusted the webinars and our current goal is to provide professionals with information and resources to create weather-ready farms in the region.”

Overstreet also looks for ways to share climate-smart practices with the wider community in Jasper County, from sharing newsletters, speaking on a local radio show, and through his work on the Purdue Extension Farm Stress team.
IU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
AND PURDUE EXTENSION
TO HELP WITH VACCINATION CLINICS THAT REACH INDIANA’S SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY.

PURDUE EXTENSION IS PART OF THE
$34.8 MILLION INITIATIVE
INDIANA HEALTHY OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE EVERYWHERE (I-HOPE).

With PURDUE’S REGENSTRIEF CENTER FOR HEALTHCARE ENGINEERING, the Indiana Department of Health and statewide partners, I-HOPE aims to help tackle the obstacles that prevent Hoosiers from living healthy lives.

EXTENSION EDUCATORS will help connect field teams to local stakeholders.

INDIANA STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WILL PARTNER WITH THE
PURDUE EXTENSION FARM STRESS TEAM AND THE INDIANA RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION ON A
$500K GRANT
TO REDUCE MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA and connect ag professionals to stress assistance programs.

PURDUE EXTENSION IS DEVELOPING THE
AGRIBUSINESS SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER
in collaboration with the Indiana Small Business Administration and Indiana State Department of Agriculture.

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