



Gardens come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, and formats. Some focus on a particular theme, cultural flair, or maybe a favorite type of plant. Other plots supply fruits, vegetables, and edible flowers with a nutritional value for the gardener. Individuals with a “green thumb” often beautify the landscape with a rainbow effect of peace and tranquility.

Through each growing season, all of these divergent horticulture venues require similar attention. First of all, the soil must be prepared for proper seedling and root growth. Other key factors to consider include soil temperature and fertility, proper sunlight versus shade, adequate moisture levels, and extensive weed control. Care and maintenance must also be an on-going effort to achieve optimum results.

University of Illinois Extension invites you to review the highlights in this annual report as we walk through the variegated gardens of this past year. Our colorful backdrops represent the different programming efforts and partnerships that allow you to “*bloom where you grow*” personally and professionally in the garden of life. The resources and educational experiences available through University of Illinois Extension in the Ford-Iroquois Unit Office are research-based and continue to provide colorful avenues that can make a difference for you, your family, and your community in the 21st century.

Ford-Iroquois Extension staff members and dedicated volunteers encourage local residents to plant a seed and explore new heights of learning through face-to-face meetings and workshops, distance delivery programs, 4-H community club activities, printed resources, along with our newly revised web site (www.extension.uiuc.edu/ford). The *Ford-Iroquois Extension Line* newsletter is published on a monthly basis and provides timely articles and details of upcoming events and opportunities. In addition, the *Extension Update on Ford-Iroquois Agriculture* provides a series of short agriculture related news items each week for area producers and agribusiness representatives.

A heartfelt thank you is extended to our major contributors: Iroquois County Board, Ford County Board, Ford-Iroquois 4-H Federation, Ford-Iroquois Extension & 4-H Foundation, Ford-Iroquois Farm Bureau, Ford-Iroquois Pork Producers, Ford County HCE, Iroquois County HCE, Ford-Iroquois Agribusiness / Extension Partners, and other individuals and businesses.

Sincerely,

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Green is the color of choice in the first segment of our garden walk. For over 100 years, the 4-H Youth Development Program has opened doors to **A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR TODAY'S YOUTH**. The time honored four-leaf clover is a protected symbol that proudly reminds the world of our four-fold emphasis: **Head, Heart, Hands, and Health**. Children ages 5 – 18 have learned new life skills in a variety of nurturing environments including 4-H community clubs, area classrooms, and home school settings. Adult volunteers have also blossomed by developing leadership skills in a variety of roles such a club leader, mentor, project leader, fair superintendent, and committee member.

- Over **1,000** community club members and adult volunteers participated in the 4-H program last year and spotlighted their outstanding achievements at the **two** county fairs.
- School Enrichment kits were in **13** schools and reached over **700** youth. Each of the 12 kits available for teachers to borrow for use in their classroom is matched to Illinois Learning Standards.
- **189** youth participants and **61** adult volunteers participated in Welcome to the Real World. The program is a hands-on activity and gives high school seniors the opportunity to explore career opportunities and make lifestyle and budget choices similar to those adults face on a daily basis.
- The Character Counts character education program helped **425** youth in grades 1-2 and 3-5 focus on making positive character choices at school and beyond.
- **55** Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley 8th graders attended the R.I.S.K. (Real Issues of the Sexual Kind) program. This simulation activity and guided discussion provided teens with a visual understanding of the costs associated with engaging in sexual activity and other risky behavior.
- The annual 4-H Awards and Recognition Event was attended by **75** youth and **50** adults. This event provides an avenue to recognize outstanding 4-H members and volunteers for their hard work and dedication.
- In October 2005, University of Illinois Extension, Ford-Iroquois Unit networked with **five** other agencies (Iroquois Memorial Hospital, , Iroquois County Sheriff's Department, Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department, Iroquois Mental Health Center and Iroquois County Probation Department) to plan Red Ribbon Week activities. **Eight** high school students from Iroquois West High School were trained to identify methamphetamine waste and its hazards. Each day a different pair of these youth presented U of I Extension's segment along with the adult representatives from the other agencies. Together this group raised the awareness of Meth. to over **800** high school and junior high school students in Iroquois County. Since Red Ribbon Week, the program has also been presented at:
 - Iroquois County School Administrators Meeting
 - FCCLA District meeting.
 - Woodland Grade School-4-5 grades
 - Glenn Raymond Jr. High School
 - Ford-Iroquois Extension Ag Day in Buckley
 - Town and Country Helpers 4-H meeting
 - Ford County Ministerial Association Training
 - Danforth Blue Ribbon 4-H meeting
- **Twelve** youth (ages 4-10 years) participated in the *Food Fun Family and Fitness* program (F4), a six week program made possible through a 2005 National 4-H Healthy Lifestyles Grant received from the National 4-H Council.
- The first annual Community Child Safety Fair educated over **150** parents and children from diverse backgrounds about keeping safe. In addition, attendees received information about 4-H as well as enjoyable recreational activities in the area. This joint effort between U of I Extension and Iroquois Sexual Assault Services was partially funded by a marketing grant from the Illinois 4-H Foundation.
- Approximately **10 – 15** youth have participated in the "Sew What!" 4-H project workshop series. These exciting efforts feature **four** Home & Community Education (HCE) ladies who have volunteered their time and sewing expertise to assist with this mentoring program. Grantsmanship has allowed the Extension office to provide **eleven** portable sewing machines for use by 4-Hers during the workshops and also on fair projects at home.
- U of I Extension staff worked with a local volunteer and a 4-H club to plan and organize a hay drive for the Hurricane Katrina Relief effort. Over **\$700** was raised by 4-H clubs to cover transportation costs for the enclosed semi trailer carrying **575** bales of hay that was donated towards this effort.
- Ford-Iroquois 4-H Federation held its annual food drive and collected over **842** non perishable food items that benefited **8** food pantries in both Ford and Iroquois County. In addition, 4-H Federation members collected over **50** winter hats and mittens for the Mitten Tree project that were then distributed through the Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department. They also wrote **35** Letters of Caring and Hope to Hurricane Katrina victims.
- **16** Youth attended Pork Quality Assurance Training and learned good production practices in raising safe and good quality pork for consumers.



Beautiful shades of green are eagerly anticipated and welcomed each spring and summer, but soon transition to the golden hues of harvest. The rich black dirt typically found in Ford and Iroquois Counties has also been a key factor in farming operations. A second colorful plot in University of Illinois Extension's growing experience annually focuses on **SAFE AND EFFECTIVE PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE**. "Hot topics" in the agriculture industry were provided again this past year through face-to-face workshops and teleconferences at the state and local level for grain farmers, landlords, livestock producers, agribusiness representatives, as well as supplying continuing education hours for certified crop advisors (CCAs). For the past several years, Ford-Iroquois Extension Ag Day in Buckley has been one of the most popular and best attended ag events in the area.

- Over **325** farmers received private applicator training and certification through the Illinois Department of Agriculture for restricted use pesticides this past winter.
- The Ford-Iroquois Extension office in Onarga has served as the host site for the monthly Ag Professionals Breakfast since November 2004. Approximately **60 – 70** producers and agribusiness representatives are in attendance each month to learn more about crop insurance, grain marketing, FAST tools (from FarmDoc web site: www.farmdoc.uiuc.edu), spring planting tips for 2005, ethanol production and integrated pest management practices.
- **Twelve** producers have put together a marketing plan for their enterprise and broadened their knowledge of market and price analysis, marketing strategies, and crop insurance by participating in the Risk Management and Grain Marketing teleconferences series.
- Beef, sheep, swine, dairy producers broadened their knowledge base at specie specific seminars addressing livestock management and sustainability.
- **Twenty** certified crop advisors obtained continuing education hours on alfalfa management and current drainage procedures at winter workshops offered through the Extension office.
- **140** producers and agribusinesses focused on current agriculture issues such as harvesting the power of the internet for today's farming, managing conflict, meth labs in Ford-Iroquois Counties, protecting your personal privacy, the ABC's of F.S.A., and taking a bite out of high utility bills at the Ford-Iroquois Extension Ag Day 2006.
- Harvest Bags distributed to **750** farm families featured nutritional snacks, farm safety information, and resource materials provided by U of I Extension.
- Networking efforts with Farmers Merchants Bank and Ford County Soil and Water Conservation Office resulted in **2** face-to-face seminars on FarmDoc and pond management, respectively with a total of **38** in attendance. Such joint ventures allow for expanded audiences and marketing opportunities.
- **Two** Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Day camps were held in Gibson City (**95** 5th grade students) and Watseka (**200** youth) to create awareness and provide important farm safety reminders.



Visitors who opened this gate found a broad spectrum of color and interesting specimens showcased at the Idea Garden, which was coordinated by Ford-Iroquois Extension Master Gardeners. The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program provides **A GREEN THUMB IN THE GARDEN**. Horticulture enthusiasts who completed the 11-week training program, either face-to-face or on-line, agreed to share their knowledge with local residents through volunteer service in the Unit. The Idea Garden continued to grow and flourish in spite of the drought experienced in the area thanks to the TLC of dedicated volunteers.

- **12** active Master Gardeners in the Ford-Iroquois Unit accumulated **693** volunteer hours through presentations for community organizations and other horticulture educational opportunities.
- The expanded Idea Garden, located behind the Onarga Public Library, featured **5** separate gardens focusing on herbs, native prairie plants, a butterfly garden, shade gardening, and a lasagna garden for children.
- Master Gardeners were available on Thursday afternoons during the summer months at the Extension Office Help Desk to answer over **150** horticulture questions on a variety of gardening concerns including vegetables, flowers, trees, insects, weeds, and diseases.
- The Digital Diagnostic system assisted over **100** area gardeners and producers with expert insect and disease diagnosis and recommendations within a short time span. This same system was also in place for soybean rust and sudden oak death diagnosis this past summer.
- Master Gardener SEASONS telenet programs provided timely topics and gardening tips for **95** horticulture enthusiasts and beginning gardeners.

Next, you will find an assortment of vibrant colors included in the nutritional portion of our garden. The Family Nutrition Program (FNP) spotlighted the new *My Pyramid* by featuring a rainbow of delicious foods to promote **BETTER HEALTH IN YOUR FAMILY** --- orange (grains), green (vegetables), red (fruits), blue (milk) and purple (meat and beans)

along with increased physical fitness for a healthy lifestyle. Pre-school through senior citizens were also introduced to important lessons on dietary quality (nutrition), food safety and security, and money management skills to stretch the family's food budget.

- Approximately **800 – 1,000** pre-school and elementary students (**7** school districts) per month participated in hands-on lessons that increased their knowledge of the **new USDA My Pyramid** guidelines (www.mypyramid.gov) for eating healthier and being more active in their daily lives.
- Nutritional information, fact sheets, and recipes were distributed on a monthly basis to **36** residents of the independent living housing unit and **25** at the Peace Meal site in Gibson City.
- Parents Night Out programs sponsored by Community Resource and Counseling Center (CRCC) in Paxton were presented in Gilman, Paxton and Gibson City. **12** parents learned about "**Physical Activity**" and "**Healthy Snacks on a Budget.**"
- Parents Night Out programs sponsored by Head Start were presented to **36** parents at Watseka, Gilman and Paxton. Topics presented were My Pyramid, Low Cost Meals, and What is U of I Extension? along with a Community Action Health Fair at Paxton with **20** in attendance.
- At the annual Food Handlers Re-Certification course, **30** individuals from area restaurants, schools, grocery and convenient stores and other related outlets learned about various aspects of food safety and renewed their license through the Illinois Department of Health.
- **Four** nutritional summer reading programs were presented at the Gilman, Paxton and Watseka Libraries. **60** youth participants learned about Sports Nutrition and how to become more physically active.
- Informational bulletin boards along with monthly walk-through clinics and nutritional lessons were presented to clientele at the Ford and Iroquois County Family Community Resource Centers (FCRC) in Paxton and Watseka. Handouts and recipe information was also provided to approximately **40** low income individuals and their families each month.
- Iroquois County Back to School Fair featured a U of I Extension interactive display for **300** children and their families returning back to school in the fall. Nutritious snacks and newsletter handouts were provided during this event.
- **15 – 20** members of the Gibson Area Diabetes Support group learned about nutritional components related to My Pyramid and diabetes at **2** separate sessions.
- **Sixteen** child care providers attended the training program sponsored by the Watseka Child Care Resource Association. **Three** presentations on the new My Pyramid, children and choking, and healthy snack ideas for young children were included during the training session. Providers were also introduced to new and interactive game ideas.
- Dining With Diabetes for the Hispanic community was held on 3 Saturday afternoons at the Community Center in Onarga. **40 Hispanic** adults were instructed on the basics of what to look for in food labels, how to prepare diabetic foods within the Hispanic culture, and portion sizes. The attendees were actively involved in the preparation and tasting of the diabetic meal each week.
- **18-20 Hispanic** children attending the Gilman Head Start program have learned about grains, vegetables and fruits. Through this newly established connection, the Extension office was invited to set up a display booth for **two** of their parent nights sponsored by East Central Community Action. **20** parents in attendance at these parent's nights learned about children and choking while receiving general information about U of I Extension resources.
- Paxton Day Care re-established their educational partnership with the Family Nutrition Program in the Unit. As a result, **32** children ages 2-5 have been introduced to basic nutrition facts through My Pyramid including whole grain popcorn and pumpkin as a vegetable.
- **Forty-three** walkers from Ford and Iroquois Counties logged an amazing **6,558.38** miles last summer in answer to the 2nd annual Walk Around Ford and Iroquois County Challenge. This figure represented almost **five times** around the entire state of Illinois, which is 1,321 miles.
- **131** Home and Community Education (HCE) members enhanced their family life with lessons on fostering a creative spirit, protecting personal privacy, nutritious family meals, vacation planning, planning for a secure financial future, body smart gardening, tornado safety, and heirloom plants.
- Monthly newsletters were provided free of charge to **6** Share Food sites, **6** Food Pantries, along with **2,500** age appropriate fact sheets, newsletters, and other resources for parents, classroom teachers, agencies, and senior citizens.





STRONG COMMUNITIES are in full bloom within the Ford-Iroquois Unit as dedicated leaders maintain their vision for the future. Community growth and development began with an objective look at the strengths and opportunities for enhancement in three area Community Swap programs (Paxton, Watseka, and Gibson City). Elected officials, local organizations, and volunteers in these communities have worked diligently to accomplish even more for their citizenry. Similar results are expected in 2006 when Onarga participates in their community swap experience. In addition, the many educational and interesting events and enterprises in this area were marketed in order to draw visitors for a brief visit or a weekend getaway.

- **Five** members of the Invest in Gibson City Committee began their campaign last August with a series of weekend events to educate local residents on the benefits of buying local. Committee members, in partnership with the Ford-Iroquois Extension office, have established a goal to increase retail sales by **\$1 million** during a 12 month period. In order to achieve this outcome, marketing and contests were planned to encourage each family in the GCMS School District to spend an additional **\$8.52** per week at Gibson City merchants.
- **35** employees from Gibson Area Hospital and Health Services and other area retailers made use of additional skills for providing excellent customer service by completing the Customers First ... Service is Key training sponsored by the Gibson Area Chamber of Commerce. This professional development opportunity was an introductory component to prepare local businesses for the buy local campaign.
- September was Disaster Preparedness month. A simple disaster quiz was distributed to over **100** families in the Unit to create awareness prior to a major disaster. Extension staff also networked with the Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department on their Bioterrorism practice drill at the Iroquois County Fairgrounds.
- **Eight** elected officials representing both county boards, municipal, and township positions took time from their busy schedules to attend this year's Local Government Education programs. Continuing education credits were available for county board members who attended one or more of these teleconferences. Topics included: legal issues; the well organized meeting; major trends in demographics, economics, and technology in Illinois; entrepreneurship, collective bargaining, intergovernmental agreements, water resources, and community land use.
- **35** members of the Ford-Iroquois Agri / Tourism Network have increased their awareness of local entities and created internal networks to promote their products and businesses to local residents as well as tourists from other locations. A brochure is published **twice** each year with details to guide visitors in planning a weekend get-away or extended vacation.



These seeds of knowledge carefully planted each day will continue to **"bloom where they grow"** for generations to come. Discover what University of Illinois Extension is doing to help residents in the Ford-Iroquois Unit improve their quality of life by visiting one of our programmatic gardens soon. These colorful bouquets represent some of the important life skills acquired through our gardening efforts.

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