

Aitkin County Board of Commissioners Board Meeting Attendance Record

Date: September 14, 2021

Name	Please check the boxes that apply.		
	Aitkin County Citizen	Aitkin County Employee	Company Representative – please list.
Steve Hughes			Aitkin Co. SWCD
Barbara Marts			
Zerick Marsyla	X		Big Dollar
Kory Marsyla	X		Big Dollar
Robert Merritt	X		
VERN WATTERS	X		FAIR BOARD
Becky Koch	X		Fair Board
Sharon Dotzler	X		FAIR BOARD
Lon Nicko	X		Fair Board
Rick Courtemanche		X	Land
Lee Adams			Treasurer

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Date: SEPTEMBER 14, 2021

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	Aitkin County Citizen	Aitkin County Employee	Company Representative – please list.
MAUL JEFFERS		X	
Kathleen Pagan		X	
John Welle		X	
Jim Bright		X	
Nick Hooper	X		
Paul Vold	X		Webex
Jennifer Eisenbart	X		Webex
Carli Goble		X	Webex



MCIT

Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust

100 Empire Drive, Suite 100, St. Paul, MN 55103-1885 • 651.209.6400 • 1.866.547.6516 • MCIT.org

Aug. 25, 2021

Dear Member:

Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust is pleased to provide for your review the 2019-'20 biennial report. Members are to be congratulated on their accomplishments. Your support and commitment continues to make MCIT a premier organization. After reviewing this report, we are sure you will be justifiably proud of your program and its accomplishments.

We have provided seven copies of the report for distribution. **Please provide a copy to each county commissioner.**

If you have questions or comments regarding this report or MCIT, feel free to contact me.

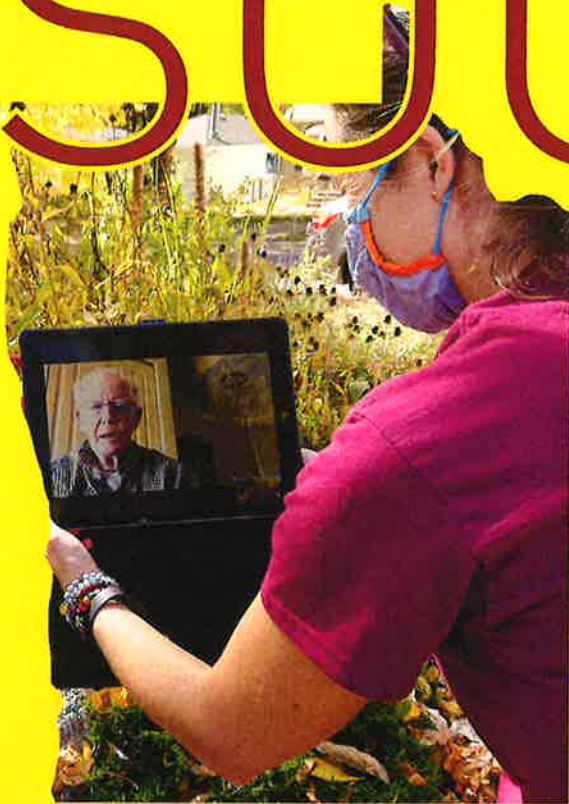
Sincerely,

Robyn M. Sykes
MCIT Executive Director

encl.

SOURCE

**MAGAZINE OF EXTENSION
RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**



**Master Gardeners collaborate
with Alzheimer's Association**

**Emerging leaders bring
new perspectives**

**Mental flourishing philosophy
lays foundation for education**

**4-H brings hands-on
science home**

**Heidi Roop advances climate-
smart decision-making**



From the Dean

Dear friends,

Driven, the University of Minnesota's decade-long fundraising campaign, is coming to a close in a few months. The campaign was the first for Extension, and I am happy to report that we are very close — more than 96 percent of the way — to achieving our goal of \$16 million. In Extension, we envision a Minnesota in which strong partnerships, discovery through science and diverse perspectives combine to find smart, creative ways to address 21st-century challenges. Thank you to everyone who contributed!

Donors' investments have provided new funding that will help strengthen the impact of programs across Extension, including the four priorities that were established when the campaign publicly launched in 2016:

- Investing in youth and families by enhancing programs in every part of the state, preparing young people for a future of learning and leadership.
- Investing in lifetime learning, by leveraging University of Minnesota research to create educational programs that help all Minnesotans thrive.
- Investing in communities across the state and helping them understand their challenges and train leaders to make smart decisions about their futures.
- Investing in educational experiences that ensure the next generation is equipped to solve 21st century challenges.



Of course, gifts for all Extension programs have always been and continue to be welcomed and appreciated. The Extension development team has collaborated with donors and potential donors from all walks of life, and for gifts of all sizes and purposes. I am grateful for the trust that these benefactors have placed in Extension, and I promise that we will steward your gifts well.

Thank you, again, to everyone who has contributed to this campaign and for your ongoing support of Extension. In future issues of *Source*, I look forward to sharing examples of how your gifts made a difference for Extension and in the lives of Minnesotans.

Bev Durgan, Dean
University of Minnesota Extension

Q and A with Heidi Roop, Extension climate scientist

Heidi Roop spent much of her career studying climate change in Antarctica, New Zealand and across the Arctic. Most recently, she led science communication at the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington. She now brings this research and communication expertise to the University of Minnesota, plugging into and building on a rich foundation of climate change work. Minnesota is expected to be a perfect fit for this self-proclaimed super-nerd of ice and lake sediments.

What is the goal of your work in Extension?

Science is critical for understanding the range of possible futures as we move into a climate-changed world, but how we respond requires an understanding of more than climate science. My overarching goal is to do research and communications work that supports people and nature thriving in a changing climate. This happens through collaboration, building capacity in communities, and by providing science and information. I want to build support for climate resilience and to advance climate-smart decision-making.

What is "climate-smart" decision-making?

It's one thing to know the climate is changing; it's another thing to do something about it. That's where climate-smart decision-making comes in.

Say you're making a decision about rebuilding a storm-damaged

Driven.

The University of Minnesota Campaign



Heidi Roop, Extension climate scientist

bridge. You can ask, “Am I going to build that bridge back exactly the way it was using information about, say, the past climate? Or am I going to leverage information that can tell me about the conditions that bridge will actually experience?” That would require considering climate science knowledge, which the University helps to generate.

What are your plans for sharing climate data?

The scientific community can say that our winters are warming faster than any other season. We can say that we expect our average winter minimum temperature to be almost 10 degrees Fahrenheit warmer by mid-century, but what do you do with that information?

The consequences of that for the thing you care about are very place-specific. Climate change projections that are at an appropriate scale — such as a census tract, watershed or community scale — can help government officials, resource managers and farmers make decisions that include climate change information.

The University of Minnesota has excellent climate modelers. We have a first generation of downscaled climate

data (data from global models made more locally relevant) for a range of variables. These data are not yet easily accessible in a way that anyone can access without special software. I see the role of Extension as being a translator, distiller and provider of information that can help others make decisions within their context. We are working to make these data available to support people who are working on the landscape — to enable them to plan for today *and* tomorrow.

How do partnerships fit into your work?

The University and Extension are key players and partners in climate work, but climate change is a team sport. It requires that we bring together a range

of diverse perspectives and expertise in order to really understand how best to prepare for climate change.

The Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP) was started by faculty at the University of Minnesota over a decade ago. It is the only multi-sector statewide group working on climate adaptation, so it brings together University, public and private sectors, and tribal partners. My goal is to build on that momentum and that foundation.

You’ve conducted research in Antarctica. What’s it like there?

It’s a humbling place to be because it makes you realize how small you are. It’s hard to comprehend the vastness as well as the fragility of the continent due to climate change.

The scale of climate change and the fact that it will change places like Antarctica as well as our own backyard should motivate us all to act. Using science and making climate-smart decisions as individuals and communities is critical. You may not care about ice sheets, but you probably care about your backyard, or your job or the water you drink. If we don’t manage for climate change, all of those things that we care about are at risk.

How we experience climate change depends on:



How well we **prevent** further warming



How well we **prepare** for the changes we set in motion

climate resilience = mitigation + adaptation

Emerging leaders bring new perspectives

Greater Minnesota is becoming more welcoming, and benefiting from the results

When it comes to recruiting and welcoming new leaders from many cultures, risks and honest conversations are required. It pays off, but it isn't easy. It's human nature to feel uncomfortable at first when reaching out to people who seem different. "Extension wants Minnesota's newcomers to lead in places where they know they are supported — and feel welcomed by their colleagues," says Jocelyn Hernandez-Swanson, Extension educator in leadership and civic engagement.

The need is real

Each community is moved to act for different reasons.

In Greater Minnesota, one of every 34 adults must take on leadership roles for elected offices, non-profit boards and committees, according to Ben Winchester, Extension's rural sociologist.

"Communities that start new leadership programs often recognize that they need people to step up —



Claudia Gonzales-George ran for a spot on the Northfield School Board and won. She is pictured with Jocelyn Hernandez-Swanson, Extension leadership and civic engagement educator and Beth Kallestad, Northfield city coordinator.

whether their name is Anderson, Ahmed, or Hernandez," says Holli Arp, who in 2018 led Extension's leadership and civic engagement educators to explore ways to invite underrepresented groups into local leadership.

Workforce shortages are another issue, and welcoming newcomers isn't just nice. It's an economic necessity.

Extension's programs, from Grand Marais to Mankato, use education, mentoring, assessments and a variety of other tools to help communities envision a future full of engaged and happy workers and leaders.

Northfield embraces diverse leadership

Northfield, Minn., has its desire to become a welcoming community written into its strategic plan. It may take time to have it woven into its fabric.

"One way to help our diverse newcomers feel comfortable here is to

have local leaders who look like them," says Beth Kallestad, Northfield's city coordinator and a former Extension educator.

In 2020, Kallestad collaborated with Mary Ann Hennen, (now retired) Extension educator, and Hernandez-Swanson to launch "Growing Local: 2020 Northfield Emerging Leaders Program."

The program attracted 15 Northfielders from a mix of gender, age, race and ethnicity groups that aren't well-represented on local committees and boards. They designed six educational sessions to guide emerging leaders in how to communicate effectively, understand their strengths, consider what it is to follow and lead in vital communities, and motivate others.

Staff recruited 15 Northfield leaders to coach participants. These volunteers served as mentors and helped them form networks. "It was a great way to connect with emerging



Veronica (Rony) Gamino, Extension emerging leadership program participant, serves on the Human Rights Commission in Northfield.

leaders in Northfield,” says one local coach. “It definitely gave me more hope about Northfield’s future.”

Since completing the program, participant Claudia Gonzales-George successfully ran for and won a spot on the Northfield School Board. Northfield’s first Latina board member was also the leading vote-getter, as the community resonated with her vision.

“There is a great community here and I’m surprised we still struggle with issues of access,” she told KYMN radio. Gonzales-George aims to be a bridge between families and the board. She also hopes to raise awareness of the strengths their Latino neighbors bring to Northfield that aren’t currently being put to use. “When we’re all participating, then our school — and our town — is better,” she says.

Blending experience and new perspectives

Kallestad often receives calls from local committee leaders who want to recruit program graduates for leadership positions. Two program participants



Claudia Gonzales-George holds a walking meeting with Northfield Schools Superintendent Matt Hillman to brainstorm solutions to the challenges of the 2020-2021 school year.

serve on city advisory boards, one is on a task force for community and police reviewing policies.

“It’s exciting to see people who are already leaders in their circles take the leap into broader community leadership roles,” says Kallestad.

To prepare experienced leaders to make the most of their work with the new leaders, Hernandez-Swanson and Hennen delivered the webinar, “Navigating and Leading With an Equity Lens.”

Forty-one board and commission chairs, vice-chairs and staff liaisons came together virtually to consider strategies to create an inclusive culture and use decision-making processes that recognize the contributions of new members.

One participant’s response to the training emphasizes what many Minnesotans are feeling during this profound time of change. “This is an extremely important subject in our community and our world.”



Elizabeth Yang (right), Extension emerging leadership participant and library board member, makes plans with the library director, Teresa Jensen.

Lessons from communities

When communities decide to address inclusion and racism, they are asking residents to change assumptions that have been part of American culture for centuries. Extension joined leaders of the Region Nine Development Commission project to consider what they learned from starting the initiative. Here are their thoughts:

- It takes time. Trust needs to grow. People need time to talk through concerns.
- The process of starting initiatives is complex. It’s not linear. Be prepared to adjust your sails as you steer.
- School districts are strong partners for equity efforts. Schools are on the front line of creating welcoming communities for all students.
- Partner with organizations and groups that are trusted in the communities that you want to hear from.
- Be prepared to question policies and practices your community has relied upon to get things done.

Garden activities coax memories into bloom

University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener volunteers help elders and people with memory disorders — and their caregivers

Gloria's family scratched their heads when their elderly mother reported on her adventurous day in Melinda Mattox's garden. They knew the COVID-19 pandemic had residents quarantined, so was Gloria making it all up?

"They were relieved when they learned Gloria had taken the tour from the safety of her own room through an iPad," says Christina Waters. Mattox is the Master Gardener who gave Gloria the tour.

Waters, a University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener volunteer, works as a registered dietetic technician at Episcopal Homes in St. Paul. She has dozens of stories about the relationships residents have built with other Master Gardeners through the Virtual Gardens with Elders program:

- **Paul Christopherson, a retired farmer from Crookston, said he was "not interested in flowers," but Hannah Schoneman, a Master Gardener, grew up on a farm. They spent hours talking and Schoneman shared current crop reports with him.**
- **An elder named Helen was starting to doze on her virtual visit with Master Gardener Elizabeth Gorman when Gorman shared a photo of her lilacs. The resident woke up and started clapping, a memory coming back to her.**
- **One elder refused to participate until Waters reminded him of his interests in immigrants' gardens and social justice when she saw those topics on his bookshelf.**



Paul Christopherson joins Hannah Schoneman, Extension Master Gardener volunteer, in a tour of her back yard.

"I get to hear memories of 60 residents in the program and share them with their families," says Waters.

Growing Connections

Ann Thureen, a Master Gardener volunteer, uses leadership skills from her former career at UNISYS to lead initiatives like Growing Connections. This collaboration with the Alzheimer's Association and local community centers focuses on the specific needs of those in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Care partners are spouses, adult children, siblings or friends — and they like the classes just as much. Talking about plants and nature can spark memories for everybody.

Cultural outings are one element of the program Thureen is excited to

start again, once it is safe to gather in person.

"Big breakthroughs have come about during tours at Noerenberg Memorial Gardens in Orono, and the Rose and Peace garden at Lake Harriett in Minneapolis," she says. Tours at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and its Tashjian Bee and Pollinator Discovery Center have also proven the evocative power of a flower's color or a bee's buzz.

On the other hand, a hands-on virtual workshop on spring bulb planting reached participants with memory loss beyond Hennepin County because it was online. "Pots, paperwhite and hyacinth bulbs, pebbles, and soil had to be delivered ahead of time, but we made it work and reached participants from Willmar in Kandiyohi County," says Patty Kelly, another Master Gardener volunteer.



A collaboration with the Alzheimer's Association is one of many initiatives Ann Thureen has helped start with other Extension volunteers and staff. Next to her is Greg Towne, Master Gardener, in this photo taken before COVID-19.

Positivity, not perfection

Thureen has a personal reason for her passion. "My sister had younger onset Alzheimer's at 58," she says. "I got involved at the Alzheimer's Association and they said, 'Aren't you a gardener? We'd love to have a program for people with early Alzheimer's.'"

Terry Straub, Extension educator in Hennepin County, says interest was strong. Forty Master Gardeners showed up for an information meeting, and soon after, Growing Connections was born.

The Alzheimer's Association Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter screens participants and trains volunteers, while community centers provide the meeting space and help promote the program.

Woo Bandel is the program manager at the Alzheimer's Association Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter. "Growing Connections provides a safe place," she says. "Nobody has to be perfect. Activities, like making a fairy

garden, are about creativity and fun. In the process, participants can focus on what they can do instead of what they can't."

Waters, Thureen, Kelly and the other volunteers feel inspired by the feedback from participants. One wrote, "Alzheimer's can be a depressing disease. Experiences like this are the incentives I need to encourage me to live the best I can."



Making a fairy garden stimulates creative thinking. Even hesitant participants end up feeling proud of what they can do, and so do their caregivers. This photo was taken before COVID-19.

Choose activities that delight

- Pay special attention to what the person enjoys. Engage the senses, but be aware when something (like loud noise) causes irritability, as well as when the texture of a fuzzy plant brings happiness.
- Focus on enjoyment, not achievement. "It's about being in the moment, not testing to see if they are retaining knowledge," says Ann Thureen, Master Gardener.
- Encourage involvement in daily life. Even setting up for group snack time can help an individual feel valued and successful.
- Relate activity to work life. A former office worker might enjoy organizing seed packets, while a farmer or gardener may take pleasure in pouring soil into a pot.

Adapted from the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/activities)

"You are always cheerful, patient, knowledgeable and encouraging. Your enthusiasm is infectious."

— a Growing Connections participant



Encourage adding memorabilia to garden creations, like childhood marbles or a favorite button. Choose items that won't rust or degrade.



4-H Afternoon Adventures bring plant science home

University of Minnesota Extension brings plant science to youth wherever they live, while keeping it hands-on.

Brian McNeill showed off his growing sweet potato vine to the young viewers through his computer's camera. "Can you guess how many inches it is?" asked the University of Minnesota Extension youth development educator as more participants joined the 4-H Ag and Hort Afternoon Adventures session.

"31 inches," one youth responded in the chat.

"A yard," said another. After more hurried guesses, Brian gave a thumbs up to the closest guesser.

In 2020, 1,377 Minnesota youth of all ages participated in an agronomy or horticulture project through 4-H. By following a model of "plant, learn, grow," 4-H teaches youth how to care for plants and soil, as well as the science behind how climate, moisture, pests, light and other factors affect crop cycles. Youth learn how these sciences address global issues like food insecurity.



Brita Carlson, from St. Louis County, joins a 4-H online adventure.



Hands-on learning and friendships

McNeill, along with Extension educators Becca Turnquist and Nick Podoll, launched the 4-H Ag and Hort Afternoon Adventures in the fall of 2020. Youth in third through sixth grade are introduced to a new topic via Zoom, and follow up with hands-on learning from their homes or schools. Many will also participate in the traditional project learning.

Jillian Babler, a 4-H mom from Sherburne County, homeschools three children. "I'm always looking for new ways for them to learn and interact with other youth," she says. "My kids and I have thoroughly enjoyed this series because it's something that we can all do together."

Each month has a theme and challenges to support it. After each session, youth are sent a packet of

seeds in the mail with information on seed starting. By spring, participants had an array of vegetables to plant in their own garden or wherever they choose. "I've always loved gardening," says 10-year-old Brita Carlson of St. Louis County. "I love learning about vegetables and the different types of soil and sediment found in Minnesota."

Brenden Biss, a nine-year-old from Grant County, enjoyed connecting with youth his age. "I like the activities and meeting kids from across the state," he says.

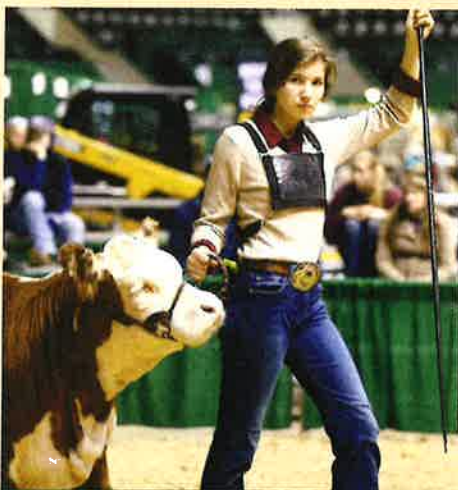
The Minnesota Corn Growers provided funds to make afternoons more adventurous for these young people. "We are committed to supporting and promoting agriculture in Minnesota," says Jean Knakmuhs, a Minnesota Corn Growers board member. "4-H is a tremendous organization that does great work."



4-H'ers in Pennington County follow along with the activity presented online.



Adoniyas K., 4-H'er in Hennepin County



Maren Hoben, 4-H Agriculture Ambassador from Becker County

4-H Agriculture Ambassadors

Extension 4-H educators are always creating ways for older youth to build leadership skills. Through the new 4-H Agriculture Ambassador program, teens assist with learning experiences, facilitate small groups and share their perspectives on agriculture. Maren Hoben, 18, is the youth project leader for Becker County's beef and swine committee. "Becoming an ag ambassador seemed like the next step for me," she says. "I always go for opportunities that come my way."

Luke Gordon, 17, has served as a youth officer on the Nobles County Federation Board for three years. "I wanted to be an ambassador to continue the legacy in my family," he says. "My dad and brothers have all been in this role and I wanted to do the same."

Hoben and Gordon, along with the others, are preparing Ag Mythbusters presentations to share in 2021 with 4-H clubs, city councils and other groups. Hoben, for example, will dismantle notions people have about how farmers care for livestock and show that farmers provide humane treatment.



Luke Gordon, 4-H Agriculture Ambassador from Nobles County. His brother is pictured on the right.

Ready, Set, Grow

4-H Ready, Set, Grow engages Twin Cities youth learning during the summer months. They focus on valuable agricultural and horticultural skills that are not always taught in a metropolitan landscape.

Youth from Success Academy in Bloomington, Franklin Housing Cooperative in Minneapolis, and Shafi Tutoring Program in Hopkins receive project kits every week along with an activity sheet to complete.

Extension Master Gardeners, when safe to meet in person, teach youth about garden work, composting, planting and harvesting. Nutrition educators introduce ingredients that youth are not familiar with and make delicious and healthy snacks. Adoniyas K., an 8-year-old 4-H'er living in Minneapolis says, "We planted tomatoes, beans, lettuces, cabbages and flowers," adding that the flowers and the beans were his favorite.

"Accessibility is important to me," says Katherine Nguyen, Extension youth development educator. "Instead of having weekly Zoom meetings, we turned to other ways of connecting. Parents have found they enjoy getting involved and have shared many photos of their children's accomplishments."

Five ways to be proactive on the crop or livestock farm

University of Minnesota Extension research shows that the most successful farm businesses are run by operators who keep up with farm management education, work together on record-keeping, and keep an eye to the future in their marketing.

Extension offers courses on all of the above, and on all of the sciences farmers use on a daily basis in raising crops and animals. Visit Extension's website (extension.umn.edu/courses-and-events) to find out what's going on in your region and online.

There is something for everyone on the farm in Extension, including 4-H activities for youth in agriculture, programming for emerging and immigrant farmers, and for women who want to grow their network and business knowledge.



1. Rethink biosecurity for poultry

"I need to fix a fan, but the tools are in the other barn. I'll just run over there quickly and bring them back."

Did you know that the seemingly harmless task above can let poultry disease sneak into a barn if protocols are not followed? Abby Schuft, Extension poultry educator, helps farmers and their employees stick with the program — the National Poultry Improvement Program (NPIP), to reduce the impact of all poultry diseases.

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health oversees NPIP biosecurity plan audits in the state, which address chickens raised for meat, egg layers, turkeys and upland game birds. They were developed after the costly 2015 outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Dr. Dale Lauer, board assistant director and veterinarian, asked Schuft to provide outreach and education about the new plans and national minimum biosecurity protocols for poultry producers, which are required in order to be eligible for any future HPAI indemnity payments.

"The plans contain 14 guiding principles," Schuft says, "Poultry researchers at the University would like the industry to adopt even higher standards in the years ahead."

For information, visit z.umn.edu/NPIP.



2. Make a livestock emergency contingency plan

Being prepared for extended illness took on a new urgency last year as the COVID-19 pandemic grew. Livestock farms are especially vulnerable because of the daily chores required to run them.

Eric Mousel, University of Minnesota Extension cow-calf educator, imagined what would happen on his own beef operation in Itasca County. His father-in-law is vital to the day-to-day work on the ranch. What if he couldn't work?

"With many livestock operations, much of the knowledge of running the farm lives in the mind of the primary operator," says Mousel. He realized that a written plan would help another family member, neighbor or friend lend a hand.

Extension educators developed Livestock Contingency Plan templates for beef cattle, dairy, horses, sheep, goats, swine and even honeybees (bees are considered livestock when used for pollinating crops).

"The template provides for an owner's manual, checklist and Rolodex all in one," says Mousel. The plans are designed to be shared with those who might be able to assist in an emergency.

The contingency plan templates are part of Extension's wealth of online information on preparing for livestock emergencies.

z.umn.edu/livestockemergencyplans



3. Keep weed seeds out of soybean shipments

In 2018, Chinese officials began rejecting shipments of soybeans from the U.S. that contain more than one percent foreign material and contain weed seeds on China's prohibited species list.

Soybean exports to China are increasing again as trade disputes ramp down. More volume will likely lead to more inspections.

"Foreign material, including weed seed, corn and wheat found in shipments could cause significant hardship for exporters, who will become stricter with suppliers moving forward," says Seth Naeve, Extension soybean specialist. "Local elevators will also need to respond. Northern soybean farmers should be made aware of potential direct and indirect consequences of delivering non-compliant soybeans."

Reduced foreign material and weed seed in grain will help growers compete in the global market, supporting pricing.

"Managing herbicide-resistant weeds also enables farmers with their own first step in weed management, which is preventing weed seeds from entering their crop soil," adds Debalin Sarangi, Extension weed scientist.

Farmers can watch a new video series produced by Naeve, Sarangi, and Extension Educator David Nicolai. Find the playlist at z.umn.edu/SoybeanFmVideos.



4. Ask for business help and advice

Farmers in the 21st century have to be savvy about everything from technology to crop and animal science to public relations. Those who don't farm may forget that farms are also businesses and require the same degree of attention to matters of finance and marketing.

Add to that the situations that seem to arise more years than not: droughts, storms, diseases and global trade disruptions, and more. Recovery resources available through government programs can become missed opportunities when they aren't understood and acted upon by deadlines.

Extension's agricultural business management team stays up to date on all of these programs and writes a blog that can help farmers make their own decisions about participating in farm bill initiatives, selecting crop insurance plans, drafting cropland rental agreements and responding to emergency situations. Find Extension's Agricultural Business Management blog at z.umn.edu/ExtABMblog.

Farmers sometimes need to talk to someone directly. Extension farm financial experts from areas like banking and farm business management education provide free, one-on-one financial counseling to those experiencing financial stress. The Farm Information Line is the place to start. **Call 1-800-232-9077.**



5. Invest in clean energy

Farms have unique opportunities to save energy and invest in renewable energy resources like solar, wind and biomass. Clean energy can help agricultural producers' bottom line.

"Clean energy is cost-effective, and you can do good by the environment, as well," says Fritz Ebinger, Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) rural energy development program manager for Extension's Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. "Energy conservation and efficiency save farmers money, while owning or hosting solar, for example, can add revenue."

Working across Minnesota, CERTs is here to help farmers understand their options, find out what's working for others and move forward with clean energy. CERTs provides farmers with unbiased resources, tools, guidance, connections, funding and financing opportunities, events, and examples to get projects done.

"Farmers are long-term forward thinkers. They understand how technology works, and they are stewards of the land. Energy efficiency and solar are examples of how you can be both a steward financially and environmentally," says Ebinger.

Farmers can learn more about clean energy options and how CERTs can help by visiting z.umn.edu/CERTs-farmers or contacting Fritz Ebinger (z.umn.edu/CERTs-contacts).

Philosophy of “mental flourishing” lays foundation for Extension education

From nutrition programs to youth and families, to agriculture and leadership, participants find strategies that bring them to their own optimum state of mental health

University of Minnesota Extension nutrition classes aren't only good for the body. Case in point, with names changed for privacy:

Tina felt hopeful hearing her mother, Sally, get excited about nutrition classes at her chemical dependency treatment center. She didn't feel ready to visit her mother yet, not trusting her, but Sally sent Tina a favorite soup recipe from class. Later, they each made the soup and discussed it on the phone; it was the first time they had talked without fighting or crying in years. Six months later, the mother and daughter cooked together in person. Traumatic memories still came up, but so did questions about herbs. They could finally visit each other without the soup — or the conversation — boiling over.

The story above comes from Joyce McGee-Brown, Extension educator in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). “We connect and collaborate with the YMCA and YWCA, homeless shelters, and recovery centers like where we met this woman who was not even allowed to see her grandchildren because of her lifestyle,” says McGee-Brown. “She came back to class so excited that she could now see her daughter and grandchildren, and it all started with sharing a recipe.”

“We have so many stories of how cooking has mended relationships,” says Christine Navarro, Extension EFNEP educator. “When you're cooking together, you're talking.”

Mental health in Extension education

Navarro's class in collaboration with Partners in Recovery takes place in the metro area with McGee-Brown and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) educators also teaching.

Mental illness and mental health are not opposite ends of a spectrum, says Cari Michaels, public health educator with Extension's Children Youth & Family Consortium (CYFC).

“When people think of mental health, they are often thinking of mental illness, or a mental crisis,” says Michaels. “In reality, people both with and without mental illness can get help in reaching their own optimum state of mental health. They can flourish.”





Christine Navarro, Extension EFNEP educator

Mental health and nutrition

“Alcohol can make the ‘on’ button get stuck for sugar cravings,” says Navarro. “When a recovering alcoholic learns why they are bingeing on pop and candy, they can see that eating a banana can help and also provide the potassium that has been depleted by the disease. That’s just one example. Understanding the nutrition science takes away the shame and promotes health.”

Navarro, who has a degree in social science, incorporates recovery tips into the classes, currently taught online. Other Extension educators are starting a similar session in St. Louis County.

Vail Place, a nonprofit organization that provides community-based recovery services for adults with serious mental illnesses, is another collaborating organization. “Our members really relied on our clubhouse, but during the pandemic they are at home planning meals around items they can get at a food bank,” says Eric Lowe, Vail Place support specialist.

“Extension educators teach them how to take a packaged meal like macaroni and cheese and turn it into something healthier while getting comfortable in the kitchen.”

A virtual cooking demonstration with the Uptown Clubhouse Vail Place members involved Extension educators sharing MyPlate food groups and knife skills while making stews. “Members asked questions and tried some unfamiliar spices” says Lowe. “They opened up, seeing that they were being treated with respect.”

Visit extension.umn.edu/mental-well-being/mental-health for more information.

Mental health awareness became woven into Extension research and education when the CYFC, established in 1991, joined Extension in 2011. Since then, CYFC has studied some of the most critical community-level risks to mental wellbeing — topics like parental incarceration, lack of understanding about transgender youth, bullying and mental health issues in early childhood. Deep dives on these topics inform work across many Extension programs.

“We are not clinicians, rather educators that are trained in recognizing and referring, listening and responding,” says Lynne Borden, Extension associate dean and head of Extension’s CYFC. “The majority of Extension educators live and work in Greater Minnesota, so we have partnerships statewide.”

A partnership with the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy is bringing a new community-based approach to opioid addiction and recovery. Educators in crop and livestock agriculture have been trained to recognize signs of suicide risk. Extension integrates mental health into social and emotional learning training for youth workers, leadership education, and family financial resiliency. Overall, these activities help Minnesota families and communities flourish.

Self-care beyond self

During the pandemic business closures, did you give a housemate a haircut? Check on an elderly neighbor who lives alone? Self-care is often marketed as something we can buy ourselves, but it isn’t all about spa treatments and cozy slippers.

“Collective care — focusing on the health and wellbeing of others — helps strengthen both individuals and communities,” says Chelsea Williams, Extension health and nutrition educator. “Collective care is a part of self-care.”

Williams says Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities have traditions of collective care brought about by threats to their survival. It can be practiced anywhere people appreciate the value of knowing and caring about one another.

Take that elderly neighbor you checked on. She’s always sharing the history of the neighborhood with its youngest residents, building pride in — and an understanding of — where they live. Her knowledge is their power. When you and others in her circle join together to bring her food, or invite her to participate in a virtual gathering, you are caring for your whole neighborhood — and for yourselves.



The butterfly whisperer

A 4-H'er from Scandia is the youngest of six winners in the Star Tribune's annual garden contest



Olivia Nienaber made her home garden a National Wildlife Federation-certified monarch way station. Photo: David Joles, Star Tribune

Almost anyone could get butterflies in her stomach from having a Star Tribune reporter and photographer tour her property for a story on its Beautiful Gardens contest winners.

But Olivia Nienaber knows where the butterflies belong.

Reporter Rohan Preston writes: "A butterfly whisperer, Nienaber is a home-schooled 18-year-old who turned a 4-H project on the effects of climate change into a calling to help pollinators, the creatures responsible for much of our food and flowers and, thus, life on the planet. Over the past year, she has planted more than 400 flowers, shrubs and trees in 16 gardens on her family's 10-acre homestead, attracting a riot of birds, bees and butterflies."

Preston notes that the contest shifted this year toward gardens that contribute to the greater good.

"I love butterflies because of their metamorphosis. They are symbols of change, and change for the better, which is something we need right now," Nienaber told Preston. "I was trying to find something that was meaningful to me that had to do with climate change and global warming. The question was, how is this thing affecting early migrating birds? Once we got into birds, it started to transfer over into the pollinators."

Extension's 4-H Youth Development program, as well as her efforts in planting public gardens in Scandia and Marine-on-St. Croix, have given Nienaber opportunities to speak in public. She spoke to Scandia's City Council, for example, advocating for funding of public gardens at the Wayne Erickson Memorial Ballpark and the Scandia-Marine Lion's Picnic Shelter at Hay Lake.

Asked what it was like to have the Star Tribune come to her home, Nienaber says, "I was nervous at first, but I just started showing them around and getting to know them. I've always been a little shy, but with time, and when you are knowledgeable and passionate about something, you can speak with more confidence."

The contest winner and her mother who nominated her, Ann Rinkenberger, take the honor very seriously, but not only for their own pride. "People have been emailing the Star Tribune about the story and they have forwarded those emails to me," says Nienaber. "The real payoff has been that the story inspired other people to plant native plants and encourage pollinators."

Read "Scandia teen gardener and environmentalist is the butterfly whisperer" at z.umn.edu/Strib4-HbutterflyWhisperer.



Olivia Nienaber talks to reporter Rohan Preston, left, while David Joles photographs her.

International learning and exchange goes virtual



Newchda Oreus

Over the course of four weeks of mentorship by an Extension educator, Newchda Oreus (Haiti), Natalia Díaz (Colombia), Simon Canelón (Venezuela) and Raquel Guabiraba Ribeiro (Brazil) will sharpen their business skills, build upon their intercultural competencies and develop their professional networks.

In early 2021, University of Minnesota Extension is serving as a host organization for four professionals participating in the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI) Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and co-implemented by the nonprofit International Research and Exchanges Board.

“The YLAI Professional Fellows Program provides an opportunity for Extension educators to engage in citizen diplomacy by connecting with young leaders from across the Western Hemisphere for mutual learning of skills and sharing life experiences,” says John Vreyens, the director of Extension Global Initiatives.

“Being a chemical engineer, I did not have the opportunity to acquire knowledge about business,” says Natalia Díaz. “I hope to get the most out of the YLAI Program to be a better leader, have a better company and create a better society through it.”

Learn more about Extension Global Initiatives at z.umn.edu/ExtGlobal.



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McKenna Carter, Catherine Dehdashti, Heather Holm, David Joles for the Star Tribune, iStock Photo, Linde's Livestock Photos, Steve Niedorf, Stephanie O'Donnell (illustrations), Anne Rinkenberger, Cory Ryan, Allison Sandve, Christina Waters. Other photos provided by sources.

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Rusty patched bumble bee becomes a household name



Elaine Evans, Extension educator and Bee Lab researcher

It's been two years since the rusty patched bumble bee became the state bee of Minnesota, a designation due in no small part to Elaine Evans, University of Minnesota Extension educator and Bee Lab researcher.

Because the rusty patched bumble bee is so uncommon, researchers haven't been able to observe nesting behaviors for over 25 years. That data is vital for conservation efforts. Her outreach paid off last summer when Evans heard from several people familiar with her work.

When Nancy Kafka found bees in her basement, she recalled learning about the Bee Lab's research through her work with the Belwin Nature Center. "As I looked at the bees, their markings were interesting and the stripe pattern made me curious: could these be the rusty patch?" says Kafka. She took photos and contacted Evans, who confirmed the identification.

"Nancy was very supportive, letting us station ourselves by her front steps to make observations at the entrance, and get into her basement to access to the nest," says Evans.

Evans and her team documented nesting and mating behavior and pest interactions. They collected specimens and samples so they and collaborators can sequence the bee's genome, examine pathogens and determine their pollen sources. Information will help researchers form recovery plans to prevent extinction of the rusty patched bumble bee.

You can help by watching for bumble bees disappearing into the ground or holes in your house. Perhaps you'll be hosting the next backyard bee survey!

