



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

Hickory County 2025

Annual Report

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**SERVE MISSOURI.
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 **Extension**
University of Missouri
an equal opportunity/ADA institution



Office of Extension
and Engagement
University of Missouri

VICE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

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Columbia, MO 65211

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Dear County Commissioners, Elected Leaders, and Friends of MU Extension and Engagement,

As I reflect on the past year, I am struck by the remarkable progress we have made together. MU Extension continues to deliver on its mission of linking the University of Missouri with every community across our state, ensuring that Missourians have access to the knowledge, resources, and partnerships they need to thrive.

Through the dedication of our faculty, staff, councils, partners, and advocates, MU Extension continues to make a measurable difference across Missouri. Last year, we had more than 1.5 million educational contacts and generated more than \$1 billion in economic impact. Building on that momentum, your support also helped secure a \$5 million recurring increase in state funding. This important milestone is already being invested in people, programs, and facilities to strengthen agriculture, improve health and well-being, support local economic development, and prepare youth for leadership through 4-H.

We have also adapted to new realities. Even as the sunset of federal SNAP-Ed funding forced hard choices, our commitment to delivering nutrition and health programs to families in need has not wavered. We are expanding investments in rural health, civic leadership and community development to address the priorities Missourians tell us matter most. We are also aligning our work with university, state, and federal priorities to maximize impact, whether in rural healthcare, agricultural innovation or workforce development.

Our strengths remain clear: people, programs, and partnerships. From nearly 6,000 4-H volunteers to county council members, master gardeners, and master naturalists, Extension thrives because of the dedication of those who serve. Our trusted, research-based content was accessed nearly 2 million times and downloaded more than 76,000 times last year, and innovative programs, from soil testing to urban revitalization initiatives, continue to meet Missouri's evolving needs.

Thank you for your continued partnership. MU Extension belongs to all Missourians, and together we will keep building resilient communities, fostering innovation, and preparing our state for the future.

With appreciation,

Chad Higgins, PhD
Vice Chancellor, MU Extension and Engagement
Chief Engagement Officer, UM System

WHO WE ARE

Faculty and Staff

Housed in Hickory County:

Allison Gunter

Extension & Engagement Specialist

Sarah Boyer

Youth Program Associate

Jocelyn Wheeler

Office Manager

Serving Hickory County:

Ashley Allen-Brown

Field Specialist in Regional Economic Development

Ramon Arancibia

Field Specialist in Horticulture

Velynda Cameron

Field Specialist in 4-H Youth Development

Patrick Davis

Field Specialists in Livestock

Debbie Dody

Nutrition Program Associate

Joni Harper

Field Specialist in Natural Resources

Travis Harper

Field Specialist in Agronomy

Mitchell Moon

Field Specialist in Labor & Workforce Development

Gene Schmitz

Field Specialists in Livestock

Wesley Tucker

Field Specialist in Agricultural Business

Lynnlee Parrott

Field Specialist in Nutrition & Health

Kelly Asbury

Emily Westermier

(Missouri Small Business Development Center at State Fair Community College)
Business Development

Council Members

Kurtis Brown, Chairman

Victoria Hurt-Grosen, Vice-Chairman

Neili Hammer, Secretary

Don Koenig, Treasurer

Alana Brauch, Member

John Christian, Member

Lori Gist, Member

Abby Gordon, Member

Kathy Rains, Member

Vacant, Member

Rick Pearson, Commission Rep.

Jason Daggett, Farm Bureau Rep.

Jakob Boyer, ECYL

Vacant, City Rep.

Vacant, MFA Rep.

County Commissioners

Robert Sawyer, Presiding Commissioner

Rick Pearson, West-Side Commissioner

Larry Lightfoot, East-Side Commissioner

BUDGET AND MORE

Appropriations budget

Income

County Appropriations	45,000.00
Balance Transfers	2,092.28
Total Income	47,092.28

Expenses

Salaries/Benefits	39,335.58
Travel	4,871.60
Postage	250.00
Telephone	315.41
Office Supplies/Services	507.62
Insurance	1,812.07
Total Expenses	47,092.28

Return on investment

University System	120,000
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Hickory County partners

Hickory County Commission
Hickory County Health Department
Hickory County Farmers Market
Hickory County Soil & Water Conservation District
Farm Service Agency
McCarty Senior Center
Hickory County Library
City of Hermitage
City of Weaubleau
Hickory Estates
Hermitage School District
Skyline School District
Weaubleau School District
Wheatland School District
Pomme de Terre US Army Corps of Engineers
OCHC

MU Extension is a unique funding partnership.

Extension funding is a three-way partnership of federal, state and county government. Federal and state money, through the University of Missouri system, pay professional staff salaries, training costs, computers and communication equipment. County funds support the local office, secretarial and youth assistant salaries, staff mileage and council expenses.

The Hickory County Extension Council, faculty and staff would like to express our appreciation to the Hickory County Commissioners for their continued support of extension programs.



Local support

Did you know you can donate directly to Hickory County Extension with a gift to be used immediately or as an endowment contribution for long term efforts. Monies put into the endowment are left forever to earn interest with the county office benefiting each year. You can also direct your donation to a specific program such as 4-H or Master Gardeners.

RURAL TECHNOLOGY GRANT

MU Extension in Hickory County was awarded a **\$37,335.75 grant** through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's **Distance Learning & Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program**. This competitive federal program helps rural communities use telecommunications technology to improve access to education, training, and health care services.

The USDA DLT Grant Program provides financial assistance that enables rural communities to connect to high-quality educational opportunities and telemedicine services using advanced telecommunications and information technology. Funds from this program supported the purchase of audio/visual equipment, computer hardware, software, and other technology that expand distance learning and remote health care capabilities in underserved rural areas.

"We are grateful for this investment from the USDA, which will help enhance our local capacity for distance learning and telemedicine as needed," said Allison Gunter, MU Extension Engagement Specialist. "This funding will enable Hickory County to better support educational programs and resources to meet the needs of the community."

The Distance Learning & Telemedicine grant supports the county's efforts to overcome the challenges posed by remoteness and limited infrastructure, ensuring that residents have improved connectivity to critical services and opportunities.

For more information about the USDA DLT Grant Program, visit the [USDA Rural Development website](#).



UM SYSTEM COUNTY IMPACTS

MU Extension in Hickory County Community Impact Report

This report offers a detailed overview of how MU Extension positively impacts Hickory County, showcasing the meaningful ways local engagement supports residents. It includes data on the number of students, employees, retirees and alumni affiliated with the University of Missouri System, along with the healthcare and extension services provided over the past year.

In addition, the report highlights the broader contributions of the UM System across Missouri in key areas such as education, research, healthcare, economic development and public service. It features metrics like job creation, financial aid distribution, research investment, healthcare access and broadband expansion.

This report is a valuable resource for understanding the measurable benefits the UM System brings to Missouri communities. It supports informed decision-making, advocacy efforts and strategic planning by illustrating the tangible impact of university-driven initiatives at both the local and statewide levels.

[Access your county's Impact Report.](#)



GRAND CHALLENGES

Grand Challenges

The Grand Challenges — Economic Opportunity, Educational Access, Health and Well-being, and Agricultural Stewardship — represent the most pressing issues facing Missouri communities. They are important because:

By focusing on these challenges, MU Extension in (your county) can better leverage university resources, data and partnerships to empower people to improve their lives, businesses and communities.

This report presents localized data and insights in how MU Extension in (your county name) is addressing these challenges. Each section breaks down county-specific statistics compared to state averages.

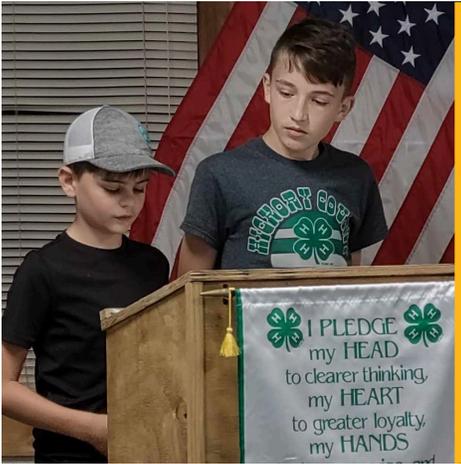
[Access your county's Grand Challenges Report.](#)





MU Extension **Serves MISSOURI and Delivers MIZZOU**
through credible statewide programs

Missouri 4-H for Ages 8 – 18



Community clubs are at the heart of 4-H. Led by trained volunteers, members come together regularly to learn, lead, and serve. Youth elect officers, enroll in projects, and plan hands-on activities that build leadership, teamwork, and responsibility. Some clubs focus on a single project—like photography or livestock—while others explore a variety of topics throughout the year.

SPIN (Special Interest) **clubs** provide a short-term way to dive deep into a specific topic with expert guidance. These clubs meet for several weeks to a few months, giving youth flexibility while developing skills to be Beyond Ready for life.



Missouri 4-H Natural Resources programs engage youth in hands-on learning across climate science, environmental sustainability, renewable energy, sportfishing, and wildlife conservation. Programs like the **4-H Sportfishing Contest** and **Sportfishing SLAM** give young people practical experience while building teamwork, problem-solving skills, and a love of the outdoors.

The **4-H Shooting Sports** program teaches marksmanship, safe firearm use, hunting, and archery principles, demonstrating how 4-H encourages holistic youth development and responsible citizenship. Supported by caring adult leaders, these programs help youth cultivate life skills, self-worth, and conservation ethics while exploring the natural world around them.



4-H's College and Career Pathways programs emphasize the pivotal role of education in achieving career goals, creating paths to success through exposure to project areas, mentorship, and skill-building experiences. Programs like **On My Own** and **Youth Futures** give youth practical tools in financial literacy, goal-setting, and workplace readiness, helping them gain confidence in planning for life after high school.

By connecting education, career exploration, and hands-on learning, 4-H prepares young people to be **Beyond Ready**—equipped with the knowledge, skills, and adaptability to succeed in school, careers, and life.

Legend



Agricultural Growth
& Stewardship



Economic
Opportunity



Educational
Access &
Excellence



Health
& Well-Being

Local Impact

Club:

Hickory County Blazers

- 11 Clover Kid members
- 26 4-H members
- 13 adult volunteers

Key Moments:

- Shooting sports was reestablished in the county.
- Community service projects included assisting with the elderly angel tree and Feeding Missouri food drive donations McCarty Senior Center.
- Hickory County Youth Poultry and Rabbit show started with plans to continue annually.
- 10-year 4-H member was recognized and returned as an adult volunteer.
- Participation in state events: Youth Futures conference (college and career readiness), 4-H Teen Conference, 4-H State Congress, and 4-H Day at the Capitol.
- First time having a youth shooting sports ambassador.

Community:

SPIN Clubs included financial literacy, STEM activities, Soccer for Success.

School Enrichment:

- **Hermitage school:** Pre-K and Kindergarten embryology, after school programming, coding club, college and career programming, middle school careers programming, and summer school programming.
- **Skyline school:** summer school STEM enrichment pre-k through 6th grade.
- **Weableau:** Youth Futures programming and On My Own
- **Wheatland:** Soccer for Success and college and career programming.

Number of youth reached: 761



Jakob Boyer recognized as a 10 year 4-H member



Annual recognition event

Hickory County

4-H Volunteers

Missouri 4-H

4-H Volunteers are the true muscle of the 4-H program, extending the reach of 4-H professionals and making a difference in the lives of youth by connecting them with a caring adult to support them in their development.

Hickory County 4-H members were supported by thirteen enrolled, screened and oriented adult volunteers supporting the development of youth in the 2024-2025 4-H Year.

Volunteers contributed 118 hours to the Hickory County 4-H program valued at \$3,951.

Adult volunteers serve as mentors for our youth, helping them transition into caring, healthy adults who contribute back to their communities, which is priceless.



First year volunteer recognition for Diane.



Photography volunteer, Holly, hard at work.

Photos from activities:



Hickory County 4-H'ers led the annual Christmas parade with a presentation of flags as well as leading the Pledge of Allegiance.



4-H members touring the Governor's Mansion during 4-H Day at the Capital event

2025 Report

SNAP-Ed Public Value Statement 2025

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Education or SNAP-Ed) brought \$11,419,598 in federal funds to Missouri. The funds support engagement with 70,722 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients and eligible citizens of Missouri who learned about being active and healthy eating on a budget. This year we had 970,939 indirect educational contacts through newsletters, health fairs, and food pantries.

312 direct and indirect contacts were made in Hickory County.

Participants in SNAP-Ed learn the importance of making healthier meals and snack choices, eating breakfast more often, are more willing to try new foods, increase their physical activity, and make healthier food choices. Those who practice healthy eating and are physically active are more likely to contribute to a healthy labor force and enjoy a high quality of life throughout the lifespan.

This vital programming effort also reduces healthcare costs over the participant's lifetime, saving taxpayer money in reduced public healthcare benefits and insurance premiums.

EFNEP Public Value Statement 2025

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) brought \$1,624,777 federal funds to Missouri. These funds were used to enroll 424 limited-resource families in nutrition education and meal preparation classes, representing 1,550 family members. Additionally, 2,942 youth were enrolled in EFNEP classes.

94 of these youth and adult participants reside in Hickory County.

Participants in EFNEP learn the importance of making healthier meals and snack choices, eating breakfast more often, trying new foods, increasing their physical activity, and making healthier food choices. Those who practice healthy eating and are physically active are more likely to contribute to a healthy labor force and enjoy a high quality of life throughout the lifespan.

This vital programming effort also reduces healthcare costs over the participant's lifetime, saving taxpayer money in reduced public healthcare benefits and insurance premiums.



MU Extension **Serves MISSOURI and Delivers MIZZOU**
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Agriculture and Environment



The **Missouri Master Gardener** program enables people of all ages to get in-depth horticultural training and apply what they've learned to improve their communities and educate others about gardening.



In 2023, almost 4,000 Missouri Extension Master Gardeners completed over 149,000 VOLUNTEER HOURS throughout the state.



Missouri Grazing Schools teach management-intensive grazing by dividing large fields into smaller paddocks and systematically rotating livestock among them. Producers who attend the grazing schools learn how to reduce costs through Improved livestock grazing and pasture management while getting insights into fencing, watering systems and grazing system design.

The annual impact of management-intensive grazing is estimated to be \$125 MILLION per year in Missouri



The Missouri Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM), funded by USDA grants, has been an important extension program for more than 30 years. Mizzou IPM distributes articles, pest monitoring data and publications on how to improve the application of integrated pest management strategies and systems in crops. In addition, the new Soybean Growth Monitoring Report is released through IPM every two weeks during the growing season.

The MU Soil Testing Program delivers research-based nutrient and lime recommendations to more than 32,500 customers annually.

Legend



Agricultural Growth & Stewardship



Economic Opportunity



Educational Access & Excellence



Health & Well-Being

Agriculture and Environment

Local Impact

2025 Annual Report
Gene Schmitz, MU Extension Field Specialist in Livestock

PaddockTrac Sensor Yield Estimation Research

Regional specialists continued working with MU faculty to harvest native warm season grass (NWSG) plots with the goal to develop PaddockTrac forage yield estimates for native warm season grass species. PaddockTrac is an integrated electronic forage measurement and yield estimation system. Forage height readings are correlated with clipped sample weights to develop equations to calculate yield estimates. Samples were collected from four NWSG plots at University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg. These data support continuing work at MU.



Figure 1. PaddockTrac sensor calibration harvest on native warm season grass plots at UCM-Warrensburg.

Show-Me-Quality Assurance Training

Youth participating in 4-H Market animal projects are required to take the SMQA training throughout their show careers. Participants learn livestock management skills related to the production of 4-H market animal projects. Emphasis is placed on animal welfare, proper use of animal health products, food safety, and exhibiting good character traits while showing their livestock projects. A total of 68 youth in Benton, Cooper, Moniteau, Morgan, and Pettis counties received training in 2025.

Livestock Update During PAT trainings

At the invitation of regional agronomy field specialists, I presented a livestock update during Pesticide Applicator Training sessions. This year's presentation focused on replacement heifer development. Approximately 100 producers from Benton, Cooper, Moniteau, Morgan, and Pettis counties attended these sessions.

General Programming

Over 1,200 direct contacts have been reported through 11/30/25. These have come from 23 different counties across Missouri. This does not include indirect activities such as news releases, newsletter articles, field day presentations, state-wide commercial media interviews, etc.

Drought or abnormally dry conditions emerged late in the 2025 growing season. Beef cattle feeding and pasture and forage management were the focus of many of these contacts and media efforts due to ongoing weather challenges.

Other Programming Activities

I have continued work with the Alliance for Grassland Renewal, a "national organization focused on enhancing the appropriate adoption of novel endophyte tall fescue technology through education, incentives, self-regulation and promotion."

Agriculture and Environment

Local Impact, cont'd

2025 Annual Report

Gene Schmitz, MU Extension Field Specialist in Livestock

During 2025, I presented information during a virtual workshop to over 100 participants throughout the U.S. Two trainings for Ag Extension agents and other adult educators are being planned for 2026. These typically have high participation rates (100 + participants) from throughout the southeastern U.S.

I made presentations to several groups during 2025. Topics included: beef heifer development, grazing management, cattle feeding buildings, composting dead livestock, using forage tests to develop feeding programs, farm disaster preparedness, farm biosecurity, and marketing directly to consumers.

To illustrate the types of topics covered during direct contact (phone, office or farm visit, email, text) with clients, the following information is from my May through August activity report.

Counties Served: Benton, Morgan, Pettis, Johnson, Cooper, Miller, Hickory, Polk, Boone, Camden, Howard, Audrain, Ralls, South Dakota

Questions: topics

Forage Management

Pest / Rodent Control

Show-Me-Select

Beef Nutrition

Weed ID / Control

Hay Quality

Show Me Quality Assurance (4-H)

Water Quality: Horses, other

Tall Fescue Endophyte Testing

Calf Predation

Pond Water Quality/Weed ID

Backyard Poultry

Hort: soil test, plant/insect id

Horse Pasture

Swine Nutrition

Mushroom Toxicity

Native Warm Season Grass Production

Farm Management

Corn Silage Pricing

Anhydrous Ammonia Treated Wheat Straw

Updated calf/stocker value of gain, winter feed cost dashboard, beef backgrounding rations and cost of gain.

This information is presented to provide insight into the varied programming and subject matter requests Extension specialists receive during the course of the year. Obviously, topics change as seasons and circumstances dictate, but this is a snapshot of typical educational requests we receive throughout the course of the year.

Agriculture and Environment

Local Impact, cont'd

Ramón Arancibia
 Horticulture Specialist, West Central Region
 2025 Annual Report

MU Extension Specialist based in Bates County to service 12 counties in the West Central Region. As the Field Specialist in Horticulture, the priority is to address the concerns of specialty crop growers in the west central region and statewide in collaboration with other regional specialists. In addition, contribute with seminars and presentations to stakeholders such as farmers communities, Marster gardener chapters and clubs, on-line webinars, etc.

Face to face farm visits were the main direct contact method with Amish/Mennonite growers since they don't have access to computers or social media. However, face to face visits as well as phone and emails were contact methods with other producers and homeowner (see contacts in table below). In addition, assisted as board secretary of the Soil and Water Conservation District in Bates and Vernon Co.

Contributed with presentations to farmers and other stakeholders to assist them in their operations at:

- The Great Plain Growers Conference in St Joseph, MO
- Two webinars on production of vegetable crops (MU Extension)
- Food Safety training at Clark Co.
- Master Gardener chapters and garden clubs in Camden, Hickory, Laclede, St. Clair, and Kansas City.
- Little Roots Big Harvest Programming (Bates Co. and others)
- Garden Hour (on-line),
- Career Exploration Field Day at the SWREEC, micro-irrigation

Contacts 2025

County	Farm/property visits	Phone consultations	Email consultations	Attendees (ppt no.)
Bates	2	10	8	8+16 (2)
Benton	1	3	9	5 (1)
Camden	8	17	37	11+23 (2)
Cedar	1	3	9	2 (1)
Dallas	9	4	0	25+1 (2)
Henry	8	3	17	
Hickory	6	5	11	
Laclede	1	10	25	10+1 (2)
Morgan	11	7	18	11 (1)
Polk	0	1	3	1 (1)
St. Clair	8	5	16	7+18+4 (3)
Vernon	11	14	15	7+12 (2)
Other	9		98	801 (37)

Agriculture and Environment

Local Impact, cont'd

Ramón Arancibia
Horticulture Specialist, West Central Region
2025 Annual Report

Additional activities

- Contributing and conducting experiments on a funded grant: Management of Fusarium and other soil-borne diseases in high tunnel tomato production.
- Contributing to update Chapter 13 of the Master Gardener Core Course and presentation: Identification and management of plant diseases.
- Contributed as reviewer/editor and Spanish translator of research and extension articles/books:
 - 1.<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/gs411>
 - 2.<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/gs6222>
 - 3.<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/gs648>
 - 4.<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/gs647>

Views of videos created over five years that are posted in the YouTube MUIPM channel:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLUfLEphtKwu5F9_S7XfM7SvXH2Ak6RYd

Video	views
Plastic Mulch Color & Soil Temperature	4.79K
Strawberry Frost/Freeze Protection	1.8K
Early Season Watermelon in MO	848
Sweet Potato Harvest, Curing and Storage	739
Increase Sweet Potato Yield with Early Planting	681
Growing Watermelons for July 4th.	422
2021 Sweet Potato Slip Production Trails	410
Fall/winter short period crops in high tunnels	404
Greenhouse and high tunnel sanitation	300
Sweet potato slip production for field planting	228
On-farm sweet potato slip production trials	199
Cucurbits: Flower types and fruit production	181
Protected production for fall/winter Vegetable crops	173
High tunnel steamers	166
Sweet potato planting	163

Business and Community

Local Impact

Mitchell Moon — Labor and Workforce Development Specialist
MU Career Accelerator Program

Whether you're an employer looking to strengthen your workforce or an individual looking to advance in your career, MU's Career Accelerator offers a variety of courses, training events, and certificates to meet your needs. Utilizing the University of Missouri's researchers and instructors, along with various partnerships across multiple industries, the MU Career Accelerator is a valuable resource for upskilling and reskilling America's workforce. We keep Missouri working and we keep Missouri competing.

- 234 individuals participated in MU Career Accelerator events/trainings
- Hosted 7 in-person leadership trainings and workshops in Boone County

Trainings and leadership institutes are half-day or full-day workshops. Attendees gain new skills, tactics, and/or knowledge that can be applied directly back to their profession. When the MU Career Accelerator hosts a workshop; we partner with fellow University of Missouri faculty and on campus departments to deliver accurate and cutting-edge information that directly benefits that specific workforce.

- Partnered with 3 different on-campus schools/departments to deliver content

Additionally, we collaborated with the Missouri Training Institute (a unit housed within Extension) to offer 2 in-person training events.

This fall, we hosted 6 workforce summits across the state of Missouri and 1 virtual summit. The Workforce Summits offered insights and resources to various sectors of Missouri's employers (public, private and nonprofit) and explained how MU Extension resources can be leveraged for local economic and workforce development.

- Engaged with 263 individuals from across Missouri



Photo from training course



Group photo from Microelectronic training