



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

Ripley County 2025



Annual Report

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**SERVE MISSOURI.
DELIVER MIZZOU.®**

 **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 in Ripley County

Faculty and Staff



Jason Morris
Regional Agriculture Business Field
Specialist



Tony Merkel
Youth Program Associate 4H



Jennifer Williams
Extension Engagement Specialist



Mary Russom
County office support staff

OUR COMMUNITY

Every year Missourians turn to the University of Missouri (MU) Extension for practical knowledge, problem-solving, and guidance in navigating change. As a key resource for informed decision-making, we play a vital role in delivering this knowledge, fostering progress, and empowering individuals and communities to thrive.

OUR MISSION

As a land-grant institution, our mission is to **Bring Mizzou to YOU**. We bring the University of Missouri's cutting-edge research and expertise to the residents of the county, helping individuals, businesses, and municipalities make informed decisions that improve quality of life. Through our educational programs, we aim to strengthen communities, boost local economies, and promote sustainable growth by offering accessible, relevant, and responsive solutions backed by the resources of the University of Missouri System.

OUR MAIN PROGRAM AREAS

- › Agriculture
- › Business & Workforce Development
- › Community Development
- › Health and Human Science Initiatives
- › Nutrition & Health Education
- › 4-H Youth Development

WHO WE ARE

Faculty and Staff Resources

Traven Crocker
Field Specialist in
Horticulture



Emily Doosing
Field Specialist in 4-H
Youth Development



Cara Carswell
Educator in 4-H Youth
Development



John Fuller
Field Specialist in
Human Development



Haley Schwantz
Field Specialist in
Agronomy



Kelley Brent
Field Specialist in
Nutrition and Health



Sarah Cope
Feral Hog Educator



Council Members

Chairman David Buxton
Vice-chairman Michael Thornton
Secretary Tabitha Allen
Treasurer Caleb Stewart
Alicia Barker
James Bland
Kenny Freeman
Chelsie Barnett
Jared Barnett
Ed Mobley
Tim Sheppard

County Commission

Jesse Roy, Presiding Commissioner
Gary Emmons, Assoc. Commissioner
Keith Whiteside, Assoc. Commissioner



BUDGET AND MORE

Key Outcomes

41 soil tests representing approx. **8,000 acres**.

6 private applicator trainings

4-H youth and parents attended **4-H Day at the Capitol**. The 4-H club elected officers and had education on parliamentary procedures. 4-H youth attended Cardinals in May. FFA and 4-H joined in **two food distributions** to **200 families** of a matching **\$1,500.00 grant** from Farmers Care in November and December.

Return on investment

University System 108,041

For every dollar invested by the county, MU invests \$2.34.

Reach

Review the [Reach report](#) for a snapshot of contacts within the county.

Appropriations budget

Income	
County Appropriations	33,000
Gifts and Grants	4,300
Investment Income	176
Fees, Resale, Services	2,103
Total Income	39,579
Expenses	
Salaries/Benefits	22,885
Travel	4,265
Telephone	1,543
Office Supplies/Service	3,346
Soil Test Expenses	1,065
Insurance	2,126
Extension Council Misc.	903
Capital Repairs	220
Total Expenses	36,353



Local support

Did you know you can donate directly to Ripley 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.

UM SYSTEM COUNTY IMPACTS

MU Extension in Ripley County's Community Impact Report

This report offers a detailed overview of how MU Extension positively impacts Ripley 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 Ripley County can better leverage university resources, data and partnerships to empower people to improve their lives, businesses and communities.

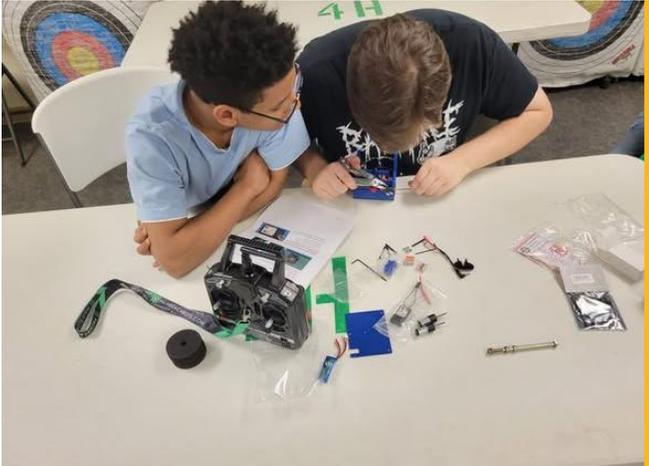
This report presents localized data and insights in how MU Extension in Ripley County is addressing these challenges. Each section breaks down county-specific statistics compared to state averages.

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





RIPLEY COUNTY 4H



Missouri 4-H is igniting curiosity and cultivating innovation through 4-H Powered STEM. From robotics and coding to environmental science and engineering, youth engage in hands-on learning that makes science come alive.

4-H STEM programs build problem-solving skills, spark discovery, and prepare the next generation of innovators and leaders. Every young person—no matter where they live or learn—has access to high-quality science experiences that open doors to future opportunities and help them become Beyond Ready for the challenges of tomorrow.



4-H's Leadership and Civic Engagement programs foster understanding, confidence, and decision-making skills to empower young people to become informed and active citizens. These initiatives prepare youth to become future leaders by engaging them in programs where they have voice and influence.

Statewide programs such as the **Missouri State 4-H Council** and **Civic Engagement Ambassadors** give youth opportunities to represent their peers, advocate for issues that matter, and build connections with leaders across Missouri. These experiences help young people grow as confident communicators and thoughtful problem solvers, ready to lead wherever life takes them.



Missouri 4-H Agriculture programs give youth hands-on experiences in areas such as animal science, veterinary science, plant science, and agronomy. Members explore the biology, care, and management of animals and crops while developing problem-solving, critical thinking, and leadership skills.

Youth can also put their knowledge into practice through statewide competitions, including **Livestock Judging, Meat Judging, Hippology**, the **Missouri 4-H Equine Tour** and more. These experiences help participants apply what they've learned, gain confidence, and prepare for future careers in agriculture and related fields.

Ripley County

4-H Youth Development



12 educational programs delivered in Ripley County, providing hands-on, in-person learning opportunities for youth.

238 youth participants engaged across 37 sessions, totaling 45 hours of direct educational programming.

31 volunteers contributed 11 hours of service, representing an estimated community value of **\$379** in volunteer time (based on \$34.42/hour).



Ripley County

Health and Human Sciences

Local Impact

Tai Chi for Health & Balance

MU Extension offered a Tai Chi class in Doniphan with **10 participants**, supporting physical and mental well-being for older adults.

Tai Chi programming emphasized:

- Balance and fall prevention
- Mobility and joint health
- Stress reduction
- Mind-body connection

This class addressed a key need in Ripley County, where older adults benefit from low-impact, evidence-based movement opportunities.

MU Extension coordinated a **Brain Health Conference** in Doniphan, bringing together community members and partners to focus on:

- Cognitive wellness
- Brain health education
- Healthy aging strategies
- Prevention and lifestyle approaches

This event expanded community awareness around brain health and reinforced MU Extension's leadership in proactive, prevention-focused education.

2025 Tai Chi Certificates



Graduates of the 2025 Tai Chi program receive Certificates of Completion, recognizing their dedication to improving balance, mobility, and brain health through evidence-based movement programming.

Ripley County

Health and Human Sciences cont.

Local Impact

Technology Education

In 2025, MU Extension delivered **9 technology classes** in Ripley County, reaching **74 participants** in Doniphan and surrounding areas.

These classes focused on building practical digital skills and confidence, particularly for adults and older residents navigating smartphones, tablets, and internet-based services.

Impact Highlights:

- Strong participation across multiple classes
- Increased confidence using everyday technology
- Improved access to online services, communication, and information
- Demonstrated demand for continued technology
- Education

This is in partnership with Aging Matters and Senior Planet.

SENIOR PLANET
FROM **AARP**



AgingMatters

MU Extension delivered **Keep Your Keys** programming to 3 participants, providing education focused on safe driving, decision making, and maintaining independence for older adults. Although the class size was small, the program served a high-impact population, offering personalized discussion and support around:

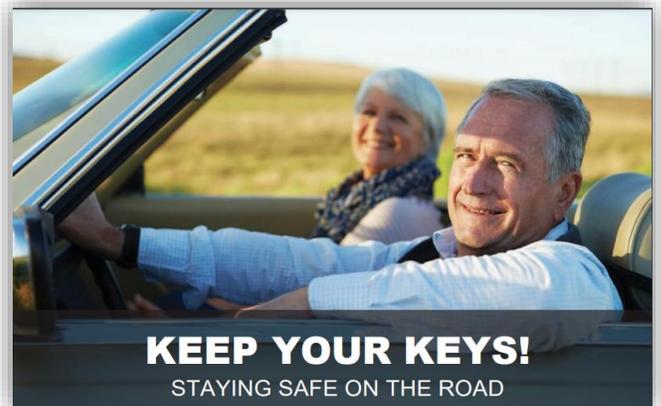
- Driving safety
- Self-awareness and planning
- Independence and mobility

Community Reach & Public Value

Through a combination of classes, workshops, and a community conference, MU Extension addressed multiple priority needs in Ripley County:

- Digital literacy and access
- Healthy aging and mobility
- Transportation safety and independence
- Brain health awareness

These efforts reflect a **whole-person approach** to Health & Human Services programming.



KEEP YOUR KEYS!
STAYING SAFE ON THE ROAD

SNAP Education

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Education or SNAP-Ed) brought over \$11,419,598 in federal funds to Missouri in 2025 to support engagement with 70,722 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients and eligible citizens. Through direct education, newsletters, health fairs, food pantries, and the Show Me Nutrition helpline, 955 direct and indirect contacts were reached in Ripley County.

MU Extension nutrition educators work with individuals and groups in a variety of settings throughout the state to meet a wide range of needs. Whether reaching out to youth and adults through direct education or working with communities to promote healthy policies, systems and environments (PSE), our goal is to help participants make behavior changes to achieve lifelong health and fitness. Often people tell us how the program has impacted their lives, even years after they have participated. Each day there are new stories that bring home the same important message: The MU Extension Family Nutrition Education Program makes a difference, a difference that means better health and fitness for a lifetime.

955 participants (both youth and adult) received education in Ripley County in 2025.



Supplemental
Nutrition
Assistance
Program

RIPLEY COUNTY

Agri-Business



Dr. Tim Evans,
Assoc. Professor & State Extension
Specialist in Veterinary Medicine

Veterinary Extension and Continuing Education, Forage Livestock Group, MU
Black Vulture Project and Equine Extension



Master Gardener Program

Local Impact- Poplar Bluff Area Extension Master Gardener Chapter

Number of Volunteers – 12 (5 emeritus)

Number of Volunteer Hours – 375

Dollar Value of Volunteer Hours - \$13,046.25*
(*[Independent Sector](#) at \$34.79/hour)

Number of New Volunteers – 4 trainees

Number of Continuing Education Hours –
124

Number of Chapter-led Education Events –
6

Number of Participants in Education Events
– 601

Social Media Analytics – 135 followers on
Facebook

Community Events:

- **Ag Day in Carter County:** Hands-on learning for second grade students with multiple stations. Students made bird feeders, butter, and learned about soil health. There were eighty participants.
- **Women Aware Event:** Two members worked the full-day gardening event for women. Approximately 350 women attended the event.



Community Events continued:

- **Sierra Girls Program:** Summer program for girls at Sierra Osage Treatment Center. The group learn about container gardening, parts of plants we eat, concrete leaf casting, native plants, plant identification. There were six participants.
- **Demonstration Garden:** Maintained Popeyes Garden showcasing best gardening practices, successful plant varieties, and sustainable techniques to the public.
- **Butler County Exhibits and More:** Two members assisted in planning and set up of the three-day event that displayed 350 exhibits of local canned goods, quilts, crafts, artwork, agronomy and horticulture crops, and other fair items. There were 100 youth entries and 65 adults.
- **Mums Fundraiser:** Successful sale and delivery of mums raised funds for chapter.

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 2025, 2,125 Missouri Extension Master Gardeners completed over 112,713 VOLUNTEER HOURS throughout the state, a value of \$3.9M dollars.



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



Spring Forage Conference

The 41st annual spring forage conference was held in Springfield, MO. 375 producers attended from 31 counties and 3 different states. The keynote speaker was Dr. Gary Bates, who spoke on "Looking Back at Advancements in Forage Production". This conference is a partnership between MU Extension, NRCS, and SWCD employees as well as many businesses and agencies that are sponsors or vendors.

Horsemen's Webinar Series

The free webinar series was offered for the first time in 2025 to serve and educate horse owners and businesses.

Four webinars were offered which reached



Elizabeth Picking, MS | Field Specialist in Livestock

Extension
University of Missouri

HORSEMEN'S WEBINAR SERIES

- March 19 (6pm) - Forage Varieties for Horses**
 Dr. Harley Naumann
 Associate Teaching Professor & Extension State Forage & Grazing Specialist,
 Division of Animal Sciences
- July 23rd (6pm) - Toxic Weeds for Horses**
 Dr. Tim Evans, DVM
 Associate Professor & State Extension Specialist,
 Veterinary Medicine
- September 24th (6pm) - Hay Selection for Horses**
 Elizabeth Picking
 Field Specialist in Livestock
 MU Extension
- December 10th (6pm) - Farm Taxes for Horse Owners**
 Katie Nuener
 Field Specialist in Agricultural Business
 MU Extension

Free Event Register online at [CVENT LINK](#)



MU Extension

Serves MISSOURI and Delivers MIZZOU

through credible statewide programs
Agriculture and Environment cont.

Artificial Insemination Schools

We taught 2 AI schools in 2025, educating 26 dairy and beef cattle producers.



I was on a team that worked to develop **curriculum for Commercial Drone use**



Elizabeth Picking, MS | Field Specialist in Livestock

