

# 2025

# URBAN WEST

## ANNUAL REPORTS

CLAY  
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PLATTE



**MU** Office of Extension and Engagement  
University of Missouri

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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 sunsetting 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,

*Chadwick C Higgins*

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



*"Serve Missouri. Deliver Mizzou."*

**MU**  
**Extension**  
University of Missouri

**Our Community**

Every year Missourians turn to the University of Missouri (MU) Extension for practical knowledge, problem-solving, and guidance in navigating change. Serving as a key resource for informed decision-making, the Urban West region plays 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 Clay, Jackson, and Platte counties, 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 Programs/Services are:**

- ▼ 4-H Youth Development
- ▼ Agriculture and Environment
- ▼ Business and Community Development
- ▼ Health and Human Sciences
- ▼ Health and Safety

**Our Commitment:**

Each year, we reach approximately 35,000 people through direct educational services. The MU Extension Urban West region is committed to making a lasting impact by improving food safety and health, empowering youth, and advancing workforce development. While there is still much to be done, we remain dedicated to working alongside our community, fostering growth, and creating opportunities for all.



**Shatomi Luster-Edward**  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR



**Tracey Sanders**  
URBAN REGIONS  
Project/Program  
Support Coordinator II



**GK Callahan**  
URBAN WEST  
Engagement Specialist



**Joshua Shinn**  
URBAN WEST  
Engagement Specialist



**Lindsay Tarasovic**  
URBAN WEST  
Engagement Specialist



### Justin Strickland – 4-H Youth Development Field Specialist

Justin is a Kansas City native with an educator mother, learning early of the power and importance of youth development. Justin earned a Sport Management degree from Culver-Stockton College then back to Kansas City serving youth. He then attended Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Masters of Theology in Leadership) and used that to develop youth across the metro area. Justin has expertise in college readiness, leadership development, and program development. He is excited to be a part of Platte County 4-H.

### Dylan Newman – 4-H Youth Development Educator

Dylan Newman is Youth Development Educator for 4-H Community Clubs in the Urban West Region. Prior to joining MU Extension, Dylan worked in MO public schools as an early childhood and elementary teacher, and in the MO public library system as a youth services associate. With years of experience in the realm of education, Dylan has a strong passion for positive youth development.



### Shianna Burgett – 4-H Youth Development Field Specialist

Experience/Professional Growths: Shianna has over 10 years of experience working with students and families of at-risk populations in the non-profit sector, with 6 years in K-12 schools. Shianna holds a Master of Arts in Teaching, Secondary Education and places high priority on continued education and professional development. Shianna believes in the importance of educational opportunity and access to experiential learning for underrepresented youth.

### Tamra Reall, Ph.D. – Field Specialist Horticulture, Jackson

With degrees in horticulture, entomology, and teaching, she passionately engages the public in science outreach. She leads the Extension Master Gardeners in Greater Kansas City and manages volunteer gardens in Kansas City. Tamra co-advises the Osage Trails Master Naturalist Chapter, writes the “Kids ask Dr. Bug” column, and shares horticulture and entomology information.



### Todd Higgins – Field Specialist Horticulture, Clay & Platte

Dr. Todd Higgins joined MU Extension in 2023. He serves six counties, including Clay and Platte in the Urban West region. Higgins earned degrees in Plant and Soil Science from the University of Massachusetts (BS) and Southern Illinois University (MS) and a Ph.D. in Agronomy from the University of Arkansas. He served as an Engineer in the Army for 24 years. After retiring he served as Assoc. Prof. of Research at Lincoln University for 8 years.

### Matt Pezold – Labor and Workforce Development Specialist

Matt promotes the adoption of inclusive and participatory leadership, best practices in mentorship, career pathway exploration, and healthy workplace initiatives. Matt works directly with local students (college/high school), and with employers/labor unions addressing challenges. Programs: Labor Studies Certificate (Labor and Community Leadership, Globalization and Workers), Labor Law Lunch Series, Career Pathway Exploration, Labor History, Solidarity Series, regional workforce and economic outlook, and healthy workplace programming.



### Elena Stephenson – Field Specialist in Community Development

Elena is Kansas City based and versed in performing, directing, and educating. While raising a fiery redhead, she is an arts education advocate and cultural community activist. Her BFA is in Acting/Directing from ACU, as well as a MA in Applied Theatre for Colleges and Communities, NYU Steinhardt. She is a teaching artist and curriculum consultant. Her essay “The Fundamentals of the Pedagogy of a Teaching Artist” was published in The Teaching Artist Journal. Previously, she worked as Theatre and Performing Arts Coordinator for The Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center in Johnson County, Kansas.

### Molly Baurain - Horticulture Educator

Molly Baurain has spent over 20 years working with plants and people, with a biology degree in botany from Drury University and professional experience in horticulture, community farming, and farm business development, most recently supporting refugee and immigrant farmers through Cultivate Kansas City. She returns to the University of Missouri Extension excited to support the Extension Master Gardeners of Greater Kansas City.



### Julie Riddle – Field Specialist in Community Development

Julie Riddle, MSW, has worked with free tax preparation in the Kansas City area for the past 20 years. Prior to joining MU Extension, she oversaw financial capability programming at United Way of Greater Kansas City. Ms. Riddle helped to form the KC Metro Tax Coalition and continues to serve in a leadership role.

### Wayne Flanary – Field Specialist in Agronomy Clay & Platte

Wayne has spent 41 years in working as an agronomist for University of Missouri Extension and with Industry. He is a Certified Professional Agronomist and Certified Crop Adviser with the Agronomy Society of America.



### Amie Schleicher – Livestock Field Specialist Clay & Platte

Her educational background includes a BS in animal science from the University of Nebraska and a MS in ruminant nutrition from the University of Wyoming. Amie works with livestock producers in all aspects of livestock production, but especially enjoys working in the areas of livestock nutrition, forages, and youth livestock projects.

### Tracy Graybill – Community Health Field Specialist

Tracy completed her Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs in 2019 from the University of Missouri, Kansas City. Tracy is dedicated to promoting the health of communities in the Urban West Region by actively engaging community leaders and stakeholders to address health disparities through targeted interventions and collaborative partnerships.



### Melissa Cotton – Field Specialist Nutrition & Health

Melissa Cotton is a Field Specialist in Nutrition and Health Education, serving Jackson and Clay Counties. She has worked for the University of Missouri Extension for seven years, providing educational opportunities focusing on nutrition, health, wellness, food safety, physical activity, and chronic disease prevention and self-management. Her educational programs contribute to MU Extension's long-term goal of improving the national health ranking of Missouri from 40th to 25th.

### Elizabeth McGinley – Field Specialist Nutrition & Health

Elizabeth serves the Kansas City area. Prior to joining MU Extension, she had 10 years with the University of Arkansas System Coop Extension as Family and Consumer Science Cty Ext. Agent. With a Master's, and Bachelor's in Human Environmental Sciences, and a major in Human Development and Family Studies (minor in Communications), from the U of Arkansas. A certified Regional Community Trainer for C.O.M.E.T (Changing Our Mental & Emotional Trajectory), she offers programs related to wellness, healthy eating, food safety, physical activity, and chronic disease prevention/management.

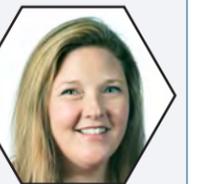


### Sidney Patrick – Field Specialist Nutrition & Health

Sidney Patrick is a Field Specialist in Nutrition and Health Education with the University of Missouri Extension. She offers programming related to active aging, healthy eating, and physical activity in the Kansas City area. With state and local partners, she delivers real-world solutions to address our state's grand challenges of educational access, health, and well-being.

### Susan Smith – Extension Instructor Health and Human Science

Her educational background includes a BS in animal science from the University of Nebraska and a MS in ruminant nutrition from the University of Wyoming. Amie works with livestock producers in all aspects of livestock production, but especially enjoys working in the areas of livestock nutrition, forages, and youth livestock projects.



## Extension Council Members—2025

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### Urban West District Map



## Budgets—2025

### Clay

Salaries/Benefits	\$38,399.00
Travel	\$4,250.00
Supplies/Services	\$15,037.00
Rent	\$768.00
Insurance/Surety Bond	\$920.00
Professional Services	\$5,974.00
Phone/Postage/ Internet/Utilities	\$2,850.00
Copy/Print Services	\$1,561.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$69,759.00</b>
Endowment Principal	\$13,742.00
Distribution	\$1,149.00
Quasi Endowment Principal	\$68,978.00
Distribution	\$5,794.00

### Platte

Salaries/Benefits	\$36,849.00
Travel	\$2,505.00
Supplies/Services	\$11,071.00
Rent	\$2,463.00
Insurance/Surety Bond	\$515.00
Professional Services	\$3,098.00
Phone/Postage/ Internet/Utilities	\$3,249.00
Copy/Print Services	\$521.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$60,271.00</b>

### Jackson

Salaries/Benefits	\$17,523.00
Travel	\$5,426.00
Supplies/Services	\$41,898.00
Rent	\$10,250.00
Insurance/Surety Bond	\$1,028.00
Professional Services	\$4,943.00
Phone/Postage/ Internet/Utilities	\$1,488.00
Copy/Print Services	\$4,598.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$87,154.00</b>
Endowment Principal	\$31,151.00
Endowment Distribution	\$2,702.00



Julie Riddle and volunteer supporting the VITA Tax Assistance Program at the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council—providing free, trusted tax preparation services to local residents.



**M**issouri 4-H programming in Urban West significantly contributes to overall youth and family engagement, as reflected in the direct education totals above. Youth participated in hands-on learning, leadership development, STEM, and civic engagement activities delivered through community-based programs, schools, and partner organizations. Volunteer engagement plays a critical role in sustaining 4-H programming, with trained volunteers contributing a substantial share of the 23,363 volunteer hours reported across the region. These efforts support positive youth development, leadership skills, and long-term educational readiness in diverse urban and suburban communities.

#### 4-H Day at the Capitol

Nearly 900 participants convened at the Missouri State Capitol, including 45 members and volunteers from the Urban West. This event provided youth with the opportunity to engage in civic leadership, meet state legislators and advocate for Missouri 4-H.



#### Science in the Park – Summer 2025

MU Extension Urban West 4-H partnered with Platte County Parks and Recreation to deliver a hands-on summer Science in the Park series for youth across Platte County. Participants explored the scientific method through engaging chemical reaction experiments, built and tested science circuits, and practiced basic coding and engineering challenges. The program emphasized curiosity, problem-solving, and real-world STEM applications in an outdoor learning environment.

#### Genesis Future Leaders – College & Career Readiness (Sept 2024-May 2025)

The Genesis Future Leaders program provided 60 7th- and 8th-grade students with immersive college- and career-readiness experiences through virtual reality simulations and hands-on learning. Youth visited a virtual reality lab to explore career pathways, including 3D printing, virtual design, and emerging technologies, while practicing essential soft skills such as communication and teamwork. The program also included an in-person 8th-grade college-readiness workshop on goal setting, postsecondary planning, and workforce preparation, along with several other community-based field trips and learning experiences.

#### Hatching Chicks in the Classroom Embryology Pilot

MU Extension Urban West 4-H piloted the Missouri 4-H state embryology curriculum in more than 100 classrooms and homeschools (approximately 2,058 students) across Clay, Platte, and Jackson counties. Students participated in hands-on learning by incubating fertilized eggs, observing embryo development, and witnessing chicks hatch in real time. The program strengthened understanding of life cycles, animal science, and responsibility through engaging lessons, books, and interactive classroom experiences.



#### 4-H in Action

*Hatching Chicks in the Classroom; Science in the Park; Genesis Future Leaders*

**A**griculture and Environment programming in Urban West reflects an urban-focused approach to food systems, environmental stewardship, and sustainable practices. Activities and indirect outreach occurred across numerous municipalities, supporting residents through education related to gardening, urban agriculture, environmental awareness, and natural resource stewardship. Volunteer involvement and partnerships with local organizations expanded program reach beyond direct instruction, allowing Extension to support both individual behavior change and community-level awareness around food access, sustainability, and environmental resilience.

#### Master Gardeners of Greater Kansas City

Frontline educators and community ambassadors.

- ▼ 260 active volunteers; 60 trainees
- ▼ 12,965 service hours (valued at \$451,067)
- ▼ 48 chapter-led events reaching 10,896 participants
- ▼ 7,629 pounds of produce donated
- ▼ 33 Speakers Bureau presentations, 800 participants
- ▼ 380 Hotline questions answered
- ▼ 47,000 indirect educational contacts

In 2025, EMG's educational capacity was strengthened through Soil Test Interpretation training, equipping volunteers to support soil health education and client consultations.

#### Extension Master Gardeners of Platte County

- ▼ Number of Volunteers - 46
- ▼ Number of Volunteer Hours - 4,372.6
- ▼ Value of Volunteer Hours - \$152,122.75



EMGPC set up a greenhouse and grew 3,000 plants for the first Spring Plant sale, earning over \$10,000. Read more about projects and activities in the annual report found at <https://www.plattecountymastergardeners.org/>.

#### Missouri Master Naturalists (Osage Trails)

Missouri Master Naturalists advance conservation education, stewardship, and engagement.

- ▼ 150 active members; 368 in good standing; 31 interns
- ▼ 13,640 service hours (valued at \$474,545)
- ▼ 2,712 advanced training hours
- ▼ 23 nonprofit partners and ongoing projects

Volunteer-led efforts expanded natural resources education while supporting community-based conservation initiatives.

#### AmeriCorps Seniors & Extension Garden Stewards

The Extension Garden Steward program paired research-based instruction with experienced volunteer service.

- ▼ 12 Extension Garden Steward courses delivered to 247 participants
- ▼ 50 AmeriCorps Senior volunteers supporting courses and workshops
- ▼ ≥300 documented volunteer hours

This program served beginning and experienced gardeners, increasing visibility and reputation of the AmeriCorps Senior volunteer program among community partners.



*Platte County Extension Master Gardeners working in the greenhouse. Dr. Todd Higgins delivering hands-on agricultural education in the field.*

**B**usiness and Community programming represents one of the most active and visible areas of work in the Urban West Region. PEARS data document a high volume of program and indirect activities, particularly in Kansas City and Independence, supporting entrepreneurs, small businesses, neighborhood leaders, veterans, and community organizations. This work includes leadership development, community capacity-building, resilience building, technical assistance, and coalition-based engagement. Strong partnerships and cross-sector collaboration amplified impact, allowing Extension to reach residents through both direct education and broad indirect outreach. Several success stories highlight how this work strengthened local leadership, supported entrepreneurship, and fostered community belonging.

#### Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

In 2025, the VITA program helped 5,700 households across six counties file over 6,000 tax returns, returning more than \$6 million to regional families—including \$2.1 million in critical tax credits—through the work of 257 volunteers and 25 partner organizations at nine service sites. Despite the loss of federal funding for 2026, councils, partners, and donors mobilized to sustain the program through April 2026.

#### Labor And Workforce Development

Labor and workforce development is part of Business and Communities Extension. Its mission is to help businesses and organizations address the emerging working challenges in the Kansas City Region, so that individuals and communities can thrive.

Read Matthew Pezold's article on Long COVID at: <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/mp1000>



Dr. Shatomi Luster-Edward at UMKC for regional Council training.



Josh Shinn with veteran Jason Kander at the Veteran Reads Program Signature Speaker Series—highlighting civic leadership, service, and storytelling.

#### SNAPSHOT: Urban West 2025 PEARS

- ▼ Direct education participants: 30,219
- ▼ Educational sessions delivered: 1,651
- ▼ Instructional hours: 2,681
- ▼ Volunteers engaged: 1,216
- ▼ Volunteer hours contributed: 23,363
- ▼ Geographic reach: Programming occurred in more than 30 municipalities across the Urban West Region, with the highest activity levels in Kansas City (394 total activities), Independence (110), Platte City (42), Liberty (20), Blue Springs (19), Excelsior Springs (21), and surrounding communities.
- ▼ Total activities: Hundreds of combined program activities, indirect activities, reflecting a mix of education, outreach, and partnership-driven work.

#### Parkville Alley Mural Reveal

*On a three-digit temperature on a night in late June of 2025, we were able to celebrate the completion of the Parkville Alley Mural. This was a particularly successful event because the community and local stakeholders were engaged. We had county commissioners, the mayor, our community partners, and county council members all in attendance at this event. We also received fiscal support from the Platte County Extension Council to complete the mural.*

*This mural was also a successful example of creative placemaking, as it brought cultural heritage, tourism, a sense of belonging, and well-being to the downtown Parkville, MO community. The mural and revitalization of the alley were proposed by two community members and supported by the Mainstreet Parkville Association. The artist selected to complete the mural was Melissa Ferris.*



**I**n 2025, Urban West Extension engaged 30,219 participants through evidence-based health and well-being education. A significant portion of this work was supported through MU Extension's Family Nutrition Education Program, including SNAP-Ed and EFNEP. In Clay, Jackson, and Platte Counties, SNAP-Ed programming generated 24,057 direct and indirect educational contacts through classes, community outreach, newsletters, health fairs, and food pantry education. EFNEP provided intensive nutrition education to 84 youth and adults in the region. Participants increased knowledge and skills related to healthy eating, physical activity, and food budgeting. This federally supported programming contributes to improved long-term health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and a healthier workforce, providing lasting public value for communities and taxpayers.

#### Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (SSSH)

Stay Strong, Stay Healthy is a resistance-training-based workout designed as an 8-week program with multiple levels, making it accessible and adaptable for older adults with varying abilities. The program's main goal is to increase independence and longevity by improving muscle mass, balance, and flexibility—key factors that allow people to move safely, confidently, and independently in their daily lives. Throughout 2025, we delivered multiple SSSH programs across the Urban West, both in person and virtually, reaching a diverse group of participants. A total of 134 individuals completed the program, meaning they attended at least 75% of classes, resulting in an estimated \$137,216 in healthcare cost savings. More importantly, the program has been truly life-changing for participants, helping them regain strength, reduce fall risk, stay active, and maintain independence, allowing them to continue doing the things they love and live healthier, more self-reliant lives.

#### Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program supports eligible low-income older adults by providing \$50 each summer to spend at local farmers markets on fresh, healthy foods of their choice. The program also removes barriers by delivering produce boxes to seniors who lack transportation, ensuring everyone can benefit. This program matters to stakeholders because it improves food access and nutrition for



University of Missouri Extension staff and community participants engaged in Walk With Ease programming; Sidney Patrick teaching a Freeze It! class; Staff supporting the SNAP Gap Food Drive at Truman Habitat for Humanity.

older adults while also directly supporting local farmers and strengthening local food systems. Key outcomes and impacts include Clay County seniors receiving \$7,100 worth of produce, Jackson County receiving \$29,600, and Platte County receiving \$2,000—demonstrating meaningful community-wide benefits for both seniors and local agriculture.

#### SNAP Gap Produce Box Handouts

The SNAP Gap Effort was created to support individuals and families during a temporary lapse in SNAP benefits around the holidays, ensuring continued access to food during a particularly challenging time. Through this program, hundreds of boxes filled with fresh produce were distributed to the community, providing both immediate relief and nutritional support. In 2025, the total value of food distributed was \$27,125, with \$13,125 distributed in Clay County and \$14,000 in Jackson County. Data was intentionally collected throughout the program to evaluate impact and effectiveness, allowing this response to be refined, strengthened, and replicated in 2026 to better serve communities facing similar gaps in food access.

# 2025

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## SERVE MISSOURI. DELIVER MIZZOU.®

### Mission

*Provide research-based education to improve community quality of life through accessible and inclusive programming.*

### Regional Overview

*The University of Missouri Extension Urban West Region serves Jackson, Clay, and Platte Counties. Our programs span 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Environment, Business and Community Development, Health and Human Sciences, and Horticulture. Communities in this region face challenges such as housing, food security, healthcare access, and crime prevention. Additional disparities persist in educational attainment, workforce development, and digital connectivity. MU Extension addresses these needs through targeted programs and partnerships designed to strengthen families, businesses, and communities.*

<https://extension.missouri.edu/counties/urban-west-region>



Federal level: USDA/NIFA funding



State level: University of Missouri administration



County level: Elected County Extension Councils authorized by State Statute RSMo 262.550-262.620



Partnership funding model: shared by University, County, and Federal partners