



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

VERNON COUNTY

2025



Annual Report

Vernon County MU Extension
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**SERVE MISSOURI.
DELIVER MIZZOU.**

MU Extension
University of Missouri

an equal opportunity/ADA institution

**VICE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE**

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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Chadwick C Higgins'.

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

WHO WE ARE

Faculty and Staff

Vernon County office

Diane Blankenship, Youth Program Associate
Thabena Bower, 4-H Youth Program Associate
Mellissia Butler, Nutrition Program Associate
Linda Clinton, Field Specialist in 4-H Youth Development
Paula Gray, Family Nutrition Education Program Manager
Jo Lynne Crowe, Secretary

Vernon County Specialists

Ramon Arancibia, Horticulture Specialist, Bates County
Sara Bridgewater, Field Specialist in Nutrition & Health Education, Bates County
Kyleigh Brown, Field Specialist in Human Development, Cass County
Patrick Davis, Field Specialist in Livestock, Cedar County
Mitchell Moon, Field Specialist in Labor and Workforce Development, Johnson County
Mikayla Neil, Extension Engagement Specialist, Cedar County
Wesley Tucker, Field Specialist in Agriculture Business, Polk County

Council Members

Amanda Ast, Chairman
Scott Pritchett, Vice-chairman
Sheree Gayman, Secretary
Ganga Fernando, Treasurer

Northern members
Kyle Bond
Shelby Lightwine
Lindsey Lechman
Cheshta Sehgal

Southern members
Laurin Dilly
Kelsie Duncomb
Kevin Williams
Frank Wilson
Hazel Wilson
Kendrick Wilson

Representatives
Jim Bell, Missouri Farm Bureau
Cindy Thompson, Commission

Vernon County Commissioners



County executives

From left to right...

John Shorten, Southern Commissioner

Joe Wilson, Presiding Commissioner

Cindy Thompson, Northern Commissioner

BUDGET AND MORE

Appropriations budget

Income

County Appropriations	58,800.00
Total Income	58,800.00

Expenses

Salaries/Benefits	45,531.05
Travel	5,678.50
Telephone	167.90
Office Supplies/Service	4,261.40
Insurance	3,425.03
Advertising	150.00
Total Expenses	59,213.88

Vernon County partners

Area Schools
Bronaugh
NEVC
Sheldon
Community Center
Home Schools
Farmer's Market
Girl Scouts
MO-KAN Square Dancers
Nevada Schools
High School
Middle School
Weber
Neil Senior Center
United Way of Vernon County
Vernon County Youth Fair
Vernon County Youth Fair Board

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



Local support

Did you know you can donate directly to Vernon 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 Vernon County Community Impact Report

This report offers a detailed overview of how MU Extension positively impacts Vernon 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. 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 Vernon 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 Vernon County is addressing these challenges. Each section breaks down county-specific statistics compared to state averages.

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





MU Extension **Serves MISSOURI and Delivers MIZZOU**
through credible statewide programs
Missouri 4-H for Ages 8 – 18



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.



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.



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 **SportfishingSLAM** 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.

Legend



Agricultural Growth & Stewardship



Economic Opportunity



Educational Access & Excellence



Health & Well-Being

Vernon County

Missouri 4-H

Local Impact

4-H Youth Development Program

4-H programs are built on the belief that youth learn best by doing. With the support and guidance of adult volunteers serving as mentors, youth engage in hands-on learning experiences through projects in areas including engineering and technology, environmental science and natural resources, plant and animal science, leadership and personal development, expressive arts, and healthy living, in addition to taking on leadership positions which help to mold them into the caring, competent, and confident citizens who know the value of contributing to their communities.

4-H programming reaches youth through a variety of delivery modes in Vernon County, including Community Clubs, SPIN Clubs or short-term 4-H programming, and in-school or afterschool membership or school enrichment programming. These varied delivery modes allow participants to participate in the format that best meets their needs and interests, while focusing on multiple skills including public speaking, leadership, exploring sparks (or interests), developing life skills, responsibility, group decision making, and exploring college and career pathways.

4-H SPIN Clubs

- 131 youth participated in 4-H through the SPIN Clubs which are short-term 4-H clubs focused on a specific topic. Among the SPIN Clubs offered in Vernon County this year, clubs focused on Clover Kids, Exploring 4-H, and nutrition.

4-H School Enrichment, In-school and Afterschool Clubs

- 187 youth were reached by school enrichment programs in Vernon County in 2024-2025.
- Six classrooms across the county were reached through the Embryology: Hatching Chicks in the Classroom program culminating in 90 hours of learning about development, agriculture and sanitation, in addition to responsibility.
- Through College and Career Readiness in Vernon County more than 500 youth were served. On My Own with four events totaling more than 150 youth,: 60 with the Nevada's On My Own group that had eight schools attending, two different events at Nevada Middle School in March 2025 and December 2025 and December 2025 at Sheldon High School for 7th and 8th graders. Served over 360 6th, 7th and 8th grade youth with Seeing Yourself in the Future curriculum in three school districts: Northeast Vernon County, Sheldon High School and Nevada Middle School.

4-H Community Club Members

- 361 youth reached through the 14 community clubs in Vernon County during the 2024-2025 4-H Year.
- Collectively, youth participated in 2905 hours of documented community club work and 4948 hours of community service in Vernon County.



Vernon County

Missouri 4-H

Local Impact

4-H Programming Participation

- 104 youth served in a leadership role within their club or council. Four youth from the County also held leadership roles beyond the county serving as Missouri Civic Engagement Ambassadors, State Shooting Sports Ambassadors, and National Shooting Sports Ambassadors.
- Seven youth demonstrated their public speaking and communication skills by participating in a demonstration/public speaking contest held at the Vernon County Youth Fair this year. 274 youth in Vernon County participated in demonstrations in their club.
- Youth showcased what they learned in their projects this year with 1584 exhibits by 274 youth shown at the Vernon County Youth Fair.
- Vernon County was represented by 102 youth exhibiting in the 4-H Building and Livestock Shows at the Missouri State Fair in 2025. Two youth also had their exhibit selected as a Best of Show in the 4-H Building.
- Vernon County youth sited in on their future through their shooting sports projects which strives to teach them focus and safety while honing their skills and developing sportsmanship. Nine youth competed in the Missouri 4-H State Shoot events this year.
- Sixty state level recognition and 42 project forms were completed by members. Completing these forms allow members to reflect on the things they have done and learned throughout the 4-H year and how they can apply what they have learned in the upcoming year.
- One youth received a Missouri 4-H Scholarship as an investment in their future.
- Six youth learned more about civic engagement and the Missouri Legislature by participating in 4-H Day at the Capitol.
- One youth participated in MOVE Across Missouri, where youth and adults are encouraged to track their physical activity and fitness in their daily life, learning about healthy lifestyles.
- 28 youth participated in the second STEM Day event held at Cottey College, where youth experienced hands-on learning in different pathways including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- Youth also took their 4-H experience beyond the county lines participating in the following events:
State 4-H Teen Conference – 3 State 4-H Congress – 7 State Poultry and Rabbit Day – 1

Vernon County members enroll in a variety of projects each year. The top project areas during the 2024-2025 4-H Year included: Rabbits – 164 Arts and Crafts – 86 Swine – 76 Poultry – 68
Meat Goats – 51 Beef - 49 Cake Decorating – 34 Exploring - 28



Vernon County

Missouri 4-H

Local Impact



4-H Programming Impact

- 4-H members are twice as likely to go college compared to their non-4-H peers and they tend to pursue careers in STEM fields (Lerner & Lerner, 2011).
- 4-H also prepares youth for the workplace. Youth must be prepared to live and work in a world we cannot completely envision- competing for jobs that do not yet exist, using technologies that have yet to be identified. 4-H is the only youth development program with direct access to technological advances in agriculture, life sciences, and social sciences from the university system. This brings relevant science content and hands-on learning that helps youth thrive (Arnold, Bourdeau, & Nott, 2013).

4-H Volunteers

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.

- Vernon County 4-H members were supported by 255 enrolled, screened and oriented adult volunteers supporting the development of youth in the 2024-2025 4-H Year.
- Volunteers contributed 25,500 hours to the Vernon County 4-H program valued at \$887,145.

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





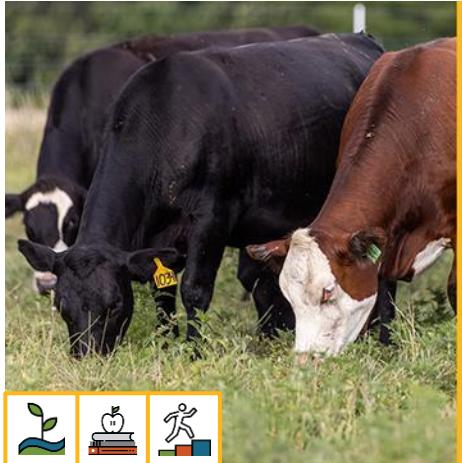
MU Extension **Serves MISSOURI and Delivers MIZZOU**
through credible statewide programs
Agriculture and Environment



The Missouri Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program strives to enhance beef herd reproductive efficiency, boost farm income and establish dependable sources of quality replacement cows in Missouri. The program brings in the power of animal genomics through an enhanced DNA-option, Show-Me-PLUS.



Since its inception more than 900 FARMS have enrolled, with an estimated statewide impact of \$200 MILLION.



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

Vernon County

Agriculture and Environment



Show Me Youth Ag Academy-This group takes in students from Sheldon School. These students get hand on education on a farm that was donated to these entities in cattle production management from conception to consumption. Students and teachers make all the decisions in this cattle operation and bring in groups like MU Extension to help in consultation and provide education to the students. During the year I was involved in the education of approximately 3 students that are part of the farm on bull selection and management prior to and during the breeding season. These students used this knowledge in determining the bulls that they will use on replacement heifers they plan to retain as they build a herd or sell through replacement heifer sales.

Show Me Quality Assurance

Training-This training is to educate youth on best management practices for raising their 4-H and FFA livestock project that they will exhibit at county, regional and state fairs. This is a required training for youth to exhibit at some of the fairs throughout the state of Missouri. During this training youth have video and hands education of best management practices that will help them manage their meat and milk producing projects so that they are safe for human consumption when they enter the food chain. There were 118 participants total for the 3 events in the county.



Vernon County

Business and Community

Local Impact

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



Vernon County

Continuing Education

Local Impact

Extension Tax Schools

University of Missouri Extension coordinated and offered tax education through one summer and three fall tax schools. The summer school was in person and live online. Fall schools were in Columbia and Springfield and an online school. The schools were designed for those who prepare taxes including enrolled agents, tax preparers, CPAs, individuals, and attorneys.

The training included updates on legislation, rulings and cases, individual taxpayer issues, agricultural and natural resources topics, ethics, trusts and estates, agriculture and natural resource tax issues, business tax issues, business entity tax issues, IRS issues, installment sales, tax benefits of home ownership, retirement tax issues, and individual tax issues. The schools were approved for up to 16 hours of continuing education credit by the IRS, Missouri Bar and for CFP continuing education. Total continuing education hours reported to IRS for the schools was 4,024 hours.

The teaching teams included CPAs, a former IRS stakeholder liaison, an IRS certified retired ag economics professor, an attorney, a certified financial planner, Missouri Department of Revenue, MU faculty and extension ag business specialists.

The evaluations had many positive comments and helpful suggestions. One comment from an online participant was "The video was outstanding – best I've seen on any CPE I've done live.". Planning is underway to offer trainings in 2026. Local county residents benefit when local tax preparers have the opportunity to gain knowledge, which benefits their clients and communities. The tax schools are a program of the ag business and policy program of MU Extension, coordinated by Mary Sobba with help from a team of ag business specialists throughout the state.

The resources for the schools included the IRS, 2025 National Income Tax Workbook from the Land Grant University Tax Education Foundation, and materials written by the instructors.

The 2025 school attendance totaled three hundred eighty-nine people, which was an 11% increase from 2024. The participants were from throughout Missouri and two from out of state. There were two participants from Vernon County in both the summer and fall classes.





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



Cooking Matters

Make quick, tasty, and affordable meals everyone will enjoy.

Learn valuable tips for stretching your food dollars and how to prepare a recipe and sample easy, low-cost, nutritious and delicious dishes.

"We prepared barley jambalaya in class and one participant mentioned she had never tried barley before. She tried the jambalaya and really enjoyed it. A few days later she excitedly said she made the recipe at home and her whole family enjoyed it."

Cooking Matters facilitator about a class participant



Building Strong Families

Studies show that people with strong family bonds tend to have lower stress levels. Building Strong Families helps families deal with disagreements, manage stress and show their love for one another.



Show-Me Nutrition

Programming for preschool through junior high

An engaging way to demonstrate the benefits of nutrition, health, and physical activity. Meets Missouri's Show-Me Health and Physical Education standards and the state's School Wellness Policy.

"We have struggled with our daughter's picky eating for years and have tried so many techniques to try and get her to eat new foods. Your influence on her has worked magic this year. She has come home so excited about trying new foods and has now become not only willing but excited to try new things."

Parent of a Show-Me Nutrition participant

Legend



Agricultural Growth & Stewardship



Economic Opportunity



Educational Access & Excellence



Health & Well-Being

Vernon County

Health and Human Sciences

Local Impact

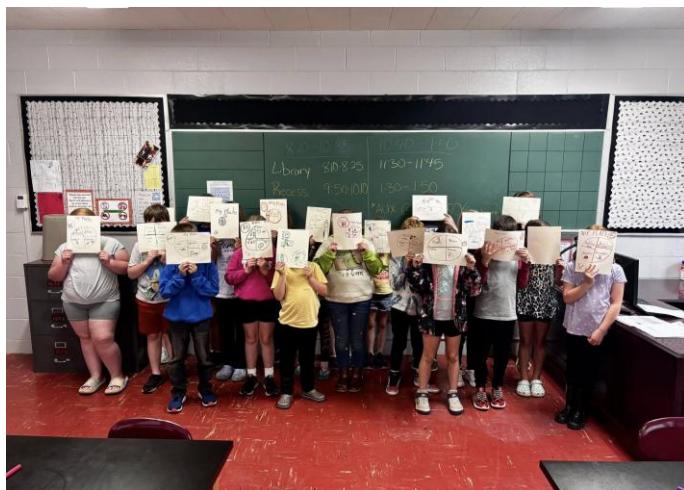
Program: Little Roots, Big Harvest:

Homesteading Together

Little Roots, Big Harvest: Homesteading Together is a dynamic program that blends traditional homesteading skills with modern health, wellness, and safety practices. Through a combination of virtual sessions and in-person summer workshops, participants learn to grow food, raise animals, preserve food, and build sustainable systems — all rooted in research-based methods. The program also incorporates wellness practices such as mindful cooking, natural remedies, and stress reduction to support a balanced lifestyle. Expert instructors emphasize safety with guidance on tool use, animal care, and food handling, ensuring participants gain both practical skills and healthy living habits.

In 2025, the program engaged 132 virtual participants from across the state and 11 participants in hands-on workshops in Vernon County. Hands-on sessions included:

- Pressure canning
- Backyard insect exploration
- Homemade trellis construction
- Butter making
- Bread baking



Program: Cooking Matters Core

Cooking Matters empowers individuals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to prepare healthy recipes. Each session goes beyond cooking instruction to cover meal preparation, food safety, and nutrition. In 2025, the program was offered to youth at Truman Elementary School during the summer and at the Nevada Public Library, reaching a total of 120 participants.

Vernon County

Health and Human Sciences

Local Impact

Program: WHOLE You Challenge!

The *WHOLE YOU Challenge!* is a year-long mind, body, and spirit wellness initiative for individuals and families. In 2025, the program reached 118 participants statewide, offering monthly, participant-driven challenges that promote sustainable behavior change. The program strengthens healthy norms, builds individual and family capacity, and enhances home and community environments to make healthy choices easier and more routine.

By embedding wellness practices into daily schedules and family routines, the challenge supports systems-level change through increased access to practical strategies for movement, mindfulness, nutrition, and stress management. Participants reported improvements in accountability, awareness, and long-term habit formation:

- “The challenge made me stop and really think about changes that needed to be made in my life.”
- “The reminders and tips helped me prioritize health and movement for myself and my family.”
- “It encouraged me to slow down, be more present with my kids, and get outside more.”
- “I loved the monthly challenges because they weren’t just about exercise—they encouraged spending time outside, gardening, and connecting with family.”
- “I became more intentional about how I was living, and that increased my overall happiness.”
- “Even when I wasn’t consistent, I became more aware of simple ways to improve my health and well-being.”



Vernon County

Health and Human Sciences

Local Impact

SNAP-Ed

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.

9,498 direct and indirect contacts were made in Vernon 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.



Vernon County

Health and Human Sciences

Local Impact

EFNEP

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.

68 of these youth and adult participants reside in Vernon 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.



Vernon County

State Fair Farm Family

Justin and Charity Ogle and family of Nevada, MO were among the Missouri families honored at the 68th annual Missouri Farm Family Day on August 11 during the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia. The Ogle family was chosen as the Vernon County Missouri Farm Family by University of Missouri Extension and the Vernon County Farm Bureau. The family includes Avery, Lawson and Brooks Ogle.

