

EXTENSION TRENDS: **KOOTENAI COUNTY**

University of Idaho Extension, Kootenai County • www.uidaho.edu/kootenai



2023 By the Numbers

- 16,705 direct contacts
- 12,967 youth participants
- 52 volunteers
- 3,416 volunteer hours
- \$464,387 extramural funding

Our Advisory Council

Special thanks to our volunteers who help shape programming and inform the work we do for UI Extension in Kootenai County.

UI Extension Educators



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2023 Impact

FCS programs focus on nutrition, wellness and obesity prevention programs, strategies, and environmental changes. Eat Smart Idaho is a major program managed by UI Extension in Kootenai County and focuses efforts on access to healthier foods for low-income families. Programming includes direct education to low-income families and youth and policy, systems, and environmental change strategies centered around school cafeterias, healthy food pantries, healthy food drives, novel food exposure, and small space gardening. In 2023, FCS programs helped over 8,639 youth and adults establish healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle. Participants showed improvement in dietary knowledge and practices, food resource management, food safety, physical activity, and an improved sense of food security.

The Idaho Master Gardener Program provides horticulture education along with horticulture-based volunteer development. A total of 23 Idaho Master Gardener volunteers committed 2,686 total hours serving citizens through a Q&A hotline, demonstration garden, and teaching classes such as resilient landscapes, efficient and clean water, increasing the value of their property, and creating a healthy relationship with nature and our community. It is impossible to place a true dollar amount on the immeasurable contributions of the Idaho Master Gardener program. In 2023, the return on investment of the local program equates to \$85,415 through in-kind service.

There was a 50% increase in visits to the mobile Plant Clinic booth and online client questionnaire forms, allowing UI Extension to reach a wider audience that may not be able to visit the office during the week. Demand was met by expanding the Ask a Master Gardener booth into the community and by expanding class offerings in 2024.

With over 802 members in 32 clubs, youth participated in projects like livestock, pets, civic engagement, leadership, art, shooting sports, and more. With 171 adult volunteers and two AmeriCorps volunteers UI Extension was able to engage 10,513 youth in Kootenai and Shoshone counties.

A total of 324 forest owners, loggers and professional foresters attended UI Extension forestry programs held in Kootenai County in 2022-2023, including the Forestry Shortcourse, Current Topics in Forest Health, the Family Foresters Workshop, Backyard Forests, Landscaping for Fire Prevention, Logger Education to Advance Professionalism, and Identifying Idaho Trees. Many Kootenai County forest owners, loggers and foresters also attended programs held in adjacent panhandle counties. Thirteen Kootenai County forest owners are currently certified UI Extension volunteers with the Idaho Master Forest Stewards, who provided over 509 hours of volunteer service to over 1,027 forest owners and others in the Idaho Panhandle in 2022-2023.

4-H in Kootenai County

In 2023, UI Extension, Kootenai/Shoshone 4-H launched the 4-H STEM Learning Center. The center provides youth a maker's space with STEM enrichment programs using 4-H curriculum. This increased enrollment last year, reaching youth in more urban communities around the county. This has become an enrichment program for home-schooled kids in the community. Traditional youth programming was delivered to 4-H

club members throughout Kootenai and Shoshone County participating at the North Idaho State Fair. During the fair, 4-H members gave demonstrations for robotics and hosted games with the robots that the visiting public could participate in. Two judging teams attended the Idaho 4-H Dairy Contest in Nampa where both teams placed in the top five. 4-H members in also participated in national contests in horse bowl, public speaking and shooting sports.

A total of 84 youth participated in the weeklong Bee City USA camp through 4-H STEM Camp. Multigenerational Master Gardeners continued guiding youth in surveying bumble bee habitats, evaluating species present and in peril, safely capturing bees to photograph for identification, plant identification for nectar sources, and entering and comparing multi-year data in the final year of the PNW Bumble Bee Atlas Project.



In-person, hands-on labs were developed by volunteers with UI Extension oversight to strengthen volunteers' diagnostic skills and offer hands-on classes to the public. Thirteen topics were created by the team then taught to a focus group and Master Gardeners obtaining CEU credits. These lab activities have become part of the 4-H STEM Learning Center curriculum, allowing Master Gardeners or STEM Center staff to instruct classes for youth and accompanying adults in new and engaging ways. All volunteers were reinvigorated through these activities.

On the Horizon

In 2023 the 4-H program piloted an overnight STEM camp offered to youth ages 8-13. Plans are in place to host this camp again in 2024 with emphasis in STEM activities and STEM based careers in agriculture.

Low-income children in Idaho are affected with high rates of food insecurity and obesity placing them at risk for poor health outcomes. Diets that are rich in fruit and vegetable intake are associated with many health benefits, including obesity. However, Idaho youth do not consume the nationally recommended amounts of fruits or vegetables each day. Research shows consumption is low because children often will not try foods they are unfamiliar with, in particular vegetables. Additionally, low-income families will not spend their limited food dollars on foods they are unsure their children will eat. One way to increase fruit and vegetable

purchases by low-income households is to introduce fruits and vegetables to youth during the school day with taste tests. The Eat Smart Idaho team has offered fruit/vegetable exposures during the school day in the elementary school setting since 2022, focused on the middle school setting in 2023, and plans on introducing students in the alternative high school setting next. The team will publish the protocol of how to successfully offer this concept to school age children and will pursue a scholarly journal article on novel food exposure.

Native beekeeping, native pollinators and techniques beyond organic practices have been the most popular outreach subjects in 2023 and will expand in 2024.

To align with the 50% increase in Plant Clinic visits and online questionnaires, UI Extension developed an asynchronous plan in collaboration with North Carolina State University and Top Hat to certify volunteers and provide an advanced certification course to professionals and the public as a pilot in 2021-22. This new Master Gardener/Extension Gardener curriculum delivery uses an engaging platform and could create a revenue stream for the program in Kootenai County. Work spent refining the course prior to a full release will allow future certification years to accept professionals in the green industry to take the course to further develop their skills in horticulture alongside UI Extension and acquire a professional Green Certificate in the process. This strategy could address public demand for certification, increase accessibility to a wider audience, and decrease demand on staff and faculty across the northern part of the state.

