

# EXTENSION TRENDS: **KOOTENAI COUNTY**

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## 2024 By the Numbers

- 18,141 direct contacts
- 12,202 youth participants
- 44 volunteers
- 6,120 volunteer hours
- \$287,205 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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## 2024 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 on access to healthier foods for low-income families. Programming includes direct education and policy, systems and environmental change strategies centered around school cafeterias, healthy food pantries and drives, novel food exposure, soccer for success, healthy role models, and small space gardening. In 2024, FCS programs helped 14,121 youth and adults establish healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle. Participants showed improvement in dietary knowledge and practices, food resource management, food safety, physical activity and an improved sense of food security. Program results include 80% of youth improving their abilities to choose foods according to dietary recommendations; 57% of youth using safe food handling practices more often; 43% of youth improving their physical activity practices; and 51% of youth improving their ability to prepare simple, nutritious, affordable food. Results for adult participants include 93% will making a positive intent to change a diet quality practice; 100% making a positive intent to change a food resource management practice; and 89% making a positive intent to change physical activity habits.

A total of 447 forest owners, loggers and professional foresters attended UI Extension forestry programs held in Kootenai County in 2023-2024, including the Forestry Shortcourse, Current Topics in Forest Health, the Family Foresters Workshop, Logger Education to Advance Professionalism Update, Map and Compass for Forestry, Identifying Idaho Trees, Logger Education to Advance Professionalism, 10 Acres and a Dream, Thinning and Pruning Field Day, and the Forest Insect and Disease Field Day. Many Kootenai County forest owners, loggers and foresters also attended programs held in adjacent panhandle counties. Fifteen Kootenai County forest owners are currently certified UI Extension volunteers with the Idaho Master Forest Stewards, who provided over 750 hours of volunteer service to 1,867 forest owners and others in northern Idaho in 2023-2024.

The Idaho Master Gardener program provides horticulture education and horticulture-based volunteer development. A total of 44 Master Gardener volunteers dedicated 6,120 total hours to residents of Kootenai County through the Q&A hotline, Plant Clinic, demonstration garden, and educational classes about resilient landscapes, efficient and clean water, increasing the value of each property, and creating a healthy relationship with nature and the community. In 2024, the return on investment of the program equates to \$194,609 through in-kind services. These services not only provide free or low-cost classes, but easy DIY instructions on subjects about growing food, supporting the soil food web and exploring new skills. Volunteers also provide a free diagnostic lab to help with insect, disease and plant identification. The Plant Clinic served 3,000 clients in 2024. The program saw a 52% increase in visits to the Plant Clinic, pop-up booths and online client questionnaire. A total of 1,436 community members attended educational classes in 2024. Of those in attendance, 519 were adults attending the Growing in Northern Idaho class series which focuses on the uniqueness of the local climate. Hands-on labs were held to strengthen diagnostic skills and supplement a new online course. These create a multigenerational learning opportunity

between Master Gardeners, area schools and 4-H STEM Center youth participants. A total of 225 4-H youth gained knowledge and wisdom alongside volunteers. Youth then transferred this knowledge, creating in-ground gardens, building and utilizing hydroponic gardens, competing in the North Idaho State Fair, and solving challenges for the Invent Idaho competition. This program is led by Kara Carleton and assistant Merry Ruth Dingman. Carleton is funded part-time and Dingman is funded quarter-time through funds raised with outreach programs and classes.



## 4-H in Kootenai County

Educator Shelly Johnson introduced the obesity prevention program Soccer for Success to Kootenai County, with support from UI Extension 4-H Youth Development and Eat Smart Idaho. Soccer for Success encourages health, fitness and positive life skills in youth, with a focus on underserved communities. The program combines physical activity with education on nutrition and healthy lifestyles to help prevent childhood obesity and foster personal growth. Two lead coach mentors and two support coach mentors were hired to provide educational content. All participants received take-home equipment. A total of 140 youth participated in the program and among youth in 3-5th grade, 84% reported choosing foods that align with federal dietary recommendations; 42% practiced safe food handling more frequently; and 53% improved their physical activity habits. One comment from a site manager: "Thank you for coming this summer and giving so much to our kids, your time and your amazing coaches were phenomenal. And all the take home equipment...sometimes our kids are just forgotten about and this summer they really felt like they were a part of something important."

Traditional 4-H programming for Kootenai/Shoshone 4-H included 10 county level contest events, not including the county fair, 18 youth attending a state level contest, one youth attending the national shooting sports competition, one youth attending the All-American Quarter Horse Congress and approximately 500 youth participating in the North Idaho State Fair.

The 4-H STEM program offered 527 classes and facilitated activities where 5,347 youth attended. Enrichment classes are attended by youth in the community that are not traditional 4-H members. They often live inside city limits and participate in programs such as robotics, 3-D printing, computer classes, engineering and design, and many

other topic areas not normally associated with 4-H. Youth participating in STEM program are also engaged in group activities where they share a sense of belonging and are learning from an adult mentor.

## On the Horizon

Johnson collaborated with health teacher Tony Hook and nutrition services lead Valerie Martin at Venture High School to ensure nutrition education and life skills were made accessible to students after the loss of the school's FCS teacher. Together, they designed a three-week program offered each trimester that included nutrition education and hands-on cooking skills. Each three-week session concluded with a well-organized Exhibit Night, where Venture students showcased their scratch-made recipes, sharing them with parents and peers. Additionally, the Eat Smart Idaho program tested having a college athlete visit local elementary schools who once had strong ties to the Coeur d'Alene community. Research suggests social factors are related to increased physical activity amongst youth such as a healthy role model. The college quarterback emphasized the importance of physical activity, guiding students through football drills that included flag-pulling games in the gym and outdoor throwing practice. At the end of each session, the quarterback threw long passes in true quarterback style, giving each student a chance to sprint down the field to catch a pass—a thrilling highlight for everyone involved. Both programs will continue in 2025.

The 2025 youth product project lead by Madison Sotin will provide youth with immersive cattle industry experiences. The project offers real-world, hands-on experience that demonstrates potential future career paths within the cattle industry. Partnerships with the Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center and Vandal Brand Meats, and focused educational sessions with national cattle marketing experts, are integrated learning highlights for participating 4-H youth. The Kootenai/Shoshone 4-H program will be hosting the 2025 Idaho 4-H Shooting Sports Contest and will see 4-H members and families from across the state in attendance. A STEM camp will be held in July, designed to spark an interest in STEM through fun activities and introduce youth to careers using technology in agriculture. The STEM program will also participate in Ag Robotics, a program using Lego Spike Prime robots and challenging youth to a real-life situation in agriculture.

