

Outcomes & Impact Quarterly – Fall Issue 2025

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Outcomes & Impact Quarterly Fall Issue 2025



As we continue our mission to serve Utah's communities, this edition highlights the innovative and impactful work being done across the state. From advancing agricultural programming and expanding college access for rural youth, to strengthening financial resilience and improving food education, our teams are addressing real challenges with practical solutions. We're also spotlighting efforts to evaluate regional summits and deliver critical health trainings throughout Utah. These stories reflect our commitment to education and empowerment, core values that guide our work every day.

Sincerely,

Kenneth L. White

Vice President of Statewide Enterprise
USU Extension and Statewide Campuses

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Pathways to Higher Education: Expanding College and Career Access for Rural Youth

Kelsey Romney, Celina Wille, Maria Jose Velasco Burgos, and Ryan Benally



Rural youth in Utah face limited exposure to college environments, fewer academic resources, and less access to guidance counselors—factors that reduce postsecondary enrollment and career readiness. In areas like Grand and San Juan Counties, geographic isolation and lower socioeconomic status create additional barriers for first-generation students who may not see college as attainable.

To address this gap, Utah State University Extension launched Pathways to Higher Education, a two-day immersive event in June 2025. The program brought 31 rural youth from southeastern Utah to USU's Moab, Price, and Logan campuses for interactive workshops, hands-on career experiences, and financial aid sessions. Using USU's CUBE model—Connect, Unite, Build, Engage—the program partnered with community health workers and local stakeholders to build trust with families and increase participation among underrepresented youth.

The impact was substantial. Youth reported increased understanding of application steps, financial aid, and career pathways, with especially strong gains among 9th–10th graders. Hands-on activities like veterinary suturing and food science experiments further boosted engagement and enthusiasm.

By connecting rural youth directly with college experiences, Pathways to Higher Education helped break down informational and social barriers to postsecondary access. The program continues to expand mentorship, internships, and follow-up support, strengthening Utah's rural workforce pipeline and future economic resilience.

- **90%** of participants reported greater confidence in applying for college and scholarships.
- **94%** would recommend the event to peers.
- **100%** of high school participants expressed interest in pursuing college.

Evaluating Online Naloxone Trainings Targeting Rural and Tribal Communities

Cara Murray, Lily Ward, Tim Keady, and Cris Meier

Rural and tribal Utah communities face some of the highest overdose death rates in the state, driven by rising fentanyl use and limited access to treatment and prevention services. To address these gaps, Utah State University Extension developed an online Naloxone training designed to equip community members with life-saving skills and reduce stigma surrounding opioid use. Originally offered in person, the program shifted online in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve accessibility for remote populations.

The single-session training covers how to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose, safely administer Naloxone, and take next steps after administration. Participants also receive free Naloxone kits by mail. Between November 2022 and April 2023, 37 participants from rural and tribal areas completed the virtual program. Among those who completed pre- and post-surveys (n = 26), nearly half identified as Native American.

Findings demonstrate that online Naloxone education effectively increases preparedness and confidence in rural and tribal settings. Building on this success, USU Extension continues to expand overdose prevention efforts through in-person and virtual trainings, local opioid symposiums, and community partnerships aimed at reducing stigma, promoting recovery, and saving lives statewide.

Survey Results

- **100%** of participants correctly understood that one cannot overdose on Naloxone (up from 58% pre-training)
- **96%** expressed willingness to participate in future projects.
- All participants said they could obtain Naloxone in their community.

From Insight to Action: Advancing Extension Programming for Utah Agriculture

Melanie Heaton, Cheyenne Reid, Reganne Briggs, Rebekah Iverson, Kara Thorton-Kurth, and Brooke Holgate

Although women now make up 37% of Utah's agricultural producers, they remain underrepresented in Utah State University Extension programs designed to support farm and ranch management. In 2024, only 19% of participants in Range Livestock programs and fewer than 12% in Agriculture Crop Schools were women—revealing persistent gender gaps in access to educational opportunities that could strengthen confidence and profitability.

To address this disparity, USU launched the Utah Voices in Agriculture initiative, guided by a statewide needs assessment of women producers. In response to survey findings from 91 participants, two programs were developed: Ag Nights evening events highlighting successful women in agriculture and a hands-on Cattle “Boot” Camp focused on livestock handling, communication, and beef quality. Together, these events reached more than 80 participants from Utah and surrounding states.

Evaluations showed strong outcomes. Participants emphasized the value of community, mentorship, and confidence gained through practical, peer-supported learning.

By fostering skill development these programs demonstrated that targeted, hands-on education can empower participants, strengthen Utah's agricultural workforce, and enhance long-term sustainability across the state's farming and ranching communities.

Participants rated program quality at 4.8/5 stars

- **39%** planned to implement new management practices.
- **95%** rated the experience as very good or exceptional.
- **85%** intended to apply skills in cattle handling, marketing, and herd health.

Evaluating the “What’s Up Down South” Economic Summit:

Accelerating Growth and Expanding Impact

Paul A. Hill



Southern Utah's rapid economic expansion has created both opportunity and challenge for business and community leaders seeking reliable data and collaboration. Yet as industries evolve and populations grow, many regional decision-makers lack accessible, research-based insights to guide planning and innovation. To meet this need, Utah State University Extension partnered with regional stakeholders to strengthen the What's Up Down South Economic Summit, a premier annual event designed to connect leaders, share data-driven trends, and accelerate regional growth.

Informed by two years of prior evaluations, the 2025 summit implemented targeted improvements: diversifying the planning committee, refining marketing to reach younger professionals, and shortening the program to foster networking. Sessions on artificial intelligence, workforce culture, and local manufacturing earned the highest evaluations.

These outcomes demonstrate that systematic evaluation and responsive program design can transform feedback into tangible impact. The summit not only delivers critical economic insights but also builds social capital to unite business, government, and education leaders in shaping Utah's economic future. USU Extension's leadership ensures the event remains a trusted, evidence-based platform for advancing innovation, collaboration, and sustainable growth across the region.

- **46%** increase in attendance, drawing 1,180 participants from across Utah and neighboring states.
- **87%** rated the experience as very good or exceptional.
- **77%** reporting they would apply what they learned to organizational decision-making.
- **38%** rise in sponsorship revenue to \$272,000 reflecting increased community investment.

Building Financial Resilience in Utah: The Outcomes of the Empowering Financial Wellness Program

Amanda H. Christensen, Melanie D. Jewkes, Andrea Schmutz, and Lendel Narine

Utahns are facing increasing financial strain as inflation, housing costs, and high debt levels outpace wage growth. Since 2021, Utah's inflation rate has risen by 21.8%, and households now need over \$1,200 more per month to maintain their previous standard of living. Compounding this, Utahns carry 30% more debt than the national average, and over one-third of Americans report they could not cover a \$400 emergency without borrowing. Despite these challenges, many Utahns are unaware of trusted, research-based financial education resources.

To strengthen financial resilience statewide, Utah State University Extension launched the Empowering Financial Wellness (EFW) program in partnership with the Utah Department of Workforce Services. The program delivers evidence-based personal finance education through online courses, webinars, and in-person workshops taught by Accredited Financial Counselors and Extension faculty. Between 2020 and 2025, EFW offered more than 750 classes, reaching 26,000 Utahns, including women, educators, and low-income residents across both rural and urban counties.

Participants reported paying off debt, starting emergency funds, and gaining confidence in money management. Educators also increased their capacity to teach financial skills to clients.

By combining practical education with community partnerships, EFW empowers Utahns to navigate economic challenges, reduce debt, and build lasting financial security—strengthening both individual and statewide economic well-being.

After going through the program:

- **97%** of participants improved their financial literacy
- **91%** planned to make positive changes
- **68%** showed improved financial stability within four months

The NourishEd Initiative: Lessons from a Pilot Program on Food Access and Education

Palak Gupta, Cara Murray, Cindy Jenkins, Kristi Strongo, Macey Bunn, Lea Palmer, and Heidi LeBlanc

Food insecurity remains a pressing issue in Utah. To address this, Utah State University's Hunger Solutions Institute launched the NourishEd program in 2023, a pilot initiative that combines nutrition education, community partnerships, and fresh produce distribution to improve food access and literacy. Originally proposed at the student-led "NourishTank" competition, the idea evolved into a collaborative pilot between the Hunger Solutions Institute, USU Extension's Create Better Health (CBH) program, and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA).

The pilot took place in the Provo School District, targeting elementary-aged children and their families. NourishEd classes drew from CBH's USDA MyPlate-aligned curriculum and paired each lesson with a seven-pound box of fresh, locally sourced produce and simple recipes. Due to low enrollment, the program shifted from a classroom-based model to a produce distribution approach, engaging school counselors and social workers to distribute 116 produce bags to families across six elementary schools.

The NourishEd pilot demonstrated that combining local produce distribution with nutrition education can strengthen community engagement and improve food access. Looking ahead, the program plans to expand educational components, refine volunteer training, and build new partnerships (e.g., with the Boys & Girls Club) to increase reach and sustainability. By integrating food access with practical nutrition education, NourishEd seeks to create lasting improvements in both food security and community health across Utah.

Fresh fruits, root vegetables, and salad vegetables were the most preferred items. Additionally, high school volunteers who helped assemble and distribute produce reported increased awareness of food insecurity, gratitude for their own food access, and enthusiasm for continued service.

Survey results showed strong outcomes:

- **91%** of participants planned to use the produce provided.
- **88%** were satisfied with the quality and variety of the produce.

One in eight residents struggle to access adequate food.



INTRODUCTION

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