

Outcomes & Impact Quarterly – Winter Issue 2025-26

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Utah State University Extension continues to deliver practical, research-based solutions that strengthen communities across Utah. From improving nutrition and community well-being to strengthening vaccine confidence, fostering youth leadership, and opening new economic pathways through digital commerce, our programs reflect a shared commitment to well-being and resilience. These efforts aren't just initiatives; they're lifelines that help families thrive, and communities grow stronger.

This report reflects the breadth of our work and the depth of our commitment to Utah State University's land-grant mission to serve people where they live, work, and raise their families.

Sincerely,

Kenneth L. White

Vice President of Statewide Enterprise
USU Extension and Statewide Campuses

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E-commerce Extension Program in Rural Utah

Amanda D. Ali, Paul Hill



Small businesses in rural Utah often face economic instability due to limited local markets, seasonal demand, and restricted access to business development resources. These challenges reduce opportunities for revenue growth and economic diversification, particularly for agricultural operations and place-based businesses. Statewide needs assessments have identified increasing farm and small business profitability as a priority for rural communities, underscoring the importance of strategies that expand market access and strengthen local economies.

To address this need, Utah State University Extension implemented the E-commerce Accelerator (ECA), a six-week mentoring service funded by the Utah Legislature as a three-year pilot program. Delivered through weekly one-on-one consultations and support, the program helped rural agricultural and small business owners develop and implement customized e-commerce strategies. Participants received tailored guidance in website development, online marketing, search engine optimization, and customer relationship management, enabling them to create functional online sales platforms aligned with their business goals.

Results indicate that targeted, hands-on e-commerce mentoring can generate meaningful economic benefits for rural communities. By enabling businesses to sell directly to consumers, the ECA program supports revenue diversification, reduces reliance on intermediaries, and

helps retain profits within local economies. As rural businesses continue to face market access challenges, Extension-led e-commerce education offers a scalable, evidence-based approach to strengthening economic resilience and supporting long-term rural vitality across Utah.

2025 Program Results

- **45** businesses participated and launched new e-commerce websites.
- **85%** reported increased confidence in implementing an e-commerce strategy.
- **81%** reported improved skills.
- **93%** indicated intentions to continue using their online sales platforms.
- **80%** reported increased sales revenue of over \$1 million generated through their e-commerce websites.

Sustaining Community Health Through Impactful SNAP-Ed Initiatives in Utah

LaCee Jimenez, Kristi Strongo, Lea Palmer, Lendel K. Narine, Heidi LeBlanc

Food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease continue to affect many Utah households, particularly among low-income families. Statewide data show that one in eight Utahns and nearly one in six children experience food insecurity, while rates of obesity and diabetes remain significant contributors to poor health outcomes. Limited financial resources, transportation barriers, and reduced access to affordable, nutritious foods further exacerbate these challenges, underscoring the need for comprehensive, community-based nutrition education and food access strategies.

Create Better Health (CBH), Utah State University Extension's SNAP-Ed program, addresses these needs through a statewide, evidence-based approach that combines direct nutrition education, policy, systems, and environmental/infrastructure changes (PSE) initiatives, and social marketing. From October 2024 to September 2025, CBH delivered in-person and online education to youth and adults while implementing PSE projects such as community gardens, food pantry partnerships, and local food donation efforts. Targeted outreach engaged diverse populations, including older adults, individuals with developmental disabilities, refugee communities, and Spanish-speaking families. Social

marketing campaigns reinforced education messages and PSE changes.

These findings indicate that CBH's combination of skill-based education, supportive food environments, and consistent health messaging promotes long-term behavior change and improved food security. As SNAP-Ed funding faces increasing constraints, CBH's data-driven, partnership-based model offers a scalable approach for sustaining nutrition education and strengthening community health across Utah.

Create Better Health in 2025

- **13,503** Utahns educated.
- **81,898** people reached in policy, systems, and environmental interventions.
- **>1.2 Million** social marketing impressions generated.

Participants reported intentions to:

- Use food resource management skills.
- Choose foods based on MyPlate recommendations.
- Use Nutrition Facts labels.
- Recommend CBH classes to others.
- Increase fruit and vegetable intake.
- Increase physical activity.

Enhancing Personal Safety Through Self-Defense

Stephanie Carlson, Naomi Brower, Aaron Hunt



Violent crime continues to pose serious physical, emotional, and economic consequences for individuals and communities across the United States. National data indicate that approximately one in three Americans has experienced violent crime in the past decade, contributing to long-term trauma and an estimated \$2.6 trillion in annual societal costs. These impacts underscore the need for accessible, preventive strategies that strengthen personal safety, resilience, and confidence while reducing fear and vulnerability.

In response, Utah State University Extension faculty developed the Empower Yourself Through Self-Defense program in 2024 in partnership with martial arts professionals. The program delivers a 90-minute, in-person training designed to equip participants with knowledge of situational awareness, conflict avoidance, and practical self-defense skills. Each workshop includes guided instruction and hands-on practice in striking, blocking, escape techniques, and decision-making under pressure. To ensure safety and relevance, the curriculum was reviewed by a domestic violence support professional and evaluated by martial arts experts. The program is open to all individuals and is intended to serve as a foundational self-defense course.

These findings demonstrate that brief, skills-based self-defense education can produce meaningful improvements in confidence, knowledge, and perceived personal safety. By empowering individuals with practical prevention and response tools, the program contributes to safer communities and supports long-term behavioral change. Expanding and adapting the program to reach broader and more diverse audiences, including youth and older adults, offers a scalable, evidence-based opportunity for Extension to continue strengthening personal safety and community resilience statewide.

- **>737** participants.
- **26** workshop locations statewide.

Participants reported gains in:

- Knowing actions to take during a confrontation.
- Ways to avoid becoming a victim.
- Identifying effective self-defense targets.
- Intentions to apply learned strategies.
- Preparedness and reduced fear following the training.

Pilot Results of Teens Lifting Teens: A Statewide Youth Development Program

Megan Hall, Vernon Parent, Cris Meier, Kaitlyn Line



Youth mental health and suicide prevention remain critical concerns in Utah communities. Recent statewide data show increasing rates of depressive symptoms, antisocial behaviors, and other risk factors among adolescents, trends that have intensified since 2019. Research indicates that weakened social connections, reduced resilience, and limited access to supportive relationships contribute to these outcomes, highlighting the need for youth development programming that strengthens protective factors and promotes positive engagement.

To address this need, Utah State University Extension developed and piloted the Teens Lifting Teens (TLT) program, a cohort-based model designed to support existing youth councils across Utah. The program provides advisor training, youth leadership education, near-peer mentoring, and service-learning opportunities aimed at fostering youth empowerment and community connection. TLT partners with organizations such as 4-H clubs, youth city councils, health department youth coalitions, libraries, and homeschool cohorts. Advisors receive training and resources to integrate evidence-based youth development practices, while youth participate in statewide and regional leadership trainings and are encouraged to mentor and serve vulnerable youth in their communities.

Findings from the TLT pilot demonstrate that youth-led, service- and mentoring-focused programming can meaningfully increase protective factors linked to positive youth development. Advisors reported that emphasizing youth leadership strengthened both youth competence and confidence, while statewide networking events fostered a broader sense of belonging among participants. With structured curricula, advisor training materials, and evaluation tools already in place, the TLT model shows strong potential for scalability across youth-serving programs statewide. By promoting connection, leadership, and purpose, Teens Lifting Teens offers an evidence-based approach to supporting youth mental health and building resilient future leaders in Utah communities.

- **106** mentoring events.
- **4,778** youth taught.

Participants saw improvements in:

- Leadership skills
- Teamwork
- Project planning
- Confidence
- Purpose
- Community engagement
- Life skills

Enhancing Vaccine Confidence and Uptake in Rural Utah

Aaron Hunt, Yvette Rea, Annalyz Castro

Vaccination remains one of the most effective public health strategies for preventing illness and death, yet vaccination rates in many rural Utah counties remain below state and national recommendations. Limited healthcare access, transportation barriers, and widespread misinformation contribute to vaccine hesitancy, increasing the risk of prevent-able disease outbreaks and adverse health outcomes for vulnerable populations. Recent measles outbreaks in Utah highlight the urgency of addressing vaccine con#dence and access, particularly in rural communities where health systems face additional strain.

In response, Utah State University Extension launched the TriCounty Vaccine Improve-ment Program (TC-VIP) in June 2023 to strengthen vaccine con#dence and uptake in Duchesne, Uintah, and Daggett counties. TC-VIP implemented a coordinated, multi-com-ponent approach that combined bilingual community outreach, culturally responsive health communication, and workforce training. Program activities included social media campaigns, educational materials, and health fairs offering on-site vaccination, along with professional trainings in motivational interviewing and neuromarketing. These evidence-based strategies were designed to address both access barriers and communi-cation challenges while building trust among rural residents and equipping profession-als with practical tools to engage vaccine-hesitant individuals.

Findings indicate that integrated outreach and workforce training can effectively strengthen vaccine con#dence and communication capacity in rural communities. By addressing both public awareness and provider skill development, TC-VIP reduced key barriers to vaccination and expanded the reach of accurate, culturally responsive health information. The program offers a replicable model for rural vaccine con#dence initia-tives that can help prevent costly outbreaks, protect vulnerable populations, and strengthen long-term public health resilience across Utah.

2025 Program Results

National Immunization Awareness Month social media campaign:

- >403,000 impressions.

Vaccination event promotion:

- ~90,000 individuals reached.

Motivational interviewing training:

- 90% of participants indicating they were likely to apply the techniques in future work.

Community Needs in the Tri-County Area of Rural Utah

Cara Murray, Yvette Rea, Lendel Narine



Understanding community priorities is essential for delivering Utah State University Extension programming that is responsive, relevant, and impactful. In rural Utah, residents face evolving challenges related to mental health, family well-being, #nancial stability, and emergency preparedness. To ensure that programs align with local needs, USU Extension conducted a formal needs assessment in the Tri-County area of Uintah, Duchesne, and Daggett counties, regions characterized by geographic isolation, limited service access, and diverse community contexts.

USU Extension implemented a three-phase needs assessment framework that incorpo-rated secondary data review, stakeholder interviews, and a community survey. The #nal phase focused on gathering direct input from residents through a Qualtrics survey distributed with support from local partners. Responses from 184 community members were analyzed using the Ranked Discrepancy Model, which compares perceived importance and access to identify unmet needs. This approach allowed Extension to system-atically identify priority issues

while examining differences across counties, age groups, and parental status.

These findings provide clear guidance for Extension programming and resource allocation in the Tri-County area. By identifying shared and subgroup-specific priorities, the assessment supports targeted program development in relationship education, mental health awareness, financial literacy, emergency preparedness, and entrepreneurship. The results also highlight opportunities to expand hybrid delivery models and digital communication strategies to increase participation. This needs assessment establishes a data-driven foundation for Extension to strengthen partnerships, tailor educational offerings, and enhance long-term community well-being across rural northeastern Utah.

Priority Topics

- Strengthening relationships
- Financial literacy
- Mental health
- Emergency preparedness
- Entrepreneurship



INTRODUCTION

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