

JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE FOOD AGRICULTURE NUTRITION INNOVATION CENTER

QUARTERLY SUMMARY
2025 MAY-AUGUST



THE JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE
FOOD AGRICULTURE NUTRITION
INNOVATION CENTER



Partners in Collaboration



Lansdowne UP



DONALD DANFORTH
PLANT SCIENCE CENTER



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN





Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation Campus Update

By November 2025, most of Phase 1 construction of the Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation JJK FAN campus will be complete—marking a transformational moment!

Spanning 80 acres, this first phase delivers:

- A 24,000-square-foot innovation center with classrooms, labs, a teaching kitchen, maker space, and media hub
- Multi-sport and baseball fields, plus a football field for youth and community play
- Campus pavilion for shade, outdoor learning, and gatherings

Starting January 2026, the innovation center will be open as a hub for education and community programming—where K-12 youth, families, and innovators will learn, grow, and build skills that create lasting opportunity.

The countdown is on!

JJK FAN at a Glance

May-August



672 unique K-12 students, with 80% of participants receiving series-based lessons



148 interactive agtech, food, and nutrition lessons provided over eight weeks



1,300+ pounds of produce grown and distributed



235 volunteers contributed a total of **737** hours





First-Time Fair, Lifelong Confidence

This summer marked a powerful milestone—for the first time ever, students from the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation proudly presented at the St. Clair County Fair!

With delicious baked goods, our students showcased not just their skills, but the JJK Winning in Life principles confidence, dedication, and courage. Their hard work paid off with blue ribbons and big smiles! Huge thanks to Illinois Extension Educator Grace Margherio, whose guidance and encouragement helped these young leaders grow far beyond the kitchen. This was more than a project—it was about expanding horizons and opening doors.

Extension By the Numbers



416 K-12 students participated in series-based lessons



\$487 raised in 4-H youth-led summer farmers market

Seed to Table Camp: Growing Skills, Changing Tastes

For the third year, Extension's Seed to Table Camp was a highlight of summer learning at the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation. Students spend mornings in the garden planting, harvesting, and exploring with 4-H, then head to the kitchen where Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) staff help them turn fresh produce into delicious meals.

"This is my favorite thing I've done all summer!" shared one 9-year-old camper. Another proudly said, "I told my mom everything I learned." These voices capture the spirit of Seed to Table: fun, hands-on learning that inspires lasting habits.

By the numbers:

- 87% want to cook at home more often
- 82% say agriculture is important
- 78% are excited about JJK growing spaces
- 75% are more willing to try new vegetables





When Purpose Meets Partnership

When purpose meets partnership, powerful things happen. This summer, Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation youth proudly sold produce and 4-H baked goods at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center Community Market—a small table representing a big story of collaboration, growth, and youth leadership. From harvesting crops to preparing for the 4-H County Fair, these young leaders showed community in action with all four JJK FAN organizations working together to make this happen!

From Classroom to Community



Farmers Market Carts Take Root

This August, farmers market carts, crafted by talented students at Southwestern Illinois College as part of the Illinois Works Construction Trades Pre-Apprenticeship Program, arrived at their new home in ... the future JJK FAN Farmers Market!

A huge thank you to Lansdowne UP top-notch moving team for ensuring the important carts' safe delivery. Soon, they will be filled with fresh JJK FAN produce and delicious food products created by local entrepreneurs who completed the Illinois Extension Cottage Food Entrepreneurship Program.



Celebrating Our First Graduates!

This summer, seven entrepreneurs graduated from the inaugural Nourish East St. Louis Cottage Foods Training Program. Guided by Illinois Extension, participants completed courses in Food Safety, Food Manager Certification, Nutrition Education, and Cottage Food Regulations, all while working alongside a St. Louis SCORE entrepreneur mentor.

Starting this fall, these graduates will bring their homemade creations to the JJK FAN Farmers Market, turning knowledge into opportunity and passion into community impact.



Donald Danforth Plant Science Center at JJK FAN



255 unique youth (670 total experiences)

48 hands-on science lessons

This summer JJK FAN demonstrated that when learning is hands-on, science becomes unforgettable! Students didn't just study plants and technology—they see themselves in the future of science, agriculture, and innovation. Together, the Danforth Plant Science Center and JJK FAN partners are planting seeds of possibility.

From an elementary student marveling, "Was the baby plant hiding in there the whole time?" to a middle schooler proclaiming, "I really want to be a pilot now!"—these moments show how powerful hands-on science can be.

**Jackie Joyner-Kersee
Foundation (137 youth K-9)**

Planting, harvesting lettuce, building seed bombs, and growing confidence

**Avant Elementary
(44 K-6 students)**

Discovering "baby plants in seeds" through dissection and planting

**Lansdowne UP RISE UP Program
(30 high school students)**

Diving deep into pest identification, tree measurement, and environmental science

**Boeing STEM Camp
(25 middle school students)**

Learning geospatial mapping and flying drones, logging 28 hours of flight time

**Wyvetter Young School of
Excellence (13 5th-6th graders)**

Creating nature journals and exploring their schoolyard ecosystem

**Hydroponics Leaders
6 middle school students**

Leading the way in experimenting with hydroponic planting and food safety

- 726 plants grown
- 148 nature journals created
- 56 seed bombs made
- 7 birdhouse built and installed

84% of youth said activities were fun!

95% gained new knowledge from their experiences

Planting Seeds of Opportunity: Danforth Center Internships



The fourth cohort of the JJK FAN internship with the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center funded by Boeing brought together four remarkable students—two returning, two new—who blended research, leadership, and community.

Interns worked side by side with Danforth Center scientists and Extension educators on projects ranging from root analysis and nutrition curriculum to food waste studies and landscape design for the future JJK FAN campus. Along the way they participated in 16 field trips that exposed them to career pathways while learning professional lab skills, cutting-edge imaging tools, and strategies to improve food access.

Growth & Inspiration

- Kareemah (second year): “I took more responsibility mentoring new interns. Dr. Lemon’s design project inspired me to pursue interior design.”
- Grace (first year): “The internship showed me how plant science connects to so many careers.”
- Heaven (first year): “It pushed me out of my comfort zone and connected me to the community.”
- Tarell (second year): “The most valuable part was the resources and support—opportunities that strengthened my résumé and leadership skills.”

Why It Matters

This internship is a pathway for future changemakers—building technical expertise, confidence, and pathways for East St. Louis youth to thrive in agriculture and STEAM careers.

Lifelong Impact

Former intern Zhakeya Hawkins advanced to the prestigious Danforth Center undergraduate FLIPPS NSF REU program this summer after being a JJK FAN intern in 2024.

“Thanks to the JJK FAN High School Internship for providing me a strong foundation to learn and grow on my plant science pathway” — Zhakeya Hawkins

“JJK FAN interns are bright, polite, and engaged—teaching them cutting-edge tools while watching them draw real conclusions excites me for the future of science.”
— Dr. Katie Murphy, PhD, Director of Phenotyping Core Facility, Danforth Center

Growing Something Powerful: Agriculture Team in Action



Impact at a Glance

1,300+ pounds of produce
grown and shared

20 raised beds and 7 farmers
market stands built

2 new systems coming online



The JJK FAN agriculture team through Lansdowne UP and the Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation continues to transform vision into reality, where food production, education, and community impact intersect. This summer marked a season of growth—not just in the soil, but in the partnerships and infrastructure that will define the long-term future of the Jackie Joyner-Kersee campus. This summer Lansdowne UP and JJK Foundation staff have laid critical groundwork for the future.



Innovation in Food Safety – Partnered with Tardis Construction to design and install a one-of-a-kind freight container wash/pack/cool system, ensuring produce is cleaned, packaged, and stored safely. This would not be possible if not for the collective work between the Lansdowne UP Grow Team and the JJK Foundation urban ag manager and chief facilities officer.



Aquaponics Expansion – In collaboration with Lincoln University of Missouri and Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, we made progress in getting our decoupled aquaponic system online and launched construction of its attached greenhouse—pioneering new models for sustainable food production.



Greenhouse Growing – Actively cultivating in our 11,000-square-foot passive solar greenhouse, we grew and harvested 1,300+ pounds of fresh produce while working to modify the system to St. Louis weather and extending learning into an adjacent market garden.

It Takes a Village: Building Futures Through RISE UP



Preparing Young Men for Success

We believe that it truly takes a village to raise, support, and prepare the next generation. That philosophy comes to life through our collaboration with Lansdowne UP's RISE UP Workforce Internship Program—an intensive, eight-week summer experience for high school students in East St. Louis.

Each summer, 30 young men rotate through hands-on experiences in construction, landscaping, clean-up, and agriculture. Beyond daily work, they build critical job preparedness—gaining life skills, work readiness, and spiritual growth. Through workshops, career exposure, and guest speakers, youth are equipped for personal and professional success.

Summer highlights with JJK FAN included:

- A field trip to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) to explore food science, sustainable farming, and campus life.
- A hands-on design studio led by Dr. Kelley Lemon, UIUC assistant professor of landscape architecture, which tied directly into community tree-planting efforts.
- Donald Danforth Plant Science Center – Lessons in agricultural pest management and building birdhouses.
- Illinois Extension (EFNEP) – Weekly cooking and nutrition classes across all eight weeks.
- Lansdowne UP interns built over 20 new raised beds for the JJK FAN campus.

Collaboration in Action

Together, these efforts nurture East St. Louis' future leaders while exposing youth to diverse career pathways. By uniting institutions, educators, and community organizations, the Rise UP program demonstrates the value of collective action—reminding us that when a village comes together, young people thrive.

