



2025 IMPACT REPORT

Agriculture & Natural Resources



Community Vitality

Family, Food & Wellness



4-H

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Executive Summary

Whether we're hosting in-person seminars teaching communities how to create and support small businesses, sharing important agricultural resources and health information online or hosting interactive events for South Dakota's 4-H youth, we're committed to providing unbiased, research-based information for everyone. With hands-on events and interactive community initiatives to supplement our published research articles and guides, we encourage everyone to get involved with resources that will improve their lives.

This brief report highlights how SDSU Extension strengthens people and places across South Dakota through every program, contact, volunteer hour, and digital outreach effort. With eight regional offices and a presence in all 66 counties, SDSU Extension is a visible, active member of communities statewide—offering in-person workshops and events, along with 24/7 access to resources through our website to ensure quality education is always within reach.

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Participants gather to listen to research trial results at the 2025 Specialty Crops Field Day.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Impact Indicators

Total programs	669
Total participants	43,819
Direct education	51,190
Digital materials and outreach (articles, community events, media interviews, videos, etc.)	22,299,650
Master Gardener volunteer numbers	472
Master Gardener volunteer hours	8,891
Volunteer Naturalist numbers	114
Volunteer Naturalist hours	2,220
Commercial Applicator Testing number (new and recertified)	5,430
Private Applicator Training number (new and recertified)	3,804
Number of Field Specialists	24
Number of State Specialists	31
Dollar value of volunteer hours*	\$334,837

*Based on \$31.19 for South Dakota independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vovt-report-2025.pdf

Beef 20/20: Empowering South Dakota Producers and Industry

The way cattle are marketed has changed dramatically over the past decade. In 2012, only about 34% of cattle slaughtered in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota were marketed on a carcass basis, where economic value is determined by carcass traits. Today, 60–70% of cattle are sold using pricing systems that apply premiums or discounts based on carcass characteristics, reflecting the widespread adoption of value-based marketing. This shift highlights a growing need for producer knowledge and skill in managing factors that influence carcass quality and consumer acceptability, including genetics, nutrition, management, and processing practices.

Recognizing this need, SDSU Extension implemented the Beef 20/20 program to provide a structured, research-based educational opportunity for beef industry stakeholders. The three-day program equips participants with knowledge and practical strategies to improve carcass quality, understand pricing structures, and enhance the overall value of their cattle in the marketplace. By leveraging Extension's expertise and trusted position in the agricultural community, Beef 20/20 helps producers adapt to evolving market demands, increase profitability, and strengthen South Dakota's beef industry.

Wallace Duck Day: Connecting Conservation, Community, and Rural Economic Vitality in South Dakota

Rural communities in South Dakota face persistent challenges, including population decline, limited economic opportunities, and the need to sustain connections between natural resource stewardship and local identity. Many residents and visitors are unaware of the ecological and economic importance of local wetlands, grasslands, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Wallace and surrounding areas possess unique waterfowl habitat and a rich conservation heritage, yet these assets are underutilized as drivers of community and economic development. Events like Wallace Duck Day address this gap by leveraging existing natural and cultural resources to support local economies, engage community members, and showcase the contributions of conservation partners and skilled individuals who sustain rural livelihoods. By connecting people with habitat restoration, sustainable land management, and recreational opportunities, the program strengthens community identity, promotes environmental stewardship, and enhances the long-term resilience of rural South Dakota.



Participants gather to see local duck habitats at 2025 Wallace Duck Day.



Participants listening to the Youth Entrepreneur Panel at Energize 2025.

Community Vitality

Impact Indicators

Total programs	28
Total participants	1,068
Direct education	6,397
Digital materials and outreach (articles, community events, media interviews, videos, etc.)	769,373
Number of volunteers	101
Volunteer hours	457
Number of Field Specialists	5
Number of State Specialists	0
Dollar value of volunteer hours*	\$14,254

*Based on \$31.19 for South Dakota independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vovt-report-2025.pdf

Applied Agritourism Learning Strengthens South Dakota Farms and Communities

Rural communities in South Dakota and Nebraska face persistent challenges in diversifying their economies while maintaining agricultural productivity. Many small- and medium-sized farm operations struggle to develop supplementary income streams, attract visitors, or expand into agritourism due to limited access to clear guidance, technical assistance, and examples of successful, replicable models. Without support, producers may be hesitant to invest in agritourism or lack the knowledge needed to navigate regulatory considerations, visitor management, and effective business planning. These challenges limit rural economic growth and reduce opportunities for farms and communities to leverage existing agricultural assets for sustainable, place-based development. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated, research-based education and trusted facilitation to help producers evaluate agritourism opportunities, reduce risk, and adopt innovative strategies aligned with community and market needs. Needs that SDSU Extension, in collaboration with University of Nebraska Extension, was uniquely positioned to meet through its multi-state expertise, statewide reach, and history of delivering unbiased education to agricultural and rural audiences.



Growing Local Opportunities Through Grant Writing

A persistent challenge facing many rural and under-resourced communities is the limited knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to successfully secure grant funding. Grassroots organizations, small nonprofits, and community leaders often have strong ideas and a clear understanding of local needs, yet these efforts stall because they lack access to grant-writing expertise and resources. Common barriers include difficulty identifying appropriate funding opportunities, uncertainty about how to navigate complex or unfamiliar application processes, limited experience with proposal language, budgets, and program design, and insufficient staff capacity or financial resources to hire professional grant writers.

SDSU Extension is uniquely positioned to address this gap by providing trusted, research-based education and technical assistance tailored to rural and community-based organizations. Through grant writing workshops, Extension builds local capacity by increasing participants' knowledge of funding sources, strengthening skills in proposal development and budgeting, and improving confidence to pursue competitive grants. This Extension response supports community organizations in leveraging external resources, sustaining essential services, and advancing infrastructure and economic development priorities critical to long-term rural resilience.

Peggy Schlechter, SDSU Extension Community Vitality Program Director, hosted an agritourism booth at the 2025 Sunflower Festival in Highmore.



Youth crunching into vegetables for the annual Crunch Off Competition.

Family, Food and Wellness

Impact Indicators

Total programs	291
Total participants	6,519
Direct education	9,620
Digital materials and outreach (articles, community events, media interviews, videos, etc.)	2,190,408
Volunteer numbers	53
Volunteer hours	372
Number of Field Specialists	9
Number of State Specialists	2
Family, Community and Health Educators and Associates	13
Program Management and Support Staff	5
Dollar value of volunteer hours*	\$11,603

*Based on \$31.19 for South Dakota independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vovt-report-2025.pdf

Strengthening Rural South Dakota Communities Through Childcare Collaboration

Across South Dakota, access to affordable, quality childcare remains a significant barrier for families, workforce participation, and community growth—particularly in rural areas. Families in small towns often face limited options for early learning and afterschool care, placing stress on parents, employers, and local economies. These gaps are compounded by a lack of centralized data, inconsistent local resources, and limited capacity for communities to implement sustainable solutions independently.

Recognizing these challenges, SDSU Extension stepped in as a neutral, trusted, and statewide convener to lead an effort to improve access to affordable, high-quality childcare.



Youth playing with marbles at the Lead Childcare Community Roundtable.

Food Rescue 605: How Community Gleaning Makes a Difference in South Dakota

Sioux Falls' Community Food Security Network—formerly known as Thrive—is a coalition of individuals and organizations united by a shared commitment to addressing food insecurity. In response to growing concerns about food waste both locally and nationally, the Network launched Food Rescue 605 in 2024 as a pilot initiative focused on food gleaning, recovering surplus produce from gardeners and local farms.

Community data and stories revealed a critical gap in traditional food distribution models—while fresh produce was made available to food-insecure households, much of it went unused due to limited knowledge or resources for preparation. Recognizing that access alone does not equate to food security, SDSU Extension stepped in to provide education and training that equips households with the skills to safely handle, store, and prepare rescued foods. By connecting food producers, distributors, processors, and consumers, the collaborative model enabled the rescue of unused produce, its transformation into nutritious, ready-to-use food items, and redistribution through community food pantries to those who need it most.



Youth playing an outdoor game at 2025 4-H Camp Poinsett.

4-H

Impact Indicators

Enrolled youth	8,655
Outreach youth	32,989
Total youth membership	41,696
Per capita youth reached	27.4%
Educational staff	59.75
Certified volunteer	1,805
Short-term volunteers	1,961
Total volunteers	3,761
Volunteer hours	192,388
Dollar value of volunteer hours*	\$4.27 million

*Based on \$31.19 for South Dakota independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vovt-report-2025.pdf

Empowering Military-Connected Youth in South Dakota Through 4-H Hands-On Learning

Over the past several years, the South Dakota 4-H program has identified a gap in programming and support for military-connected youth and families. While afterschool and child development programs on military installations are required to offer 4-H programming, many of these programs lack the resources, training, and ongoing support necessary to deliver high-quality, positive youth development experiences. As a result, 4-H programming is often underutilized or inconsistently implemented, limiting its potential impact on military youth. This gap is particularly concerning given the unique challenges faced by military families, including frequent relocations, parental deployment, and disruptions to social and educational stability. Consistent, engaging youth development programs such as 4-H can play a critical role in building resilience, fostering a sense of belonging, and supporting social-emotional development for these youth. Without adequate resources and tailored support, military-connected youth may miss out on opportunities to develop essential life skills and establish positive connections within their community. A needs assessment revealed a clear need for targeted outreach, training, and accessible programming designed specifically for military settings. In response, it was determined that dedicated 4-H programming should be developed and implemented to better serve youth on Ellsworth Air Force Base in western South Dakota. Addressing this need will help ensure that military-connected youth have access to high-quality 4-H experiences that support their growth, well-being, and long-term success.

SkillsX by South Dakota 4-H: Developing Future Leaders and Workforce-Ready Youth

SkillsX by 4-H provides youth from South Dakota with an immersive, on-campus experience focused on building essential leadership and life skills. The program is intentionally aligned with the four South Dakota 4-H public outcome pillars—leadership, life skills, social development, and workforce readiness—ensuring participants gain well-rounded skills needed for future success.

Beyond skill development, SkillsX connects youth with South Dakota State University, the state's land-grant institution, in a safe and supportive learning environment. Through direct exposure to a college campus, participants increase their awareness of higher education opportunities and develop greater confidence and interest in pursuing postsecondary education.

SkillsX is planned and implemented through a strong youth-adult partnership model. State 4-H Ambassadors lead the design and delivery of the event, with guidance from program coordinators. This approach empowers teens to take meaningful leadership roles while gaining hands-on experience in planning, decision-making, and collaboration.



Aubrey Anderson, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Minnehaha County, guides a young participant through a creative learning activity during the state fair.

