



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
MARATHON COUNTY



# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



# Table of Contents

Extension .....	3
Horticulture .....	4
Community Development.....	8
Health & Well-Being .....	10
Agriculture .....	12
Natural Resources .....	16
Wisconsin 4-H .....	18

---

**University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension Marathon County**

212 River Dr, Ste 3 | Wausau, WI 54403

715-261-1230 | [marathon.extension.wisc.edu](http://marathon.extension.wisc.edu) | [info@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:info@extension.wisc.edu)

# UW-MADISON EXTENSION

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

---

## Agriculture & Horticulture »

Our network of researchers, outreach specialists, and local educators are on the leading edge of creating practical solutions for livestock and crop production in addition to farm and labor management. We provide customized guidance, business planning assistance, and industry knowledge for what today's agricultural operators are facing.

## Community & Economic Development »

Businesses, governments, and organizations succeed through development from Extension educators and specialists. We provide education for elected officials to understand their roles and responsibilities in helping communities thrive. We offer businesses the direct technical assistance and connection to support structures they need to help them succeed. Our rural entrepreneurship program identifies ways for businesses to overcome challenges and take advantage of unique opportunities.

## Health & Well-Being »

We're supporting positive change for families through physical and mental health programs in addition to structural improvements needed to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Our physical fitness classes and mental health training equips people with the tools they need to lead healthy, active lives. We provide public health resources and tools for community action. We provide guidance on systems changes for food security and food access.

## Families & Finances »

Reinforcing family connections, financial knowledge, and strong relationships is at the heart of Extension's programming. We support learning and emotional bonding by building literacy skills in justice-involved families. We guide community and individual development across lifespans. We teach financial security through rent planning and budget management.

## Natural Resources & Conservation »

We work at the crossroads of communities, natural resources, and agriculture to protect our environmental assets and guide resource management. We support individual and regional water-well testing along with education to address safe drinking water. We educate farmers, businesses, and communities on safe practices to ensure access to plentiful, sustainably managed sources of food, water, and energy.

## Positive Youth Development & 4-H »

Community-led 4-H programs deliver quality activities and leadership opportunities that are leading to engaged, energized, and informed young people across the state. 4-H is a movement — in Wisconsin, 98% of our 4-H members are inspired to make positive changes in their communities. They're developing leadership skills, building connections, and finding what topics spark their interest.



## Challenges facing Marathon County in 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted mental health. Among the general population, COVID-19 transmission fear has facilitated the development of psychiatric symptoms such as depression, confusion, stress, and anxiety among individuals who have never previously experienced mental illness (Shigemura et al. [2020](#)). Studies have shown that people who spend time cultivating plants have increased indicators of well being, including inducing feelings of happiness. (Brethour 2007).

According to the USDA, 11.6% of Wisconsin households are food insecure. Growing food in community and home gardens can contribute to food security by helping provide access to fresh vegetables and increasing consumption of vegetables by gardeners (Algert et al. 2016).

Wisconsin is facing many environmental challenges due to overuse of horticulture chemicals in urban and suburban environments (USFWS, 2000, Meftaul et al. 2020, DATCP, n.d.(b)). Proper pest management techniques can lead to less fertilizer and pesticide use (UW-Madison, n.d.) leading to reduced likelihood for environmental contamination and pollution (UGA, 2020).

Horticultural best practices can play an important role in helping solve these challenges. As Wisconsinites become more aware and knowledgeable of how to reduce overuse of horticulture chemicals in urban and suburban environments, it is likely that some people will adopt practices that reduce pollution. Overtime, sustained reductions of environmental contamination and pollution will improve aquatic and terrestrial ecological functioning in the environment.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Public Outreach Programs

- 416 participants
- 22 programs

### Service Hours

- 122 hours reported to ATTIC Services by Gaining Grounds participants

### Foundations in Horticulture

- 385 participants state-wide

### Outreach Partnerships

- The Landing
- ATTIC Correctional Services
- UWSP Continuing Ed
- Veterans Services
- Marathon County Public Library
- Marathon County 4-H
- Community Connections



# Horticulture

## Therapeutic Gardening Programs

**Gaining Ground Garden** in Marathon County provides individuals with court mandated community service hours an opportunity to learn horticultural and vocational skills.

Fall programming centered on implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) based weed management. Participants were introduced to concepts and components of IPM and addressed various management techniques and the place of chemical solutions in the hierarchy of options.



Gaining Ground Garden participants have reported a total of **122 community service hours to ATTIC Correctional Services** from August 1-October 27. Participants shared changes in knowledge in formal and informal evaluations and informally **expressed feelings of pride and increased well being** from time spent in the garden.

**Green Team** provides **Veterans** in Marathon County and surrounding communities an opportunity to engage in camaraderie and personal enrichment. In the fall of 2021, participants were introduced to concepts and components of IPM and addressed various management techniques and the place of chemical solutions in the hierarchy of options. Green Team is a partnership with Marathon County Veterans Services.



## Outreach Collaboration with Marathon County Public Library (MCPL)

Virtual public programs were developed and delivered in collaboration with Marathon County Public Library.




In **Planting the Vegetable Garden**, participants learned direct sowing techniques, factors for storing seeds, selection criteria when purchasing transplants, and planting methods. As a result of participating in “Planting the Vegetable Garden”, all participants stated that they understood which crops are best suited for direct sowing and which should be transplanted. **Participants stated as a result of the program, they were more confident in their ability to direct sow seeds in their gardens.**







## Outreach Collaboration with MCPL-Continued

 In **Managing Weeds in the Garden**, participants learned to identify characteristics of weedy plants, the cultural and mechanical methods of weed management, appropriate methods to manage annual and perennial weeds and monocots and dicots, and to differentiate between selective and nonselective and pre and post emergent herbicides. 74% of participants reported as a result of the program, they understood how to use cultural and mechanical weed management techniques, while 18% reported they understood these techniques before the program. **81% of the participants reported that they would change at least one gardening technique going forward and 78% of participants stated they understood appropriate methods to manage annual and perennial weeds as a result of the program.**



 In **Growing Veggies in Small Spaces**, participants learned how to choose cultivars for gardening in small spaces, general intensive gardening techniques, and were introduced to basic concepts of square foot, straw bale, and vertical gardening. As a result of the program, **90% of participants reported they understood key factors to keep in mind when choosing cultivars, and 100% reported they now understood how to appropriately water container plants. 100% of participants also reported they would change at least one aspect of their gardening techniques going forward.**

 In **Forcing Bulbs**, participants were presented with information to increase their success in forcing spring ephemeral bulbs indoors. Attendees were introduced to the concept of forcing and the differences between bulbs, corms, tubers, and rhizomes. Participants learned criteria for proper bulb, container, and growing media selection. Participants were introduced



to the planting procedure and steps necessarily for proper cold treatment. Finally, they learned how to proceed through forcing and after care for their bulbs. **82% of the participants stated that as a result of the presentation, they were confident in their ability to properly chill bulbs for forcing. 94% of participants also stated that as a result of the program, they understood the correct planting depth required for forcing bulbs.**



## Foundations in Horticulture: Online Comprehensive Course

Horticulture educator, Janell Wehr, worked with a team of Extension educators to implement the online Foundations in Horticulture (FIH) course during the fall of 2021. This was the second year FIH was offered.

- 385 participants learned fundamental knowledge of Wisconsin horticulture with an emphasis in Integrated Pest Management (IPM).
- At the end of the course, nearly 99% of respondents self-reported that they will change how they garden in the coming year from previous years because of something learned in FIH. In particular, respondents felt they will change their gardening practices in soil management, pest management (insects, disease, and weeds), plant selection, and fruit/vegetable growing.
- Survey respondents also indicated changes to where they find gardening information, increasing use of University/Extension sources by nearly 87%.
- Respondents' comments included that they will **plant more pollinator-friendly plants**, will use **IPM strategies to manage insects and diseases**, and will use **fertilizers differently** to meet the needs of specific plants.

In September of 2021, a follow-up survey was sent to the course participants from 2020 to assess the impact of FIH in achieving the Extension Horticulture Program Plan of Work's midterm outcomes of reducing pollinator decline and environmental contamination by overuse of chemicals.

- 88% of those who responded stated they had changed how they gardened** this summer because of what they learned in FIH. In particular, students indicated changes in their decision-making in the areas of plant selection, soil fertility, and pest (insect, disease, and weed) management. Specific statements made by participants indicated a change in how they amend and fertilize their soil by getting soil fertility tests first, intentional and careful with chemicals to ensure proper usage, selecting the right plants for the site, and using proper watering methods to minimize diseases.
- Additionally, **93% of respondents indicated that they increased their reliance on University based information** as a source of gardening information.







# Community Development

**Community Development Educator, Melinda Osterberg, resigned her position during the middle part of 2021. After her position was vacated, Extension was unfortunately not able to fill the position and programming directions were adjusted. The following is a snapshot of the work Melinda was able to accomplish in 2021.**



## **Broadband Task Force**

- Researched and prepared summary of State and Federal broadband grant programs for Marathon County stakeholders. This supported the Task Force in developing a process to engage internet service providers in discussing potential partnership opportunities and criteria to facilitate the County's decision-making process. As part of continued support of the Marathon County Task Force, Melinda prepared a summary of current State and Federal broadband grant programs. This supported the Task Force in developing a process to engage internet service providers in discussing potential partnership opportunities and criteria to facilitate the County's decision-making process.
- Conducted a webinar for local agencies and County stakeholders where they learned about the Emergency Broadband Benefit program and what information they could share with the community. The purpose of this effort is to increase community participation in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, which reduces monthly internet costs for eligible households. Nine individuals representing social service agencies from Lincoln and Marathon County attended a webinar on May 26, 2021 to learn about the Emergency Broadband Benefit and how to share information on the Emergency Broadband Benefit with their program participants.
- Hosted a meeting for Marathon County stakeholders and representatives from Charter Communications to share information concerning the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction. The meeting allowed Charter to present background information on the Auction and share the Company's process for utilizing their funds. The meeting resulted in Marathon County stakeholders furthering their understanding of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction and how the County can support broadband expansion outside of the Auction area.
- Provided outreach and technical assistance for local officials where they learned about the importance of filing for American Rescue Plan Act Local Recovery Funds (APRA-LRF) and received advice on how to file. The purpose of this effort is to ensure local governments receive significant federal funding to counteract the fiscal effects of Covid-19, resulting in officials recognizing the value in receiving their allocation of ARPA-LRF.





# Community Development

## Additional Programming Delivered

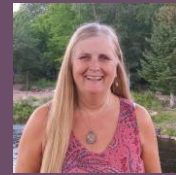
- After the success of the Central WI Chinese New Year Festival, the Wausau School District Director of After School Programming contacted Extension to see about options to share information on the Lunar New Year with School District student. Given the status of the COVID-19 Pandemic and limitations to in-person activities, Melinda developed a virtual program to provide education on how the Lunar New Year is celebrated, a hands-on activity to help keep youth engaged and the school district provided a food incentive for participation. This program allowed families to learn about the Chinese New Year and Marathon County's work in supporting diversity and inclusion, while building cultural competency. Twelve families participated in the first family night for the 2020-2021 school year.
- Conducted a series of weekly virtual programs for residents of Central Wisconsin recognizing Black History Month. The weekly programs featured community leaders from across Central Wisconsin. The program was designed to foster and practice civil discourse by listening and engaging in conversations about race. Participants increased their knowledge of the African American experience and developed their cross-cultural communication skill set. In partnership with LPRC Diversity Consulting Services, a Wausau based diversity and inclusion consultant, they developed a weekly "Courageous Community" conversation during Black History Month to increase the community's understanding of the African American experience. Through the four-part series, participants learned about United States history after the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Racism through a Trauma Informed Lens, Why We are Still Talking about Racism, and Black Women and Racism. Participation through the four weeks varied from 40 to 75.
- Implemented a 13-week online program for formerly incarcerated adults, where we are teaching entrepreneurship and personal development skills so they can "defy the odds" by overcoming barriers in the workplace due their criminal histories, start their own businesses, and potentially employ others with criminal records. The UW-Madison Extension Entrepreneurs in Training (EIT) Partnership offers year-round online Entrepreneurship Bootcamps for formerly incarcerated adults. The coursework covers the basics of starting a business from ideation to pitch, as well as personal development skills such as self-limiting/self-freeing beliefs and writing a personal statement acknowledging the mistakes and learnings from their incarceration. The goal is that participants have what they need to launch a business and to be more successful leaders in their current place of employment and community. The class meets twice per week for two hours. Along the way, guest speakers and community business coaches join to speak on specific content areas and share their entrepreneurial journey post-incarceration.



# Health & Well-Being

Tammy Hansen – FoodWise Coordinator

Gaonou Thao – FoodWise Educator



## The Challenge

In response to the ongoing challenges in reaching SNAP-Ed audiences with direct education during the pandemic, FoodWise increased the delivery of indirect education. This included an expanded social media and website presence, local online and print resources, electronic materials and handouts, and pre-recorded videos; all with the overall goal to continue to reach audiences with helpful nutrition information and resources empowering participants to live healthier lives.

## Community Impacts



Made 631 teaching contacts with 291 low-income Marathon County youth and adults both virtually and in-person during 2021. Lessons reinforced healthy behavior changes including a willingness to try new foods, increased fruit, vegetable and whole grain intake and increased physical activity.



In the summer of 2021, conducted a series of three in-person lessons that included nutrition, physical activity and simple snack preparations in 3 income-eligible schools with 99 1st- 5<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in the Community Connections Program through the Wausau School District.



Managed the Marathon County Hunger Coalition's (MCHC) "Share the Harvest" initiative with the Wausau Farmers' Market, including volunteer recruitment, partner coordination, project marketing and other tasks. In 2021, MCHC members gleaned 3,205 pounds of food that was shared with the residents at Riverview Towers, a subsidized senior housing unit in Wausau and other sites. Additionally, nearly 2400 pounds of food was gleaned from the Wausau Winter Market on two Saturdays during the holidays in 2020. The donated food was shared with the First Presbyterian Church Food Pantry and the Wausau Senior Center, "The Landing," for their Thanksgiving Community Meal.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Nutrition Education

- 105 participants
- 631 teaching contacts

### Share the Harvest

- over 5500 lbs of food gleaned



**FOOD  
WISE**  
Healthy choices, healthy lives.



# Health & Well-Being

## Virtual StrongBodies Program Help Hmong Women Stay Fit At Home



According to the 2021 County Health Rankings, 34% of Marathon County adults were obese (2019). Lack of physical activity is one contributing factor to the development of obesity and an increased risk for chronic disease, such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. In 2019, only 51% of Marathon County LIFE report survey respondents participated in 30 minutes or more of physical activity 3 or more days/week. Additionally, 16% reported no physical activity at all.

In 2021, FoodWise staff conducted a virtual 10-week StrongBodies series over Zoom with nine Hmong participants. The program combines strength training exercises with a short nutrition lessons. Participants were recruited from the Hmong Missionary Alliance Church food pantry and a domestic abuse support group. This program is unique as there are no other strength training programs in the area that are taught in the Hmong language. Participants reported loving the convenience of exercising from home and the opportunity to socialize with others.

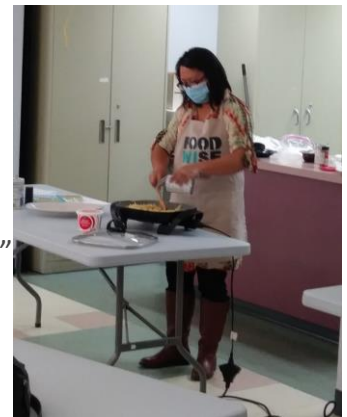
All participants reported feeling stronger and healthier overall and having better balance after participating in the StrongBodies program. Such positive changes will hopefully reduce the rates of chronic disease for these StrongBodies participants over time.



## “Healthy Eating” Lessons Lead to Improved Eating Habits

In 2019, 71.6% of 492 respondents to the 2019-2021 Marathon County Life Report survey self-reported being either overweight or obese. In 2020 and 2021, FoodWise staff planned and conducted a monthly “Healthy Eating” series in partnership with the Marathon County Hunger Coalition, to help county residents with limited-incomes learn to improve the quality of their families' diet and increase their ability to manage their food resources.

Nutrition educators conducted one-hour nutrition/food demonstration lessons both virtually and in-person with adults recruited from area food pantries, Head Start, the Women’s Community, and other partnering agencies. Classes focused on using food available from the food pantry, healthy meal planning/preparation based on the USDA’s “ChooseMyPlate” guidance, and creative ways to stretch your food dollars. Following these lessons, participants reported eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and an increased willingness to try or prepare new foods.



***“I enjoy all the new products that I would not have tried before until I was showed how to use them and enjoy the taste. Love the meetings. I always learn something new.” - Healthy Eating Series participant***



# Agriculture

Heather Schlessler – Agriculture Educator



## Agriculture in Wisconsin and Marathon County

Wisconsin is home to 1.26 million dairy cows. Dairy production is by far the largest agricultural sector in the state, generating \$45.6 billion annually for Wisconsin's economy. Wisconsin dairy farmers produced 30.7 billion pounds of milk in 2020, with a farm gate value of more than \$5.8 billion. The 2021 numbers will be released in June.

Dairy producers face serious challenges to remain viable and profitable. Farmers have limited control of the price they are paid for their milk and the wholesale product price is highly volatile. From an economic perspective, the U.S. dairy industry has experienced a prolonged 5-year period of milk prices at or below the cost of production (USDA-NASS, 2020). Wisconsin has seen a related steady decline in the number of dairy farms. A 5% rate of attrition from 2021 through early 2022 is evidence of extreme financial stress in the sector.

The COVID-19 epidemic added a myriad of challenges for dairy producers, but they also received significant direct payments through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) making it the best income year since 2014. This helped stabilize farm loss and milk futures market prices for 2021 were reasonable.

While producers can't control the price they get for milk, they are able to improve efficiencies and closely manage their input costs to remain viable. This year, the key opportunities to increase efficiencies and maintain viability are: feed management, data management, maintaining animal welfare, and reproduction efficiencies. Each of these is associated with underlying opportunities and challenges. Marathon County will be focusing on areas relating to maintaining animal welfare, and reproduction efficiencies.

With the prolonged period of depressed milk prices and the repercussions from COVID – 19, farm stress and mental health has become increasingly important. Work on educating about farm stress is also critical to the residents of Marathon County.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### **Badger Dairy Insights Workshop**

6 sessions - 246  
attendees

### **Dairy x Beef Workshop**

2 sessions - 100  
attendees

### **Farm Management Fridays Workshop**

8 sessions - 302  
attendees

### **Artificial Insemination Program**

1 session - 14  
attendees



# Agriculture

## Planning Emergency Livestock Transportation Response (PELTR) Training

The purpose of this training is to increase the effectiveness of emergency planning and the preparedness of local emergency response agencies. Heather Schlessner, dairy educator, worked with a team of Extension educators to conduct this in-person training that was held on November 3, 2021, in Wausau, WI. Seven students enrolled in the pilot version and participated in two tabletop roadside incident exercises, and a walk-through and discussion of a multi-deck livestock trailer that is pulled by a semi-tractor. The post-training self-reported evaluation results were based on the 5-point Likert scale. It indicated a positive 1.47-point average change in the participants understanding of the topics discussed. The highest average change was 2.5 points, (1.67 before/4.17 after) occurring in their increased knowledge about how the design of livestock trailers may impact livestock extrication from a wrecked trailer. Take home messages from the participants include *'the implications there are with this type of accident versus general motor vehicle accidents'*; *'the type of precautions that are necessary in handling livestock for the safety of the animals and the public as well as responders'*; and *'I did not realize how complicated trailers were inside in order to cut and extricate animals'*. Written comments about the training include, *'Good job, hands on were great'*; *'Excellent class, instructors were extremely knowledgeable'* and *'I will recommend this course to first responders in my region'*.



## Farm Stress

Three Farm Stress focus groups were held between March and April of 2021. There were ten farms that participated in these focus groups. Results from this study will help mental health providers in better understanding what stress farmers face, why they do not seek help, what coping strategies they employ, and how to overcome barriers to seeking help. The outcome of these focus groups will allow mental health providers to better understand farmers and why they do not seek out help. With a better understanding of farm culture mental health providers will be able to adapt their approach to providing care to better serve the farming community. Results of these focus groups was written up and submitted to the Journal of Agromedicine for publication.

The Virtual Farm Stress Summit was held in October of 2021 to connect organizations working on farm stress and mental/behavioral health. This one-day summit provided a platform for professionals to meet, network, and to learn the newest in farm stress research. We had 31 participants from 25 organizations that attended. Participants commented that they hoped to: *'Connect with other organizations and individuals who may be a good resource to connect our farmer-members with.'* After the first networking activity one participant commented, *'Wow! I've already spoken to 2 people who can help our county with great resources!! Woohoo!!'* Participants were highly engaged throughout the day.

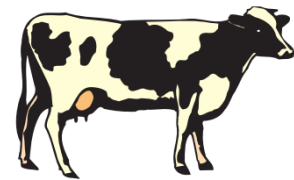
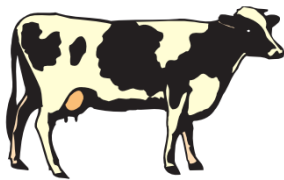




# Agriculture

## Midwest Manure Summit

In conjunction with other Extension educators, a one-day virtual conference for farmers, managers, agronomists, engineers, government agency personnel, and agribusiness professionals was held. They learned innovation, research, and solutions for manure handling and storage to optimize manure management, upgrade biogas production, as well as effectively manage manure-derived nutrients, odor, and gas emissions. Based on a live Zoom evaluation, 100% of respondents indicated they were more knowledgeable about innovative manure processing technologies and manure management strategies after the conference. This included finding significant interest and value in manure processing technologies to capture and/or handle nutrients, and manure management strategies to reduce environmental concerns. After attending the Summit, 100% of respondents plan to seek out more information on manure management strategies and/or processing technologies, while 84% indicated they are likely to change manure management or processing technologies on their farm or suggest changes on their clients' farms.



## Artificial Insemination Program

Dairy educator, Heather Schlessner, worked with an additional Extension educator, to teach the Artificial Insemination Program as a hybrid course for convenience of the participants and to mitigate COVID concerns by limiting the in-person contact time. Four hours of classroom time were taught over ZOOM during two evening sessions. Five hours of in-person activities were taught during two half-day sessions. Fourteen individuals earned their certificate of completion while using the curriculum that is available in both English and Spanish. A 22% increase between Pre- and Post-tests of the material indicates successful student learning. Participants rated the value of the topics as 4.6 out of a possible 5 points. Written comments about the course included: *'participating gave me information I need to make decisions on what I want to do with my farm'*, *'I plan to better myself for caring for and breeding my own herd while working alongside my husband and father-in-law'*, and *'I will begin a synchronization program with my beef cows next breeding season'*.



# Agriculture

## Heart of the Farm - Women in Agriculture “Coffee Chats”

Due to COVID-19, we were unable to host our in-person Heart of the Farm Conferences. Instead, Heart of the Farm - Women in Agriculture “Coffee Chats” were created to address the needs of farm women by providing education on farm business topics, connecting them with agricultural resources, and creating support networks using ZOOM. Topics for the 2021 Coffee Chat series included communication, financials, time management, dinner conversations, and reinventing traditions. For a local educational piece, Heather partnered with District 8 Farm Bureau to offer a soap making class. This class provided an opportunity for farm women to mingle and learn a skill that can be used as a side business or just as neat gifts. During the day we discussed the importance of taking care of oneself and making time for their needs.

## Additional Efforts in 2021



**National Association of County Agricultural Agents** conference was for Extension educators across the United States. Heather created a session that was designed to help educate individuals on the nuances of creating and giving a presentation, so their audience is engaged. This presentation focused on what not to do when giving a presentation and gave examples of what presenters should do.

**Extension Central News** is newsletter for farmers and agribusiness professionals. Heather regularly contributes to this publication. Articles are focused on Dairy, Livestock, Crops and Soil, and Farm Management. The purpose of this effort is to work collaboratively to provide timely education for improving agricultural production with multiple county farmers and stakeholders. Each issue of Extension Central News reaches 4,152 county stakeholders. The newsletter is sent out quarterly.

**Dairy and Beef Wellbeing Conference** planning started in 2021 with Heather serving as co-chair. The goal of the conference will be to educate dairy workers, farmers, and agribusiness professionals on the current animal care and animal wellbeing practices.

**Beef Quality Assurance** program is for beef producers and provides a research-based educational platform that demonstrates commitment to feed safety and quality while safeguarding the public image of the beef industry and upholding consumer confidence in beef products. Participation in BQA improves the value of marketed beef cattle and enhances herd profitability through better management. In conjunction with other trained Extension educators, three-year certifications were offered for producers. Thirty beef producers from seven north central Wisconsin counties attended and 12 completed their BQA certification. A total of 160 beef producers throughout Wisconsin received BQA certification through the Hybrid BQA trainings.





# Natural Resources

Kris Tiles – Natural Resources Program Manager



## Water Resources Issues

### Farm Profitability Conference

A new event was established, the Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo, to encourage profitable farming by building resiliency, diversifying farming operations, reducing inputs and increasing farmers' return on investment. The event was intended to be in-person but pivoted to provide a series of in-depth webinar topics. Overall, seven topics were presented with over 239 unique attendees across all the sessions.

### Watershed Study

Embarked on an 18-month Agricultural Conservation Outreach program for Central Wisconsin farmers, crop consultants, and youth (active in agricultural course work) in collaboration with area DATCP Producer-Led Watershed groups, and local Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Departments. The goal of this effort is to bring youth and farmers together in an educational space where each audience can share their experiences with implementing and troubleshooting soil health practices, and to increase adoption of soil health practices.

### Agronomist-Focused Regenerative Agricultural Workshop

The community-led watershed group, EPPIC (Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation), conducts educational programming about agricultural Best Management Practices as part of their overall mission to improve water resources in the Big Eau Pleine. Extension assists with program planning and provides resources as needed. This was the first time addressing an agronomist audience. Sharing this information with EPPIC board members and partnering educators will increase the understanding of this audience's educational needs and will assist future program planning directed toward this audience.





# Natural Resources

## Forest Resource Issues



## Learn About Your Land Classes for Woodland Owners

Virtual classes were held for woodland owners across Wisconsin. These classes are designed to provide woodland owners with tools to learn more about their own land and have confidence engaging with natural resources professionals. Topics included identifying and controlling invasive plants, managing for wildlife habitat, conducting a timber sale, forest health, and management planning. Attendees are then enrolled in a monthly newsletter that updates them on topics and events of interest to landowners.

## Fenwood Creek Community Agricultural/Natural Resources Needs Assessment Survey

This project engaged a needs assessment survey for communities within Fenwood Creek Watershed in collaboration with Marathon County Conservation Planning and Zoning, EPPIC, U-W Stevens Point Wausau Campus, and UniverCity. Extension served as an advisor for survey development, dissemination, and data collection/analysis. This data will be utilized to guide future programming around conservation Best Management Practices.





# Wisconsin 4-H

Holly Luerssen – 4-H Educator


Jasmine Carbajal – 4-H Associate Educator




## Thriving in Marathon County

Wisconsin 4-H did not have a consistent evaluation tool for its programs which limited the ability to collect meaningful and consistent impact results. The 4-H Thriving Model illustrates how high-quality positive youth development programs shape the thriving trajectory of young people. A team of county-based colleagues has been working on studying and piloting the model's evaluation tool since late-2019. In 2021, the team created resources and supported the roll-out of a statewide version of the survey tool to assess program quality on a statewide basis. The team, that included former 4-H Educator Kaitlyn Bernarde, along with Evaluation Specialist, Josset Gauley, published the survey statewide October 4, 2021. Please see page 21 for Marathon County's Thriving results.

### Summer Camp

 **Camp Counselor Training:** A virtual training for youth leaders from Clark, Marathon, and Wood Counties who will serve as camp counselors this summer during which youth learned more about camp counselor roles and responsibilities. The goal of this effort was to engage them in planning three upcoming day camps, and to prepare them for their roles. Also, an in-person camp counselor training for teen leaders from Clark, Marathon, and Wood counties. These future camp counselors learned how to manage difficult camp situations and how to reduce risks, then began planning three upcoming day camps.

 **Day Camps:** A series of three-day camps was developed for youth in grades K-8. Campers experienced a hands-on outdoor education experience that was similar to a typical camp experience. These day camp programs were designed to offer youth a camp experience while following pandemic-related health guidance.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Participation in Marathon County 4-H - 4<sup>th</sup> Largest Program in WI

~ 670 Youth Members  
~ 208 Adult Volunteers

### Project Enrollments

Expressive Arts - 814  
Environmental Ed - 340  
Animals - 218  
Leadership  
Development - 121  
Technology - 154  
Health - 51  
Plant Science - 31


### Youth By Residence


Towns Under 10,000 - 375  
Farm - 179  
Towns & Cities and  
Suburbs (10-50,00) - 89  
Suburbs & Cities over  
50,000 - 23





# Wisconsin 4-H

## Families and Clubs


 **Bi-weekly Newsletter:** A broadcast tool where 4-H families learn about local, state, and national program opportunities and project resources. This effort is designed to increase communication while efficiently utilizing resources.


 **Recognition Celebration:** Members, volunteers, and parents participated in art activities, bowling, team building activities and awards distribution. The celebration engaged youth from around the county in recognition of achievements and allowed members to make connections between clubs.

 **Annual Financial Audits:** Ongoing managing of 4-H club financials, for the review of annual financial audits and ensure proper legal tax filing. This process ensures sound financial management and strengthening financial skills of members and volunteers.

 **Wisconsin Valley Fair:** Educational programs were created for youth and adults attending the Wisconsin Valley Fair. Hands-on activities allowed exposure to different projects in 4-H.

## Adult and Youth Growth Opportunities

 **Volunteer In Preparation Training:** Virtual trainings were held for new and returning 4-H volunteers. Trainings informed participants about their roles, policies, risk management, insurance, and youth development principles in order to provide them with the knowledge needed to begin performing their volunteer duties successfully.

 **Annual Leaders Training:** The yearly training provides youth and adult volunteers tools for the importance of involving youth voice in decision making, gain strategies for building trust and respect between youth and adults, and increase their ability to create an inclusive environment where youth and adults can express their ideas and concerns. The goal of this effort is to increase the quality of youth-adult partnerships within the 4-H program.







# Wisconsin 4-H



## 4-H Thriving Model – Program Quality Scores Marathon - 2022

The 4-H Thriving Model predicts that youth who participate in 4-H programs that provide a high-quality developmental context will thrive, and thriving youth achieve key developmental outcomes.

To determine scores for Program Quality, youth members age 13 and up were invited to take an online survey asking them questions about their 4-H experience. The survey was developed by Mary Arnold, Oregon State University and Ryan Gagnon, Clemson University. Wisconsin served as a pilot state for administering the survey in 2020 & 2021.

After analyzing data, the scores are provided which assess each component of the model on a scale of 1-7, 7 meaning outstanding program quality.

5.3

### Youth Sparks

The Youth Sparks outcome measures how 4-H programs give youth opportunities to explore topics they are interested in learning about, passionate about, engaged with.

5.4

### Challenging Growth

Challenging Growth outcome measures the extent to which adults in the program help youth to see new possibilities, push them to reach higher and hold them accountable.

5.7

### Youth Belonging

This outcome measures how safe, welcome and supported youth feel in 4-H programs

5.8

### Youth-Adult Partnerships

This outcome measures how youth feel about adult volunteers working with them and if they feel respected, listened to and have their ideas taken seriously.

5.7

### Caring Adults

This outcome measures how youth feel the adults in their 4-H programs care about them and investing time in youth.

5.7

### Program Quality Overall Score

### Implications:

The data suggests that the program quality in Marathon County 4-H is in good shape, and there is room to grow. The lower score for Youth Sparks is not surprising – Sparks are tied to the opportunities to gain new experience (projects) and develop an interest in a topic/project. In 2022, we will be working on ways to offer more project-based learning for members. Challenging Growth is also a respectable number. As a program, we will be looking at ways to recruit more volunteers and offering more training on creating a safe and caring environment for youth to learn. Since this was the first year for this survey, this is a good benchmark for future analysis.



# Extension

## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

[www.extension.wisc.edu](http://www.extension.wisc.edu) | [info@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:info@extension.wisc.edu)

An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title VI, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requirements.