



*We teach, learn, lead, and serve,
connecting people with the University of Wisconsin, and engaging with
them in transforming lives and communities.*

4-H – Positive Youth Development

Holly Luerssen, 4-H Program Educator

Jasmine Carbajal, 4-H Associate Educator

- A hands-on, fun, and educational activity where elementary Marathon County youth learned the history of piñatas and made their own.
 - Thanks to a partnership with Growing Great Minds (G2M) which is an after-school program in local elementary schools, youth were able to learn about the history of piñatas and they also made their own.
- A hands-on educational activity for Marathon County youth to learn about quilting basics and have space to work on a project. The goal of this activity was to expose youth to quilting/sewing and help them complete a project they can show at the local county fair.
 - Marathon County 4-H has a passionate sewing leader that wants to increase the sewing and quilting skills in our local youth. Therefore, we decided to offer a monthly quilting club in the Spring of 2024. Overall, the attendance each month was between 6-12 youth depending on the month. The quilting club ran from January through April. Youth that participated had the choice to start a project or bring a project from home each month. The county office provided sewing machines, fabric, and sewing tools. Youth learned about sewing machine parts, rotary cutters, cutting mats, patterns, and sewing and quilting basics.

"I wanted to let you know how wonderful quilting club has been for my daughter- she learned a lot and developed a love for sewing. Thank you all for offering this wonderful opportunity!"

- A hands-on, fun, educational activity where Marathon County teens learned about the basics of photography. The goal of the activity was to expose youth to different cameras and to help them practice simple takes.
 - Marathon County 4-H has had a strong partnership with Marathon County Public Library-Wausau. The library specifically invited Marathon County 4-H to lead a class on photography basics. 4-H educator, Jasmine Carbajal, recruited two former 4-H members to lead the session as they grew up in the 4-H photography project and currently are photographers as well. Four youth and five adults attended the photography basics class. All nine participants reported learning the differences between cameras, enjoying the hands-on activities, having fun, and being excited to take more photos in the future.
- A hands-on educational presentation for Latinx parents and students in Marathon and Clark Counties. The goal of the session was to promote the Juntos program.



- 60% of the Abbotsford School District student population identifies as Latinx. School district staff have talked to district Latinx families about what needs they recognize they want help in to help their students succeed. One of those needs is a better understanding of the educational system in the US. 4-H educators Jasmine and Seth were invited to a scheduled family night to present to parents about the Juntos program and to recruit families to participate. Thanks to this effort, three families registered for the Spring series in Abbotsford.
- An interactive camp workday with 4-H educators from across the state. Through this effort we supported each other with ideas about camp and how to improve camp for the youth while also learning about new policies and procedures in relation to camp.
- A distance learning kit, for 3-6th graders that focuses on tomatoes and uses them as an opportunity to discuss history, practice gardening skills, implement cultural cooking, and explore careers connected to plants. The kit teaches relating and critical thinking skills and provides ample opportunity for connection with others.
- Discover 4-H @ Trinity is a monthly in school program bringing Wisconsin Agriculture education to three classrooms. The monthly curriculum is led by the Marathon County 4-H staff: Educators and AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistants. Approximately 57 youth in 1st, 4th, and 6th grade are engaged in hands on lessons. Current 4-H programs are also shared.

Agriculture

Heather Schlessor, Dairy Agent

- A research-based educational article for dairy producers and agri-business professionals, where participants will learn about the impacts of dairy cow stress and strain on reproductive performance. This is a follow-up piece to the Reproduction Roadshow, with the goal of highlighting stressors (health, nutrition, psychological) that affect reproduction and how herd managers can help mitigate the strain they create.
- A series of workshops for farm owners and potential successors where participants learned about legal risks around farm succession and first steps they can take to prepare to meet with service providers to raise awareness for the need to plan and resources to help them plan.
 - Wisconsin farmers are aging and a high percentage of them have not made succession plans. Major challenges of business transition and succession are financial viability to support multiple partners and communication. Transition can be financially complex with a lot of emotion for families, often causing stress. The need for succession planning education was identified by county and regional educators and industry organizations. While Extension has many virtual programs, in-person workshops were requested by several county and regional educators. Wilfert and Kirkpatrick offered four regional workshops in March/April of 2024. Wilfert provided an overview of the legal risks of not planning and Kirkpatrick provided information on the first steps farm owners can take in the process. Forty-two people attended one of these workshops. Thirty-four evaluations were completed for an 81% response rate. Evaluations indicate participants learned how to better prepare to meet with service providers (average 4.44 response on Likert scale with 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). They learned about tools to help them effectively communicate with business partners and/or family with the average response 4.36 on the same Likert scale. Respondents identified



communication, fair versus equal inheritance, and financial capacity of the farm as barriers to their succession planning. They identified estate planning tools, holding successful team meetings, and financial analysis as future educational topics. Interestingly, the last session, that was switched to virtual was the best attended, with twice as many joining than were originally scheduled for in-person. Last minute marketing helped advertise the switch.

- Developing a Planning for Emergency Livestock Transportation Response (PELTR) hybrid training in collaboration with Waukesha County Emergency Management and the Humane Animal Welfare Society (HAWS) of Waukesha for area and statewide emergency response personnel to learn about responding to roadside incidents involving livestock trailers. The purpose of this program is to increase the effectiveness of emergency planning and the preparedness of local emergency response agencies.

FoodWise

Mallory McGivern, FoodWise Administrator

Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator

Julia Perock, FoodWise Educator

- Shared leadership in the Marathon County Hunger Coalition, where emphasis is placed on expanding healthy food access and developing new projects and partnerships that will empower Marathon County families through education and shared resources. The coalition's goal is to increase access to healthy foods in order to achieve health equity for all county residents.
- A 5-week nutrition education series for 1st grade classrooms at Franklin Elementary School, where students will learn about MyPlate, the five food groups, and try new fruits and vegetables. The goal of the series is for students to learn about being physically active and help them make healthy choices in school and at home.



Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

- A therapeutic horticulture activity (Lettuce Bowls!), where participants learned indoor seed starting techniques through a hands-on activity. This effort was designed to support social and emotional wellbeing of local residents.
 - According to the Marathon County 2022 LIFE Report, Marathon County residents feel less connected to their communities than in 2017, with the greatest growth of disconnection to organizations (clubs, churches, etc). In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with Woodson YMCA-The Landing for one session and MCPL- Wausau branch for two sessions to meet the needs of the Marathon County residents.

The goal of the effort was to provide participants the skills necessary to successfully start



lettuce plants indoors, so they would reap the therapeutic benefits of engaging with plants. Participants learned about different types of planting media and conditions required to successfully start lettuce plants from seed. They then engaged in a hands-on seed starting exercise.

Many of the participants were novice gardeners with limited experience, as 92% stated they had never tried or had only tried starting seeds indoors once or twice. One participant shared when asked how they felt about growing lettuce as a therapeutic gardening activity, "gives me peace, joy, and fulfillment." 100% of participants shared that successfully starting their "lettuce bowls" would give them an increased sense of accomplishment, while 93% stated it would increase their self-esteem.

- A hands-on workshop for adults over 55, where participants learned about pollinator gardens. This effort was designed to support social and emotional wellbeing to local residents.
 - Lifelong learning is beneficial for Marathon County's aging population, because it supports overall cognitive function, sense of accomplishment, and personal growth, and positive social engagement that combats social isolation, which is common in older adults. In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with Woodson YMCA-The Landing to meet the needs of the Marathon County residents over 55. The goal of the effort was to teach about pollinator habitat while providing hands-on learning and social activity. Participants met at The Landing Adventure Camp at Camp Sturtevant. After reviewing the needs of pollinators, including habitat requirements, participants made seed "bombs" to take home. They then used premade seed bombs in an archery activity with slingshots. 90% of participants stated it had been over 5 decades since they had last used a slingshot, and all shared they enjoyed spending the afternoon together.
- A program (Romaine Calm and Garden On Session 3) for the general public, where participants learned about soil texture and pH and fertilizers. This effort is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of resources to decrease environmental contamination.
 - Marathon County is facing environmental challenges including pollinator decline and environmental contamination & pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals. Proper pest management techniques can lead to less fertilizer and pesticide use leading to reduced likelihood for environmental contamination and pollution. Extension partnered with Mosinee School District for their Community Education program, as well as provided this program in an additional session via Zoom. In Romaine Calm and Garden On Session 3- From the Ground Up, participants learned about the components of soil texture, how pH affects nutrient availability, how organic matter improves soil, and the function of primary plant nutrients in supporting plant function and growth. Participants learned how to better implement fertilizer strategies to improve plant health.
- A presentation for members of the North Central Wisconsin Master Gardener Association, where participants connected good gardening practices to climate change adaptations to increase gardening resiliency.
 - As Central Wisconsin experiences shifting climate patterns, gardeners face new challenges in maintaining their gardens. To ensure the resilience of local flora and fauna, it's crucial for gardeners to understand the connection between sustainable gardening practices and



climate change adaptation techniques. Equipping gardeners with essential knowledge and skills will empower them to foster biodiversity, conserve water, and mitigate the impacts of climate change on their gardens and the broader ecosystem.

I delivered a presentation which identified key climatic weather issues gardeners will face and facilitated a conversation with the audience in which they identified adaptation and mitigation strategies to temper the worst effects. As a result of the program, participants were able to connect research based gardening practices they are familiar with as adaptation strategies for future extreme weather challenges.

- An in-person presentation for adults over 55+ where participants learned about the “No Mow May” initiative and the impacts of lawn care on pollinator health so participants adopt gardening practices that increase pollinator habitat and reduce the use of horticulture chemicals.
 - Participants learned the history of No Mow May and the impacts of unmowed lawns on pollinators. Participants were introduced to pollinator friendly lawn care strategies. They also learned how gardening practices can support pollinators in residential yards throughout the year (i.e. provide forage and habitat, reduce stress such as pesticide reduction/elimination). Finally, participants learned where to find science-based resources for best practices for lawn care, pollinators, pollinator friendly gardening, and more.
- A presentation for the general public, where participants learned about the historical, economic, and cultural significance of garden vegetable plants to gain a better understanding of the importance of genetic diversity.
 - In the past 50 years, there has been a noticeable decline in genetic diversity among backyard vegetable plants, largely due to the prevalence of commercialized hybrid varieties. This shift has sidelined many traditional heirloom varieties, diminishing our access to unique flavors and vital genetic traits. Preserving and reintroducing heirloom varieties is crucial for maintaining resilient and sustainable agriculture amidst changing environmental conditions and pest pressures. Participants learned the differences between different pollination types and how this applies to current and future backyard vegetable diversity.
- “Can you dig it?” newsletter for the general public, where subscribers can read timely articles specifically related to horticulture issues facing central Wisconsin. The goal of this effort is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of resources to decrease environmental contamination.
- A diagnostic service for the general public, where Marathon and Wood County residents’ horticultural inquiries are answered through evidence-based resources. This effort is designed to reduce pollution through horticultural product (pesticides and fertilizers) misuse.

Natural Resources

Kris Tiles, NRI Program Manager

Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator

Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Groundwater Educator

- Presentation to Baraboo Range Protection Association on community planning and homeowner protection during wildfires. The purpose of the presentation was to build awareness of ways the community can prepare for and prevent extensive damage from wildfires.



Additional Extension Outreach Programming Occurring in Marathon County

- A career awareness event planning and event was held for high school students to learn more about the diversity and opportunities available in the field of agriculture.
 - Working with the Marshfield Chamber of Commerce and Industry and 10 area high schools, students learned from area agriculture related business partners about career opportunities relating to agriculture. Students were able to meet face-to-face with industry representatives that discussed the skills employers are looking for, the education and skills needed and if these careers could be a good choice for the students in the future. Nearly 300 students attended the event that also offered connections for students to job shadow, seek internships and short term employment while in high school. The event was funded by a grant from Wood County 2018 Farm Technology Days.
- A farm open house highlighting automated milking systems (AMS) was held for dairy producers. Many producers are interested in AMS at this time as they help address labor shortages, distribution of labor and working conditions for farmers. Understanding AMS will help producers make better decisions addressing critical labor and management issues on their farm that affect profitability.
 - Over 150 people of diverse backgrounds and age attended the Robotic Milking Open House that Extension held at Dukestead Acres, Abbotsford. Working in partnership with the family farm and several vendors that have labor saving and cow-care improving products on the farm including robotic milking, feeding, calf feeding and bedding of the herd producers from across the North Central area of the state came to learn about how these management and labor saving tools can be utilized on their farms. The event was enhanced by providing parking options for people traveling by horse and also by being held adjacent to a spring open house and customer appreciation day held by a local farm equipment dealer. Extension materials were provided for robotic milking management and the current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Materials were in English and Spanish. A state specialist addressed the group discussing current modeling of ventilation needs for barns with robotic milking systems. The host family shared how they arrived at the decision to utilize AMS and their experiences since installing the system.
- A meeting discussing the feeding characteristics of several forages based on the fiber digestibility and forage kinetics was held for dairy producers and consultants so that they may develop more profitable feeding programs for their farms or their customer's farms.
 - Working with the Central Wisconsin Forage Council, an annual educational program involved state specialists from UW-Madison CALS. They discussed production practices regarding corn silage and



alfalfa forages. In addition to their information, I presented on how to understand the feeding of alfalfa for high producing dairy cows featuring research I was involved with from a SARE grant funded trial looking at the feeding characteristics of several alternative forages.

- 2024 Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo, a Significant Planning/Development Activity Abstract: Planning the April 24, 2024, Annual Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo. The goal of this event is to encourage profitable farming by building resiliency, diversifying farming operations, reducing inputs, and increasing return on investment. Farmers, Crop Consultants, and local stakeholders will learn about best-management practices they can use to take advantage of what nature has to offer and increase self-sufficiency on the farm. Topics include regenerative management, managed grazing, cover and companion crops and no-till farming. They will also explore specific barriers central Wisconsin farmers are experiencing when adopting best management practices through discussion with fellow farmers who have implemented these practices.
- A field day and classroom instruction for goat producers and those interested in becoming goat producers where basic introductory kid development, doe care, biosecurity, feeding strategies and marketing were discussed. This program was developed as Clark County has a rapidly expanding dairy goat, and meat goat, family scale enterprise largely among the Amish Community. The success of this program may develop into future offerings.
 - The County Extension Committee at several of their monthly meetings identified a rapidly increasing dairy goat industry among the Amish community within the county. They also identified the need for education about marketing of male goats destined to be utilized as meat animals. I identified several agribusinesses that serve the community and obtained suggestions or progressive producers who would be willing to share their experiences in goat production with others in need of this information.

To serve the Amish community, the need for low cost, low technology instruction located in an area that was easily accessible by all means of transportation including horse and buggy was needed. A town hall within a mile of several current producers and near to many others interested proved to be successful as good attendance from the local community and from others with similar interests from far away occurred. Other Extension educators with small ruminant knowledge were recruited to create and present at the program. The discussion was lively and interactive and there is great interest in future offerings with some topics already identified.

Increasing awareness of Extension in the Amish community and assisting them to develop an economically viable goat industry is a great win-win for local Amish and Extension.

- Program planning for Dean's Innovation Grant award to provide well water testing to farmers with employee housing to test water quality for underserved audiences. The goal of this program is to incentivize water testing for farms to ensure drinking water is safe for human consumption.

Upcoming Programs

- **4-H Programming** – Information at marathon.extension.wisc.edu/projects/programs/



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
MARATHON COUNTY

April 2024 Report

- **Horticultural Programs** – Information at <https://marathon.extension.wisc.edu/horticulture/programs/>

Jeremy Solin
Area Extension Director

Janell Wehr
Horticulture Educator

Kris Tiles
NRI Program Manager

Heather Schlessler
Dairy Agent

Mallory McGivern
FoodWise Administrator

Kathy Johnson
*Administrative
Assistant*

Holly Luerssen
4-H Program Educator

Julia Perock
FoodWise Educator

Jasmine Carbajal
4-H Associate Educator

Michelle Van Krey
Healthy Community Coordinator