



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
MARATHON COUNTY

# March 2024 Report

*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**

- Planning and developing a short informative video in Spanish for Spanish-speaking and Latine audiences about 4-H and Juntos 4-H in Wisconsin, highlighting the benefits, objectives, and positive impact of these programs. The goal of this video is to inform, increase awareness, participation, and outreach among local Spanish-speaking families and youth.
- A 4-week virtual series for youth (Youth on the Rise) in which they explored the world of bread baking. The series had two tracks: quick breads and yeast breads. During each session, youth learned basic skills and techniques and baked along with the instructor.
- An orientation for youth participants and their parents who are registered for 4-H American Spirit to learn about the objectives, expectations, and preparations to travel on this educational experience so that the program increases the quality of spark exploration, belonging, and positive developmental relationships.
  - Increasing program quality includes helping young people and their families have a socially and emotionally safe experience. This orientation is designed to reduce anxiety and increase the understanding of expectations while traveling. As a result of participating in this orientation 100% of participants (n=?) indicated they gained a clearer understanding of the goals and objectives of the experience, and they had a strong understanding of participation roles and responsibilities. Because of their participation and experiences in this orientation, the likelihood of a more positive experience while traveling on 4-H American Spirit has increased. Those who travel on the American Spirit Experience demonstrate high levels of civic engagement during and following the experience.
- The Marathon County 4-H Finance Committee is reviewing their finance policies, location of accounts, and working toward creating a more streamlined way of doing business as a county wide program.
- The March Clover-Kaboom is an activity for younger 4-H members, grades K - 2. The focus was making new connections and learning through all things "Spring" themed activities where youth tie-dyed a t-shirt, created a rainbow/pot of gold snack, played games, designed a no-sew bunny, and more.
- Discover 4-H @ Trinity is a monthly in school program bringing Wisconsin Agriculture education to three classrooms.
  - 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.



- The 4-H Rabbit Committee meets bi-monthly November through May to set 4-H Rabbit project meetings and educational learning activities for Marathon County 4-H youth.
- A Horse Project Kick Off Meeting to bring youth together to broaden their knowledge of horse related educational topics.
- An educational outreach table to promote Extension to Latinx families at a local high school. Youth that stopped at the table made baleros, a Mexican game.
  - The Abbotsford School District, located in both Marathon and Clark County areas, has a Latinx student body of 60%. During their parent teacher conferences, the Marathon County Bilingual 4-H Associate Educator was invited to have an outreach table to share the various programs available to youth and their families. The educator specifically focused on promoting the Juntos program. Youth that stopped at the Extension table were able to make a "balero" which is a traditional Mexican game. The game also helps with hand and eye coordination. Overall, the educator was able to talk to about 15 families and two officially registered for a future Juntos program.

## Agriculture

### Heather Schlessler, Dairy Agent

- In 2021, a series of focus groups were held to identify what stressors farmers exhibit and why they do not seek help for these stressors. One major reason participants do not seek help is a disconnect between the farming and medical communities. Focus group participants indicated that they did not feel health care providers understood them. The purpose of this event was to break down the barrier of disconnect. For this event, we discussed the results of the focus groups with the medical community and agriculture professionals in attendance. As a result of these efforts, those in attendance are aware of the farming subculture and better understand that when a farmer seeks help, it is an emergency situation. Based on participant comments and evaluation feedback, there was an increased awareness of the farming subculture and the stoicism that exists among farmers. Participants recognized that they need to take extra care when working with farmers to connect with them. As a result of this event, healthcare professionals are better poised to assist farmers' mental and physical needs.
- The March Badger Dairy Insight webinar for dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals, where participants learned the latest trends for using sexed semen and beef semen for reproduction. The goal of this effort was to increase knowledge of the latest University research on the use of sexed semen, beef semen, increasing conception rates and how dairy professionals can practically apply these technologies to their clients' farms. This month's session was a conversation where participants asked questions about reproduction for their farms or businesses. A live, in-person meeting for dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals, where participants learned the latest trends for using sexed semen, beef semen, and the effects stress and strain have on reproduction. The goal of this effort was to increase knowledge of the latest University research on the use of sexed semen, beef semen, increasing conception rates and how dairy farmers and industry professionals can practically apply these technologies.
- The Repro Roadshow was a multi-location, in-person program, that provided the latest research-based information to improve the understanding of current timed AI protocols for use with sexed semen for dairy professionals.

In this meeting, Extension Specialist Dr. Paul Fricke and Assistant Professor Dr. JP Martins discussed their



labs' latest findings on the application of sexed semen in dairy herds and Timed AI protocols. One hundred percent of participants answering the evaluation poll (n=70) said "yes" to the question, "I have gained new insights on how to help me or my clients optimize conception rates and manage breeding in my herd." Local dairy educators presented on the impacts of Stress or Strain on reproduction or the impacts of personnel training on reproduction protocols. One hundred percent of participants answering the poll saying yes to the question "I have increased my understanding of how stress can affect the occurrence of disease." Overall, 99% of participants indicated they were somewhat or very likely to share information from the workshops with others, and that information from the workshop improved their understanding of ways to optimize fertility in their herds (Ave. 4.04; scale 1=a little; 5=a lot). On hundred and fifty-six people participated, representing dairy farmers, educators, and industry professionals. Participants completing the evaluation poll (n=70) indicated they own, or impacted the management, of over 250,100 cows.

Article about the ReproRoad Show: <https://dairystar.com/stories/happy-healthy-cows-are-fertile-cows.23576?>

- 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**

- A 5-week nutrition education series (Read for Health) for 1st grade classrooms at Lincoln 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.
- 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.
- Working with partners in Clark, Marathon, Portage and Wood Counties to build a new platform that directly focuses on food access mapping for those with limited incomes. The goal of this effort is to provide current, reliable food access information for all community stakeholders in Central Wisconsin and the state.





## Horticulture

### Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

- Two programs called "Starting Seeds Indoors", hosted by the Wausau Area Garden Club and MCPL-Stratford Branch, where participants learned about the appropriate growing media, and the requirements for seed germination and seedling growth. 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 plant growing techniques can reduce the dependence on horticulture chemicals.

15 program participants from the Stratford Library evaluated their changes in understanding as a result of the program. 100 % of participants stated they now understood how to choose the appropriate growing media for starting seedlings. 100% of participants stated that they now understood the requirements needed for seed germination. 93% of participants stated that they now understood how to provide the right conditions for seedlings to thrive.

- Four sessions of a program called "Growing Citrus Indoors", hosted separately by MCPL-Wausau Branch, UW-Madison Extension Marathon County (virtual), and the Woodson YMCA-The Landing, where participants learned about the conditions required for citrus plants to thrive indoors and were introduced to pest management techniques for indoor and containerized plants. This effort is designed to support physical, social, and emotional benefits to local residents.
  - Social isolation, the absence of social connections, is a key indicator of community strength, impacting individual and communal well-being. Strong social ties correlate with better mental and physical health. Socially isolated individuals face heightened risks like depression, anxiety, and poor physical health. 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). 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.

As a result of attending the program, 13 participants from MCPL-Wausau Branch reported the following: 100% shared that they understood the conditions necessary to provide in order for containerized citrus to thrive. 91% stated they understood the pest management framework for indoor plants.

12 participants from the Landing reported the following: 100% shared that they understood the conditions necessary to provide in order for containerized citrus to thrive. 100% stated they understood the pest management framework for indoor plants.



- A program (Romaine Calm and Garden On Session 2) for Mosinee residents, where participants learned how to map out a garden for crop rotation. This effort is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of resources to decrease environmental contamination.
  - As a result of attending the program, 16 participants reported the following:
    - 75% of respondents stated they could distinguish vegetable plant by plant family
    - 88% of the respondents stated they could define crop rotation in the garden.
- "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

- A regional event for members of watershed protection groups (farming and non-farming) and conservation practitioners, where attendees got to connect, collaborate, and have candid conversations about water quality needs. The goal of this event was to strengthen relationships in the greater Wisconsin River watershed basin, increase collaboration, identify goals and initiatives for improving water quality, and assessing community needs.
- A forestry conference for woodland owners in 3 states, where various topics on forest health, taxes, wildlife, and other topics relevant to woodland management were presented. This effort is designed to network landowners with resource professionals and topics to help them make informed management decisions.
- A facilitated discussion for producers and conservation professionals in the Springbrook and Upper Eau Claire River watersheds where participants will learn about the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program. The goal of this meeting is for producers to identify conservation related concerns, local stakeholders, and engagement/commitment in order to determine if forming a producer-led watershed protection group is in the best interest of the environment and community members.
- Well Water Educational Program for rural landowners with private wells that participated or were interested in outcomes of the Eastern Marathon County well testing.



## **Additional Extension Outreach Programming Occurring in Marathon County**

- 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.
- A single session event for Hmong youth where they learned elements of healthy relationships and effective communication.
- 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 be understanding 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.
- A workshop for Hmong Farmers in Madison and Eau Claire with the Wisconsin Hmong Association where farmers learn the importance of farm financial recordkeeping for their farm business, having a written land lease, and having access to government agency programs. The purpose of this program is to increase their awareness of USDA Programs, land access and the why and how farm finance is important for one's farm business.
- 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.
- 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.

## Upcoming Programs

- **4-H Programming** – Information at [marathon.extension.wisc.edu/projects/programs/](https://marathon.extension.wisc.edu/projects/programs/)
- **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 Schlessor  
*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*