



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
MARATHON COUNTY

May 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

Marathon County 4-H Staff Earn Three State Level Awards for Quality Programming in 2023

The Marathon County 4-H staff recently received a **WAE4-HYDP Specialty Award: 2024 Jim Kahler Excellence in STEM Programming Award** for their Discover 4-H at the Wisconsin Valley Fair program. This award was presented by the Wisconsin Association of 4-H and Youth Development Professionals in recognition of the unique STEM based outreach programs at the Wisconsin Valley Fair. Youth attendees engaged in a series of 10-12 different hands-on activities each day of the 2023 fair. Daily STEM activities focused on arts, food, agriculture, wildlife ecology, and more. Youth and families who visited the activity stations sparked a new interest during the fair. Join us as we congratulate the 2023 Marathon County 4-H Staff including Holly Luerssen, 4-H Educator; Jasmine Carbajal, former 4-H Associate Educator; and the AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistants: Kate Loucks, Erin Sabo, Jade Betts, and Malina Carattini. We also wish them luck as this program moves forward to national level competition.



WAE4-HYDP Communicator Award: 2024 Periodical Publication

Team Award was presented to our multi-county LinMarWood 4-H Summer Camp team for their Pre-Camp Newsletters. The administrative team created three vibrant newsletters to help campers and their families prepare for a successful 2023 summer experience. Each edition focused on information that would build excitement for campers and their families while easing anxieties. We would like to congratulate the following team members: Holly Luerssen, 4-H Educator-Marathon; Erin Sabo, AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistant; Laura Huber, 4-H Educator - Wood; Melissa Yates, 4-H Educator - Lincoln. This program award is also moving on to national competition.





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One more quality program recognition was presented to Holly Luerssen, 4-H Educator, for an educational piece she created as part of the How to Put the Spark in Your 4-H Club Meeting workshop she presented to multiple groups in 2023 & 2024. The Four Components of a 4-H Club Meeting graphic provides club leaders a way to foster growth in their meeting spaces. The well-rounded structure empowers members to share knowledge, engage in teamwork, and of course have fun. Cultivating relationships and sparking enthusiasm takes place through the 4 dynamic elements: Pre-Meeting activities, Business aspects, Educational workshops, and Recreation. This handout earned the **2024 Communicator Award for the WAE4-HYPD Educational Piece by an Individual**. It is moving on to the national level competition. Congratulations Holly!



- The LinMarWood staff development training for the 4-H summer camp where youth and adult leaders learned gained a deeper understanding of their role and how to support campers at the upcoming 4-H Summer Camp.
 - 4-H Educators created a dynamic training agenda where counselors and adults engaged in meaningful pieces which allowed the staff to better understand behavior traits, how to support campers and create programs. 4-H Educators created a dynamic training agenda where counselors and adults engaged in meaningful pieces which allowed the staff to better understand behavior traits, how to support campers and create programs. The Camp Staff will be ready to recognize and acknowledge positive behavior traits, be ready to lead camp songs & skits, and role played correcting behaviors.
- A 4-H activity for the students and family of Hawthorne Elementary School's Elementary Family Night. Participants created an art piece from the Indigenous Art Aboriginal Dot Painting of the people of Australia/Oceania.
 - Hawthorne Elementary School invited Marathon County 4-H to provide an activity table during their May Family Night. As a 4-H Educator, I worked with my AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistant team to find a unique cultural activity for families to engage in. Once the activity was selected the team gathered supplies and created activity and PR pieces to distribute to the attendees. Attendees of the Hawthorne Elementary School Family Night engaged in activities and gained a deeper understanding of the 4-H program.
- An activity for all Marathon County 4-H families to spend time together building relationships while playing BINGO and enjoying a meal.
 - Family Fun Night was created to provide a family engagement activity. As a 4-H Educator, I created PR, BINGO cards, set up for and clean up after the event, and recruited volunteers to serve food, sit at the registration desk, and more. Eight-nine people attended this event. Families enjoyed a free night out where they could connect with other families.
- Wausau Children's Festival is a community event sponsored by the Marathon County Parks & Rec Department. Marathon County 4-H hosted a table for attendees to engage in and learn about the 4-H program.



- The Marathon County Parks and Rec Department hosts the Wausau Children's Festival annually. Local non-profits and community programs focused on family engagement are invited to attend and host a booth allowing them the opportunity to share their impact with attendees. Marathon County 4-H attended and hosted an engagement table where youth interacted in an activity and won a prize. Families were given a piece of 4-H literature and learned about a few upcoming programs.
- A six-week educational series called Juntos (Together) where Latinx high school students and their families learned tools and resources to help students achieve high school graduation and post-secondary academic success which is the goal of the program. (Jasmine Carbajal, SETH HARRMANN)
 - According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the overall status dropout rate in 2020 for Latinx students was 7.4%. The status dropout rate "represents the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack school credentials". When looking closer, Latinx born outside the U.S. and first-generation students have a higher dropout rate than second generation or higher students. Juntos' goal is to help Latinx students graduate high school and provide their families with tools and resources that will help support their students and will also help the high schoolers reach post-secondary academic success. Juntos was offered in partnership with the School District of Abbotsford in Abbotsford, WI. Three families registered and completed the six-week series. The topics covered include making education a family goal, school communication, graduation requirements, post-secondary options, financing higher education, and goal setting. Three families (5 adults and 1 youth) completed the program. They stated they found the sessions useful. Parents were also motivated to attend a technical college.

Agriculture

Heather Schlessor, Dairy Agent

- Planning for an update to Topic Hub article heat abatement resources in dairy cattle, as well as, creating new informative videos to showcase dairy farmer success stories about heat abatement strategies on-farm. The goal is to increase awareness and highlight successful implementation of heat abatement strategies for dairy cattle. These resources will address a critical topic related to climate change and sustainability, as well as methods to ensure high quality animal care and economic viability for the dairy industry.
 - Heat stress presents both an animal welfare and sustainability challenge for the dairy industry. Dairy cattle of all ages are susceptible to thermal discomfort and may experience poor animal welfare as a result (Van Os et al., 2024). In lactating cows, milk production and reproductive losses have been documented to occur during heat stress, which, along with a greater risk for mortality, threatens the economic viability, efficiency, and environmental sustainability of dairy production. Some limited evidence also suggests heat stress and mitigation strategies impact public perception of dairy farming (Cardoso et al., 2018). Many Wisconsin dairy farmers have expressed interest in learning more about cost-effective and energy-efficient housing and management practices to mitigate heat stress in dairy cattle. Previous heat abatement resources on the Topic Hub will be updated and new resources will be added to address economic impact. In addition, brief, informative videos to highlight various types of successful heat abatement strategies implemented by dairy producers on-farm will be created. Our goal is to serve as a reliable source for research-based information on



effective and efficient heat abatement strategies in continental or temperate climates, across dairy herd sizes and facility types. Dairy producers and the industry will increase awareness of heat abatement strategies and important sustainability, economic, and animal care implications.

- Planning for Planning Emergency Livestock Transportation Response (PELTR) hybrid workshops for and in collaboration with area and statewide emergency response personnel. The goal of PELTR is to maintain an effective emergency response that protects producer/livestock owners' and Wisconsin's agricultural economic viability.
- A hybrid training (virtual and in-person) for emergency response personnel in the Planning for Emergency Livestock Transportation Response (PELTR) where they learned how to respond to 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.
 - Livestock transportation is a critical segment of Wisconsin's food supply system. It is also highly visible to the public with animals being transported to and from farms, points of sale, and to processing facilities. Safety on roadways is in everyone's best interest as is increasing the capacity of local community response to efficiently respond to roadside incidents. These incidents often involve high-value animals. A successful response keeps roads open, reduces injury to people and animals, protects Wisconsin's livestock industry from biological threats, and limits the liability of local responders and negative public scrutiny. Local emergency responders asked us for this training as their personnel do not have experience handling livestock and the equipment needed for responding to these incidents. First developed as an Extension in-person, day-long program, PELTR was converted in 2021 to an online (UW-Madison CANVAS) course in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in-person meeting restrictions. Course participants gathered after the online course for a half-day in-person session to tour a multi-deck livestock trailer and participate in tabletop exercises to review what was learned during the course. Sixteen Extension Educators and three Extension specialists assisted with curriculum development. Four Extension educators (Seefeldt, Schlessler, Stuttgen, Halfman) built the online PELTR course and continued as co-leads. In 2023, PELTR co-leaders surveyed 24 past participants to learn their suggestions for improving the course. Phone interviews and emailed surveys were used. Respondents preferred that the course not use the online learning platform. In response, for the April 2024 course held in partnership with the Waukesha County Humane Animal Welfare Society (HAWS), Stuttgen, Schlessler, and Halfman assigned prework where the participants viewed the YouTube videos of the first three modules (introduction to the course, livestock behavior, and biosecurity) and joined in a virtual ZOOM meeting to cover the last two modules (scene assessment, extrication, relocation, and hot wash). Participants then met for the half-day course review, in-person trailer tour, and tabletop exercises. We marketed this program statewide. Twenty-four individuals from ten counties including firefighters, law enforcement, county emergency managers, WI Division of Animal Health veterinarians, and humane society employees completed the April 2024 course held in Delafield, WI with the Waukesha County Humane Animal Welfare Society (HAWS). Their increase in knowledge about responding to livestock transport incidents increased as evidenced by the 1.4-point increase in pre- and post-test scores. The tests included 20 multiple-choice and true/false questions; pre-test scores ranged from 15 to 20, and post-test scores ranged from 16-20. Participants also self-reported an average 1.31 point



increase in knowledge of the course topics (modules). The post-training evaluation used a 5-point Likert scale, with excellent valued at 5 points, and poor at 1 point) to gauge their change in knowledge before and after learning about each topic module. The highest increase in their knowledge (1.64 points) occurred from how the design of livestock trailers may impact livestock extrication from a wrecked trailer. The second highest change (1.36 points) occurred with their increased understanding of the biosecurity implications regarding livestock transport, relocation from an accident scene, euthanasia, and mortality disposal. Our desired outcome was realized as we read how they plan to share the knowledge they gained from this course with their local emergency response planners which they reported on the post-session evaluation: "We will share the videos and our knowledge with local first responders to create an after-hours call list for dispatch/emergency management to have or incidents in our county." "Set up a response model and pre-plan for this type of event." "Good info. This is one of the accidents that you don't think about happening. Being prepared will go a long way to help it run smooth." And "Pass along some of the information provided and develop a tabletop/workshop to help formulate a plan for our county."

FoodWise

Mallory McGivern, FoodWise Administrator

Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator

Julia Perock, FoodWise Educator

- Shared leadership in the Marathon County Hunger Coalition (MCHC), 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.
- Provided Summer EBT benefit information and lettuce samples at the MCHC Mobile Pantry at Edgar Elementary School.
 - 9% of Marathon County residents use SNAP benefits to purchase food, and many more would benefit from increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables. FoodWise provides leadership to the MCHC, which gleans at the Wausau Farmers Market, purchases and procures local produce for food pantries, and operates a monthly mobile pantry that travels throughout the county. The MCHC purchases thousands of dollars of produce and local food from farmers in the community to be distributed through food pantries. This program supports the local economy by keeping money in the community and provides healthy food to those that need it most.
- A 5-week nutrition education series (Read for Health) 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.





- 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

- A hands-on workshop for adults over 55, where participants learned container gardening techniques. This effort was designed to increase awareness and knowledge of environmentally-sound gardening practices that simultaneously improve mood, increase physical activity, and encourage positive socialization.
 - Lifelong learning is beneficial for Marathon County's aging population because it supports increased wellbeing, quality of life, healthy cognitive function, self-dependency, and a sense of belonging. (Nobel, et al. 2021). Non-medical interventions involving gardens and gardening can improve mental and physical outcomes for people with a range of health and social needs (Howarth, et al. 2020). In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with the **Woodson YMCA-The Landing** to meet the needs of older Marathon County residents. In a hand-on activity, participants learned techniques to successfully grow dwarf tomato plants in containers, including cultivar selection, potting media criteria, container selection, as well as how to provide conditions in which containerized tomato plants are required to thrive.
 - 57% of respondents reported they had little to no experience growing containerized tomato plants. 35% had moderate experience, and 7% were experienced containerized tomato gardeners. 7% of the participants shared they rarely engaged in social activities, 21% engaged sometimes, and 64% shared they tried to socialize as much as possible. 100% of participants reported that a successful harvest of dwarf tomatoes would fill them with a sense of accomplishment, while 71% reported that they believed successfully growing dwarf tomatoes would increase their sense of self-esteem, with 28% reporting they were either unsure or did not think success would impact their self-esteem.
 - When asked how they felt about growing dwarf tomatoes as a therapeutic gardening activity, one participant shared, "**It will give a sense of accomplishment after not having a big garden.**" Another stated, "**I think it is a great idea! Having a plant grow, thrive, and produce can be very satisfying and enjoyable :)**".
 - Wisconsin faces environmental challenges including pollinator decline (DATCP, n.d.(a) and environmental contamination & pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals (Walsh et al. 2012, Meftaul et al. 2020. Proper pest management techniques can lead to less fertilizer and pesticide use leading to reduced likelihood for environmental contamination and pollution (UW-Madison, n.d.). **Hmong Week** began in Portage County in 2019 by the founders of **Sib Pab Sib Qhia** and expanded in 2024 to include Wood and Marathon Counties. Additional partners are invited each year to help plan and execute the week's events, enhancing community involvement and support. Extension
- An outreach booth for local Hmong residents, where participants learned about Extension resources to increase awareness and knowledge of resources to decrease environmental contamination and pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals.
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answered the call of local community involvement, sharing gardening resources including culturally responsive resources with the Hmong gardening community at a booth at the outdoor event. At this Hmong community event, participants learned about Extension resources. This can lead to an increased awareness and knowledge of resources to decrease environmental contamination and pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals.

- 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.
 - Marathon & Wood County residents have come to rely on their local Extension office to answer horticulture related diagnostic questions with research based answers in a timely manner. Questions come into the office either directly through phone calls to the offices, direct emails to Janell Wehr, horticulture educator (janell.wehr@wisc.edu), or the UW-Madison Horticulture Program website. Inquiries also are processed through the Marathon & Wood County Master Gardeners, either directly via email or at one of the many events they attend (farmers markets, plant sales, and fairs). Support for the Master Gardeners includes identification and selection of volunteers, training, and orientation to diagnostics, as well as providing continuous support to the volunteers. By providing research based answers to gardening questions, residents see reduction in time and money spent on efforts either have no impact, or worse, negative impacts in their lawns and gardens and the larger environment.
- A hands-on workshop for the general public, where participants learned container gardening techniques. This effort was designed to increase awareness and knowledge of environmentally-sound gardening practices that simultaneously improve mood, increase physical activity, and encourage positive socialization.
 - 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 **Marathon County Public Library- Wausau Branch** to meet the needs of Marathon County residents. Two workshops were delivered; a morning and evening session to meet the scheduling needs of local residents. In a hand-on activity, participants learned techniques to successfully grow dwarf tomato plants in containers, including cultivar selection, potting media criteria, container selection, as well as how to provide conditions in which containerized tomato plants are required to thrive.
 - Between both sessions, 38% of respondents reported they had little to no experience growing containerized tomato plants. 30% had moderate experience, and 30% were experienced containerized tomato gardeners. 23% of the participants shared they rarely engaged in social activities, 54% engaged sometimes too frequently, and 23% shared they tried to socialize as much as possible. 100% of participants reported that a successful harvest of dwarf tomatoes would fill them with a sense of accomplishment, while 69% reported that they believed successfully growing dwarf tomatoes would increase their sense of self-esteem, with 30% reporting they were either unsure or did not think success would impact their self-esteem.



- When asked how they felt about growing dwarf tomatoes as a therapeutic gardening activity, one participant shared, ***"I am looking forward to watching them grow. I will nurture my Red Robin."*** Another participant shared, ***"I really enjoyed all the information I received and I feel confident and happy to try. I love going home with my "project"!"***
- A hands on workshop where grieving participants learned container gardening techniques. This effort was designed to support social and emotional wellbeing to local residents.
 - Bereavement can lead to decreased mental and physical wellbeing (Hart, et al. 2007). Non-medical interventions involving gardens and gardening can improve mental and physical outcomes for people with a range of health and social needs (Howarth, et al. 2020).

In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with **Brainard Funeral Home Aftercare** to meet the needs of grieving Marathon County residents. In a hand-on activity, participants learned techniques to successfully grow dwarf tomato plants in containers, including cultivar selection, potting media criteria, container selection, as well as how to provide conditions in which containerized tomato plants are required to thrive. If the Extension Horticulture Program builds trusting relationships with identified audience members, it will likely lead to Extension providing educational opportunities meaningful to them, while concurrently addressing the identified issues we are working to address. This process is grounded in extension educator experience, outreach best practices and the body of technical literature. We know that when our audiences gain knowledge, understanding, or experience a change in attitude, that a proportion (not all) of them will implement that knowledge or understanding or attitude change into new behaviors or practices. In this program, participants gained an increased awareness and knowledge of environmentally-sound gardening practices that simultaneously improve mood, increase physical activity, and encourage positive socialization.
- A program for Mosinee residents, 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.
 - This program was developed by county educators and state specialists in an effort to educate the general public about the No Mow May initiative as well as provide information for adopting other gardening practices to support pollinators. **Mosinee School District- Community Education** partnered with Extension to share with Mosinee area community members. Participants increased awareness and knowledge of resources to increase pollinator habitat.
- A presentation for residents of **Primrose Assisted Living Community**, where participants learned how to choose and grow plants that support pollinators. The goal of the effort was to teach about pollinator habitat while providing a learning and social opportunity.
 - In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with **Primrose Assisted Living Community** to meet the needs of the Marathon County residents over 55. Participants learned the importance of pollinators and the need to protect their habitats from pesticides. Participants learned how to choose appropriate plants, and the conditions to provide to improve plant health outcomes, including how to choose cultivars, containers, and proper fertilizer application. The goal of the effort was to provide participants with the skills necessary to successfully grow plants beneficial to pollinators, so they would reap the therapeutic benefits of



engaging with plants. Participants learned proper plant sitting and how to provide the conditions to thrive to reduce the need for pesticide use, which could reduce misuse.

- A program for adults over 55 where participants learned techniques for saving seeds. The goal of the effort was to teach seed saving strategies while providing a learning and social opportunity.
 - In an effort to combat social isolation and improve wellbeing, Extension partnered with **UWSP (Learning Is ForEver)** to meet the needs of the Marathon County residents over 55. Participants learned how to select suitable plants for saving seeds, how to harvest and process dry seeds and seeds from fleshy fruit, as well as how to store seeds. Participants increased awareness and knowledge of environmentally-sound gardening practices that simultaneously improve mood, increase physical activity, and encourage positive socialization.
- “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.
 - Can you dig it? newsletter shares timely gardening articles from trusted evidence based resources from UW-Madison and other university resources in the upper Midwest. The newsletter also highlights podcasts, citizen science opportunities, UW resources, and upcoming Extension programming. Subscribers are directed to the Horticulture Program topic hub, diagnostic labs, and other resources.
- A workshop for Hmong growers/farmers in collaboration with Women's Community, Hmong American Center and USDA-FSA/NRCS. The goal of this effort was to introduce USDA farm programs, recordkeeping/cash farmland leasing, as well as IPM and pesticide safety so that Hmong farmers are aware of farm programs and Extension services and use them to strengthen their farm business.
 - Focus groups found that Wisconsin Hmong farmers play a critical role in supplying farmers' markets around the state. On smaller scales, direct market vegetable farms make up the fastest growing sector within the state's agriculture industry. Despite this growth, Hmong farmers lack access to government agency services throughout the state. Extension partnered with the **Women's Community, Hmong American Center, and USDA-FSA/NRCS** to meet this identified need. Hmong farmers/growers gained awareness of government farm programs, Extension services, and the use of recordkeeping to help their farm business.

Natural Resources

Kris Tiles, NRI Program Manager

Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator

Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Groundwater Educator

- Needs assessment with counties in Central WI (Adams, Marquette, Waushara, Wood, Portage, Juneau, Marathon) and with partnering organizations (Center for Watershed Science and Education and Wisconsin Geologic and Natural History Survey) to discuss needs and wants as they relate to groundwater and potential projects for the future.



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Upcoming Programs

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

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