



*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**

- We are continuing with the 4-H Fridays as a partner program with the Children's Imaginarium in Wausau. Two Fridays in July we provided programs in their STEM lab. Families attending the museum engaged in three different activities each week. Total Reach: Over 75 people attended the July 12th session.
  - The Children's Imaginarium invited Marathon County 4-H to host STEM activities in their lab on Friday's during the summer. Two additional sessions were held in July. During the July 12th session, our team led 3 different activities related to the pirate theme. Activities included designing their own pirate flag (art), creating an aluminum foil boat to test its floatability, and mixing their own pirates bounty (snack mix). Into the Woods is the theme for the July 26th session. Youth will learn how to track animals by their scat and make a turkey call. STEM sessions were two hours in length. Besides general STEM educations another focus was for families to engage in activities together and learn alongside each other.
- A travel experience (Discover WI) for middle school grade (5th-8th) 4-H youth and adult advisors where they learned about Wisconsin's rich cultural history as they traveled to Northwestern Wisconsin. This travel experience helped youth develop their skills related to independence, voice, and flexibility. Total Reach: 37 youth, 3 volunteers
- A day camp program for youth aged 10 and older where they learned basic outdoor skills like archery, campfire building, canoeing, fishing, and woodworking. This camp was designed to help youth discover sparks they can enjoy for a lifetime, meet new friends with similar interests, and to learn to appreciate nature. Total Reach: 27 youth, 2 adult volunteers

## **Agriculture**

**Heather Schlessor, Dairy Agent**

- A webinar, one session part of Badger Dairy Insight, for dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals, where participants learned about leveraging digital technologies to improve management decisions on dairy farms. Total Reach: 81 people registered for the webinar.
  - Badger Dairy Insight is a monthly webinar offered to dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals around topics related to reproduction, nutrition, emerging technologies, and animal welfare to increase their knowledge around the latest University research. The emerging technology workgroup collaborated with Dr. Joao Dorea an Assistant Professor in Precision Agriculture and Data Analytics to develop this Badger Dairy Insight presentation. Examples of Dr. Dorea's work include the use of digital technologies to monitor animal behavior, growth



development, social interaction, and early detection diseases or animal welfare concerns. Attendees and those watching the recording of the presentations will have knowledge of emerging technology applications on dairy farms.

- A webinar, one session part of Badger Dairy Insight, for dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals, where participants learned about updates to the MILK 2024 spreadsheet and about feeding lactating dairy cows alternative forages. Total Reach: 100 people registered for the webinar.
  - Badger Dairy Insight is a monthly webinar offered to dairy farmers and dairy industry professionals around topics related to reproduction, nutrition, emerging technologies, and animal welfare to increase their knowledge around the latest University research. Then nutrition workgroup provided speakers to talk about the MILK 2024 spreadsheet which helps producers and nutritionists think about how well corn silage is being fed. We also provided a speaker to talk about a SARE grant on alternative forages. Attendees and those watching the recording of the presentations will have knowledge on feeding corn silage and alternative forages.
- 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. Total Reach: Workshops require pre-registration and are limited to 20 participants per location. Two locations are being planned for 40 emergency responders total.
  - Livestock transportation is a critical segment of the food supply system and Wisconsin's agricultural industry. It is also a highly visible segment 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 and part of that safety is preparedness for responding to



**Extension**

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MARATHON COUNTY

# July 2024 Report

emergencies on the roadway. First responders are the front line in that response and many lack experience with livestock handling. First responders, and livestock owners and associations, asked us to provide this training. UW- Madison Extension Livestock and Dairy Program colleagues created the research-based curriculum titled Planning for Emergency Livestock Transport Response (PELTR). The curriculum consists of five modules delivered virtually and in person through lectures, interactive discussions, videos, and demonstrations. Short-term outcome: increase emergency responders' preparedness to respond to roadside incidents involving transported livestock. Medium-term: responders share what they learned as they develop their local response plans. Long-term: Wisconsin's emergency responders have plans in place to respond to roadside incidents involving transported livestock.

## **FoodWise**

**Mallory McGivern, FoodWise Administrator**

**Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator**

**Julia Perock, FoodWise Educator**

- A quarterly nutrition education series in Marathon County for adults with young children as part of the Children's Wisconsin LEAP (Learning Essentials about Parenting) program where they learn about incorporating healthy eating habits into the family routine, including family meals and eating more fruits and vegetables. The goal of this effort is to encourage healthy eating behaviors 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.
  - FoodWise Educator Julia Perock attended Bridge Community Health Clinic's Family Festival and provided recipes and samples using the free food distributed by the Marathon County Hunger Coalition.
  - 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.





## Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

- "Multiply your joy with fragrant herbs!" workshops for both the general public and adults over 55, where participants learned plant propagation techniques through hands-on activities. This effort was designed to improve plant growing skills while also supporting mental resilience. Total Reach: 16
  - Two workshops were held in partnership with MCPL-Wausau branch and the Woodson YMCA-The Landing with a total of 16 participants. Participants learned recent research which shows that nurturing plants improves well-being, including reducing stress and improving mindfulness. Students then participated in a hands-on activity in which they learned about plant, container, and media selection and how to successfully propagate herbaceous cuttings. Students took home multiple propagation experiments to continue growing at home. 100% of surveyed participants reported they understood that growing plants could help support mental wellbeing. 90% of participants reported that as a result of the workshop, they understood how to select the proper planting media for plant propagation.
- A program for justice involved youth, where participants learned how to maintain a vegetable garden. This effort was designed to increase awareness and knowledge of environmentally-sound gardening practices that simultaneously provide physical, social and emotional benefits of gardening. Total Reach: 1
- 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.
- "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. Total Reach: February: 533 open, 87 click throughs March: 659 open, 92 click throughs, April: 815 open, 119 click throughs May: 700 open, 82 click throughs, June: 626 open, 72 click throughs

## Natural Resources

Kris Tiles, NRI Program Manager

Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator

Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Groundwater Educator

- A project for Wisconsin woodland owners where they will work with a forester to get a Forest Stewardship Plan. Through this program, woodland owners will receive a plan that will allow them to identify goals for their property, plan for the future of their land, and implement management activities. Total Reach: 28 Cooperating Foresters have joined the project to write Forest Stewardship Plan 40 Woodland Owners have been connected with Forester to get a plan 1 Forest Stewardship Plan completed
  - Wisconsin has made great strides in private forest landowner engagement; more than 21,000 new landowners have received a property visit from a professional forester since 2018. These landowners have received personalized information about their property and are poised to act in their woods. The cost of getting a Forest Stewardship Plan can be prohibitive for some woodland owners, but those same plans are commonly required to participate in cost-share programs that help pay for



woodland management activities. We created the Wisconsin Stewardship Plan Project (WSPP) to help Wisconsin landowners take the next step by making it possible for them to get a Forest Stewardship plan for their woodlands. WSPP created a network of private foresters that will write plans across the state. The Wisconsin DNR received a grant so that the project could pay the private foresters for the plans they write. When an eligible woodland owner signs up, the project will connect them with a private forester that can write a Stewardship Plan in their area. The woodland owner works with the private forester to identify goals for their woodlands and strategies to reach goals, and the process ends with the landowner having a Forest Stewardship Plan. Targeted outreach to woodland owners that have done a walkthrough with their DNR forester, but do not have a management plan, is planned for the future to help the project continue to grow. Outreach will include emailing information about the program and/or a mailing. We will also connect with partner organizations to help us proliferate information about the project in their network. The Wisconsin Stewardship Plan Project will increase the number of landowners who have a Forest Stewardship Plan for their property. Further this will increase the number of woodland owners that have the required management plan to apply for cost share programs that can financially help with management activities. Our project removes the financial barrier of getting a Forest Stewardship Plan for some landowners by using grant funding to pay for the plans. UW Extension Forestry will continue to engage and provide resources for woodland owners after they get a Forest Stewardship Plan so participants feel better prepared to implement their plan. The project is also employing private foresters across the state by providing plan writing opportunities. The hope is that culmination of this effort will increase forest health across the state.

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

- A workshop for farmers where producers learned effective management strategies to respond to excessive and persistent rain, that has prevented normal planting and development of crops. Farmers learned about alternative forages, providing adequate feed for livestock, crop insurance rules, resilience to climate change and conservation practices to protect soil and water. This program was developed in response to a problem that developed suddenly and required an immediate local response.
- Field observations of the developing alfalfa crop were monitored twice weekly over a month's period of time and shared with local media and on the state alfalfa quality website, to provide information to producers about the quality of the developing alfalfa crop so that they make better harvest, crop and feed management decisions. Total Reach: Listenership on one of the radio agriculture programs where the results were broadcast is over 23,000 people during the time period of the broadcast.
- A selection application was developed so that scholarships could be provided to area high school seniors so that opportunities for further education are enhanced in the agricultural field.
- Planning for a strategic doing workshop on October 7, 2024, for stakeholders in Portage, Marathon and Wood Counties. At this workshop individuals will create action plans with a focus on enhancing entrepreneurial ecosystems and quality of place in Central Wisconsin. These activities contribute to the economic vitality of each community and allow key stakeholders to work together to solve challenges with a regional approach.



- A study to better understand the demographics of successful business entrepreneurs in the "Bootcamp" course of the Entrepreneur in Training Partnership program. Results from this study will help all organizations and affiliates of Defy Ventures curriculum in recruiting and retaining entrepreneurs and create curriculum that is equitable and accessible. Total Reach: 10 staff members of Defy Ventures and 7 staff members of UW-Madison Extension.
- Planning for a Fall workshop focused on Entrepreneurship and Placemaking efforts in Marathon, Portage, and Wood Counties. The goal, under the Strategic Doing framework, is to bring together stakeholders from across the region in order to establish action-based work groups to support, enhance, and grow efforts towards placemaking and an entrepreneurial ecosystem within the region.
- A study to better understand water quality concerns for foreign-born farm workers. Results will inform participants of water safety concerns and provide education for remedying water quality concerns. Total Reach: 119 farms were contacted for participation. Testing is still being conducted.

## 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/>

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