



*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**

- Winter Camp is a weekend-long, in-person overnight camp experience during which teens build friendships and life skills through active engagement in a variety of activities. This year's theme was "Winning at the Game of Life" and the activities focused on "adulting" skills like automotive maintenance, sewing, dressing for interviews, resume writing, responsible social media usage, cooking, and more.
  - Since the beginning of life, social connections influence youth to mature. Through interactions with family members and eventually peers, children develop a whole host of skills they'll use for the rest of their lives – behavioral and emotional regulation, feelings of connection and empathy, self-confidence, and the ability to understand how their actions and behaviors affect others. These are developed through interpersonal interactions. Much of becoming an adult is learned "on the job"; skills are picked up through the countless face-to-face experiences that until recently were the very fabric of teenage life. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt notes that a "child's brain is already 90 percent of its adult size by about age 6. The next 10 or 15 years are about learning norms and mastering skills—physical, analytical, creative, and social." As youth spend less and less time with each other and more time online, teenage social skills can atrophy. Couple that with the fact that not all parents are equipped with basic life skills such as cooking, automobile maintenance, finance, communication, and more, and you have youth who are in deep need of a basic course in "Life". Over the past five months, educators from five counties have met together to discuss how to best meet the needs of the youth they serve. With that in mind, they worked to develop a theme for the annual Teen Winter Leadership Camp into an experience where youth would have hands-on experience learning the basics. From changing tires and checking pressure, to using a hand blender to mix batter, youth were able to learn simple life skills that so many adults take for granted.
- A series of six afterschool programs for 2nd-5th graders at John Marshall Elementary where they explored STEM topics through hands-on activities. The purpose of this program is to increase teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking skills.
  - The Growing Great Minds of Wausau School District provides an afterschool program for youth in Elementary school. During the winter of 2025, Thomas Jefferson's Elementary's program coordinator reached out and asked Extension to provide a 6-week program with the focus on STEM skills (critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork). Each week, Extension staff provided a one-hour, hands-on STEM exploration activity and processed with the youth what they learned at the end. Youth explored various topics in small groups and learned teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking skills. Each week, Extension staff provided a one-hour, hands-on STEM exploration activity



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## **Agriculture**

**Heather Schlessor, Dairy Agent**

**Melissa Ohlrich, Regional Crops Educator**

- Planning for a four session Focus on Forage webinar series for forage growers and agriculture consultants in collaboration with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the US Dairy Forage Research Center. The goal is to provide research based forage management solutions to improve forage quality and meet producer goals.
  - Forage growers and dairy producers require high quality forages to meet the needs of their operations. Changing growing conditions and increased planting and harvest challenges create barriers to achieving these forage production goals. In response to this situation, forage working group team members outlined the key topics they felt would meet the needs of these stakeholders. Webinar sessions were scheduled using the Zoom platform, and team members identified and scheduled subject matter experts to address each of the topics identified for a four part webinar series. Currently, there are four webinars scheduled for February and March, each lasting one hour. There are two webinars in the series that will focus on alfalfa management as that remains a key forage in Wisconsin, one webinar focused on the use of cover crops as forage in dairy cattle diets, and one webinar focused on corn silage production. The webinars are being marketed statewide through a variety of media including direct e-mail, radio, local newsletters and social media.
- Planning for an artificial insemination course for dairy and beef producers. The goal is to teach farmers how to breed their cattle, so that they are not dependent on an AI technician.
  - In 2012 artificial insemination (AI) companies in Wisconsin stopped offering farmers artificial insemination training. During this time, these companies also concentrated their services to areas with more significant concentrations of dairy cattle. These changes in business practices created voids in artificial insemination services. As a result of this void and the need for continual improvement, the University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension developed an AI program for beef and dairy producers.
- Planning for a calving management course for dairy and beef farm owners and workers. The goal is to teach farm owners and workers to recognize signs of stress during calving and to know when assistance is needed and how to assist with the delivery of the calf, so that more live calves can be born.
  - While calving is a natural process there are times when assistance is needed. Having a person that is trained to properly assist with the delivery of the calf can aid in the success of a calf being born alive.
- Planning for a conference on managing stress in all aspects of farming for farm owners. The goal is to educate on how stress can affect cattle, people, and ways to mitigate this stress in both, so that we have healthier more fulfilling lives and cattle have more productive lives with less health events. A study to better understand milk quality. Results from this study will help dairy farmers improve milk quality in their herds.



## **FoodWise**

**Mallory McGivern, FoodWise Administrator**

**Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator**

**Julia Perock, FoodWise Educator**

- A quarterly nutrition education series in Portage & 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.
- Co-hosted the kickoff meeting of the Central Wisconsin Farmers Market Collaborative (CWFMC) and Farmers Market Promotion Program grant. This collaborative and grant will bring together farmers markets from the central Wisconsin region to create a space for market managers to learn, connect and collaborate on making their markets more successful, including increasing access to EBT and other nutrition programs at markets.

## **Horticulture**

**Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator**

- 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.
- Planning for a series of interviews for Marathon and Wood County leaders and stakeholders to assess the local needs in horticulture education. The goal of this effort is to identify specific challenges, opportunities, and partnerships to meet the needs of Marathon and Wood County residents.
- A program for members of the North Central Wisconsin Master Gardener Association, where participants learned the best practices for culture and pest management for indoor plant care. This effort is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of UW-Madison resources.



## Natural Resources

Kris Tiles, NRI Program Manager

Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator

Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Groundwater Educator

- A planning effort for Marathon County where local decisions makers and stakeholders are working to update the County's Groundwater Management plan. The outcome of this effort will be an updated Groundwater Management Plan that provides recommendations to County staff on how to protect and enhance the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies in Marathon County. Total Reach: The planning process will include 9 team members.
  - In 1988 Marathon County first developed their County Groundwater Management Plan in order to bring attention to groundwater protection and propose recommendations for that County departments could implement to safeguard the resource. The plan was updated in 2001 to continue these efforts. In 2023 Marathon County identified the need to update their groundwater management plan with new data and information and identify new recommendations. This work is alignment with objective 6.3 of the Marathon County Strategic Plan to "protect and enhance the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies," with a stated outcome of updating the Marathon County Groundwater Plan by the end of 2025. Marathon County developed a groundwater management planning team of County professionals, agency representatives, UW-Extension, and County Board Supervisors to begin the process of updating the Marathon County Groundwater Management Plan. This planning team is currently working on assembling resources and identifying areas of needed information for the plan. The outcome of the planning effort will be an updated Marathon County Groundwater Management Plan that will identify new management recommendations for County Departments that protect and conserve the groundwater resources of Marathon County
- 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: 30 Cooperating Foresters have joined the project to write Forest Stewardship Plan 93 Woodland Owners have been connected with Forester to get a plan 76 Forest Stewardship Plans completed 2814 New Forested Acres in a Forest Stewardship Plan
  - 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 landowner's 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 the culmination of this effort will increase forest health across the state.

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

- Planning for in-person and virtual workshops in collaboration with Wisconsin Farmer's Union and the R-STEP Collaborative. The goal is to provide an overview of large scale solar energy opportunities in the economy and to discuss common contract terms in solar leases with Wisconsin farmers and landowners so that participants can analyze legal risk when considering these new economic opportunities. Total Reach: 31 farmers, landowners, local government officials, agriculture service professionals, or community members
- A workshop "Dairy Feeder School" for all the individuals with a link with the formulation, mixing, and/or delivering of feedstuff for dairy cattle. We are creating an in person and bilingual event where participants will learn and reinforce their knowledge about feed safety, feed management, transition cow health, and the economics of feeding. Through this effort we will impact animal health and milk production efficiency, by improving the use of resources such as, feed ingredients, time and labor leading to an increased farm profitability and waste reduction.
- A factsheet for dairy producers and nutritionists is being developed to provide guidance about the emerging use of roasted high oleic soybeans in dairy cattle diets. The goal is to provide research based information to be used on farms to improve dairy cattle profitability and sustainability. (Matt Lippert, Jackie Mccarville, Luiz Ferraretto, Manuel Pena Pena)
  - High oleic soybeans are being marketed to dairy farmers in Wisconsin. This new type of soybean feeds much better than conventional soybeans providing for improved cattle performance, more economical feeding and higher inclusion of whole soybeans in the diet. However, as a new plant variety there are problems including season length challenges, poorer herbicide tolerance packages,



marketing problems and lack of infrastructure for roasting of the soybeans. The information will help producers understand the potential of this product and the potential challenges of being an early adapter of this technology. The information will help producers understand the potential of this product and the potential challenges of being an early adapter of this technology. The fact sheet will be followed by presentations and articles about the topic.

- A one-day workshop for community broadband leaders, economic development organizations, public and private permitting agencies, and internet service providers, where participants learned about broadband permitting requirements, engagement and endorsement of BEAD projects, and engaged in peer learning through case studies so they can build effective public-private partnerships that meet their community's broadband needs, increasing economic opportunity and quality of life for all community members.
- A food preservation and safety efforts for community members, where participants learned safe canning techniques and proper pressure canner testing. Through this program, community members can safely preserve food, reducing waste, and ensuring safe and healthy foods. Total Reach: 31 families with 46 pressure canning equipment being tested
- Shared leadership in the Eat Right Be Fit coalition in Clark County, where emphasis is placed on the health and safety of Clark County families through increased food access, education and shared resources. The coalition's goal is to develop new projects and partnerships that will advance health equity in Clark County.
- Shared leadership in the Giving Gardens committee of HPPP (Hunger & Poverty Prevention Partnership), where emphasis is placed on promoting and supporting efforts to maintain community gardens, improve food security, and provide educational programming in Portage County.

## Upcoming Programs

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

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