



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
MARATHON COUNTY

January 2025 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

- Planning for the addition of the Marathon County 4-H AmeriCorps Program Assistant year of service. The goal is to prepare AmeriCorps member to boost the capacity of Marathon County 4-H by evaluating current programs, identifying growth opportunities, and launching new 4-H community engagement initiatives. This effort aims to expand educational opportunities for youth, attract new participants, and engage more volunteers, thereby enhancing community connections and fostering positive youth development through schools and other youth-serving programs throughout the county.
 - The AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistant will enhance the reach and impact of Marathon County 4-H by collaborating with other youth-serving organizations. The goal is to recruit new members and find innovative ways to connect with youth in their communities. This effort is driven by the desire to expand our program's capacity, ensure we meet the needs of a broader audience, and strengthen our overall impact on youth development. The AmeriCorps Member will be tasked with creating dynamic programs for area non-profits and schools. The member will design curriculum, deliver programs and create evaluation tools. Additionally, they will participate in existing 4-H programs like workshops, camps, and travel opportunities. This role is designed to enhance our ability to connect with more youth in Marathon County. Samantha Soback is the new Marathon County AmeriCorps/4-H Program Assistant who will take 4-H youth development programs into the community. Her term of service will with Marathon County is January 6 through August 22, 2025. The key objects are to: Increased Program Capacity and Broadened Youth Engagement.
- A virtual program for teen 4-H members interested in servings as camp counselors during which they learned what the role of counselor entails, where camp will be held, and got their questions answered. Total Reach: 6 youth, 1 AmeriCorps, 2 adult volunteers
- A series of six afterschool programs for 2nd-5th graders at the Thomas Jefferson 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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- An in-person professional development program for adult 4-H volunteers where they practiced experiential learning strategies, networked with volunteers from other counties, and learned more about youth development. Total Reach: 20 adult volunteers from 4 counties attended the program
 - Adults are required to take specific training from Extension's PYD Institute in order to become approved volunteers. Those trainings focus on youth protection. Those trainings do not focus on the skills volunteers need to effectively build experiential learning programs for youth. The 4-H Volunteer Retreat is focused on teaching adult volunteers about skills and resources that will help them make learning fun and engaging for youth in their 4-H programs. This program is hands-on, interactive, and encourages social networking among volunteers. It also recognizes the experience that volunteers bring to the program and encourages them to share their expertise. Participants reported that they are "extremely likely" to recommend this program to other volunteers in the future. When asked why, they reported that the program was an awesome learning experience, that staff were fun and friendly, and that they gained wonderful ideas and resources to take back to their county to share with other leaders. When asked what skills they learned at the Retreat that they would use in the next 6 months, answers included: using Lego with their clubs to boost engagement, building awareness and understanding of differing abilities, and reevaluating how club meetings are run.

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 dairy heifer reproduction data collection and survey project in collaboration with UW-Madison Department of Animal and Dairy Science faculty and graduate students. The goal is to assess current management practices and identify areas for improvement. Raising replacement dairy heifers is a significant and rising cost to dairy farms, and poor reproductive performance only adds to rearing costs.
- 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.
- Planning for a workshop for dairy producers. The goal is to educate farmers on the results of UW-Extension's colostrum management research project so they can implement changes to their colostrum management program and increase calf health.
 - Many dairy farms in the state are currently breeding animals to beef semen. These beef x dairy crossbred animals are often sold within 7 days of age. The colostrum management practices for these animals were largely unknown. The true effectiveness of heifer colostrum management protocols was also unknown, as many farms do not measure the failure of passive transfer rates in their animals. Due to the lack of knowledge surrounding the success of colostrum management practices in calves we sought to measure the rate of passive transfer on animals that are retained on the farm and those that are not retained. To date we have finished collecting blood samples on 1500 heifers and 1500 non-retained animals. We will now begin analyzing the data to determine the results of passive transfer on farms throughout the state.
- 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, threaten 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.

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.
- A 5-week nutrition education series for 3rd grade classrooms at Hawthorn Hills Elementary School, where students learn about the importance of eating from the five food groups, try new fruits and vegetables, and learn how food and physical activity can help them now and in the future. This effort was designed to make healthy eating a positive experience which will help students make healthier food choices in the future.
- 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.





- A 12-week series of strength training sessions (StrongBodies) at the Hmong American Center, where older adults learn best practices for weightlifting and learn nutrition and health education. Participants engage in regular strength training exercises to improve strength, balance, and flexibility so they can stay healthy and socially connected.

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.

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 culmination of this effort will increase forest health across the state.



Additional Extension Outreach Programming Occurring in Marathon County

- Real Colors and Improv Workshops for county department and public library staff in Marathon County. Participants increased awareness of their strengths and the strengths of others, learned how to communicate more effectively with colleagues and the public, and practiced skills to increase their ability to think creatively and adapt to various situations. These skills are designed to help participants be more effective in their public service roles. Total Reach: Marathon County Staff: - 42 Marathon County Public Libraries staff - 15 District Attorney staff - 5 Finance Department staff - Conservation Planning and Zoning Department staff
 - Extension was contacted by Marathon County to assist with their annual professional development day. Several department heads wanted workshops that would help their staff improve communication and work more effectively with others. Extension colleagues delivered three workshops for Marathon County: - Real Colors workshop for the District Attorney's Office and County Finance Department - Real Colors workshop for Marathon County Public Libraries staff - Improv workshop for the Conservation Planning and Zoning Department These workshops are designed to accomplish several things: - increased understanding of yourself and your strengths - increased understanding of the strengths of others - improved communication with team members and clients/customers - increased ability to adapt to situations and think creatively As a result of building these skills participants are prepared to be more effective members of their organizational team, and communicate with and meet the needs of the public they serve.
- 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.
- An article, for dairy and livestock farmers, nutritionists, and crop consultants was utilized in three newsletters documents a problem of low soil potassium fertility and its impacts on dairy and livestock production systems. The article identifies a statewide situation where increasing potassium inputs will likely improve profitability and sustainability on the majority of dairy and livestock farms. Total Reach: Midwest Forage Association e- Clippings 2,500 Extension Central News- 7,500 email Clark County Extension Views-2,000 plus- print Wisconsin State Farmer
- 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.
- 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.
- 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/
- **Horticultural Programs** – Information at <https://marathon.extension.wisc.edu/horticulture/programs/>

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