Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
MARATHON COUNTY

March-April 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

- 4-H Cloverbuds club met in March. The goal is to introduce youth in K-2 grade to 4-H and provide an opportunity for them to explore their sparks. Total Reach: 7 youth, 2 parents
    - The month 4-H Clover Kaboom workshops bring youth in grades 5K-2 together to build relationships, explore 4-H projects, learn hands on, and laugh with each other. At the March workshop youth tried their hand at glass etching, played musical clovers exercises, and created healthy snacks. The March 4-H Clover Kaboom workshop provided a fun and interactive opportunity for youth in grades K-2 to build relationships, explore 4-H projects, and engage in hands-on learning. Through activities like glass etching, musical clover exercises, and creating healthy snacks, participants not only developed new skills but also enjoyed a collaborative and laughter-filled experience. The workshop fostered creativity, teamwork, and healthy habits, while allowing youth to connect with one another and the 4-H program. This engaging and educational experience helped youth build a sense of community, while nurturing their curiosity and enthusiasm for future 4-H activities.
- Marathon County 4-H is continuing their partnership with the Children's Imaginarium in Wausau. In March, we provided programs in their STEM lab. Families attending the museum engaged in two different activities. Total Reach: 27 youth participated 14 adults joined the youth
    - The Children's Imaginarium invited Marathon County 4-H to host STEM activities in their lab on Saturday's during Winter and Spring. During the March 8th session, our team led 2 different activities related to healthy snacks. Activities included basic handwashing, reading a recipe, and making choices while creating their own ham roll ups. The other snack the youth made were PBJ sushi roles. Youth enjoyed a little snack while taking a quick break from their interactive play time. 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.
- The Marathon & Wood County 4-H staff developed training for the 2025 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. Total Reach: 20 4-H Youth
    - 4-H Educators created a dynamic training agenda where counselors and adults engaged in meaningful pieces which allowed the staff to begin to build their relationships, better understand behavior traits, how to support campers and to make decisions on the summer camp program. The camp staff will be trained to recognize and acknowledge positive behaviors, lead engaging camp songs and skits, and effectively address behavior corrections through activities & role-playing

exercises. This will ensure campers are actively involved in camp activities, fostering a positive atmosphere. Staff will use consistent positive reinforcement strategies and fair, respectful behavior correction techniques to maintain a supportive environment. Allowing camp staff to speak to the overall program will enhance the overall camp experience, ensuring both staff and campers are engaged, supported, and empowered to create a fun and inclusive camp culture.

Agriculture

Heather Schlesser, Dairy Agent
Melissa Ohlrich, Regional Crops Educator

- A zoom meeting for dairy cattle feeders, where tools for improving feeding safety, accuracy and timeliness were learned or achieved) to improve the production, success and profitability of the dairy. Total Reach: 21 people attended the event from 7 farms
    - A series of five dairy cattle feeder bilingual face-to face meetings were developed beginning in the fall of 2024. The last meeting had to be cancelled due to a winter storm. Instead of cancelling the event, zoom and zoom interpretation services were put in place along with online forms such as google forms so that attendees could still participate in the program despite the need to cancel the face-to-face event. Twenty one attendees, representing 7 farms and a feed mill, were able to participate in the event. The event was recorded and will be captioned to increase the audience over the upcoming months. Attendees received quality experience in the language of their choice, helping them be aware of the importance of their work to the success of the dairy farm. They learned they were part of a team that is seeking to improve accuracy, precision, safety and timeliness and the reason why what they did was important.
- Planning for a fecal egg count roadshow titled Parasite Patrol for small ruminant, beef, and dairy producers in collaboration with Extension County, Regional, and State Outreach Specialist, local producer groups, and veterinarians. The goal is for producers to manage parasite resistance, anthelmintic use, genetic selection, and pasture management to reduce anthelmintic resistance and economic loss to parasitism.
    - "Small ruminants typically obtain most of their nutrition from forage produced in pastures. Improper management of pastures can negatively affect forage growth, thus negatively affecting the nutritional quality of the pastures. Improper management of forages can increase the impact parasites (gastrointestinal helminths) have on the growth, development, health, and reproductive capabilities of the livestock and the plant, compounding the cycle of poor forage growth, poor grazing practices, high parasite numbers, and low animal production performance. Overgrazing impacts plant and soil health and can lead to soil erosion and increased ingestion of L4 parasite larvae. Overuse of anthelmintics (dewormers) has led to anthelmintic-resistant (AR) parasite populations. The AR parasite populations are challenging to manage, can be transferred by animal movements, and, when left unmanaged, can cause animal death. When forages are used to manage parasites, they are managed for good forage performance. " Planning of a Fecal Egg Count Roadshow to educate producers about parasitism and to teach proper techniques to gather fecal matter, perform fecal egg counts, and make informed management decisions to improve animal

health and decrease economic loss of parasitism. Producers will perform or utilize fecal egg count data to determine when anthelmintics are used to control internal parasites, evaluate anthelmintic effectiveness and resistance, formulate rotational grazing strategies for improved pasture health, and employ parasite life cycle interactions to decrease anthelmintic use to increase animal health and performance.

- A Wisconsin Idea Collaboration for dairy producers and those who service dairy producers, where videos and fact sheets were produced on ventilation and cow comfort. Through this effort/program/activity, dairy producers will increase their knowledge of cow comfort and ventilation, therefore improving herd health, welfare, and profitability.
    - In modern dairy farming, the health and productivity of cows are directly impacted by their living environment. One of the key environmental factors is the quality of ventilation in the cow barn. Insufficient ventilation can lead to poor air quality, increased humidity, and the buildup of harmful gases such as ammonia and carbon dioxide. This not only compromises cow comfort but also increases the likelihood of respiratory infections, heat stress, and reduced milk production. To improve cow health and optimize profitability, it is essential to implement effective ventilation systems that provide fresh air, control humidity, and regulate temperature. Proper barn ventilation supports the overall well-being of the cows, reduces the risk of disease, enhances milk yield, and can lower veterinary costs. In turn, these improvements directly impact the farm's bottom line by increasing production efficiency and reducing losses associated with health-related issues. This situation highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to barn ventilation to improve both cow welfare and farm profitability. Creation of videos and fact sheets based on the needs expressed by stakeholders. Producers will implement cow heat abatement strategies in cattle housing to increase animal comfort, herd health and welfare, and profitability. These efforts will also implement climate-smart strategies to improve milk production efficiency.
- 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.

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- A series of four Focus on Forage webinars for forage growers, livestock producers, agency staff and agricultural consultants where research-based forage management solutions are shared to optimize forage yield and quality to improve overall farm profitability.
    - Forage production is an important segment of crop production in Wisconsin and helps to support the livestock and dairy industries in the state. Meeting forage quality and forage yield goals of producers is a key metric to profitability on these operations. The Focus on Forage planning team brainstormed timely forage topic ideas and generated a four session series - Focus on Alfalfa Companions, Focus on Corn Silage, Focus on Forage Cover Crops and Focus on Alfalfa Toolbox. The educators then identified Extension specialists, Educators, and researchers that could discuss the impact of these management recommendations to forage growers. Each webinar was one hour long, featured three to four speakers and allowed time for participants to ask questions related to their operations. The four webinar series averaged 111 participants per session, which is an increase from the 2024 series. We are currently collecting post event survey data.
- A training session for manure applicators and farmers where participants learn to apply manure safely and accurately to keep themselves safe, protect the environment, respond to manure spills and increase farm profitability. Total Reach: 144 commercial manure applicators and farmers
    - Manure applicators handle approximately 2/3 of Wisconsin's 12-billion-gallons of dairy manure produced annually. Proper training in accurate and efficient manure applications is critical to applying manure where and when it is needed to reduce environmental risk and improve farm profitability. Manure applicator training 101 sessions were offered to commercial applicators and farmers. These sessions are part of a series of statewide applicator training. A new interactive mapping exercise was created to engage applicators and farmers in problem solving and decision making. The mapping exercise focused on manure storage sitting, transportation, environmental setbacks and impact, application methods, safety, spill response, and communication. A new Manure Application Workbook was developed to correspond to the new mapping activity. The workbook and materials were created by team members Kevin Erb, Conservation Training Specialist, Jerry Clark, Becky Brathal, and Scott Reuss and delivered and taught with assistance from Anastasia Kurth, Jordyn Sattler, Melissa Ohlrich, Landon Baumgartner, and Laura Flandermeyer. After five training sessions, 144 applicators completed the training. Participants received a certificate of completion at the end of the course. A post activity evaluation indicated an increase in knowledge about Manure Storage Site Selection and Setbacks and Sensitive Areas. A knowledge increase was indicated on Road and Transportation, Semis, Dumpster, and Hose Location, and Manure Gas and Road Safety. An evaluation summary of all statewide locations is currently being developed.

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FoodWIse

Mallory McGivern, FoodWIse Administrator
Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator
Julia Perock, FoodWIse Educator

- Collaborating with students from UWSP to create a Food Access Map for Clark, Marathon, Portage and Wood Counties that includes grocery stores, farmers' markets, farm stands, convenience stores and food pantries. The purpose of this project is to assist community members in understanding all food resources available to them in their communities.
- A collaboration with DPI and the Wausau School District where engaging, clear menu boards were installed in cafeterias to upgrade school meal appeal, encourage healthier choices and increase meal redemption for students at Lincoln and Franklin Elementary Schools. Nutrition Educator Julia Perock offered educational lessons to reinforce the importance of making healthy choices in school and at home.
- FoodWIse provided the Wausau Winter Farmers Market with a flutter flag that draws traffic to the market and includes information about payment methods accepted at the market (credit, debit, EBT). This flag was provided to encourage SNAP-eligible individuals and families to shop at the market, which provides a benefit to local farmers and the community by increasing consumption of healthy food at home.
- A 5-week nutrition education series for 1st 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.
- Nutrition Educator Julia Perock taught a strength training lesson (StrongBodies) for older adults to learn best practices for weightlifting and nutrition. Participants engage in regular strength training exercises to improve strength, balance, and flexibility so they can stay healthy and socially connected through the statewide Strongbodies virtual classes.

Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

- A workshop for area Hmong growers where participants learned how to apply the principles of IPM to market gardens. This effort is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of UW-Madison 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.

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Natural Resources

Kris Tiles, NRI Program Manager
Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator
Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Groundwater Educator

- A hands-on demonstration for Scouts, where Anna used a watershed model to help Scouts achieve objectives of their Environmental Science merit badge. Through this demonstration, scouts learned to identify sources of pollution across the landscape and how they can impact water quality through runoff and infiltration. Scouts also learned the environmental and human health impacts of impaired water, and how conservation practices can be implemented to protect surface water and groundwater resources from pollution runoff and infiltration. Total Reach: 22 Scouts
    - To receive the Environmental Science merit badge, Scouts needed to meet the following objectives – Identify the environmental impacts of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, including effects on non-target species (including humans), what happens if the chemical infiltrate into the groundwater, and what happens to any runoff of the chemicals. Anna helped Scouts meet the Environmental Science merit badge objective by using an Enviroscape watershed model to demonstrate runoff, infiltration, and the surface water and groundwater effects of pollutants on the landscape. This interactive demonstration enabled Scouts to visualize and comprehend the movement of pollutants across landscapes, highlighting their effects on surface water and groundwater quality through runoff and infiltration. Additionally, they explored various conservation practices designed to mitigate these processes and engaged in discussion about the environmental and human health impacts of different pollutants. Following the demonstration, Scouts reported that they could confidently identify various sources of point and nonpoint source pollution. They were able to explain how these pollutants affect surface water and groundwater quality, understand the environmental and human health impacts of polluted water resources, and recognize conservation practices that help reduce water quality pollution. Not only did this demonstration enable Scouts to earn their Environmental Science merit badge, but it also equipped them with valuable knowledge on how to personally reduce pollutant impacts on water quality. It also gave them the confidence to educate others about the environmental and human health effects of runoff and infiltration, and to identify effective strategies for mitigating these impacts.
- 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, 46 Woodland Owners have been connected with Forester to get a plan, 10 Forest Stewardship Plans completed, 541 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. In 2024, 10 landowners received a new plan, covering 541 acres of woodland in Wisconsin. 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 the culmination of this effort will increase forest health across the state.

- A regional gathering for Producer-Led Watershed Protection groups in the North Central region, where producer-led group members participated in breakout discussions and facilitated conversation focused on three topic areas - grant management and operational support, community and member engagement, and conservation practices. Through this gathering, producer-led groups explored shared ideas, successes, challenges and opportunities for collaboration while building a stronger network to support producer-led efforts focused on improving soil health and water quality in Central Wisconsin. Total Reach: 23 producer-led group members and collaborators
- A conference for woodland owners in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois in collaboration with Iowa and Illinois Extension where landowners learned about a variety of forest management topics to allow them to make more informed decisions about the management of their woodland. Total Reach: 285 Woodland owners attended the conference

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Additional Extension Outreach Programming Occurring in Marathon County

- 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.
- An interview for the WFHR listening audience, where listeners learned how to prune woody ornamentals. The goal of this effort was to increase awareness and knowledge about UW-Madison resources.
- Preparation and facilitation of a strategic planning session, where participants analyze their strength, weakness, opportunities and challenges, brainstorm strategies and prioritize them to better address local health needs and health inequities.
- A study to monitor how land use changes affect nitrate concentrations in groundwater, and to foster environmental awareness and stewardship amongst school aged children.
    - Abbotsford is located in an area of north central Wisconsin where groundwater quantity is limited to a thin shallow aquifer that is impacted with nitrates. One of the city's well fields is located on school property. The land use was changed from row crops to restored prairie and school forest in an attempt to improve groundwater quality. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) contracted with WGNHS to evaluate groundwater quality and establish a conceptual model for groundwater flow around the wellfield and to engage Abbotsford schools in an attempt to incorporate groundwater education into the district's curriculum. WGNHS subcontracted the well drilling and worked with Abbotsford schools to have students visit the drilling site and to make observations of the aquifer material. In May and September 2025, WGNHS will provide additional training and material support (a water quality meter, sampling supplies, etc.) to support the school taking over long term monitoring at the site. WGNHS will provide ongoing technical support for the analysis and interpretation of the results.
- An informational presentation and hands on demonstration of the groundwater model for central Wisconsin residents, where participants were able to learn about surface and groundwater resources of central WI and how land uses can affect them. Through this presentation and demonstration participants are able to learn how their land uses affect their water resources and actions that they can do to mitigate the risks. Total Reach: 80 participants

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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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