



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
WOOD COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



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UW-MADISON EXTENSION

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Supporting Wisconsin's Agriculture Industry »

Whether on the farm or in the field, we're on the front lines of modern agriculture, helping producers build stronger and more productive food systems. From managing livestock to crops to strategic financial planning for farms, our educators and researchers help solve challenges that Wisconsin producers face.

Fostering Civic & Economic Leadership »

From educating elected officials to training the next generation of local leaders, we're committed to empowering citizens to make positive, transformative change in their communities.

Empowering Health & Well-Being »

We provide individuals, families, and communities the tools and guidance they need to reduce stress, improve nutrition, and support physical activity. We work with community partners to increase access to healthy affordable food, create environments that promote well-being, and address access to quality health care.

Promoting Healthy Relationships »

We embrace the philosophy that each stage of life is unique, exciting and filled with potential. Our programs promote aging-friendly communities, coach parents and help families put technology, mindfulness and financial awareness into everyday use.

Enhancing Resilient Natural Resource Systems »

We work with partners across the state to ensure that our diverse natural resources remain resilient and productive. From water and forestry programming to conservation training and youth environmental education, our educators and researchers navigate complex issues, facilitate challenging conversations, and help develop innovative solutions.

Supporting Positive Youth Development »

Our research-based youth enrichment programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to grow into the global leaders of tomorrow. From youth governance to Wisconsin 4-H clubs, we provide diverse educational opportunities to prepare youth for success in Wisconsin and beyond.



Agriculture

Matt Lippert, Agriculture Educator

Quality Forage is Key for Dairy Profitability

New systems such as summer annual forage mixtures, winter cover crops harvested as feed and old stand byes such as corn silage have all been featured in efforts for dairy and livestock producers to feed their animals more economically with greater production.

In 2022 Farm Technology Days was held locally and provided a great opportunity to focus on forage production topics. Display plots featured a range of forages ranging from traditional alfalfa, to annual legumes, grasses and blends of warm season and cool season annual grasses and fast establishing annual legumes.

Data was collected locally as part of a state-wide collaboration to establish potential yields, quality and cow performance on winter forage and summer cocktails. Zoom webinars on these topics were presented, articles in state magazines, and fact sheets on the Extension Topic Hub are still being completed as this effort is ongoing.

A pasture walk was held and focused on improved forage quality in pastures utilizing summer annual mixtures to compliment perennial grass and legume systems.



Extension Grazing Specialist Jason Cavadini discusses the economics of grazing summer annuals.

Robot Milking, Automated Milking Systems (AMS) Have High Producer Interest



A block of six robots in a grazing system.

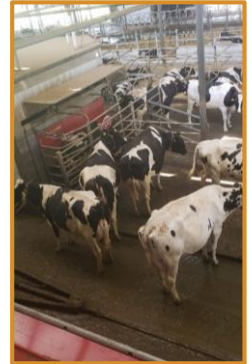
As hired and family labor become increasingly scarce on dairy farms, and also more expensive, dairy producers have turned to robotic milking systems to get the cows milked. Robotic milking came to Wisconsin and the US first in 2000 but the interest has increased nearly exponentially in recent years. Service networks, improved systems, increased reliability and greater awareness by producers of robotic milking as an alternative have aided the increased adaptation of robots. Robots are considered a size-neutral technology, meaning that small producers may implement this new technology as easily as large producers. Robotic technology is very capital intensive, trading labor for money, this is a barrier for many producers; however with few options to get the cows milked, installation of new systems remains strong.

In 2022 Extension Wood County hosted an open house to tour a robotic milking facility so producers could “kick the tires” and network with other producers that already own or are considering robotics. Extension also included articles about dairy automation in newsletters, discussed automation on radio programs, and discussed the importance of the technology with many producers and industry partners.



Agriculture

Expensive concentrate feeds are utilized to encourage cows to voluntarily show up to the robot to be milked. This may increase the cost to feed a robot milked herd compared to a traditionally milked herd. During 2022 and 2023, Extension Agent Matt Lippert is working with others on the Dairy Program team to survey producers and get more concrete answers to how producers manage feeding costs on robotic dairies.



Cows adjust well to the robotic routine and report to the robot when they need to be milked.

Animal Husbandry and Producing High Value Beef-Dairy Crossbred Calves Featured at Farm Technology Days



Matt Lippert provides a television interview at 2022 Farm Technology Days in Clark County.

Other topics of emphasis this year included paired calf housing, beef x dairy beef crossbred calves and humane dehorning practices. All of these topics were covered at Farm Technology Days. The use of paired housing to help calves socialize was demonstrated with beef-dairy crossbred calves at Farm Technology Days. Information on humane dehorning practices were also provided. 46,000 people attended the show, our reach was extended by being included on the evening news covering the event.

Partnerships, Webinars and Articles Extend Our Reach

Badger Dairy Insight, a webinar covering dairy topics during the winter was continued from 2021. Matt Lippert presented topics on corn silage and genetic selection. A statewide Extension Dairy Program e-newsletter featured several articles from Matt Lippert. Lippert also was a regular contributor to the Extension Central Ag Newsletter, Wisconsin Agriculturist, Wisconsin State Farmer and Midwest Forage Council Newsletter.



Community Development

Kayla Rombalski, Community Development Educator

Clean Sweep Event Takes in 7,800+ Pounds of Hazardous Wastes



Wood County Health Department employees assisting with Clean Sweep

Wood County's annual Clean Sweep event was held from 8 AM-Noon at the Marshfield Agricultural Research Station South Campus on Saturday, September 10. Clean Sweep is a voluntary program for the legal and safe disposal of hazardous waste from homes, farms and businesses. Chemicals that are improperly stored or disposed of can pollute lakes, rivers and drinking water.

Despite a dreary, rain-filled morning, Wood County residents were lined up before 8:00am to safely dispose of items that may have been taking space in a garage or barn.

Extension facilitated the Clean Sweep event with the support of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

2022 CLEAN SWEEP HIGHLIGHTS

151

Vehicles Participated

5,715

Pounds of Household Hazardous Waste Collected

2,123

Pounds of Agricultural Waste Collected

Scientific Discoveries Abound at Science By The River

Science By The River, an official Wisconsin Science Festival event, was held on Saturday, October 15. From meeting a muskellunge to guessing does it sink or float, community members of all ages had the opportunity to connect to the Wisconsin River while engaging with science and technology.

Approximately 60 people attended the interactive walking trail, stopping at activity stations along the way. Partners included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, McMillan Memorial Library, Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools, Mead and Sandhill Wildlife Areas, and Extension Wood County.

The event also included two "Tap Talks" at B's Tap House in Wisconsin Rapids. Scott Provost, Water Resources Specialist with the WI DNR presented "A Water Quality Journey of the Big Wisconsin," sharing the history and importance of preserving the Wisconsin River. A presentation on "The Science of Brewing" was also given and attendees had the chance to tour and learn all about the brewing operations at Two Doors Down Brewing Company.



'Sink or Float' activity at Science by the River



Community Development

Task Force Tackles Child Care Crisis

In June 2022, after seeing the impact of the lack of affordable, high-quality child care options in our community the Wood County Child Care Task Force was formed. In September, Kayla joined the Task Force as a facilitator and one of 19 individuals representing 13 stakeholder organizations.

Child care access and affordability is a significant economic development issue across the state and the nation. By examining data and following best practices, the Task Force has identified a few potential strategies, including stipends and support to new and existing child care providers, support for behavioral interventions at child care centers, and businesses subsidizing child care costs for their employees. Extension's involvement in this issue connects resources from UW-Madison to the local community and aims to positively impact child care access and affordability.



A young child enjoying an activity at day care.

In 2012, there were 145 providers in Wood County with 2,993 child care slots. Today (in 2022) there are only 58 providers with 2,228 slots. That is a 60% decrease in the number of providers in 10 years! As of February, 36% of Wood County zip codes are considered a child care desert. About 5.4% of Wood County's population is under the age of 5. Thirteen percent of children in Wood County live in poverty, which is two percentage points higher than the state average of 11%.

Creating A Community Economic Development Action Plan in Pittsville

In August, the Pittsville Area School District (PSD) applied to and was selected for the Community Economic Analysis for Rural Wisconsin Communities (CEA-RWC) Initiative. This pilot program is in partnership with Extension and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). Pittsville Area School District is one of five rural communities selected.

A community leadership team of PSD stakeholders began working with Extension in October to develop a strategic economic development plan for the area.

A series of strategy sessions focused on:

- Reviewing economic and demographic data unique to Pittsville,
- Conducting Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) analysis of the Pittsville area, and
- Discussing potential priorities and areas of opportunity.

These sessions have centered on economic development and entrepreneurship, housing, community building, civic leadership development, marketing and communications, and outdoor recreation infrastructure. In the next session, the community leadership team will continue to narrow these focus areas, creating actionable strategies for each priority that will positively impact the Pittsville Area School District.



Cranberries

Allison Jonjak, Regional Cranberry Educator

- January’s cranberry outreach & education summit is Cranberry School, which was held virtually for 2022. Nearly more than 400 growers attended to learn about the research conducted the prior year, and to discuss current best practices to implement on their marshes.
- Through the months of February, March, May, June, July, November and December, growers participated in Virtual Brown Bag lunches, showcasing ongoing research, discussing timely issues (such as 2022’s spring hailstorm, which was unlike any memorable hail events in that it struck before vines had set their fruit, and consequently growers needed extra information to support full recovery), and sharing field observations. Each Brown Bag spotlighted 2-3 researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and most included a crop consultant report to foster conversation.
- The Spring Mini-Clinic, held in mid-April, gave growers their first chance to meet in person for pre-season planning since the 2020 pandemic.



The “Weed Zoo”: an abandoned cranberry bed where spectrum of control herbicide screening programs are conducted.

Addressing grower feedback (“we like face to face exchange with other growers and researchers, but we don’t like driving 4+ hours to do it”), the Spring Mini Clinic in 2022 was offered at one “live” site with researchers present (Wisconsin Cranberry Research Station in Jackson County), and three “satellite” locations (Whittlesey Cranberry Co in Wood County, Bartling’s Manitowish Cranberry Co in Vilas County and the Spooner Agricultural Research Station in Washburn County). All growers were able to attend an in-person meeting with direct contacts, but with maximum 1 hour’s drive each way. Growers appreciated this format and voted to continue it for future years’ Mini-Clinics.

SUPPORTING WISCONSIN CRANBERRY GROWERS

521

Copies of the Cranberry Crop Management Journal were distributed April through September

770

Attended Virtual Cranberry Educational Events

585

Attended 3 in-person Cranberry Educational Events

10

Product Screening Research Trials Conducted with Grower Cooperators



Cranberries

- May through September, Allison conducts screening trials for timing, rate, and chemistry choices available to growers, and in support of registrations for new chemistries. Conducting 10 trials in 5 counties across multiple timings results in a busy summer season, but growers are grateful for the knowledge gained.
- At the August Summer Field Day, 500+ growers gathered at the Wisconsin Cranberry Research Station in Jackson County, and saw fungicide research plots, herbicide research plots, phosphorus solubilizing microorganism cultures collected from cranberry marshes, new cranberry breeding trials, and lined beds for water quality testing--in person. More than 80% of growers had not been to the Research Station previously, and all feedback reported positive experience gained and increased understanding.
- After September and October's busy harvest season, growers congregate for the November Research Round Table, where researchers listen to growers, breakout discussions are held, and surveys taken to understand growers' research priorities for the coming year. The round table ensures that research done at the University of Wisconsin is relevant, and that growers are eager to use results once they become available. The tight feedback loop provided by this connection, but at the Research Round Table and all year long, is what helps Wisconsin's cranberry industry remain best in the world. Allison is proud that her work tightens this bond and helps growers and researchers achieve common goals.



Growers line up to take a "Mini Clinics on the Marsh" bus tour, with 5 stops curated to discuss current field research.



Spore Traps collect pathogens during cranberries' susceptible period, so that growers can understand which disease vectors are present in their crops. June 2022, Jackson County.



Dr. Jyostna Mura and three of her graduate research assistants showcase their work on the sunny Summer Field Day.



Health & Well-Being

Hannah Wendels, Nutrition Educator

Mallory McGivern, Program Administrator



Healthy Choices, Healthy Lives

FoodWise is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). We advance healthy eating habits, active lifestyles and healthy community environments for Wisconsin residents with limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community and systems levels.

Community Impacts In 2022

- Delivered nutrition education to 622 learners in a variety of settings (early care and education centers, K-12 school settings, food pantries, etc).
- Implemented the Harvest of the Month campaign in the Wisconsin Rapids School District, reaching students, parents & caregivers with messages in English & Spanish to promote eating Wisconsin-grown fruits & vegetables.
- \$200K USDA grant was utilized to hire Wood County-based Farmers Market Regional Coordinator and research and develop business plans that will support FoodShare/EBT access at farmers markets in Central Wisconsin.



Stockboxes for Seniors

After two monthly distributions in 2021, the Stockbox program took off running in 2022! This free program provides 30lb boxes of food to low-income seniors once per month.



63%

of population lives in census tracts that are low income & have low access to healthy foods



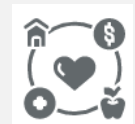
36%

of adults have obesity



10%

of individuals are food insecure



20%

of households receive SNAP benefits



Health & Well-Being

FoodWise, the ADRC of Central Wisconsin, United Way of South Wood and Adams County, FOCUS Food Pantry, and the Wisconsin Rapids Housing Authority came together to sustain this program each month.

Each month, around 90+ seniors receive a box. The moment folks arrive for their box of food, the social impact of the program really shines through. Each person wants to share a story about their day, or tell you how they prepared the foods from last month's Stockbox. For some seniors, this may be one of the few times they leave their homes and interact with people. You can see and feel that they are coming for more than just a box of nutritious foods to benefit their health, they are coming for socialization which is so vital to a person's overall well-being.



FoodWise Educator Hannah Wendels with a Stockbox volunteer

Stockbox recipients also benefit from the array of community partners involved. This is a great opportunity to ask questions and get connected to other resources in our community. When someone pulls up to receive their box of food for the month, they receive more than just that. They receive connection to people, resources, and so much more.

Education Reconnection

Extension staff reconnected with River Cities High School in 2022 to create relevant programming for all students enrolled in the alternative high school.

- Nutrition Educator Hannah Wendels and Human Development & Relationships Educator Jackie Carattini collaborated to teach nutrition and life skills.
- This collaborative education began as a 10-month series in September 2022 that will carry on throughout 2023.
- Students learned about food preparation, cooking, budgeting, finance, and mindfulness activities to better prepare them for their future and living on their own.

Achieving More Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension works alongside the people of Wisconsin to deliver practical educational programs where people live and work – on the farm, in schools and throughout urban and rural communities. In Wood County, FoodWise partners with schools, school garden programs, Head Start programs, ADRC, YMCA, farmers markets, and food pantries to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in our communities.



Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

Horticulture is the art and science of growing plants, including flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees, and lawns. Research shows that plants have a positive impact on people and communities by providing economic and environmental benefits, increasing access to food, and improving personal and community well-being.

Wood County is facing many environmental challenges such as pollinator decline, climate change, and environmental contamination & pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals in urban and suburban environments. Proper plant selection can reduce invasive plant species and provide habitat for native pollinators. Properly sited plants around homes and buildings can also decrease energy consumption thus reducing carbon emissions that lead to climate change. Proper pest management techniques can lead to less fertilizer and pesticide use leading to reduced likelihood for environmental contamination and pollution. We know that when our audiences gain knowledge, understanding, or experience a change in attitude, that a proportion of them will implement that knowledge or understanding or attitude change into new behaviors or practices.

Horticulture Inquiries

- Using the IPM framework which emphasizes reducing chemical applications to when only necessary and general plant health, Master Gardeners and the horticulture educator Janell Wehr answered over 80 inquiries from Wood County residents in 2022. To accomplish this, Janell coordinated the Wood County Master Gardener Volunteers, including selection, orientation, and training.
- Participated in the Wisconsin Horticulture Update, a series of weekly meetings for Master Gardener Volunteers to connect with county based educators and state specialists to help ensure research-based guidance is provided to residents with gardening questions.
- Taught 12 week in person introductory horticulture course to potential Wood County Master Gardener Volunteers. 5 participants.

Public Outreach Programs

- *Extension Wellness Series:* A virtual and in-person weekly educational series for Central WI residents where participants learn a variety of topics to improve overall well-being and health.
- *Learning is ForEver, Continuing Education, UWSP- Spring and Fall Programs:* Lifelong learning program that engages participants from the geographic area of all three UWSP campuses.



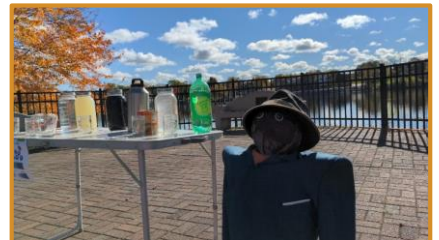
Horticulture

Media Outreach

- Media outreach through interviews for WFHR in Wisconsin Rapids, WDLB in Marshfield, and Garden Talk with Larry Meillor on WPR.
- The state level Social Media Team works together to provide timely and relevant information to gardeners through engaging and educational social media posts, using the Extension Horticulture Facebook and Instagram channels. The team also evaluates this effort using data from Meta and Google Analytics. Over the course of 2022, 102 posts were made to Facebook and Instagram to educate the public about timely and relevant horticulture topics throughout the year. Posts include educational information and links to articles on the Horticulture Topic Hub and upcoming events such as statewide webinars, classes and activities (i.e. Pollinator Week).
- Overall, from Facebook Meta Analytics, Facebook posts on the Extension Horticulture page reached 1,037,221 people with 10,772 engagements (combined total of link clicks, shares and comments). This is a significant increase from the previous year where there was little activity on the Extension Horticulture Facebook page. The majority of Facebook posts directed people to the Extension Horticulture Topic Hub website. Additionally, posts may direct people to other university-based information. Using Google Analytics for the Horticulture Topic Hub website, we had 15,696 users on the website from Facebook posts and activities and acquired 13,365 new users on the website.

Youth Outreach

- *Science by the River*: An educational science event for Wood County families, where attendees engaged in science demonstrations in order to spark curiosity and an interest in science and STEM fields.



Inspector Cabbage at Science by the River



Human Development & Relationships

Jackie Carattini, Human Development & Relationships Educator

A Path to Stable Housing

Increased rental costs, reduced rental availability and lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the workforce and economy have led to record numbers of individuals and families struggling to find affordable, safe and sober housing in Central Wisconsin.



In 2022, Carattini responded by increasing the number of local partnerships and monthly offerings of the Rent Smart program. Rent Smart is a free 6-hour curriculum that focuses on the knowledge and skills essential for a successful renting experience. It challenges participants to know and understand their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as those of their landlord. Establishing a positive rental history is much like having a positive credit report and sets Rent Smart participants on the right path for success.

Rent Smart strives to guide and inform participants so they may:

- Learn new skills to build positive relationships with landlords and neighbors.
- Gain confidence in their ability to find and maintain affordable housing.
- Understand the application and screening process used by landlords.
- Learn the responsibilities and rights of tenants and landlords.

Who is our target audience? Rent Smart is designed to help those individuals who have little to no rental experience and those who have had difficulty obtaining rental housing in the past.

In Wood County, community partners reported increased difficulty from individuals with prior evictions, convictions and poor credit history. Rent Smart has been offered in Wood County consistently since 2018. In 2022, Carattini surveyed partners to determine the best way to increase participation and work with their programs and referrals. For the entire year, Carattini offered monthly Rent Smart classes at both McMillian Memorial Library in Wisconsin Rapids and at the Everett Roehl Public Library in Marshfield. The libraries were chosen as safe locations and easily accessible for those who may have transportation barriers. Having monthly set dates allowed partners to refer clients according to their program needs.

Another need that was identified was helping individuals find safe and sober housing. Individuals who are in recovery may have made choices in their past that make it difficult to find housing. Several partners are working to help these individuals. Starting in the fall of 2022, Carattini partnered with the Wood County jail to offer the Rent Smart program virtually in the jail. Participants are screened and approved to participate. The program is set-up to alternate with females and males every other month. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Extension began offering Rent Smart as a statewide virtual program on a monthly basis to meet the needs throughout Wisconsin. Carattini taught one of the monthly sessions each month during 2022.



Human Development & Relationships

Lastly, Carattini has partnered with the River Cities Alternative High School to offer the Rent Smart curriculum during the 22-23 school year to all of their students, in hopes of preparing them as future tenants.

Pre/post survey results show that 100% of participants of all the local Rent Smart programs showed an increase in and "strongly agree" that they:

- Understand the importance of building a positive relationship with their landlord.
- Understand how finances affect getting or keeping rental property.
- Understand how landlords screen applicants.
- Understand the responsibilities of both the landlord and the tenant.
- Feel confident they can communicate their rental needs with their landlord.
- Feel that they have the tools and ways to manage their monthly expenses.
- The importance of using a "check-in/check-out" form to protect myself.

When asked what is the most important new idea that they learned in the Rent Smart program, some responses were:

- What are renters' rights and the landlords' rights.
- What to check for before moving in, so I know what needs to be fixed before signing the lease.
- Learning about renting safely and smartly, so as to not be taken advantage of.
- How to properly budget to figure out what kind of rent I can really afford and be able to maintain.
- To fully read my next FULL rental agreement and lease and if I have any questions or concerns with it, bring them up to the landlord before signing.
- Learning how to properly budget has really opened my eyes alot.
- What the landlord can and cannot do in an eviction process. How to prevent evictions.

When asked what they would do differently when renting going forward due to the Rent Smart program, some responses were:

- Fully read the rental agreement and lease before signing.
- Call past utilities on the place i am interested in to see what the utility costs are throughout the winter.
- Have copies of all legal documents and important papers in a safe and easy to access place.
- Building a relationship with the landlord that's strictly professional.
- Get everything in writing!
- Have a budget to know what I can afford!
- Do a check-in/check-out list before renting.
- Getting, keeping and maintaining a rental unit... don't screw it up.

In addition to monthly trainings for participants, Carattini is a trainer in the Train-the-Trainer Rent Smart training that occurs twice a year in July and December. This training is offered at no cost to community partners and agencies throughout WI and the United States.



Natural Resources

Anna James, Regional Natural Resources Educator

Newly Appointed Natural Resources Educator

In October of 2022, Wood County and UW-Madison Division of Extension appointed Anna James as the Regional Natural Resources Educator for Wood County and the surrounding Central Sands Region. In her role, Anna will develop and support water quality improvement efforts, as well as producer led watershed initiatives focused on water quality and soil health. She works with county land and water conservation staff, state agency staff, and others to fulfill goals focused on reducing nonpoint source pollution impacts to groundwater and surface water.



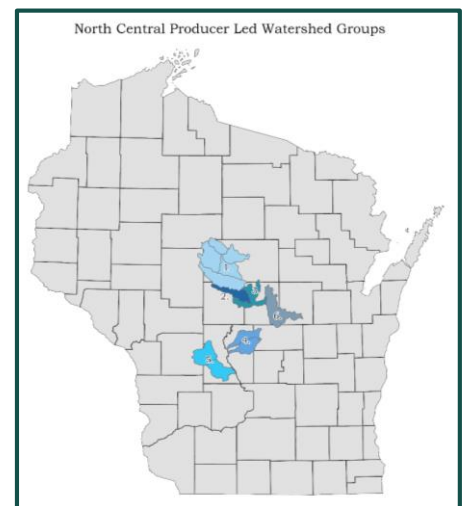
A Unique Approach to Improving Soil and Water Quality

Since 2016, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has been funding producer-led watershed groups that focus on nonpoint source pollution abatement activities through the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program. Six producer-led watershed groups have since formed in Central Wisconsin and now make up the North Central Region of Producer Led Groups. Each of these six groups have a unique way of improving the soil and water quality within their watersheds but share the common goal of improving Wisconsin’s soil and water quality through producer-led solutions.

Throughout the year, groups within the North Central Region delivered cost share programs for implementing conservation practices, hosted on-farm demonstration and research projects, and created education and outreach efforts on conservation systems and practices that improve water quality. The events hosted by these groups were well attended by a diversity of stakeholders within the watersheds which generally included members of the agricultural and non-agricultural communities and conservation professionals. For example, Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri hosted their 2022 kick-off event: Precision Agriculture & Its Effects on Soil Health which saw over 60 attendees.

While each group’s unique approach to improving soil and water quality should be well recognized, it is imperative to celebrate the diversity of production systems represented by members of each group. Of the six groups in the North Central Region, there is representation from dairy, cash grain/forage, managed grazing, canning crop, fresh market crop, potato, and cranberry farming operations. The region is rich in its diversity of farming systems, and the producer-led watershed groups are a wonderful example of those systems coming together to improve Central Wisconsin’s soil and water quality.

1	Eau Claire Partnership for Integrated Conservation	4	Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri
2	Farmers of Mill Creek	5	Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley
3	Central Wisconsin Farmers' Collaborative	6	Farmers for Tomorrow





Natural Resources

Wood County has a total of 7,250 acres of surface water (lakes, rivers, and streams) and a total of 389.7 miles of streams and rivers. These numbers represent well known water features like the Wisconsin River, Lake Wazeecha, and Nepco Lake which provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities for community members. What some might not know is that many of the pleasurable aspects of these lakes and rivers depend on healthy, well-vegetated shorelines.

Natural shorelines are home to diverse mixtures of native grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees which provide a multitude of benefits to lake, river, and stream ecosystems. Natural shorelines can help reduce many water quality concerns that are present in our cherished waterbodies as they will trap and filter sediments and debris from runoff events like rainfall and snowmelts. The plants can help reduce the amount of excess nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, from entering waters and causing events like blue green algae blooms.



Photo from Wisconsin Healthy Lakes & Rivers

Well-vegetated shorelines also provide many benefits to aquatic and terrestrial (land dwelling) wildlife. Most game fish in Wisconsin are sight feeders and do best in clean water, meaning that they also benefit from cleaner water filtered through natural shorelines. The leaves, twigs, and other organic matter from shoreline vegetation are food resources and breeding grounds for aquatic insects. These insects in turn feed many others up the food chain and can even be pollinator species.

Without natural shorelines many of us would not be able to enjoy the beloved water resources that Wisconsin is so well known for. The next time you're enjoying a lake, river, or stream find a well-vegetated area of the shoreline and try to identify some of its benefits to the water!

Future Programming and Research for 2023

The Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo: In March of 2023, Wood County Land and Water Conservation will host the Central Wisconsin Farm Profitability Expo, in partnership with UW-Madison Extension, Petenwell & Castle Rock Stewards, and Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association. The Expo promotes farming by building resiliency, diversifying farming operations, reducing inputs, and increasing farmer return on investments.

AgriVenture Farm Camp: In June of 2023, 60 youth from grades 3-6 will have the opportunity to attend the 2023 AgriVenture Farm Camp hosted by Memory Lane Farm in Marshfield, WI. Students will rotate between 5 program areas which include gardening, natural resources, farm animals, woodworking, and arts and crafts. Anna will be leading the natural resources program where students will learn about symbiotic relationships and how to identify these relationship in local ecosystems.

14 & 10 Mile Social Indicator Survey: Anna, along with colleague Guolong Liang, will be interviewing producers in the 10 Mile and 14 Mile Watersheds as part of a social indicator survey that they developed. The survey data will provide information about awareness, attitudes, constraints, capacity, and behaviors that are expected to lead to water quality improvements and protection. A similar survey will be created for lake front property owners in the 14 Mile Watershed.



Wisconsin 4-H

Laura Huber, 4-H Educator; Jasmine Carbajal, Associate Educator

Wisconsin 4-H Fall Forum Helps Youth Thrive

The success of 4-H across the state is due to powerful partnerships between staff, adult volunteers, and youth 4-H members. Every November, Wisconsin 4-H hosts Fall Forum, a special conference that highlights and strengthens this partnership. Youth in grades 7-13, adult volunteers, and Extension staff come together to learn and to practice new skills. They meet others from across the state to share ideas and build their network of friends.

In 2022, Wood County 4-H helped host Fall Forum right here in Wisconsin Rapids! Over 300 youth and adults from all across the state spent the weekend at the Mead Hotel & Conference Center. Over the weekend, they were able to participate in workshops and interactive programs. They learned about the 4-H Thriving Model, and how they can help youth succeed to be the very best adults they can be. Saturday evening was highlighted by the Wisconsin 4-H Hall of Fame Induction ceremony.

One of the most powerful pieces of the weekend was, in part, thanks to a powerful partnership with the McMillan Memorial Library. The Library, its MakerSpace and staff, opened up workshop possibilities that no Fall Forum has ever been able to offer before. The program offerings reinforced the Fall Forum theme "Together Towards Tomorrow."



Fall Forum participants visit the recording studio in the McMillan Library MakerSpace.



Fall Forum participants visit the recording studio in the McMillan Library MakerSpace.

Wood County 4-H members and volunteers showed statewide leadership throughout the weekend. A Youth-Adult partnership team from Badger 4-H Club led a workshop on leading 4-H programs for youth in kindergarten - third grade.

555

youth members in grades K-13

113

adult volunteers

15

4-H clubs

3

project-based 4-H groups

8,983

Hours of volunteer service

\$285,659.40

Value of volunteer time*



UW-MADISON EXTENSION
WOOD COUNTY

*Source: www.independentsector.org



Wisconsin 4-H

Laura Huber, 4-H Educator; Jasmine Carbajal, Associate Educator

The same group helped participants create 4-H shrinky dinks during the interactive programs. Another Youth-Adult partnership team from Webster 4-H club led a rock painting activity. The Wood County Youth Llama Project taught about llamas during the interactive program. An adult volunteer helped everyone relax by teaching yoga. Jasmine Carbajal, Wood County 4-H Associate Educator, teamed up with a volunteer from H2N teamed up to teach how to make tamales and how to work with LatinX communities.

Laura Huber, Wood County 4-H Program Educator, helped coordinate and provide leadership for the whole event with help from the Wisconsin 4-H Leadership Council. It was so exciting to bring this statewide hands-on learning opportunity to Wood County!

Providing Latinx Students with Tools to Thrive

According to Mental Health America, 18.3% of the U.S. population is estimated to be Latinx. Of those, over 16% reported having a mental illness in the year 2021. The Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health 2022 Annual Report showed that there is an increase in the number of youth with feelings of sadness or hopelessness. This same report stated that participation in extracurricular activities has a range of positive outcomes like improved resilience, social skills, connection to school, and academic performance. Kids who are connected to their schools, and feel they belong, have a much better mental health. Tools to Thrive was not an extracurricular activity, however, eight ELL (English Language Learner) Latinx youth participated in the weekly series from February through May 2023. The series was created due to the collaboration between the School District of Marshfield and Extension Wood County 4-H. In the 2022-2023 academic year the School District of Marshfield had an increase in their Latinx student enrollment, particularly in ELL students.

Tools to Thrive created a space for the ELL students to learn information in their native language, Spanish. Topics covered included: cultural differences, communication skills, health habits, education in their future, stress management, and goal setting. Six of the eight participants filled out an end of series evaluation. 67% of participants reported learning about stress and ways to cope with it. 83% stated they learned about different emotions and ways to communicate them. 67% found the sessions useful. The goal of these sessions was to help the ELL students engage more in their school, increase positive relationships at home and school, and increase their academic success.



Jasmine teaching Tools to Thrive



4-H Associate Educator, Jasmine Carbajal, led the weekly sessions using three main 4-H curricula: Mindful Mechanics, Your Thoughts Matter: Navigating Mental Health, and Juntos.

The teachers of the ELL students saw the difference in engagement and Jasmine has been invited to return in the 2023-3024 academic year to lead two more series of Tools to Thrive (one in the fall and one in the spring) and potentially adding a series with middle school students. The sessions also opened the door to more opportunities for local Latinx families to be involved with the school district. Post the eight-week series, a Latinx Family Night was organized and held at the Marshfield High School. Many families attended and stated how happy they were to get resources on how to stay more connected to their children's school.

Juntos

Another program that started in Wood County in 2022 for Latinx families is Juntos (means *together* in Spanish). Juntos is a six-week bilingual educational series where Latinx high school students and their families learn tools and resources to help students achieve high school graduation and post-secondary academic success, which is the goal of the program.



Extension Staff with Juntos participants

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 was offered in partnership with First Presbyterian Church in Marshfield, WI in October through December 2022. One family graduated from the program. The topics covered included

making education a family goal, school communication, graduation requirements, post-secondary options, financing higher education, and goal setting. The high school student that participated in Juntos grew significantly and one of the parents stated at the end of the program that Juntos staff “were the pioneers to giving us the light to get through the tunnel to help with our daughter’s education”.

Extension Wood County 4-H is excited to keep offering Juntos and see it grow in the coming years.

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