



# NEWS FROM EXTENSION

UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION WOOD COUNTY



## Stockboxes in Central Wisconsin Help Nourish Seniors & Fill Pantries

In Portage, Wood, Marathon and Clark counties, partnerships support unique distribution models for connecting important food items to seniors with limited incomes. These monthly boxes of shelfstable goods not only provide needed food, but the SNAP-Ed funded program FoodWise, volunteers and partners, including local ADRC, United Way and food pantries, bring care and valuable social connection during distribution days.

In June of 2021, the Milwaukee-based Hunger Task Force approached FoodWise coordinator Kelly Hammond to expand Stockboxes for Seniors, also known as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, to Wood and Portage counties. Building on established relationships and efficiently mobilizing partners such as the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Portage County, the Housing Authority, local food pantries and Central Rivers Farmshed in Stevens Point, distribution began a few months later. 100 seniors each received a food box, which contained 30 pounds of shelf-stable goods. In November of that year, work expanded to Wood County, building on partnerships with ADRC of Central Wisconsin, United Way of South Wood and Adams County, and Feeding Our Community with United Services (FOCUS) to connect 280 boxes to individuals in the community. Wood County Nutrition Educator Hannah Wendels supported distribution throughout 2022, and continues to sustain strong logistics and partner foundations even as Kelly stepped away from her Stockboxes leadership role and into other projects. Stockboxes are important resources that support access in emergency food systems. The distribution itself – those moments when individuals pick up their boxes each month – can be significant social events when volunteers, staff and organizers bring compassion to each individual interaction.

United Way of South Wood and Adams County leads the Hunger Coalition in Wood County. They assist with registration and tapping into the coalition for monthly volunteers at each distribution. The ADRC also assists with registration while managing paperwork for the program. Both organizations, along with FoodWise, promote and recruit eligible individuals so that as many seniors as possible who can benefit from the food know about and access this community resource.



Pick-up for Wood County takes place once a month at FOCUS Food Pantry in Wisconsin Rapids. This is also a location with The Neighborhood Table, a community meal site. Seniors picking up their boxes are able to have lunch and are joined by community members: The Neighborhood Table is open for anyone to have one meal a week without charge, and without restrictions of age or income.

Hannah grew up in Wood County, where she currently teaches and brings care for her community. She wasn't sure how often she would see people picking up these goods, which are free for residents over 60 years old based on income, from one month to the next. Even so, she worked to build trust and be a familiar face. "You can get really deep with someone in five minutes." Through these conversations, she learned so much about the importance of this social outing for many seniors. The commodity goods provide essential pantry items in the same way volunteers and educators like Hannah offer meaningful human connection. This engagement – sharing stories and talking with others – is a "part of health we forget to talk about with this work sometimes, and something that is really beautiful."

FoodWise Administrator Mallory McGivern noted, "if people qualify for these boxes, something could be going better for them – we don't always know the impacts we have." Understanding the connections between nutrition, social connections and Stockboxes is essential to partners' abilities to reach seniors in Marathon and Clark counties. Understanding how essential both nutrition and nourishing connections are will help her support Stockboxes reaching seniors in Marathon and Clark counties.

After a successful series at the South Wood County YMCA, Hannah brought Seniors Eating Well classes to FOCUS in February of 2023. A series of group nutrition education lessons, Seniors Eating Well highlights dietary topics for older adults, and at FOCUS, Hannah and participants bring attention to cooking with and preparing items specifically from the Stockboxes. This further

supports seniors with social connections. It also helps them learn new ways to use pantry items they might not otherwise have on their grocery list or pick up from the pantry on their own. Hannah will also pilot a learning series at Norris Manor apartments in Marshfield, cooking and exploring nutrition with seniors whose independent housing manager facilitates Stockboxes delivery to the apartments. Building programming like these lessons into the Stockbox concept adds depth and engagement to not simply using what is available, but also being creative with the goods at hand.





# WHAT IS YOUR INTERNET SPEED?

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, in partnership with Wood County, is conducting a regional internet speed testing initiative.

Many communities that need broadband funding may miss out because the data showing their need isn't available. The goal of this project is to create an accurate regional map of where internet services are or are not available in Central Wisconsin and what speeds residents are currently receiving. **We need your help Wood County!**

Take the **SPEED TEST TODAY** and encourage your friends, neighbors, and coworkers to participate!

**SCAN** OR **VISIT** OR **CALL**



[wisconsinsspeedtest.net](http://wisconsinsspeedtest.net)

If you do not have internet access please call 715-421-8440

No Internet? If you do not have internet available at your residence, business or face other barriers please call 715-421-8440.

## Turning Red Dots Green:

### *Expanding Access to High-Speed Internet in Wood County Through Speed Test Mapping*

by Kayla Rombalski, Community Development Educator

- [Take the Speed Test!](#)
- [View real time results for Wood County](#)
- [Brush up on Broadband Terminology](#)

Wood County's Digital Equity Solutions Team (DEST)/Broadband Task Force was recently reactivated. The team's goal is for broadband access to be accessible, affordable, and adoptable. For accessibility, it can be summarized as turning more of the red dots on this speed test map green.

This can be achieved through infrastructure investments supported by federal or state dollars. An accurate map that shows the full picture of internet access in our County is the best way to position us to receive those funds.

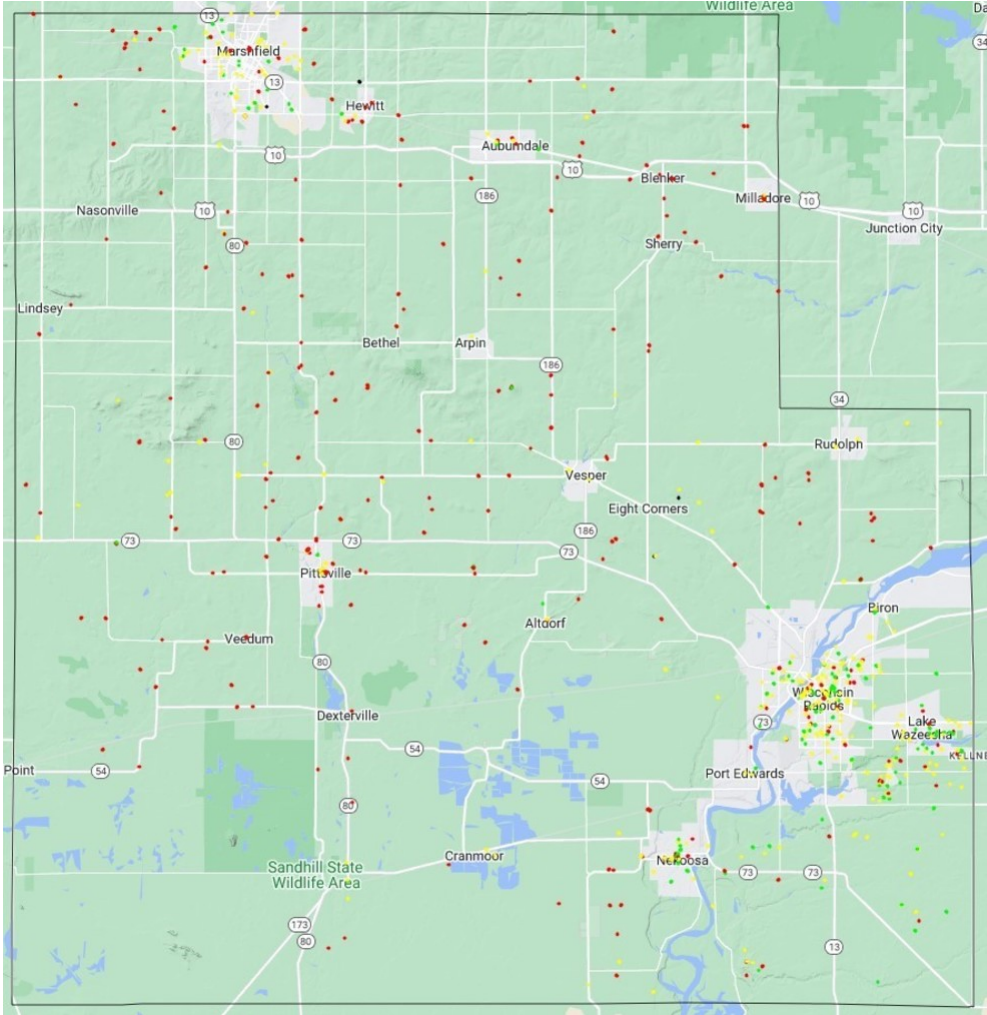
We need help from Wood County residents to make sure this map represents the internet service in all corners of our County, not just Wisconsin Rapids and Marshfield. Take the North Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission's speed test, at [www.wisconsinsspeedtest.net](http://www.wisconsinsspeedtest.net).

Of the 34,039 households in Wood County only 671 locations have been tested. Our goal is to capture the internet speed of at least 10% of household residences in Wood County. This means we need approximately 2,500 more speed tests to be completed!

In her letter included in the 2023 Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin Chairwoman Rebecca Cameron Valq says "We know internet access is needed to participate in nearly all aspects of our modern-day society. Internet access makes it easier for the people of our state to live healthy, enriching lives; for businesses to reach new customers; and for our state to grow and reach its full potential."

Mapping speeds allows us to identify areas of Wood County that are underserved and unserved and in turn makes a direct case for funding to expand the infrastructure in our County.

Contact Kayla Rombalski, Wood County Extension Community Development Educator, with questions – [krombalski@wisc.edu](mailto:krombalski@wisc.edu) or 715-421-8440.



# Upcoming Extension Programs

- **Rent Smart** | McMillan Library | Friday, Sept. 1 - 9:30am-12:30pm
- **Rent Smart** | Everett Roehl Library | Friday, Sept. 8 - 9:30am-12:30pm
- **Wood County Clean Sweep** | Saratoga Town Hall | Sept. 9 - 8am-12pm
- **Sowing Success** | McMillan Library | 12 Sessions Sept. - November

wood.extension.wisc.edu - 715-421-8440

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