



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

WOOD COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

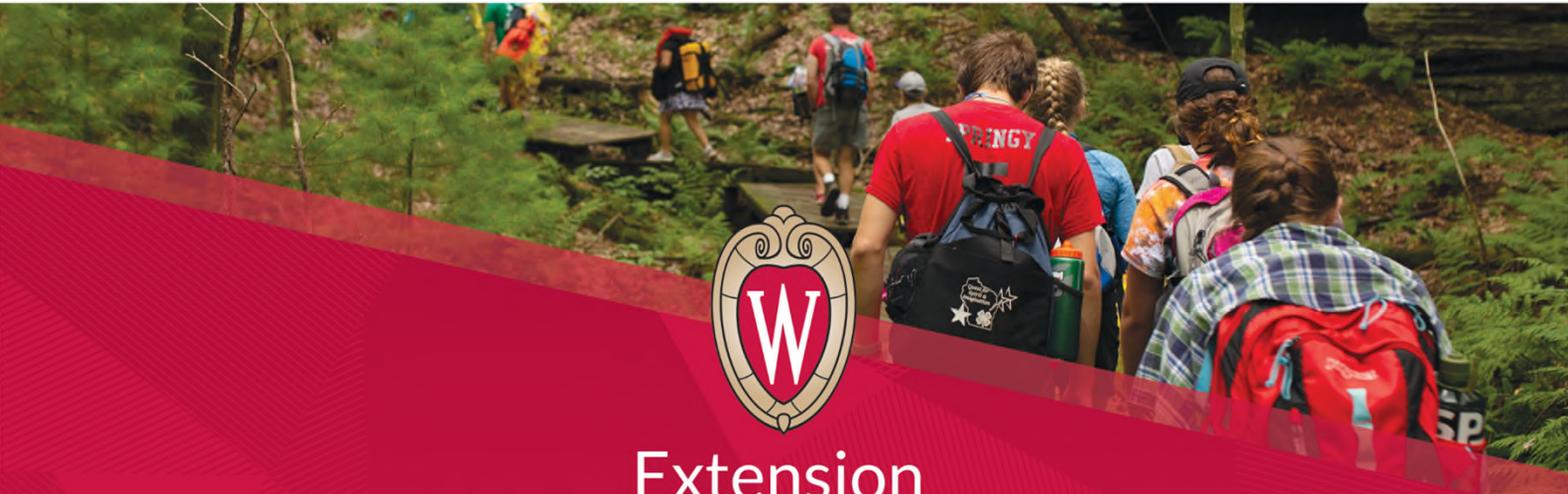


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Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

UW-Madison Extension's outreach creates key connection points for families, farms, communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, government, and more. We support local volunteers and leaders to take action and serve as role models in their communities, and we make sure Wisconsinites have the latest research, best practices, and educational opportunities.



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Agriculture

Matt Lippert, Agriculture Educator

PASTURE WALKS

Following two previous years of successful fall grazing pasture walks, local Extension Educators organized a pasture walk on the farm of a very successful organic dairy producer belonging to the plain faith community. Working with the local County Land and Water Conservation departments, an organic milk cooperative and a vendor and provider of organic farm supplies, and ultimately with the farmer host, topics of interest, addressing the current needs of organic dairy producers were identified. These topics included establishment of perennial pasture mixtures, maintaining high yield, crop rotation and high forage quality with maximum use of crop cover to minimize erosion and to maintain soil health; breeding and identifying the optimum type of dairy cow selecting for longevity, disease resistance, fertility and consistent yields of high component milk suitable for organic markets; raising of dairy replacements on pasture systems; and testing of soil and interpreting soil reports to economically improve pasture yield.



Hands on interactive discussion with other farmers with similar production practices is highly valued in this community.



Practices such as improved cattle lanes and efficient fencing systems were reviewed on the pasture walk.

Extension educators were identified to present on these topics and to lead group discussions with the participants and the host farm to learn how these goals were being addressed on this dairy farm.

Promotion of the event among the plain faith organic dairy farm community and with Land Conservation Departments and other groups resulted in a successful day with dynamic and interactive discussion.



Agriculture

FFA CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Students and instructors from nineteen school districts participated in a career development event through the FFA program. Eighty-five people evaluated four classes of dairy cattle for their soundness as a productive animal in a dairy herd. They also took a quiz on general dairy knowledge and understanding of Dairy Herd Improvement records. Many students engaged in preparation in advance of the event and increased their skill considerably through these efforts. Students also give a set of spoken reasons justifying their placings, thus having an opportunity to improve their speaking and problem solving skills.

The Marshfield Agriculture Research Station and another local dairy farmer provided their facilities to make the event possible along with collaboration with Mid-State Technical College.

VITAL

VITAL (Valuably Informed Thriving Agricultural Leaders) is an ongoing program for farm women. On February, 20 women interacted with their peers learning about trends in the dairy industry, farm business strategic analysis and successful entrepreneurial efforts of farm women diversifying their farm business by adding enterprises such as retail marketing of milk based lotions and cut flowers.

MEDIA OUTLETS

Media including the Wisconsin Agriculturist, Wisconsin State Farmer, Extension Agriculture SharePoint sites and Extension Badger Dairy Insight zoom programs, included much information on dairy cattle genetic evaluation, dairy transition cow management, feeding alternative forage and management of alfalfa and corn silage reached many audiences.

CENTRAL WISCONSIN FORAGE COUNCIL

Meeting with the Central Wisconsin Forage Council, Matt Lippert shared insights about forage based livestock production in Argentina, and genetic variation in corn silage adapted hybrids. The group included farmers and consultants managing many acres of forage crops.



Community Development

Kayla Rombalski, Community Development

REDI IMPLEMENTATION

2023 was a busy year for community economic development in Wood County. Jason Grueneberg, Wood County’s Planning & Zoning Director, and Kayla Rombalski, Community Development Educator, began forming implementation teams to bring Wood County’s REDI Plan (Rural Economic Development Initiative) off the shelf and into practice.

This effort began with a core group of stakeholders (many of whom were engaged in the original REDI process in 2019) forming the REDI Roundtable. This is a “collaborative economic development collaborative group” whose creation is outlined as the very first goal of the REDI plan. Goal accomplished! ✓



Makerspace Director Mark Bowie provides a tour of the C2 Makerspace in Marshfield.

Following REDI formation, an additional four implementation teams were launched to tackle the plan’s priority areas.

1. Broadband / Digital Equity Solutions Team (DEST)
2. Child Care Task Force
3. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Steering Committee (EESC)
4. Housing Task Force
5. (Launching in 2024) Marketing & Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Team



Brainstorming ideas captured during a Community Economic Analysis strategic planning session in Pittsville.

These teams are comprised of more than 100 individuals across Wood County. Team members provide subject matter expertise, passion, and drive to help us achieve our goals. More than 30 team meetings were held in 2023 with members providing a combined 300+ hours of their time to REDI implementation.

REDI BY THE NUMBERS

30

meetings of the REDI Roundtable & Implementation Teams (Broadband, Child Care, Entrepreneurship, Housing) were held

96

individuals were engaged in REDI activities

81%

(78 of 96 people) regularly attended more than one REDI meeting. There are nearly 150 people on the five team email lists

14

Participants (on average) attended each meeting. Total meeting attendance in 2023 topped 400! (416 total meeting attendance)

520+

hours of time given to REDI Implementation in Wood County



Community Development

CLEAN SWEEP

Clean Sweep 2023 was held on Saturday, September 9, at the Saratoga Town Hall in Wisconsin Rapids.

A total of 5,014 pounds of household hazardous waste and 324 pounds of agricultural waste were collected.

115 vehicles participated in the collection. Approximately 70% of the residents who attended live in zip code areas nearest to the Town of Saratoga. The remaining residents came from across Wood County with the second highest number coming from Marshfield.

The full report on the event, including materials collected, disposal costs and year over year comparison can be found at <https://bit.ly/CleanSweep2023>



Cars line up to dispose of hazardous materials at Clean Sweep.

CLEAN SWEEP BY THE NUMBERS

115 vehicles participated

5,014 pounds of household hazardous waste collected

324 pounds of agricultural waste collected



Pounds of hazardous wastes collected, by category, at Clean Sweep 2023.



Clean Sweep event at the Saratoga Town Hall.



Cranberries

Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist

EDUCATION

The Cranberry Summer Field Day in August attracted 450+ attendees. Extension led the "Mini-Clinics on the Marsh"- a series of bus tours where cranberry growers, employees, and allied industries spent an hour traveling from researcher to researcher. Eight researchers were stationed next to their research projects and were able to show-and-tell growers about the work that is underway.



Allison Jonjak (l), with Dharani Suresh Babu, a PhD student in the Mura Lab at UW-Madison, and a presenter at Cranberry School.



A packed session at Cranberry School.

January's Cranberry School hosted 330 guests at a 2-day event focusing on industry updates and research conclusion presentations from research that is ready for grower adoption.

Seven Cranberry Virtual Brown Bag Lunches were held throughout the year. Attendance ranged from 21-46 per session. Topics focused on issues and practices growers could implement. Some of the topics presented:

- Cold-hardiness research
- Agriculture input supply chain issues
- Worker Protection & Safety education, employee retention
- Extension Farm Management offerings
- Fuel sources and storage

A Spring Cranberry Mini-Clinic was held in a regional format: one live location and 3 livestreamed locations, encouraging growers to meet with their local communities while limiting drive times, for sessions focusing on early season herbicides, live bud dissections, and more. There were 122 attendees across the 4 locations.

CRANBERRY RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS

Research

5

herbicide screening trials

3

fungicide screening trials

3

insecticide screening trials

Education

7

virtual brown bag lunches

330

attendees at Cranberry School

450

attendees at the Summer Field Day



Cranberries

A Nutrient Management Planning training was held educating 21 cranberry growers about macro and micro nutrient needs of cranberries, and nutrient absorption in cranberry growing conditions. This training also reviewed how growers can create and maintain Nutrient Management Plans to ensure efficient and sustainable use of nutrients on their farms.

RESEARCH

Eight issues of the Cranberry Crop Management Journal were published. The archives are available here: <https://fruit.wisc.edu/cranberries/cranberry-crop-management-newsletters/>

On the research side, 5 herbicide screening trials, 3 fungicide screening trials, and 3 insecticide screening trials were conducted. Most exciting for growers are potential herbicides that show action against the Bristly Dewberry, and a potential insecticide that showed good lasting power against the red-headed flea beetle. A Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Project (funded by DATCP) was undertaken in 2023 at a Necedah cranberry marsh, and nitrogen applications were made according to 4 test timings to see which cranberry growth stage is the most advantageous time for nitrogen uptake. For 2024, three additional marshes (in Plainfield, Manitowish Waters, and Tomah) have applied for NOPP project funding to explore nitrogen optimization in cranberries.

Presentations to other groups included:

- A presentation on water quality was delivered to students in a pre-college program at UW-LaCrosse to encourage understanding of the interactions between wetlands and water purification.
- A presentation was delivered to the statewide Shriner's (a charitable organization) Fall Ceremonial educating them about the ecology of the cranberry, and the cranberry industry's economic importance to Wisconsin.
- A presentation was given to worker protection & safety auditors with the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection to help them understand cranberry production and cranberry chemistry trial applications, to develop rapport and understanding with a lesser-known production crop to help cranberry growers and auditors complete audits successfully.
- A Wisconsin Cranberry Research Station tour was provided to Department of Natural Resources staff, increasing their understanding of cranberry cultivation and the importance of water access for cranberry growing, as well as cranberry soils' capability of water filtration.
- Several media interviews (WFHR, Midwest Farm Report, WSAW, and more) throughout the growing season and harvest season highlighting the importance of the cranberry industry and its positive impact on economics, environment, and society in Wisconsin.



Allison applying a screening trial.



Health & Well-Being



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). With local strengths, we support healthy eating habits, active lifestyles and healthy community environments for Wisconsin residents experiencing limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community and systems levels.

ACHIEVING MORE TOGETHER

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

COMMUNITY IMPACTS IN 2023

- Engaged with 603 learners around nutrition education topics in a variety of settings, including early care and education centers, K-12 school settings and food pantries.
- Partnered with 3 schools in the Wisconsin Rapids School District to expand the Harvest of the Month campaign, reaching students, partners and caregivers with messages in English and Spanish to promote eating Wisconsin-grown fruits and vegetables.
- Worked with FOCUS to build relationships with pantry guests. Offered relevant nutrition education classes and provided monthly Stockboxes to about 100 senior community members with limited income.

WOOD COUNTY LANDSCAPE

Whether people are healthy or not is affected by systems, policies and environmental factors.

7%

of county residents experience limited income and low access to a grocery store.[^]



14%

of county residents use SNAP benefits to purchase food for themselves and their families.*



[^]County Health Rankings

* WI Dept. of Administration and WI Dept. of Health Services



Health & Well-Being



INSPIRING COLLABORATIONS

The River Cities Alternative High School approached Wood County Extension about teaching a variety of life skills from the health and well-being perspective for all students in the school to prepare them for life on their own.

Education topics included budgeting, renting and mental health from the Health and Well Being Educator. Other topics included reading a recipe, measuring, safe knife skills, food safety and how to use basic kitchen appliances to make healthy meals at home. FoodWise topics also included stretching food dollars, how to plan meals as well as nutrition education throughout each life skills lesson.



Hannah demonstrating kitchen skills at River Cities High School.

The High School indicated that every student enrolled that year was truly in need of basic life skills because many lived on their own or are the main caretaker for their family or have families and children of their own. Teachers also shared that many students never learned to cook before or even spent time in the kitchen. All of the students reported improvement in their ability to read a recipe, measure and use a knife safely.

MULTI-LEVEL PROGRAM EFFORTS



Kelly Hammond (l) and Hannah helping with Stockboxes distribution.

Seniors with limited incomes in Wood County can receive Stockboxes through a partnership between FoodWise, Hunger Task Force, FOCUS, ADRC and United Way. These boxes of shelf-stable goods not only provide needed food, but they also bring valuable social connection during distribution days.

Stockboxes are important resources that support food access when budgets are stretched thin. 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.

Hannah has worked for years to build trust with recipients and understands the importance of this social outing for many seniors. The relationships Hannah has grown have allowed her to host other educational events for seniors like nutrition education based around Stockboxes as well as teaching the strength training program, StrongBodies.

CONNECT WITH US



Mallory McGivern

FoodWise Program Administrator



Michelle Van Krey

Healthy Communities Coordinator



Hannah Wendels-Scott

Nutrition Educator



Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

GARDENING TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Social isolation, the absence of social connections, is a key indicator of community strength, impacting individual and communal well-being. Strong social ties correlate with better mental and physical health. Socially isolated individuals face heightened risks like depression, anxiety, and poor physical health.

In an effort to combat social isolation and improve well-being, Extension partnered with local agencies, organizations, and universities to meet the needs of the Wood County residents.

Lifelong learning is beneficial for Wood County's aging population, because it supports overall cognitive function, sense of accomplishment, personal growth and positive social engagement that combats social isolation, which is common in older adults.

- Spring and fall programs serving adults over 55 through the UWSP Learning is Forever program (LIFE). During the spring program, participants learned about best practices in designing and maintaining container gardens. The fall program introduced participants to the biophilia hypothesis, and learned how incorporating elements of nature into their everyday lives supports mental health resilience.
- Four therapeutic horticulture programs at FOCUS (Feeding Our Communities with United Services), which were aimed to develop new skills while supporting positive mental wellbeing and positive socialization.

SOWING SUCCESS

Sowing Success is a 12 week introductory course in horticulture. The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) course teaches participants how to link gardening practices and biology to prevent plant problems. Students learn how to select, grow, and maintain the health of plants, including lawns, woody and herbaceous ornamentals, fruits and vegetables. Students learn how to apply the principles of IPM to pests, including insects, diseases, weeds, and wildlife. As they learn about how to grow plants in a way that helps them plan for gardening success, they will prevent plant problems before they start and manage issues when they happen.

'HORT' BY THE NUMBERS

89 horticulture inquiries answered

3 outreach events

13 outreach programs

5 radio interviews



Horticulture

They will leave the course with a combination of practical gardening skills to try plus the knowledge of why they work.

Six students completed Sowing Success in fall 2023. Students prepared for each session by reading assigned chapters and watching videos hosted on the web. During the sessions, students worked through hands-on activities designed to reinforce the concepts introduced in the readings and video lectures. Wood County Master Gardeners provide added support in mentoring students throughout the course.



Students in the Sowing Success class are familiarizing themselves with all the information available on a fertilizer label.

Sowing Success is an approved learning opportunity for the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program in preparation to become a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener. The Wood County Master Gardener Association looks forward to adding these students next year.

RESPONDING TO POLLINATOR DECLINE AND POLLUTION DUE TO PESTICIDE AND FERTILIZER MISUSE

Wood County is facing environmental challenges including pollinator decline and environmental contamination & pollution due to overuse of horticulture chemicals. Proper pest management techniques can lead to less fertilizer and pesticide use, leading to reduced likelihood for environmental contamination and pollution.

Wood County residents have come to rely on their local Extension office to answer horticulture related diagnostic questions with research-based answers in a timely manner. Questions come into the office either directly through phone calls to the office, direct emails to Janell Wehr, or the UW-Madison Horticulture Program website. Inquiries also are processed through the Wood County Master Gardeners, either directly via email or at one of the many events they attend. Support for the Master Gardeners includes identification and selection of volunteers, training and orientation to diagnostics, as well as providing continuous support to the volunteers.

By providing research based answers to gardening questions, residents see reduction in time and money spent on efforts that either have no impact, or worse, negative impacts in their lawns and gardens and the larger environment. In 2023, at least 89 diagnostic questions in Wood County were answered through the Extension office. Here are the trends from the inquiries:

- 30% centered on trees and shrubs; this isn't surprising, since trees significantly add to property values.
- 41% centered on insects, diseases and weeds; this is an area of opportunity to increase responsible use of pesticides and fertilizers.
- 9% centered on the drought in the early summer.



Human Development & Relationships

Jackie Carattini, Human Development & Relationships Educator

PLANNING AHEAD

Studies have shown that older adults are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness, as they often experience losses of family, friends, or spouses; live alone; or have chronic health issues that isolate them in their homes. Immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, minorities, victims of elder abuse, and adults living with disabilities have an even greater risk of developing social isolation and loneliness.

Extension Wood County creates spaces for and facilitates connections between older adults through programs like: the Wise Wisconsin series, Aging Mastery Program, Planning AHEAD, and Who Gets Grandma’s Yellow Pie Plate?. Participation for all these programs increased due to offering them both in-person and virtually.

One topic covered, end of life planning, can be a intimidating process that is often confusing and stressful. The Planning AHEAD (**A**dvance directives, **H**andling financial changes, **E**state planning and **A**rriving at **D**ecisions for the end of this life) curriculum is a seven-session program that helps participants create a comprehensive end-of-life plan for themselves and/or a loved one. The goals are to help participants create plans that reflect their wishes and to help those who lose loved ones to have the information they need to successfully transition after.

Wood County has also been a pilot location for creating a Hmong adaptation of the Planning AHEAD curriculum in 2023.

Quotes from program participants:

“Prior to this we didn’t know where to start. During this series we were able to share the completed book and information with our 7 children. Thank you!”

“Every time I have started to work on end-of-life planning I get overwhelmed and stop. The check lists provided have been great and help me keep going.”

HDR BY THE NUMBERS

77

Wood County residents attended Planning AHEAD

99%

of participants learned enough to move forward with planning

79%

of participants in a 4-month follow-up survey reported having gathered or written down important information

93%

of participants in a 4-month follow-up survey reported having completed or are actively working on their plans



Human Development & Relationships

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Older adults are not the only population that are at risk due to social isolation. Carattini works with all populations to promote positive mental health by teaching skills to manage stress more effectively, practice self-care, increase positive emotions, reduce risky substance use and identify signs of mental health challenges.

Programs offered in Wood County in 2023 include: WeCOPE, Adult Mental Health First Aid, and QPR (**Q**uestion **P**ersuade **R**efer). WeCOPE, an evidence based program designed to help adults cope with life stress by providing tools to increase positive emotions, was offered for the general public as well as to specific groups such as healthcare providers and childcare providers - two groups identified as at risk for employee burn out. Participants reported that WeCOPE gave them the tools to cope with daily stress in a healthy way.

RENT SMART

Access to safe and affordable housing is a issue facing many central Wisconsin residents. It is often difficult for tenants with a positive rental history to find affordable and safe housing but if you have any negative experiences in your past it is extremely difficult.

Carattini works with local coalitions, partner agencies and county departments and programs (Wood County Jail and Probation and Parole) to offer the Rent Smart program on a monthly basis. Rent Smart is a six-session course that helps participants with negative or limited rental records gain the skills to find and keep safe and affordable housing. We also train service providers to use the Rent Smart program with their clients.

Carattini offered Rent Smart monthly in 2023 for 40 participants in the Wood County jail using a virtual format. Classes rotated with male and then female participants every other month.

- 100% of participants were able to request their credit reports
- 86% of participants state the course will help them obtain appropriate housing in the future
- 100% state the course will or might help them keep future housing
- 100% of participants reported that they now know how landlords screen applicants

Quotes from Rent Smart participants:

"I'm glad there was a class like this available to us in jail to help us better understand our rights as a tenant. I learned a lot that I never knew and I will now fully read my lease and determine what needs to be fixed prior to signing it."

"I now know the importance of reading your lease before just signing it and making sure I budget first to make sure I can afford a place and set myself up to succeed."



Natural Resources

Anna Mitchell, Regional Natural Resources Educator

CONNECTING YOUTH WITH NATURAL RESOURCES

There is currently a lack of opportunities for youth to engage in hands-on experiences in an agricultural and natural resources setting. To provide youth access to these kinds of experiences, Anna Mitchell partnered with AgriVenture Farm Camp and led a 6-session environmental science course.



Anna and a camper during the Symbiotic Scavenger Hunt.

Anna held the environmental science course in an outdoor classroom where youth learned about symbiotic relationships in local ecosystems. The outdoor classroom provided a space for youth to learn about these relationships through hands on activities and guided exploration. After participating in the environmental science station youth increased their knowledge of local ecosystems, confidently identified symbiotic relationships, and built courage to explore the natural environment.

SOCIAL INDICATOR SURVEY IN THE 10- AND 14-MILE WATERSHEDS

Anna Mitchell along with Extension colleague, Guolong Liang, created a survey after recognizing a need to better understand social indicators (awareness, attitudes, constraints, capacity, and behaviors) of producers around the topics of water quality and conservation practices to improve water quality. Anna and Guolong also wanted to gather this information in order to build relationships with producers and better understand producer needs in regards to water quality improvement and how they could utilize education and outreach programming to address those needs.

During the summer of 2023, Anna and Guolong traveled to 12 different farms in the Central Sands area and interviewed producers using the survey as a guide for conversation.

NRE BY THE NUMBERS

Outreach & Education

10

water quality focused events

490

total participants

Partnerships with Water Quality Focused Groups

9

producer-led watershed groups

4

lake protection groups

45

facilitated discussions or capacity building exercises

Research

2

social science surveys

25

in-person interviews



Natural Resources

As a result of this effort, Anna and Guolong have gained a better understanding of the farming systems in the Central Sands, specifically vegetable and potato production systems. They've also created relationships with producers who have not historically worked with UW-Madison Division of Extension. The following data points from the survey are a very small representative of the total data set.

When asked to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements, participant responses showed:

- 100% of participants agree or strongly agree that "it is my personal responsibility to help protect water quality"
- 100% of participants agree or strongly agree that "my actions have an impact on surface water and groundwater quality"
- 92% of participants agree or strongly agree that "using conservation management practices on farms improves water quality."

Trusted sources of information about soil and water (ranked from most trusted to least trusted) – please note that some rankings have two responses due to the average sum equaling the same amount.

- #1) University Extension and NRCS, #2) County Land & Water Conservation, #3) Private agronomists & producer-led watershed groups, #4) Peers, #5) Trade and industry groups, #6) Resources Conservation & Development Council, #7) DNR & processors/buyers

Anna and Guolong plan to use the data from this survey to inform future education and outreach programming. That programming has yet to be determined but is being worked on.

The efforts of producer-led watershed protection groups are generally focused on a local watershed ecosystem, but the importance of regional collaborations should not be overlooked. Producer members and conservation educators in the Wisconsin River basin recognized the importance for regional collaboration and decided to host a regional gathering for the 7 producer-led groups in the North Central area. During the gathering, 24 producers and collaborators participated in a guided question and answer session led by Anna Mitchell, to identify regional resources concerns, discuss successes and hardships, examine group needs, and talk about the statewide producer-led program. The regional gathering ultimately served as a space for groups to strengthen their relationships through candid conversations.



Guided Q&A session led by Anna.



Wisconsin 4-H

Laura Huber, 4-H Educator

Jasmine Carbajal, Bilingual Associate 4-H Educator

WOOD COUNTY 4-H IS GROWING!

In 2023, Wood County 4-H welcomed its first AmeriCorps member. AmeriCorps is a national service program and its members serve our local communities. Wood County 4-H's first AmeriCorps member, Malina Carattini, is focused on outreach. Her focus is on offering hands-on learning opportunities to youth who are not already members of 4-H. She has expanded 4-H's partnership with local libraries, especially McMillan, and the Boys and Girls Club of South Wood County.



AmeriCorps

SUMMER CAMP

Summer camp is more than just a few fun days away from home, it's an intense learning experience. Youth in grades 3-7 from Lincoln, Marathon, and Wood Counties ventured to Northern Lakes Impact Center in Rhinelander for 3-days and 2-nights of learning by doing. Camp is designed to help youth create positive relationships with their peers, empower youth to develop their independence, and to give them opportunities to try new activities. This year, those activities included rock climbing, paddling, archery, swimming, and more!



Youth show off their art projects at summer camp.

Youth love camp, and it's a good thing! When campers age out of summer camp, they have the opportunity to come back as counselors. Camp counselors have very important roles at camp. Not only do they help plan and lead activities at camp, they also serve as role models and youth leaders for campers.

4-H BY THE NUMBERS

564 youth members
(3.64% growth over last year)

14 community clubs

4 chartered 4-H groups

Most Popular Projects:

- Art
- Photography
- Foods & Nutrition
- Swine
- Cloverbuds



Wisconsin 4-H

Counselors voluntarily step into leadership, and 4-H staff are serious about helping them become the best leaders they can be. Counselors participate in 15-20 hours of training before camp. Counselors grow their leadership, confidence, communication skills, and a whole lot more.

In 2023, Wood County sent 24 campers and 3 counselors to summer camp. The Incourage Community Foundation helped make this possible with donations towards transportation costs and scholarships for youth who would otherwise be unable to afford camp.



A camper participating in rock climbing.

TEEN LEADERS: READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

2023 was a year where Wood County 4-H offered various programs to help youth find their sparks. For some of those youth, it was leadership. After a few dormant years, the Wood County 4-H Teen Leaders has revived and the program has hit the ground running. The goal of the Teen Leaders county group is to develop and foster their leadership, teambuilding, and communication skills while they outreach and give back to their community. Youth enrolled in 4-H in grades 6th and up are eligible for Teen Leaders.

One of the first projects the group decided to work on was service. They partnered with The Ronald McDonald House in Marshfield to cook a meal for families being housed there. The Teens not only had to work together for the cooking portion of the session, they also had to practice basic cooking and communication skills while in the kitchen. The participants loved it so much that they chose to do a second visit to cook a different meal at a different season of the year.

The Wood County 4-H Teen Leaders also offer a space for adolescents to come together and do fun activities like pizza parties, escape rooms, bowling, cornhole tournaments, and running concessions at local 4-H events. Youth that participate in the Teen Leaders county group are exploring sparks, have a sense of belonging, are building adult-youth partnerships, and are active in their community. The goal of having the Wood County 4-H Teen Leaders is to keep teens engaged in 4-H, but greater than that, is to support our local youth in making a difference in their community.



Winners of the Teen Leaders' Cornhole Tournament.



HELPING LATINX YOUTH AND FAMILIES CONNECT

The LatinX population is growing in Wood County. For many of these families, language is a serious barrier. Language barriers often cause parents to feel disconnected from their children's school life and cause youth to feel isolated from their peers.

In 2023, Wood County 4-H partnered with Marshfield Public Schools to help build connections between schools and families and among students in school. The partnership has taken a multi-pronged approach.

Part 1 - Family Nights at School: These interactive outreach nights brought families, students, school staff and community assets together in one space. The goal was to inform families about what resources are available and how to access them (like health care, for instance), as well as help them feel connected to the school community.

Part 2 - Tools to Thrive: These 8-week educational series were held in both Marshfield Middle School and Marshfield High School. The focus in both schools was mental health. Students learned strategies for dealing with stress and discussed navigating two different cultures in their family setting and their school setting. The goal of this series was to create a safe space for LatinX English Language Learners (ELLs) to learn and talk about topics in their native language (Spanish) to help with long-term positive outcomes like more engagement in school, more positive relationships and better grades.

Part 3 - Juntos: This program's intent is to help families understand how Wisconsin schools work, why graduation matters, and how families can make education (including higher education) an attainable goal. As part of the program, parents learn about how to support their students in school - including how to communicate with school staff, check on grades and what the requirements for graduation are. All participants learn about higher education options like college and technical school, what funding options are available and how to set and achieve goals.



Jasmine presenting at a Family Night.



Laura and Jasmine with Juntos participants.

Quote from Juntos participant:

"I moved to this area 10 years ago. All my children went through this school district and it was difficult because we didn't have any resources or help. This is the first time that this district has done a family night for LatinX families that I know of at least since I have been here."

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