

# NEWS FROM EXTENSION

Wood County | June 2025



## EXTENSION EDUCATORS HONORED BY RCHS

Extension Educators, Jackie Carattini (posthumous), Laura Huber (4-H Educator), and Hannah Wendels Scott (FoodWise Nutrition Educator) were recently honored with the River Cities High School Phoenix Award. This award is "in appreciation for their support, assistance and inspiration as students take flight on their journey toward success".

River Cities High School is an alternative public high school in the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools District. Extension has partnered with RCHS to help students gain valuable life skills before graduation. Skills and topics covered include: nutrition and cooking skills, financial management (like budgeting and RentSmart), resilience, mental health, and other topics of special interest to students like plant propagation, drywall repair, and embryology.

We are grateful for the opportunity to help community members improve their lives and are so thankful for the partnership with RCHS!



*Hannah (middle) and Laura (right) receiving the Phoenix Award at the RCHS graduation ceremony.*

## HMONG GROWER WORKSHOP

*by Janel Wehr, Horticulture Educator*

In collaboration with the Wood County Health Department, FairShare CSA Coalition, Groundswell Conservancy, and the USDA, Extension hosted a six-hour workshop focused on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for Hmong refugee farmers growing vegetables in Wisconsin. The workshop aimed to build farmer capacity in managing pests more effectively and safely while reducing reliance on pesticides. Participants learned to recognize beneficial insects, understand natural control methods, and develop proactive IPM plans tailored to real-life farm scenarios.



*Janell facilitating the IPM workshop for Hmong farmers.*

The session featured four interactive activities, beginning with the story of Yee and Mai—an engaging comparison of reactive versus planned pest control. Farmers then worked together to build IPM plans using puzzle pieces and scenario cards, followed by a game to identify garden “helpers” and pests. In the final activity, participants learned to interpret pesticide label signal words and choose safer products. Each activity was designed to be visual, hands-on, and accessible for participants of all literacy levels.

The workshop was enriched by contributions from several program partners. Gaonou Thao from Extension’s Farm Management Program led a session on farm recordkeeping, helping farmers understand the importance of tracking inputs and production. The USDA’s crop insurance cost share program was shared with participants, and Golden Sands RC&D provided information on additional USDA

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programs and land leasing opportunities. These resources added valuable context and support for long-term farm planning and sustainability.

Evaluation methods such as games, drawing activities, and guided reflection showed strong learning outcomes. By the end of the session, most farmers could describe at least one IPM strategy they intended to implement—such as trap cropping, using physical barriers like row covers, or choosing low-toxicity pesticides. The workshop successfully combined education, outreach, and resource navigation in a culturally responsive format.

## EMPOWERING LATINE STUDENTS IN WOOD COUNTY

*by Olga Meza, Bilingual 4-H Educator*

Olga Meza, the new Bilingual 4-H Associate Educator in Wood County, has been making significant strides in fostering family engagement among Latine families through monthly Juntos Family Engagement nights, in collaboration with Marshfield schools. These events aim to improve communication between families and the school, with Olga's bilingual skills playing a crucial role in connecting culturally with Spanish-speaking parents.

Juntos has been instrumental in providing resources that help students and families better understand the school system, effectively removing language barriers. In January, Juntos partnered with College Goal Wisconsin to offer FAFSA workshop application information in Spanish in Marshfield and Wisconsin Rapids.



*Olga leading an activity at a Juntos Family Engagement Night.*

Looking ahead, Olga continues to do outreach by participating in various community events to build relationships with community stakeholders. Recently, she had the opportunity to meet with the associate principal of WRAMS in Wisconsin Rapids to discuss promoting the Juntos program at the school. Olga hopes to expand Juntos throughout southern Wood County by Fall 2025 with the goal to reach more

families and students, providing them with the resources and support they need to succeed in their educational journey.



*Olga providing students with information on the Juntos program.*

In addition, Olga is developing 4-H Spanish Summer Workshops for elementary-aged students to help them connect with the language at a key stage in their development. These workshops will explore Spanish through culture, art, and music—making language learning both fun and meaningful. For more details, please see the attached flyer.



# Kids 4-H Spanish Summer Workshops



JOIN US FOR A FREE SUMMER OF:

 **SPANISH LANGUAGE**

 **MEXICAN ART**

 **TRADITIONAL DANCE**

 **CULTURAL FUN**

- For kids aged 5 to 11 years old
- No registration required
- Space limited to 20 participants

 **Location: McMillian Library**  
**490 East Grand Avenue**  
**Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Floor-All Purpose Room**

 **Date: June 18-July 16**  
**Mondays & Wednesdays**

 **Time: 1:00 PM-3:00 PM**

**For more information, contact us at:**

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