



## HEALTHY LIVING PROGRAMMING IN WOOD COUNTY JAIL

*by Hannah Wendels Scott, FoodWise Educator*

FoodWise Nutrition Educator, Hannah, Bilingual (HMong) Community Health Worker, Ka Zoua, and Human Development and Relationships Educator, Ben, began programming in the Wood County Jail in early June. The participants are part of the SMART Recovery Program and receive a variety of educational programs from community organizations across the county. When the ask came to Wood County Extension about hosting programming with the participants, these three educators crossing three different program areas jumped in.

On Mondays, Ben teaches a program called Rent Smart to a total of 10 participants split up over the course of a month. Rent Smart 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 know and understand the rights and responsibilities of their landlord. Rent Smart starts participants on the right path for success and taking this program to individuals who are incarcerated helps set them up for success upon their transition out of jail and back into the community.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Ka Zoua and Hannah teach a combination of two evidence-based programs - StrongBodies and Tai Chi. StrongBodies has a strong presence in multiple Wood County communities. However, this is the first time StrongBodies has programmed inside the Wood County Jail. StrongBodies focuses on improving fitness, building strength, gaining confidence, connecting socially, and enhancing overall well-being. Tai Chi involves moving your body in slow, fluid motions which are intended to be low impact and work with each individual participant's range of motion. The specific type of Tai Chi that we offer focuses on Arthritis and Fall Prevention but really allows participants to slow down, work on breathing, and settling their mind all while moving their body. Blending StrongBodies and Tai Chi together seemed like the perfect combination and it was an area of wellness that was not previously focused on here.

In addition to these two physical well-being programs, Hannah also offers a nutrition education component at the end of each lesson where participants learn about and try new fruits and vegetables and discuss ways to buy, store, and prepare these foods for when they are back in their communities. Ka Zoua also teaches lessons from the program, WeCope, which helps adults cope with life stress in a positive way.

Once again, Extension Wood County works together within the office to offer a well-rounded program that targets all areas of wellness - financial, physical, nutritional, and mental health.



*Extension Educators (L to R): Ka Zoua, Ben and Hannah*

# REGIONAL PRODUCER-LED GATHERING BUILDS MOMENTUM FOR CONSERVATION IN CENTRAL WI

*by Anna Mitchell, Natural Resources Educator*

In March 2025, producer-led watershed protection groups from across Central Wisconsin came together at Hintz Farms for a day dedicated to collaboration, learning, and connection. The Regional Producer-Led Gathering was thoughtfully planned and facilitated by Anna Mitchell, UW-Madison Division of Extension Natural Resources Educator, who serves as a regional coordinator for these watershed groups. The event brought together 23 members and collaborators representing six active producer-led groups: Antigo Silt Loam & Water, Farmers for Tomorrow River Watershed Council, Farmers of the 14-Mile Creek Watershed, Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri, Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley, and Producers of Lake Redstone.

The event was designed to strengthen the growing network of producer-led groups working to improve soil health and water quality across the region. Through a series of rotating breakout discussions, participants explored shared challenges, exchanged ideas, and identified opportunities for deeper collaboration.

Conversations were structured around three key themes: financial and operational support, community and member engagement, and conservation practices. Each topic sparked thoughtful dialogue and surfaced both practical strategies and long-term goals.

On the financial front, participants emphasized the need for streamlined cost-share processes, clearer guidance on grant use, and more administrative support. Many expressed a desire for tools like templates and shared resources to reduce the burden of grant writing and reporting. Best practices such as cover cropping, no-till, and stacking conservation programs were highlighted as effective and accessible.

When it came to community engagement, the message was clear: relationships matter. Farmers shared that face-to-face outreach, social gatherings, and peer mentorship are among the most effective ways to build trust and bring new members into the fold. There was also a strong call to challenge public misconceptions about agriculture and to elevate the stories of farmers who are leading in conservation.

The discussion on conservation practices revealed both the passion and the challenges that come with on-farm implementation. Participants noted that logistical constraints, profitability concerns, and climate variability can all be barriers. However, they also shared a wide range of innovative practices they're exploring—from biochar and year-round grazing to precision agriculture and soil health testing. Many agreed that the easiest way to get started is by following the lead of peers and celebrating small wins along the way.

As the day wrapped up, several common themes emerged: the importance of peer-to-peer learning, the value of public education, and the need for continued collaboration across the region. Participants expressed interest in co-hosting events, sharing speakers, and developing regional newsletters to keep the momentum going.

One participant summed it up best: "Just show up." That simple act of participation—of being present and open—was a powerful reminder of the strength and potential of this growing conservation community.



*Attendees at the Regional Producer-Led Gathering in March*