

# NEWS FROM EXTENSION

Wood County | January 2026



## Cranberry School Returns to Stevens Point

*by Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist*

When cranberry vines are dormant under a protective layer of ice, Extension together with the Wisconsin Cranberry State Growers' Association host Wisconsin Cranberry School, and growers come to learn. After several years hosting Cranberry School in Wisconsin Dells, Cranberry School returns to Stevens Point, continuing to be the pinnacle event of cranberry agronomic information in the year.

Presentations will range from plant pathology, plant physiology, cranberry genetics, entomology, to food science and AI. Screening trials results, epi-pen safety, grower panels, pesticide applicator training test availability, and networking opportunities draw growers with all interests from across the state. Registration is more than 425 participants.

Cranberry School was held January 14 & 15 in 2026, and Proceedings will be available shortly thereafter.

In addition to in-person Cranberry School, cranberry outreach continues throughout the winter with well-attended Virtual Brown Bag lunches, Nutrient Management Plan training, specialty crop succession plan training, and more.

Cranberry Virtual Brown Bags are also being uploaded to YouTube. Check them out [here!](#)



# Building Healthier and Connected Communities

*by Ka Zoua Thao, Bilingual Community Health Worker*

The past few months have been full of activity across Wood County, with multiple programs underway. Bilingual Community Health Worker, Ka Zoua Thao, has been actively leading presentations and supporting community programming.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention is a relatively new class in Wood County, but it's quickly becoming an essential resource. Participation is rising fast - Ka Zoua's fall class at the Lowell Senior Center doubled in size from the spring with a waitlist of 8 folks. We all know that Tai Chi nourishes the mind and body, and when you add the joy of moving along with other folks, the experience gets even better. The response has been amazing! Participants noticed better balance throughout the class as well as a sharper memory. Tai Chi strengthens more than just physical balance—it nurtures the mind and uplifts the spirit too.



Alongside Tai Chi, Ka Zoua began a StrongBodies class for the Hmong community in December at the South Wood County YMCA. Thanks to a partnership with the YMCA, she's able to use one of their studios to offer this strength-training program. The hope is that participants will not only benefit from StrongBodies but also become familiar with the many resources the YMCA provides. Since the class began, several folks have signed up for Y memberships.

Mental wellness is just as important as physical fitness. Ka Zoua first introduced WeCOPE (Connecting With Our Positive Emotions) in the Wood County Jail in the summer of 2025 while leading physical fitness sessions with the recovery pods. Thanks to the wonderful feedback from participants, Ka Zoua is solely teaching WeCOPE this winter. She is giving participants time, tools, and a dedicated space to build their emotional resilience. The goal is to ensure participants have the necessary skills they need to navigate life's challenges and transition back into the community with greater confidence.

For the first time, Ka Zoua is bringing WeCOPE to the professional staff at Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools. Winter can be a challenging season not just for students, but for educators as well. Through WeCOPE, she hopes to provide staff with practical skills and strategies that help them manage both personal and professional stress with greater resilience.

Ka Zoua is also committed to strengthening community understanding by sharing knowledge about the Hmong community and its rich cultural heritage, as well as fostering awareness around cultural competence and implicit bias. In November, Ka Zoua joined KaBao Xiong, the Hmong Coordinator at the Wisconsin Rapids Family Center, to deliver presentations about the Hmong community for the Wisconsin Rapids Fire Department. Every emergency call is unique, and having foundational knowledge about the people they serve makes a real difference. Wonderful discussions were had during all three presentations. Her goal is to help bridge all communities, emphasizing that we grow stronger and thrive when we learn from one another and move forward together rather than apart.



# WOOD COUNTY 4-H SERVICE PROJECT

**Help Wood County 4-H collect food items for FOCUS and Marshfield Area United Way meal kits!**

In March, 4-H members will pack the backpacks for distribution to families in our local communities.



Marshfield Area  
**UNITED WAY**



## ITEMS NEEDED:

- 12.5 ounce cans of chicken
- 14 ounce boxes of instant rice
- 10.5 ounce cans of broccoli cheese soup
- 15 ounce cans of fruit
- 15 ounce cans of corn

**Our goal is  
200 meals!**



**COLLECTION DEADLINE IS FEBRUARY 20.**

Items can be dropped off in the Extension Office,  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the courthouse.