



## Extension Horticulture Collaborates with Local Wood County Libraries

*by Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator*

From January through April, horticulture educator Janell Wehr delivered a four-session Integrated Pest Management (IPM)-based vegetable gardening series at the Pittsville, Marshfield, and Arpin public libraries. Wehr offered the series once at each location, resulting in a total of 12 in-person educational sessions across Wood County. By hosting programs in familiar, accessible community spaces, Extension reduced barriers related to cost, transportation, and comfort with educational settings.

Wehr intentionally designed the programs to be drop-in friendly. This format allowed residents to attend individual sessions based on interest or availability or to participate in the full four-session series for more in-depth learning. The flexible structure supported both first-time attendees and returning participants while reinforcing key concepts for those who attended multiple sessions.

The Beginning Vegetable Gardening for Everyone series served adult gardeners with a wide range of experience levels, from first-time vegetable growers to individuals seeking to refine existing practices. Wehr covered garden planning and site selection, soil health and planting methods, insect management using IPM principles, and weed and disease identification and management. Throughout the series, she emphasized prevention, regular scouting, and informed decision-making, with a strong focus on environmentally responsible and research-based practices rather than routine pesticide use.

Attendance varied by location, with the Pittsville library demonstrating the strongest participation. Active library promotion and a strong local partnership between Extension and library staff supported this success. At all locations, multiple participants returned for additional sessions, indicating sustained interest and perceived value.

Evaluation feedback showed that participants increased their understanding of IPM concepts and gained confidence in identifying and managing common garden challenges. Participants also reported clear intent to adopt specific practices, including crop rotation, improved pest scouting, and reduced reliance on chemical pesticides in home gardens.

This series supports Wood County priorities related to environmental stewardship, public health, and community education by helping residents grow food responsibly while protecting soil and water resources. Partnerships with local libraries expanded access to no-cost, research-based horticulture education and strengthened Extension's presence within the community.

# Wood County 4-H Continues to Grow

by Laura Huber, 4-H Program Educator

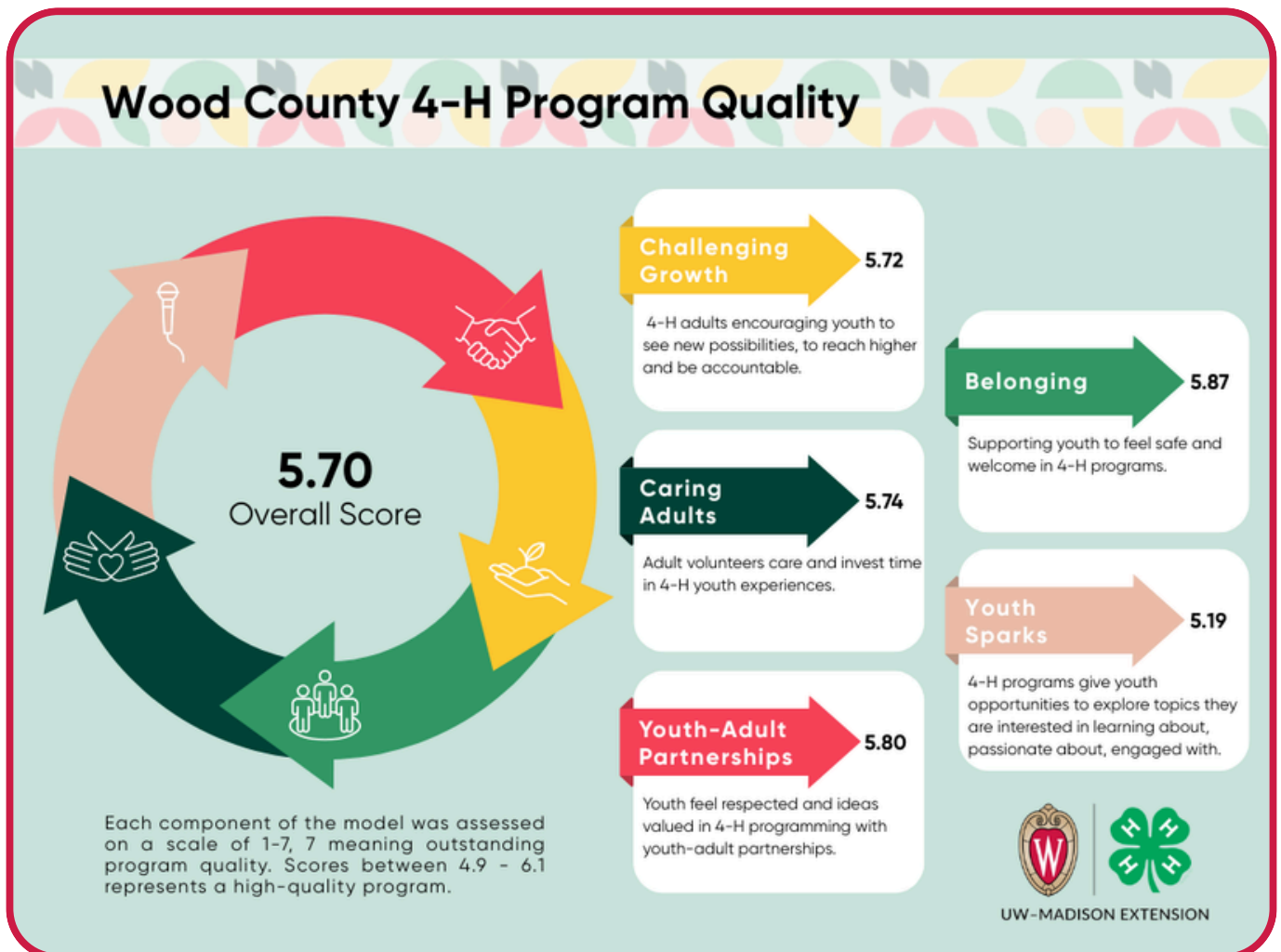
Wood County 4-H currently has **593 youth members** in kindergarten through 13th grade. Youth membership has grown **7%** over the last five years, and nearly **14%** since the 2020-21 pandemic year.

These youth belong to 14 different community clubs and 1 after school club. The after school club is a new program for Wood County 4-H in collaboration with Pittsville School District. This club was marketed specifically to those enrolled in the school's After School program. Club members meet once a month during the normal after school program. There are currently 18 youth in this club and almost all of them are brand new to 4-H.

Adult volunteer enrollments are growing right alongside youth memberships. We rely on caring adult volunteers to provide positive and engaging opportunities to youth. This year, the volunteer team has grown **21%** over last year with a total of **136 approved volunteers**.

Program growth is indicative of a great program, but since 2020 we've had another great tool for measuring program quality. The Wisconsin Thriving Survey is sent out every fall to youth who are at least 13 years old. The survey measures program quality, youth thriving, and developmental outcomes as identified in the 4-H Thriving Model. This model predicts that youth who participate in high quality 4-H programs will thrive and achieve long-term successes.

In 2025, 48 Wood County 4-H members from 13-19 years old completed the survey. Survey results indicate that *Wood County 4-H is a high quality program*.



In addition to providing quantitative data, the survey also offers youth the chance to share their thoughts on the program.

**Here are some responses to “Tell us something important or valuable you learned in 4-H”:**

- *“I have learned a lot about leadership through 4-H. Being a good leader is not about taking the spotlight but helping others find that spotlight.”*
- *“I have learned how important it is to give your time and volunteer to help make for a better world around us.”*
- *“In 4-H, I have learned that community really is everything. Through volunteer opportunities, the fair, creative events, and more, I have truly seen the difference 4-H can make for people. Those in the community I have volunteered with and for see the impact 4-H makes on their lives. Through events like the fair, I am able to meet so many great and talented people of which push me to explore my passions further.”*

## SAVE THE DATE!

Find Wood County 4-H at the  
**Wisconsin Rapids Downtown  
Farmers Market**

Find our booth to participate in fun and  
hands-on activities & crafts!

Visit us on the following Thursdays  
from 8:00am-1:00pm:

- **July 9**
- **July 30**

