Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
WOOD COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

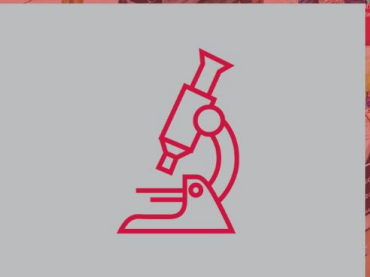
UW–Madison Extension's outreach creates key connection points for families, farms, communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, government, and more. We support local volunteers and leaders to take action and serve as role models in their communities, and we make sure Wisconsinites have the latest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

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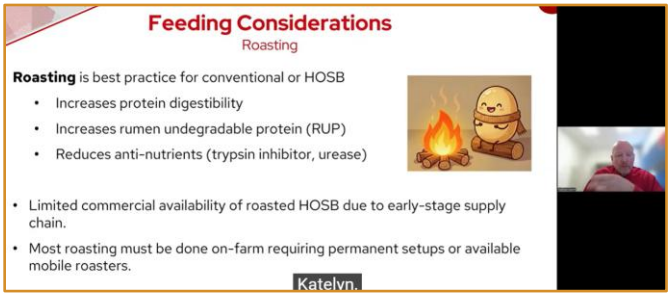


Agriculture

Matt Lippert, Regional Dairy Educator

BADGER DAIRY INSIGHT

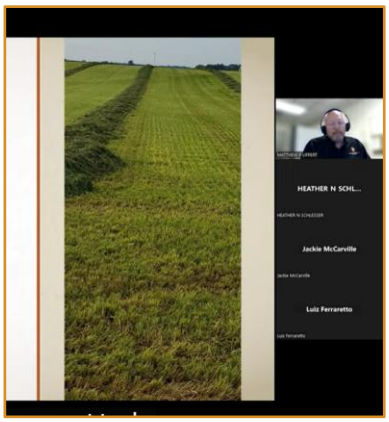
I work with a group of colleagues to form the Extension Dairy Nutrition Group. There are several other Regional Dairy Educators and a state Dairy Nutrition Specialist on the UW-Madison campus that forms this group. Since feed is the single largest expense category on the dairy farm, and its management is critical for cow performance, it is an important area of interest for dairy producers. The most economical feed for dairy cattle is locally produced forages, such as corn silage and haylage. It is subject to the weather and other local conditions.



Lippert leading the Badger Dairy Insight Zoom discussion on roasting soybeans.

In 2024 and 2025 a wet spring created challenges for producers to make quality forage in a timely manner. I respond to many questions about local situations and author articles in several statewide newsletters and magazines about dairy nutrition issues. Another outlet for nutrition topics are four offerings during the year of nutrition topics on Badger Dairy Insight, a monthly zoom originating from UW-Madison Extension on timely dairy topics.

One topic that has become of great interest to dairy producers is growing locally a special type of soybean, high-oleic acid soybeans. These can substitute for expensive fatty acids imported from South East Asia that have been found to greatly improve butterfat test and overall production in dairy cattle. To be able to grow something similar but on your own farm improves the local control and cost effectiveness of supplemental fatty acid supplementation in dairy cattle. I worked with our team to produce articles on growing high-oleic soybeans that are available on our website https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu and in several local newsletters and in early 2026 it was offered on the Badger Dairy Insight zoom.



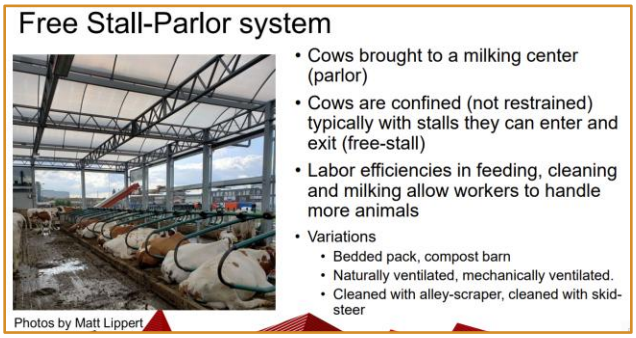
Lippert presenting about summer forage cocktail mixes with Italian ryegrass, sorghum sudangrass and annual legumes.

Locally produced soybeans need to be roasted for the best feeding value, this includes the new high-oleic soybeans, so roasting procedures and measures of adequacy of roasting we also discussed on Badger Dairy Insight.

I continue to work with alternative forages and grazing to help producers identify low-cost and resilient programs to produce high quality forage program. Grazing has proven to have strong interest from Mennonite and Amish producers as well as other groups and is a good way to contact these groups that appreciate Extension outreach efforts.

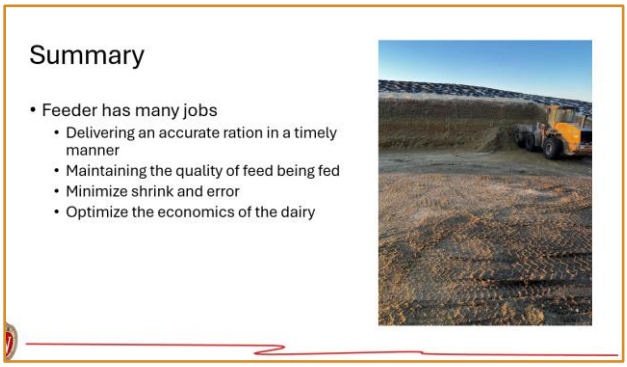
Agriculture

I worked with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide a training for their staff that develop support plans in cooperation with Easter Seals of Wisconsin so that farmers may be able to continue as productive workers despite disability due to accidents or other factors. The program "A Day in the Life of a Dairy Farmer" is important so that staff better understand what the needs of dairy producers with disability are.



A slide from the DVR Presentation

Another bilingual program offered in 2025 was **Save a Calf, Save a Cow**. This program emphasized cow and calf care before, after and during calving for both dairy and beef cattle. I presented on transition dairy cow programs (two weeks before and after calving). The program was a combination of hands-on and virtual with breakout sessions for beef and dairy producers.



Screenshot of the Dairy Feeders School presentation.

A program that I helped organize and presented at in 2025 was the Dairy Feeders School. It was held at five locations around the state. Our local event was to be held in Abbotsford but due to spring weather it was moved to a virtual program. This program in total served about 150 people. Because many dairy feeders speak Spanish as their primary language the program was offered in English and Spanish, because of the virtual event we had interpreters to provide the Spanish content as well as Spanish translation of the class materials. The program emphasized the special skill of operating large equipment, accuracy and timeliness of delivery and that feed is the single largest cost of production on the dairy farm. The goal was for feeders to take pride in their important work and to learn vital skills to improve their success.

Another program I have been active with is the monthly offering on zoom of Badger Dairy Insight. While attendance at these has been good, they are also recorded and available on You Tube. The November program featured local producer Jake Peissig from Dorchester. Peissig utilizes robots to mix and deliver the total mixed ration (TMR) for his high producing dairy herd. Other participants used scales, stationary mixers and enclosed feeding centers to improve consistency, reduce feed loss and improve operator efficiency.

Community Development

Kayla Rombalski, Community Development Educator

CLEAN SWEEP: RECORD-BREAKING PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Wood County's Clean Sweep program saw record-breaking participation across two collection events held in Marshfield and Wisconsin Rapids in 2025. A total of 382 households took part, underscoring a strong and growing commitment among residents to safe and responsible disposal of hazardous materials.

The spring Clean Sweep event, held May 31 at the Marshfield Agricultural Research Station on Yellowstone Drive, drew particularly high engagement. More than 210 residents participated, safely disposing of nearly 12,000 pounds (11,864 lbs.) of household hazardous and agricultural waste in just four hours. This single-day total nearly doubled the combined collection from both events in 2024, signaling a significant increase in awareness and utilization of the program.

The fall event, hosted in Wisconsin Rapids, continued this momentum, contributing to the year's overall record participation. Residents arrived with full trailers and long lines formed early, demonstrating the program's value and the community's dedication to environmental stewardship.

Clean Sweep is a collaborative effort between Wood County Extension and the Wood County Health Department, providing residents with safe disposal options for materials such as pesticides, oil-based paints, fluorescent bulbs, and other hazardous waste. By reducing improper disposal and potential contamination, the program plays a critical role in protecting local soil, water, and public health.

Beyond the numbers, Clean Sweep reflects a broader cultural shift toward sustainability. Each participating household contributes to a cleaner environment and a healthier community. The program's continued growth highlights the importance of accessible, community-based solutions to environmental challenges, and demonstrates the power of partnership in achieving shared goals.

CLEAN SWEEP BY THE NUMBERS

382 households participated

- **43%** from Marshfield
- **35%** from Wisconsin Rapids

23,163 pounds of hazardous wastes collected

- **34%** pesticides/poisons
- **32%** solvents/thinners
- **18%** lead oil/paint



Jennifer McNelly, Laura Huber and Kayla Rombalski volunteering at Clean Sweep.

Community Development

CONNECTING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE: EMPOWERING RURAL INNOVATION

In June 2025, Wood County welcomed participants from across the state and beyond for the second annual Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) Conference in Wisconsin Rapids. With more than 200 attendees, including 210 registrants representing 47 Wisconsin counties and several neighboring states, the conference showcased the strength, creativity, and resilience of rural communities.

Centered on the theme '**Building Bridges, Empowering Entrepreneurs**,' the conference featured 16 sessions across four learning tracks covering topics such as rural innovation, agritourism, ecosystem building, and downtown revitalization. The conference extended beyond traditional sessions by incorporating immersive local experiences.

CEC CONFERENCE BY THE NUMBERS

210 registrants

- **19%** from Wood County
- **81%** from outside of Wood County

47 Wisconsin counties represented



Speaker panel at the CEC Conference.

Participant feedback consistently highlighted the event's organization, welcoming atmosphere, and high-quality programming. Most notable were the comments from attendees:

- "It was lovely, I'm definitely bringing my family back for a visit!"
- "Bigger than I expected. More shops, restaurants and downtown hangouts than I expected. The YMCA is beautiful! The conference was a great way to showcase the city and various cool locations -- well done!"
- "Lovely! Definitely great to see a county and city so energized and willing to tackle really big challenges to diversify and strengthen community."

Together, Clean Sweep and the CEC Conference reflect Extension's commitment to strengthening communities through environmental stewardship and economic vitality. These initiatives are part of a comprehensive approach to community economic development in Wood County. Throughout 2025, Extension partnered with local leaders, regional organizations, and state agencies to move priorities forward, recognizing that strong infrastructure, attainable housing, and reliable child care are essential to sustaining vibrant communities and local economies.

Health & Well-Being

HEALTHY CHOICES, HEALTHY LIVES

For more than 30 years, UW–Madison Extension has provided local nutrition education across Wisconsin through the federal SNAP-Ed grant program. The congressional budget reconciliation bill signed into law on July 4, 2025 ended federal SNAP-Ed funding, effective September 30, 2025.

Working with schools, food pantries, farmers markets, and community centers, FoodWIse has taught practical, evidence-based skills in meal planning, food safety, and food resource management, helping people stretch food dollars and make healthier choices. We are grateful to Wood County for their investment which will allow us to continue nutrition education and other health and well-being programming in 2026.

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 schools, after-school programs, the Wood County Jail, community centers, and food pantries to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in our communities.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS IN 2025

- Engaged with 574 learners around nutrition education topics in a variety of settings, including K-12 school settings, the Wood County Jail, community centers, and food pantries.
- Strengthened the Wood County StrongBodies program by adding 2 new volunteer leaders, increasing the total to 4, and supporting sustained classes in Nekoosa and Pittsville, with continued expansion planned for Wisconsin Rapids and Marshfield.
- Conducted a food waste study at Grove Elementary School to learn about the amount of food that is not eaten and the reasons why. After the study, a new and improved share cart was added to the school cafeteria as a way to reduce food waste and allow students to choose a healthy addition to their lunch if they are still hungry.



Mallory (left) and Hannah (right) conducting a food waste study at Grove Elementary.





Original share cart (left) and after improvements (right).

Health & Well-Being

MULTI-LEVEL PROGRAM EFFORTS

Extension Wood County was honored to have three educators—Jackie Carattini (posthumous), Laura Huber (4-H Educator), and Hannah Wendels Scott (FoodWIse Nutrition Educator)—recognized with the River Cities High School Phoenix Award for their support, inspiration, and commitment to student success.



Hannah (center) and Laura (right) accepting the Phoenix Award

River Cities High School, an alternative public high school within the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools District, partners with Extension to provide hands-on, relevant life skills programming that prepares students for life beyond graduation. Through this partnership, students engage in nutrition and cooking education, financial management topics such as budgeting and Rent Smart, and student-driven enrichment topics including plant propagation and drywall repair.

This recognition reflects the strength of Extension's multi-program approach and its ability to meet youth where they are, empowering students to build confidence, practical skills, and pathways toward long-term success. We are grateful for the continued collaboration with River Cities High School and the opportunity to support students as they chart their futures.

INSPIRING COLLABORATIONS

Extension Wood County expanded health and well-being programming at the Wood County Jail by offering StrongBodies, Tai Chi, and nutrition and coping skills education as part of the STRONG Recovery Pod Programming.

While participants were initially hesitant and programming required creative adaptations, engagement grew quickly as individuals began practicing exercises independently, using Tai Chi for stress management, and showing enthusiasm for hands-on nutrition experiences.

Participants reported improved physical and mental well-being. This collaboration demonstrates Extension's ability to meet individuals where they are and support meaningful, lasting change within an often-overlooked population.

"Working out in the morning is good for your physical and mental health—I enjoyed the vibe and positive emotions."

-Wood County Jail Participant

CONNECT WITH US



Mallory McGivern

FoodWIse Program Administrator



Michelle Van Krey

Healthy Communities Coordinator



Hannah Wendels Scott

Nutrition Educator

Health & Well-Being

Ka Zoua Thao, Bilingual Community Health Worker

PHYSICAL HEALTH

StrongBodies is becoming a valuable wellness resource for adults in Wood County. It offers a supportive space to build strength, balance, and relationships. Being able to remove many barriers, StrongBodies in the community has been a blessing as many elders are able to feel comfortable working out, ask questions, and stay engaged. It strengthens both physical health and social connection while making programming more accessible and culturally responsive for elders in the community.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention gives older adults a calm, supportive way to build strength, improve balance, and lower their risk of falling. We use slow, gentle movements that are safe for people with joint pain or limited mobility. These movements help participants feel more confident and independent. Through each session, people feel welcomed, prepared, and encouraged to stay involved. My role helps Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention reach more adults and creates a positive space where everyone can focus on being the best version of themselves.

"I enjoyed all of this program . . . working out is good for your physical and mental health. I also enjoyed the positive emotions."

-StrongBodies Participant

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

I support three youth groups at the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools alongside KaBao Xiong, the Hmong Coordinator/Advocate at the Wisconsin Rapids Family Center. I bring mental wellness education through a cultural lens to the students.

In each group, I guide students through conversations, hands-on activities, and simple lessons that help them understand stress, emotions, healthy relationships and self-care. I focus on creating a calm and welcoming environment where students feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings, ask questions, and learn from one another.

PARTICIPATION BY THE NUMBERS

29 StrongBodies participants

25 Tai Chi participants

SUPPORT GROUPS

7 elementary students (grades 4-5)

33 middle school students (grades 6-8)

21 high school students (grades 9-12)

18 women

Health & Well-Being

Ka Zoua Thao, Bilingual Community Health Worker

In addition, the Wisconsin Rapids Family Center invited Extension to support two community-based groups (Women's Social Space and Viv Ncaus) , which foster connection, engagement, and mutual support among participants. These groups create welcoming, responsive environments where people can safely share their experiences and build community.



Group members participate in a Viv Ncaus women's support group meeting

Recognizing that cultural values and lived experiences, including caregiving roles, family responsibilities, and norms around discussing personal challenges, can shape how individuals experience and express stress, these spaces are designed to be respectful and affirming. Through shared storytelling, peer support, and accessible wellness strategies, participants are supported in strengthening their emotional well-being in ways that honor their cultural identities and community strengths.

In my work with the incarcerated population, I lead WeCOPE sessions to help people strengthen their resilience and emotional well-being. Through lessons centered on mindfulness, gratitude, cognitive reframing, and practical coping strategies, I support participants as they build skills to manage stress and understand their emotions more clearly. In the Wood County Jail, I focus on offering tools that promote healthier decision-making and personal stability. I strive to create a steady, supportive environment where people feel safe to reflect, engage, and develop lifelong wellness habits.

"Honestly, at the beginning of this class, I was like what am I going to learn from this. But by the end I was pretty amazed and Ka Zoua is a great, positive, friendly teacher. She did a great job."

-WeCOPE Participant

CULTURAL



A presentation to local community members, sharing the Hmong culture and history.

KaBao Xiong, the Hmong Coordinator/Advocate from the Wisconsin Rapids Family Center, and I present to community members and professionals to bridge culture, promote healing, and have honest conversations. We begin by introducing our Hmong history and culture. Together, we speak openly about mental health, domestic violence and sexual assault, and alcohol and substance usage, naming the silence and shame that surrounds these issues while honor the resilience within the Hmong community. We use stories, cultural context, and gentle language to help people understand why these conversations can be difficult, but helpful for safety and healing. Our shared purpose is to raise awareness, strengthen understanding, and create the road towards healing within our communities.

Horticulture

Janell Wehr, Horticulture Educator

EXPANDING ACCESS TO IPM AND INCLUSIVE OUTREACH REDUCING

Extension delivered programs in Wood County focused on increasing awareness of IPM principles and expanding access to horticultural education. These efforts emphasized practical strategies that reduce reliance on chemical inputs while supporting sustainable practices.

In April, an IPM workshop for Hmong producers in Wisconsin Rapids introduced key concepts such as pest identification, monitoring, and decision-making. Participants learned to apply preventative strategies and reduce pesticide use.

Extension partnered with the Central Wisconsin State Fair to judge the "Ugly Weed Question" and provide outreach through the Wonders of Wisconsin booth. This connected with a broad audience and increased awareness of Extension resources through materials and informal conversations on research-based practices.

Additional programming addressed common landscape concerns. A wildlife damage management program at the Rome Library provided strategies to prevent and manage impacts using non-chemical approaches. A fall garden clean-up program highlighted how end-of-season practices reduce insects and disease pressure.

These programs provided practical, research-based education that supports informed decision-making and long-term behavior change, while reducing environmental impacts and supporting productive landscapes.

'HORT' BY THE NUMBERS

248 diagnostic inquiries

4 Integrated Pest Management programs

3 therapeutic horticulture programs



Wehr presents at an IPM workshop for Hmong producers.

GARDENING TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Extension delivered therapeutic horticulture and youth-focused programs in Wood County that supported skill-building, social interaction, and overall well-being. These programs highlight gardening as a tool for learning and personal growth.

Horticulture

Youth programming played a central role. In February, a kokedama workshop at 4-H Project Discovery Day introduced moss-wrapped plant design. This hands-on activity supported creativity, focus, and fine motor skills while engaging youth in plant care.

Extension partnered with Marshfield High School to offer a kokedama workshop for ESL students, supporting horticultural learning and social connection. Outreach at National Night Out provided additional opportunities to engage youth and families.

Therapeutic horticulture was incorporated through a dwarf tomato workshop with the Wood County Health Department as part of Parent Café programming. Participants planted while building connections in a supportive setting.



Wehr at Science by the River with Inspector Cabbage.

Extension also contributed to Science by the River with the "Inspector Cabbage" activity, using red cabbage as a pH indicator to teach basic science concepts.

Participants gained practical skills while experiencing the benefits of engaging with plants. These efforts highlight horticulture as an effective approach to supporting community well-being and lifelong learning.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF PESTICIDE AND FERTILIZER MISUSE

Diagnostics

Wood County faces environmental challenges, including pollinator decline and pollution from improper use of horticultural chemicals. Overuse of fertilizers and pesticides contributes to water contamination and reduced biodiversity. Research-based pest management strategies help limit these risks and support healthy landscapes. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) emphasizes prevention, monitoring, and targeted intervention.

In 2025, the Extension office responded to 248 diagnostic questions in Marathon and Wood Counties. Wood County residents rely on Extension for timely, science-based guidance. Questions are received through phone calls, emails, and the UW–Madison Horticulture Program website, with Master Gardeners assisting to expand access.

Diagnostic services address plant diseases, insect concerns, and environmental stress. By identifying root causes, Extension helps residents avoid unnecessary treatments and reduce chemical use.

As weather becomes more variable, these services remain essential. Fluctuations in rainfall and temperature increase plant stress and pest pressure. Access to research-based guidance helps residents respond effectively while minimizing environmental impacts.

Extension supports Master Gardener volunteers through training and guidance, strengthening accurate recommendations and helping residents protect their landscapes and the broader environment.

Human Development & Relationships

Ben Eberlein, Human Development & Relationships Educator

RENT SMART

Finding safe and affordable housing has become increasingly challenging in recent years. For people with a negative rental history, poor credit, or criminal record, it can feel almost impossible to find any housing at all.

Extension educator, Ben Eberlein, worked with local coalitions, partner agencies, and county departments and programs (Wood County Jail and the STRONG Program) to offer the Rent Smart program in 2025. Rent Smart is a six-session course that helps participants with negative or limited rental records gain the skills to find and keep safe, affordable housing.

The Rent Smart program was provided weekly for participants in the Wood County jail, with a total of 15 participants completing the program between June and December of 2025. Eberlein also partnered with the Marshfield Family Health Center to offer Rent Smart in conjunction with the Rent Ready program which serves individuals in recovery to obtain and keep housing. This series was offered monthly at both McMillan Memorial Library in Wisconsin Rapids and the Everett Roehl Public Library in Marshfield.

- 100% of participants stated the course will help them obtain appropriate housing in the future.
- 90% of participants stated the course will help them keep housing in the future.
- 100% of participants stated that they now understand their rights and responsibilities as a tenant.
- 100% of participants stated that they now feel that they have the tools to manage their monthly expenses.

YOUTH FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Extension educators collaborated to provide educational programming at River Cities High School and the Pittsville School District After-School Program to address needs for life-skills, financial, nutrition, and health & well-being education.

Programming was provided monthly to 81 students at River Cities High School in 2025, in both morning and afternoon sessions, with each class rotating between educators. Financial Security educator, Ben Eberlein, provided financial education during these sessions, covering topics including:

- Budgeting and spending
- Smart shopping and financial biases
- Rent Smart
- Credit and debt

Human Development & Relationships

Programming was provided weekly to 2nd through 8th grade students attending Pittsville's After-School Program in 2025, through a rotation of six Extension educators. The series was provided in two 40-minute sessions each week. Eberlein provided financial education to 46 students attending the after-school program in 2025, on a range of basic financial topics, including:

- Needs versus wants
- Budgeting and spending
- Long & short-term savings goals
- Comparing places to save
- How and why to be a good borrower
- Comparison shopping
- Planning for long-term financial commitments

FINANCIAL WELLNESS AT WORK

Many people in Wood County struggle to afford basic needs like housing, food, and healthcare – a reality that was captured in the results of the 2024 Community Health Assessment (CHA), in which Financial Security was identified as a top issue. As a result, goals to improve financial security were included in the county's 2025-2027 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

Throughout the fall of 2025, Eberlein collaborated with Niki Lucht at the Wood County Health Department to establish a partnership with Wood County to provide the Financial Wellness at Work program for all county employees. The program removes barriers to financial security by integrating financial education, resources and supports directly in the workplace. The program will launch in January of 2026, with the inclusion of "Grow Your Green" workbooks in new employee onboarding, access to free financial education resources to all Wood County employees, and the addition of financial education activities and opportunity for free financial coaching as part of Wood County's incentivized employee wellness program.

Natural Resources

Anna Mitchell & Jen McNelly, Regional Natural Resources Educators

SCIENCE BY THE RIVER



Attendees visit a station at Science by the River.

Science by the River, a free event celebrating all things science and outdoors, marked its fifth anniversary this year. This year's event was held on October 18th in conjunction with the Wisconsin Science Fest. The event attracted over 300 visitors of all ages, eager to spark their curiosity and engage with science and technology in their community.

Participants had the opportunity to learn about and connect with various science and conservation organizations, gaining a deeper understanding of local science and conservation efforts. The event featured representatives from 14 different community collaborators, each hosting a "discovery station" with information and activities related to science, conservation, and their respective organizations.

A crowd favorite was the discovery station hosted by the Einstein Project, where visitors had the opportunity to assemble mechanical toys that they could take home. Local fisheries biologists from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources also hosted a popular station, where they showed off native Wisconsin fish and offered families a chance to try their hand at fishing.

Overall, this year's Science by the River was a resounding success for both visitors and discovery station hosts. Feedback from attendees highlighted the event as a fantastic opportunity to enhance their understanding of science within the community while also enjoying the great outdoors.



Science by the River attendees fish from the river bank.

NRE BY THE NUMBERS

Outreach & Education

31 educational events/programs

1,312 total participants

Partnerships with Water Quality Focused Groups

5 lake protection groups

9 producer-led watershed protection groups

18 facilitated conversations with partners

NEPCO LAKE DISTRICT

The Nepco Lake District was created in 2023 when it was approved by the Wood County Board of Supervisors to oversee the management of Nepco Lake. In April 2025, at the request of the Nepco Lake District, Anna Mitchell and Jen McNelly facilitated a stakeholder meeting focused on the Fourmile Creek Watershed which contributes to Nepco Lake. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate conversations around a comprehensive watershed management plan.

Through this facilitated dialogue, it became evident that the Lake District needed to develop an internal strategic plan to clarify its mission, priorities and capacity. The District also identified a need to establish baseline water quality data from throughout the watershed to better understand how nutrients were moving from the landscape to the water resources of the watershed and ultimately to Nepco Lake. This data is critical in trying to determine management actions for Nepco Lake.

Anna Mitchell developed and implemented a stakeholder engagement survey designed to gather community perspectives. The survey targeted seasonal and full-time residents, recreational users, business owners and farmers/landowners. It collected input on familiarity with the Lake District, perceptions of lake health, community concerns, and priorities for action.

The survey results were used to help inform a strategic planning process for the Nepco Lake District. Anna facilitated a series of four strategic planning sessions with the District Commissioners and lake residents. During these sessions participants identified goals and actions to work on over the upcoming year to help achieve the vision.

Jen McNelly continued to work with the Nepco Lake District, Wood and Portage County Land and Water Conservation Departments, Wisconsin DNR and the UWSP Center for Watershed Science and Education to create a water quality monitoring program for the Fourmile Creek Watershed, Lake Wazeecha and Nepco Lake. In order to implement the water quality monitoring plan, two Wisconsin DNR Surface Water grants were applied for and awarded to the Wood County Land and Water Conservation Department. They will be overseeing the coordination and implementation of the monitoring plan between all partners. Data gathered over the next two years will be incorporated into a watershed management plan for the Fourmile Creek Watershed and a Lake Management Plan for Nepco Lake.

Outcomes of Effort

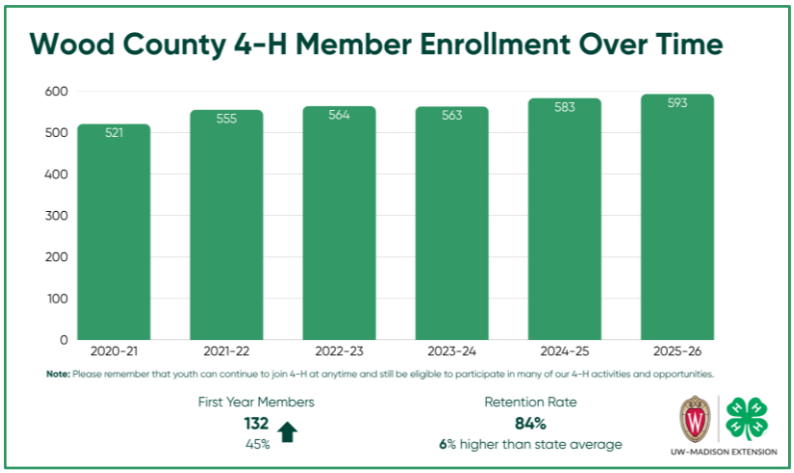
The stakeholder engagement survey received 69 responses, providing a rich dataset that reflects the community's values, concerns and expectations. This feedback is being used by the Nepco Lake District to guide its internal strategic planning process, ensuring that future goals and initiatives are informed by and responsive to the community it serves. By fostering inclusive and informed decision-making, this effort lays the foundation for a more effective and collaborative watershed management plan. The process also builds local capacity for participatory planning, contributing to broader societal outcomes such as improved water resources and stronger community engagement in environmental decision making.

Wisconsin 4-H

Laura Huber, 4-H Educator

YOUTH MEMBERSHIP IS STRONG IN WOOD COUNTY 4-H

Youth membership in Wood County 4-H is GROWING! The COVID-19 pandemic caused serious membership declines for membership programs across the country, Wood County 4-H included. Over the last six years, membership in 4-H has grown nearly 14%. We are excited to share that through the hard work and dedication of staff, AmeriCorps members, and 4-H volunteers, our program is growing and thriving! Not only is our overall membership growing, the number of youth staying in the program is improving, too. On average, 78% of 4-H members remain in the program, but in Wood County 84% of our members stay.



THE 4-H THRIVING SURVEY

In November, the Wisconsin 4-H Program sent out a survey to all youth members 13 years and older. The survey measures the overall quality of their 4-H experience so that we can understand the impacts 4-H is having on the lives of young people. We also use the data collected to improve our programs at both the county and club levels.

4-H BY THE NUMBERS

112 adult volunteers *(15 new volunteers in 2024-25)*

14 community clubs

3 project groups

1 volunteer-led leadership association

Community Service

Youth: **3,804** hours

Volunteer: **5,268** hours

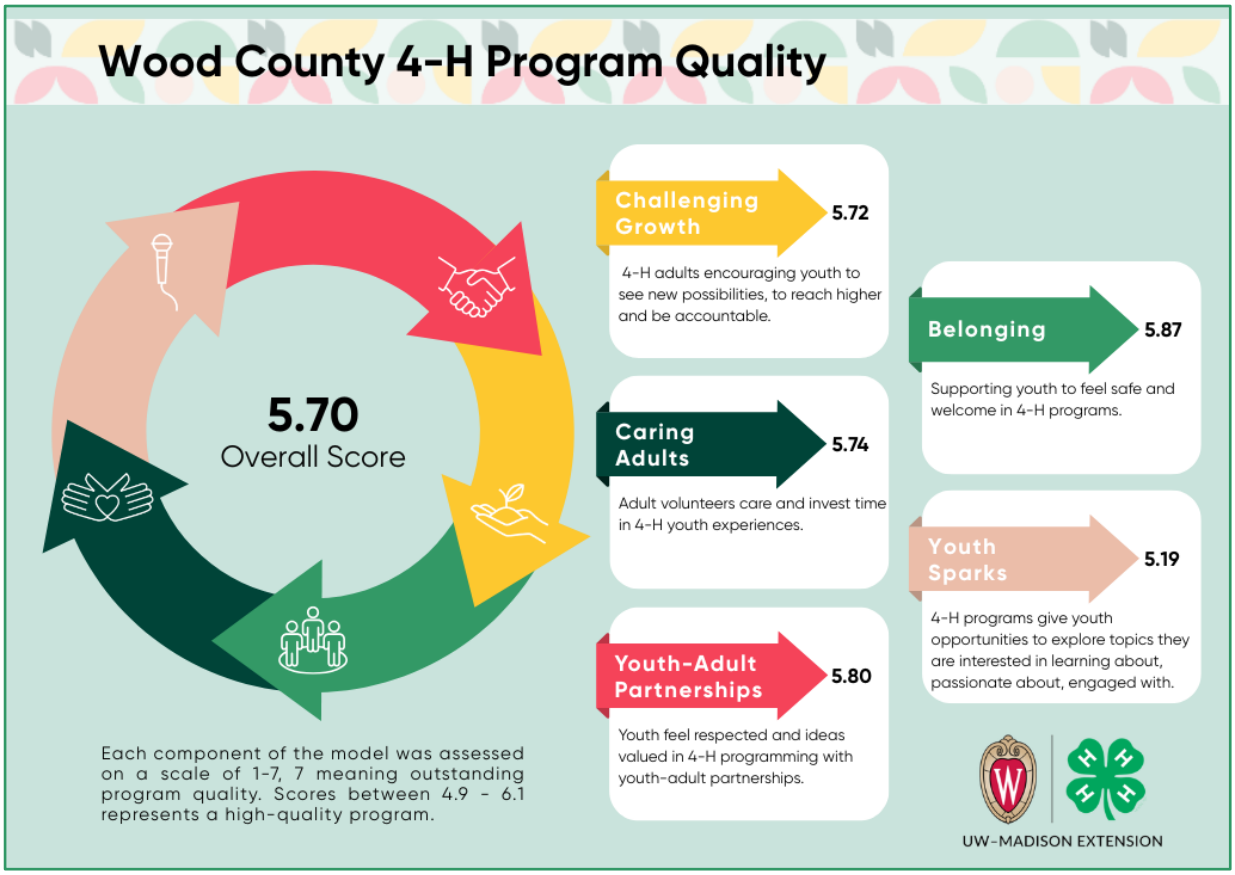
Total: 9,072 hours

Total value of volunteer hours performed by Wood County 4-H to local communities:*

$314,526.24

**based on the value of an hour of volunteer service of $34.67 from Independent Sector in 2025*

Wisconsin 4-H

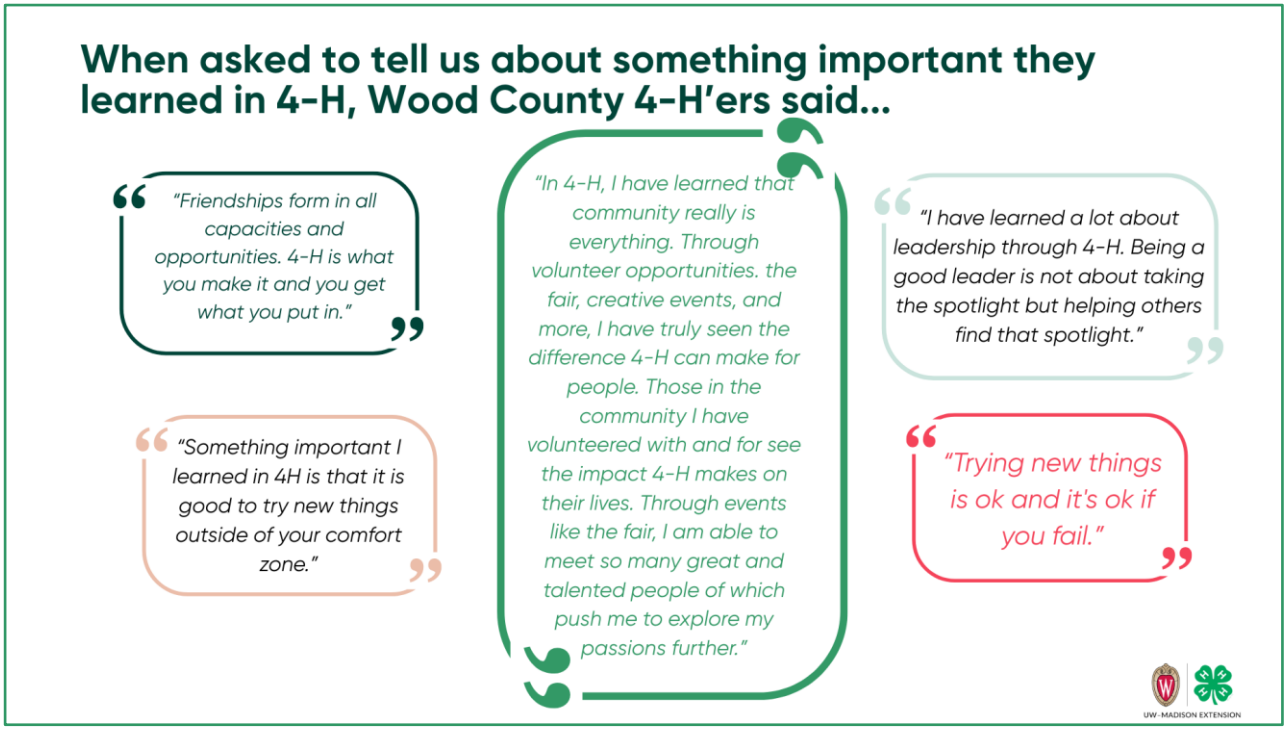


Wood County 4-H received a composite score of 5.70 out of 7 for Overall Program Quality. Scores between 4.9 - 6.1 represent a "High Quality Program." Overall program quality is measured based on factors that have been identified as key for youth to thrive in life, including: challenging growth, caring adults, youth-adult partnership, belonging, and sparks.

The two areas in which Wood County 4-H really shines are Belonging and Youth-Adult Partnerships. Belonging is a sense that a person is welcome in a space and free to be themselves. When a young person feels like they belong, they are more likely to try something new even when there is a risk of failure. They are more likely to recover from their failures, share their ideas and opinions, and even step into leadership.

Belonging leads to an overall sense of well-being. Youth-Adult Partnerships, on the other hand, are like purposeful mentorships between a caring adult and young people. When adults and youth work together in true 4-H partnership, youth take the lead and adults take a supportive role. Youth voice and decision making is prioritized and adults help coach youth through. Quality youth-adult partnerships help young people develop the skills that will be crucial in the workforce like communication, responsible citizenship, teamwork, decision making, and organization.

Wisconsin 4-H



For more information about the 4-H Thriving Model or why it matters, please reach out to Laura Huber in the Extension Office.

MEETING YOUTH WHERE THEY'RE AT: PITTSVILLE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Pittsville After School Program began in the 2023-24 school year. It provides youth with homework support and enrichment activities, with goals that include improving student academic performance, school attendance, and overall well-being. In early 2025, Ron Klein, Dean of Students for Pittsville Elementary School, reached out to ask if 4-H would collaborate with the After School Program. In response to that local need, Laura Huber, 4-H Program Educator, developed and led fun, hands-on learning activities for students throughout second semester.

Science, technology, engineering, and math were topics identified as "high interest" to students in the after school program. In February, students learned about electricity and circuits by making electrical circuits. They celebrated National Agriculture Day in March with a mini greenhouse building activity and then celebrated the Global Day of the Engineer in April by designing and building marble runs out of household materials.

Wisconsin 4-H

In 2024-25, 116 students were enrolled in Pittsville After School. Huber primarily worked with those in grades 1-8. On each visit, she worked with 20-50 students. Each activity was tailored to the age of the students to ensure each student could succeed.

The students, parents, and staff in Pittsville After School Program were so happy with the enrichment programs led by Wood County 4-H that they asked Extension to return in the 2025-26 school year with even more opportunities!

AMERICORPS AND 4-H: GETTING THINGS DONE

In 2023, Wood County 4-H began working with AmeriCorps to expand the opportunities available for youth around the county to engage in fun, hands-on learning. AmeriCorps is the federal government's only agency focused on domestic service to America.

Marshfield Clinic Health System | AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps and 4-H both focus on education to improve the lives of people in our communities. With Wood County 4-H and AmeriCorps working together, we are able to expand the reach of 4-H's "learn by doing" approach to youth not served by traditional 4-H clubs. Hands on learning opportunities we provide are not only fun, but they help young people build skills they'll need for success in life.

Trina Bores has been serving Wood County 4-H through the Marshfield Clinic Health Services AmeriCorps since January 2025. Her focus has been on creating opportunities for young people to socialize and learn together. This is especially important in our digital, post-pandemic world.

Trina has offered programs throughout Wood County by teaming up with public libraries, the Downtown Wisconsin Rapids Farmers Market, and the Central Wisconsin State Fair. She's expanded opportunities for youth already in 4-H by creating new programs and day camps. She has also helped to plan and lead programs at summer camp and the Discover Wisconsin travel experience for middle schoolers.



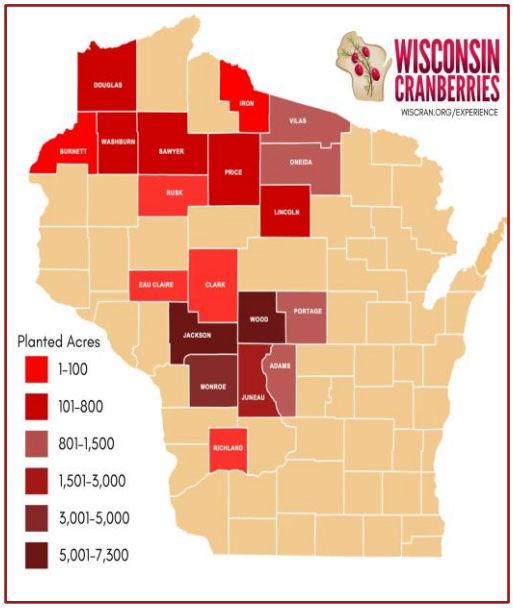
Wood County AmeriCorps Member, Trina Bores, with 4-H members on a travel experience.

Cranberries

Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist

EDUCATION

Education and outreach continued in Wisconsin's 21st year as the nationwide cranberry leader. Every program, from virtual brown bag lunches to the Summer Field Day to Cranberry School had higher attendance than prior years. Especially the Nutrient Management Plan training, enabling growers to write DATCP-certified Nutrient Management Plans, had 47 participants, including more than two-thirds first-time attendees. A direct result of the Cranberry Outreach Specialist's outreach and publicization to growers who have only been tangentially engaged and newer growers, has been those growers participating more and remarking that they are glad to be more involved.



Map showing 2025 cranberry production in Wisconsin, by county

Remaining front and center are the three key outcomes from the Needs Assessment:

1. A revised Nutrient Management Practices guide that supports growers in raising today's modern hybrids and in establishing new plantings

2. A foundational, easily searchable, online library of educational materials to support younger generations returning to the farm and educating new hires without cranberry backgrounds to improve their work experiences

3. Continuing to strengthen the tight feedback loop between grower needs and research priorities. See go.wisc.edu/cranberrybrownbags to see archived Virtual Brown Bag content, and the updated cranberry webpage will be available soon.



Attendees at 2025 Cranberry School

We are proud of 2025's successful crop—Wisconsin's 21st consecutive year leading the world in cranberry production—and of the cooperative and research-driven cranberry industry and all of its successes.

Here is continued progress in 2026!



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