

Extension Eau Claire County

April 2025 Report

Agriculture

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Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator



A webinar series for farmers and agronomy professionals where participants learn about on-farm research design to improve cropping system decisions and increase profitability. (Jerry Clark, Abby Augarten, Lindsey Rushford)

An on-farm research study to better understand manure application, commercial nitrogen application rates, and nitrogen credits on corn yield and potential effect on groundwater. Results from this study will help farmers, agriculture industry professionals, and agency professionals in adjusting manure and commercial nitrogen applications to optimize corn yield and protect groundwater resources. (Jerry Clark, Amber Gilles, Christine Clark, Jordan Kampa, Joshua Kamps, Kelsey Hyland, Kristi Peterson, Lindsey Rushford, Liz Gartman, Melissa Ohlrich, Ryan Sterry, Scott Reuss, Steven Hall, Teal Polzin)



Spotlight

Manure and commercial nitrogen fertilizers are sources of nitrogen for corn production. Over application of nitrogen and manure can lead to nitrate nitrogen leaching to groundwater. Funding through a Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program On-Farm Research grant led to investigation of the effect of manure and commercial nitrogen application on corn yield on six farms across Wisconsin. Farmers and Regional Educators are collaborating to implement on-farm research to discover yield and water quality effects of various rates of nitrogen to areas of fields with and without applied manure. Participating farmers and extension educators anticipate there will be an increase in yield for plots with manure and nitrogen applied, but a lower crop response to nitrogen as the amount of nitrogen applied increases. Water quality measurements through lysimeters installed at one location will assist in evaluating the movement of nitrogen through the water profile. Lysimeters installed in April 2024 were removed in April 2025 and nitrate results are currently being analyzed. This is the second year of a two-year project to be completed in fall of 2025 with results to be released in Spring 2026.

Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



An article for beef cow-calf producers where readers learned the value of crossbreeding and how it can be implemented on their farms to help them improve profitability. (Bill Halfman, Beth McIlquham, Kimberly Kester, Ryan Sterry)

Chippewa Valley Forage Council Spring Seminar for Beef and Dairy Forage producers. Extension Regional Educators Jerry Clark and Ryan Sterry, and Outreach Specialists Leonard Plzien and Bill Halfman, addressed current forage, beef, and dairy production topics for the 2025 Chippewa Valley Forage Council Spring Seminar

Presentations and discussions included an update on producer-led watershed grant programs, a dairy market outlook, nutrition considerations for the beef cow herd, transitioning to beef: considerations for cattle handling, nitrogen

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management research, and Inter-seeding alfalfa with corn silage. For Ryan's presentation, Transitioning to Beef: Considerations for Cattle Handling, participant evaluations showed a +1.5 gain in knowledge (5-point scale) (In partnership with: Bill Halfman, Jerry Clark, Leonard Polzin)

A series of workshops for beef producers where producers learned about what type of cattle packers prefer to meet consumer demands, what quality and yield grades are, current challenges in the beef industry and best management practices to produce ideal market animals. (Beth McIlquham, Bill Halfman, Kimberly Kester, Ryan Sterry)

Spotlight

The traits of fed cattle influence what beef processors are willing to pay for them. The 2022 Beef Quality Audit identified what is going well in the beef industry and where there is room for growth and education. UW Extension collaborated with the Wisconsin Beef Council and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture to organize and conduct workshops at 3 locations around the state to provide beef producers the opportunity to learn about what ideal market animals look like, what meat quality and yield grades are and management practices to produce quality animals. Organizing partners created a safe space for producers to ask questions to a packer representative. A workshop evaluation found that across all topics, the average percent increase in knowledge was 39%. Some of the top responses to a question referencing what they learned included hearing from the buyers about what they are looking for, quality and yield grade, the results from the most recent beef quality audit, bruising, and carcass defects, factors that influence meat that is dark, firm, and dry, the importance of feeding, bunk management, and keeping cattle clean.

Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

Sign up to receive [Extension in the Valley](#) and for more garden articles, visit [Seasonal Gardening Articles](#).



A program for the public on common diseases, pests and disorders that they may encounter in the gardens this summer. Participants learned what signs / symptoms to look for and corresponding management strategies based on IPM techniques. This effort was designed to encourage people to stay observant in the garden for early detection of an issue and properly identify and understand the issue before making management decisions.

An activity to illustrate the benefits of gardening for participants in the Chippewa County Recovery Court Program. Participants learned how gardening is a great way to incorporate many wellness benefits such as stress relief, focus recovery and a sense of accomplishment into your life and were able to build their own sensory garden in a pot. This effort was designed to encourage people to include plants and gardening in their lifestyle to experience the many benefits that gardening can provide. (In collaboration with Jeanne Walsh)



Provided garden articles and factsheets for the public in the Extension in the Valley, a tri-county monthly newsletter that focuses on Agriculture and Horticulture news. Included were gardening tips for older adults, tips on gardening with kids, and links to UW Madison Extension articles on seed starting, early spring lawn care and pruning evergreen shrubs. Links to the PDDC current blog and upcoming garden events were also included. This effort is designed to keep participants connected to seasonal horticulture topics. (Partnered with: Amber Gilles, Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

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A program for the public on growing fruit in containers where participants learned best practices on container gardening together with guidance on fruit selections for containers. This effort was designed to encourage people of all ages to go to food gardens even if space or mobility is limited.

A garden program for beginners where participants learn the basics of vegetable gardening. The goal of this effort was to teach those new to vegetable gardening how to start a vegetable garden, understand soil health, learn about plant selection, planting, and garden maintenance.

Spotlight

The garden program for beginners is in response to a request to offer classes on vegetable gardening for residents of Affinity House. We decided on growing a salad garden as a teaching tool on how to start a vegetable garden that includes cool season and warm season crops, crops that will be tended and harvested through the growing season and will offer healthy, nutritious foods.

Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Community Development Educator



A three-part workshop series convened leaders from over 30 homeless service providers in Eau Claire County to build and refine a community plan to end homelessness through participatory methods and the inclusion of people with lived and living experience. This collaborative effort, in partnership with Eau Claire County Department of Human Services and Eau Claire City-County Health Department, aims to establish a unified and effective strategy for addressing homelessness across the county.

Planning for a series of mini-publics and workshops for community members, service providers, and individuals experiencing homelessness in collaboration with the Eau Claire Department of Human Services and Eau Claire City/County Public Health Department. The goal is to collaboratively develop concrete, actionable strategies for supporting individuals experiencing homelessness, so that we can ensure all community members have safe housing, strengthen our collective sense of belonging, and realize Eau Claire's potential as a truly welcoming and inclusive community. (Garret Zastoupil, Amber Wichowsky)

A 4-part workshop series in partnership with Wisconsin Literacy where board members and directors of small literacy organizations evaluate the current state of their organization, analyze support pools for volunteers and funding, and create action plans to ensure their organization is sustainable over time. (Sarah Schlosser, Alyson Sauter, Barbara Alvarez, Garret Zastoupil).

Planning for a Strategic Planning workshop for Eau Claire County in collaboration with Eau Claire County Administration. The goal is to assist the County with identifying key priorities and develop coherent action plans, so that the county government can be responsive to challenges and opportunities and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Continued development of the Chippewa Valley Health Cooperative and its efforts to re-open the former St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls as an full-service interim healthcare facility, and to build a new full-service hospital in Lake Hallie, Wisconsin to replace the 34% of regional health care lost with the closure of the two HSHS hospitals in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls and 19 Prevea clinics across the region. (Bill Oemichen, Garret Zastoupil, Karl Green, Kristen Bruder)

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Spotlight

The Community Development Educator had engaged in preliminary conversations with community members during their onboarding. During this process, they developed a system map for homelessness in the county to understand relevant organizations and share with Public Health and other organizations. Later, the Educator worked with the Department of Human Services on a strategic plan and built trust with staff who later approached the educator about the potential to support efforts on community conversations. The Educator is in a series of meetings to co-design processes that will build trust among service providers, increase community engagement, and strengthen the participation of those most impacted by these challenges in creating new futures. 1. Build trust among service providers 2. Increase sense of belonging among community members 3. Decrease the number of people who are functionally homeless 4. Increase community capacity to respond to challenges



Health & Well-Being

Sandy Tarter

FoodWise Coordinator



Joy Weisner

FoodWise Educator



A 6-week nutrition education series for 1st graders (two classrooms) in Augusta Elementary school. The goal of this effort is for students to learn about eating healthily, being active, exploring fruits and vegetables, and the importance of handwashing.

A 6-week nutrition education series for 5th graders at Augusta Elementary school where students learn about MyPlate: the five food groups, eating healthy foods in each food group, reading nutrition facts labels, finding total sugars and how to incorporate physical activity into daily life. This effort engages students with interactive, fun activities and gives them a hands-on experience to taste a variety of healthy foods from each food group related to the lessons.

An educational caregiver event at the Altoona Head Start Center where parents learned helpful techniques to help parents/caregivers feed their picky eaters. Families had the opportunity to make and taste a Mango Smoothie. This effort supports parents in encouraging their families to eat healthy and reduce mealtime struggles.

Continuation of a 6-week nutrition education series to 3rd graders (two classrooms) at Flynn Elementary. The goal of this effort is for students to learn about MyPlate: the five food groups, eating healthy foods in each food group, reading nutrition facts labels, food safety in the home and how to incorporate physical activity into daily life.

A 3-week series for Augusta 4K AM and PM classrooms to learn about fruits, vegetables and keeping their bodies healthy. This effort helps children to learn to use their senses with colors and tastes to explore foods and includes movement.

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A series of virtual strength training sessions (StrongBodies) for adults in the community, where participants engage in regular, progressive strength training and health education to improve their physical and mental health and enhance social connectedness.

Spotlight

Studies on teaching young children about fruits and vegetables consistently demonstrate that repeated exposure, positive experiences, and engaging activities, like gardening and cooking, are key to fostering healthy eating habits. Early introduction to a variety of fruits and vegetables, combined with education and positive reinforcement, can significantly impact children's preferences and consumption of these foods. FoodWise education incorporates the following key findings and messages (Part 1):

Repeated Exposure and Positive Experiences:

Taste exposure: Repeatedly offering children new fruits and vegetables, even if they initially dislike them, can lead to increased acceptance and liking. Their taste buds are growing and changing with their bodies!

Positive mealtime environment: Creating a fun and supportive environment around meals, free from pressure to eat, can encourage exploration of new foods. We like to encourage the "Smell it, Lick it, Bunny bite it method in our classrooms!

Involvement in food preparation: Activities like gardening, cooking, and taste-testing can enhance children's interest and willingness to try new fruits and vegetables. We provide age-appropriate activities in the kitchen to help Mom or Dad with food preparation. Even a 2-yr old can wash fruits and veggies or tear lettuce!

Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator



Developing the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) educational program in collaboration with Health and Well-Being Institute colleagues. The goal of this effort is to develop a program plan, logic model, evaluation methods, etc. so that other Extension educators can offer similar programming to their target audience(s).

A series of meetings for WeCOPE facilitators where the curriculum is being reviewed and revised. This effort is being conducted to ensure quality learning experience for participants in this program and to support consistent facilitator delivery of the content. (Sheila Michels, Danette Hopke, Janeth

Orozco, Jennifer Park-Mroch, Margo Dieck, Sara Ennocenti)

Attendance at the 2025 Art & Science of Health Promotion Conference: Cultivating Connection: Belonging & the Bottom Line. Conference sessions specifically addressed combating isolation and loneliness, increasing meaningful social connections, and fostering a workplace culture of health and well-being. The skills and knowledge gained from this conference will directly apply to the work in Eau Claire County, align with partner and community priorities, and help fulfill the Wisconsin Idea.

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A [Mental Health Training Request Form](#), where members of the public and community partners can request training for their group in Eau Claire, Chippewa, and Dunn Counties. The goal is to have a central location for tracking mental health training requests in the Chippewa Valley and work with community partners to efficiently fill training needs.

Request a local mental health training

Spotlight

The WeCOPE curriculum was written in 2021 and has been implemented widely across the state. A current evaluation of the program impact is underway and the WeCOPE facilitator team has identified necessary changes to incorporate adult learning principles, participant feedback, and educator requests. A team of educators and state specialists are gathering input from instructors and revising the curriculum. The product of this effort will result in a curriculum that supports consistent delivery by educators across the state, be more comprehensive in the tools and modifications necessary for unique audiences and will align with adult learning principles.

Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator



A Camp Orientation Zoom where campers and their parents could see pictures of camp, hear expectations for campers and parents, and ask questions. Camp orientations have been shown to reduce anxiety about participating at camp. (Rachel Hart-Brinson, Seth Harrmann, Zachary Rozmiarek)

A 5-week Cloverbud Club in partnership with the Altoona Public Library. This club is an opportunity to participate in the 4-H program/Positive Youth Development in a short-term opportunity for an age group that is particularly looking for activities.

A five-week family night series at DeLong Middle School where middle school students and their parents learn together about how to achieve academic success. This program aims to promote building social capital, an understanding of the school system, and the importance of family involvement in a young person's education.

Preparation for Camp Counselor training on May 4. This training will allow young people an opportunity to practice their sessions that they will lead at camp as well as cover some leadership strategies and self-reflection that they will use when they are at camp. (Rachel Hart-Brinson, Seth Harrmann, Zachary Rozmiarek)

A Project Exploration Day for youth in grades K-5. This provided an opportunity for young people to explore their interests and for older youth to share some of their sparks in 45-minute sessions.

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Area Extension Director

Kristen Bruder | Eau Claire, Chippewa, and Dunn Counties



The role of the AED is like that of the department head in the county. If you have ideas, thoughts, or want to chat about Extension please reach out! Below is a brief overview of the role of AEDs: Extension fully invests in Area Extension Directors (AEDs) who oversee an area. These administrative positions are responsible for partnership management, staff development, financial management and program coordination.

Through the many interactions the AED has with county partners and local educators, the AED develops a solid understanding of the local needs and county priorities and helps to align Extension educational programs to ensure the programs address county needs. Educators also communicate local needs to their programmatic Institutes, which collectively identify opportunities to address statewide needs.

For a full list of upcoming events throughout Extension, click [here](#)

Value Added Programming

An online learning opportunity for Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs) and volunteer business leaders to collaborate on developing stronger business plans. This structured interaction builds confidence and entrepreneurial skill in the EITs and fosters empathy and confidence for volunteers that formerly incarcerated entrepreneurs can contribute positively and move our communities forward after prison. (Diana Hammer, Erin Rivera, Michael Senn)

A 17-week online program teaching entrepreneurship and personal development skills to formerly incarcerated adults so they can "defy the odds" by overcoming barriers in the workplace due their criminal histories, start their own businesses, and potentially employ others with criminal records. (Diana Hammer, Michael Senn)

An educational opportunity for program alumni to return as peer facilitators and support new participants through a 17-week entrepreneurship class to help more people finish the class successfully and deepen their learning. (Diana Hammer, Erin Rivera, Michael Senn)

Part 2 of the Introduction to Qualitative Data Analysis Workshop for Local and Tribal Health Departments where participants learn about tools and tips to conduct qualitative data analysis, develop codebooks, present data in a report and share findings back to their community. The goals of this effort are to increase community capacity in qualitative data analysis and program evaluation, and community capacity to incorporate community inputs in decision-making in public health. (Pearly Wong, Sarah Boulton, Selena Freimark, Sheena Cook-Fuglsang)

A coaching program for families and individuals, where participants learn how to create financial goals and gain money management skills. The goal of this program is to enable participants to prepare for and take charge of household financial situations that occur due to changes in income or unforeseen hardships. (Jeanne Walsh)

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