

Extension Eau Claire County

November 2025 Report

Agriculture

Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator

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An on-farm study to better understand the effect of nitrogen application rates on nitrogen cycling and corn yield. Results from this study will help corn growers in that they can implement and adapt N management practices to optimize economic return, improve efficiency of N fertilizer resulting in more sustainable corn production and farm profitability. Jerry Clark, Deanna Wiersgalla, Ryan Sterry

A nutrient management program for farmers where participants learned to identify nutrient application strategies and management decision points to improve farm profitability and protect ground and surface water. The goal of the program is to increase overall efficiency of nutrients applied to the landscape.

An AgriAbility of Wisconsin program for staff from Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Health Services Independent Living Centers where staff learned about a Day in the Life of a Farmer related to crop production to increase awareness of seasonal and day-to-day functions on a crop production farm.

A clinic for students where students learned forage feed and nutrition analysis recommendations and the nutrition impact on dairy cattle and type and structure of dairy cattle to improve forage and feeding practices and increase dairy production efficiency and improve farm profitability. The goal of the program is to increase knowledge and understanding of the importance of forage and feeding impact on dairy animals. (Jerry Clark, Amber Gilles, Jordan Blue, Ryan Sterry)

A land evaluation clinic for students where participants learned land management principles, soil properties, and land use, to increase effective land management practices and maximize soil and agricultural land production into the future. The goal of the program is to increase knowledge and understanding of the importance of land and soil management and the impact agriculture and commercial development has on the land. (Jerry Clark, Amber Gilles)

Planning for three in-person and one virtual crop management update programs for crop growers, agency staff, consultants and educators. The goal is to provide timely crops and soils management updates where the audience learns about the most recent research findings from University of Wisconsin and Extension specialists that can help them make more productive and profitable decisions moving into the 2026 crop season. (Liz Gartman, Anne Pfeiffer, Daniel Smith, Jerry Clark, Joshua Kamps, Kevin Jarek, Megan Sankey, Melissa Ohlrich, Scott Reuss, Will Fulwider)

Spotlight

Each crop growing season offers its own set of challenges and opportunities based on weather, pests and economics. Extension specialists engage in work that deals with many of these challenges. The update programs offer a space for specialists to share their findings and tools with key stakeholders that can implement these management methods to improve forage and grain production, soil health and profitability for farms in Wisconsin. The Badger Crop Update planning team has identified three in person venues and one virtual opportunity and has aligned an agenda of speakers that can provide the most insight to the audience based on the growing season of 2025. There are additional opportunities for local educators to share upcoming programs and updates, as well as networking between educators, specialists and attendees.

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Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



An artificial insemination course for dairy and beef producers, where they learned how to breed their own cattle. Through this program, producers will be able to save money and increase reproductive rates by breeding their own cattle in a timely fashion. (Heather Schlesser, Ryan Sterry, Sandy Stuttgen)

An educational article for the Wisconsin Agriculturalist magazine, for farmers and ag industry professionals, focusing on replacement beef heifer selection and development.

In October and November, Ryan met with community partners to continue efforts to learn about livestock producer needs and develop programmatic relationships in the Chippewa Valley. Examples include the Chippewa County Ag Education Council, Chippewa Valley Technical College Animal Science Advisory Council, Northern Wisconsin State Fair, Farmer-Led Watershed Council staff, UW-River Falls agriculture students, and more.

Spotlight

Artificial insemination (AI) is an important tool for dairy and beef producers to make genetic improvement. In the past decade, a need for training has arisen due to fewer private companies in Wisconsin offering AI training. Also, during this time, companies have realigned and concentrated on their service areas, sometimes creating voids in AI services for hire. As a result, dairy and livestock educators have collaborated to develop and deliver an AI program for beef and dairy producers. As a result of this work, 14 people were trained in AI in the Fall of 2025. Participants were asked to complete a pre/post style evaluation to measure their change in knowledge relating to the various topics covered. Participants indicated an overall change in knowledge of 1.12 on a 4-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to rank the various topics taught, and they indicated that AI practice in cows, AI Technique, Reproductive tracts and semen handling, and Heat Detection were their most valued topics.

Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

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Developing a Community Garden Oversight Committee to increase educational outreach and community involvement at the gardens. The goal is to ensure the gardens are sustainable, well-maintained, and have inclusive spaces for all members, foster community engagement and provide educational opportunities for gardeners and the public.

Planning work on invasive plant awareness and removal for 2026. The education committee is currently developing a plan to identify goals and actions steps to provide educational outreach to the public on invasive plant identification and management.

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Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Community Development Educator



Planning for a Comprehensive Housing Strategy Design Series for County, City, and State Stakeholders in collaboration with the Department of Human Services, the City-County Health Department, and WEDC. The goal is to synthesize the data from the 2023 Housing Study and the specific interventions in the forthcoming Homelessness Plan, so that we can create a unified county-wide housing roadmap that prevents bottlenecking by ensuring adequate supply at every rung of the housing ladder—from transitional housing to workforce ownership.

Strategic planning for a community-serving organization where we updated the organization's mission and vision statement, identified goals, and developed action plans. The planning process is intended to clarify the organization's purpose and develop achievable steps to realize its vision.

Planning a "Strengths-Based Culture" Workshop Series for Family Services Division Staff (CPS, CLTS, Youth Justice) in collaboration with Division Leadership. The goal is to facilitate a three-part engagement series where staff identify their top strengths (using High 5 & Gallup tools) and learn to apply them to team dynamics, so that the division models the same strength-based perspective internally that they are mandated to use with families, creating a congruent culture that reduces cynicism and improves practice.

A presentation where Extension educators connected with over 20 local nonprofits around the services and programming Extension provides in the community. This presentation was designed to make partnership connections and provide a greater understanding of how Extension serves and partners with local organizations. (Margo Dieck, Garret Zastoupil)

A walking tour with presentations from downtown organizations and business owners as part of the Food Entrepreneur Ecosystem Development (FEED) Summit. Participants learned about the opportunities that downtown, business district organizations, and others can offer entrepreneurs at various stages in their business development, providing encouragement and identifying resources for entrepreneurs to consider when opening or expanding their businesses. (Patrick Nehring, Garret Zastoupil)

The 2025 statewide FEED Summit, hosted in Eau Claire, is a catalyst for entrepreneurial ecosystem development in Wisconsin's food and farm sectors. Designed to support new and emerging entrepreneurs, the event fosters sustainable business growth through strategic networking, resource sharing, and capacity building, ensuring long-term viability and resilience for early-stage ventures. (Hannah Altimus, Addison Vang, Cathryn Herlihey, Garret Zastoupil, James Pyecroft, Kelly Maynard, Lissa Radke, Michelle Grimm, Patrick Nehring, Sara Tedeschi, Stephanie Plaster)

Developing interactive maps and planning an educational program to help community organizations identify and connect with others by addressing similar system-level issues. The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration and increase organizational capacity to respond to local needs and drive meaningful changes. (Tim Borud, Garret Zastoupil, Michael Brenneis, Sarah Schlosser)

A study to better understand the motivations, aspirations, and practices of strategic planning within Wisconsin's county governments. Results from this study will help Extension in improving how it supports strategic planning efforts across the state. (Garret Zastoupil, Amber Wichowsky, Elizabeth Mccrank, Sarah Schlosser)

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Planning for a three-part workshop series titled "Building Powerful Networks of Support" for librarian directors, staff, volunteers, and leaders in collaboration with IFLS Library System. The goal is to build the strategic capacity of these individuals to lead their organizations, so that they can strengthen volunteer, financial, and community support for libraries across the IFLS region.

Planning for the launch of the "Chippewa Valley Nonprofit Exchange," a collaborative effort to consolidate nonprofit resources and professional development opportunities. The Exchange aims to strengthen nonprofit capacity by developing and sharing resources.

Continued development of the Chippewa Valley Health Cooperative and its efforts to re-open the former St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls as a 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)

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)

Facilitated a 2-day planning and design workshop to help the community of Fairchild, Wisconsin make improvements to community infrastructure (parks, trails, downtown, etc.). Members from 3 local organizations as well as citizens at large worked together to develop a shared vision for future development and enhancements to community infrastructure in Fairchild. The 2-day workshop provided a forum to collect information to inform community placemaking planning and design alternatives that the community could use to make Fairchild more vibrant. (Todd Johnson, Garret Zastoupil, Krist Runge, Melissa Kono, Todd Barman)

Spotlight

Wisconsin has been mobilizing a statewide initiative to empower emerging food and farm entrepreneurs by expanding their business networks and strengthening their development ecosystems. This effort prioritizes access to critical support channels—including logistics, supply chain coordination, marketing, financial planning, and strategic partnerships—to accelerate growth and long-term sustainability. The FEED Summit planning committee, composed of statewide specialists and educators from UW-Madison Extension's Community Development and Agriculture Institutes, partnered with organizations to host a two-day summit featuring educational sessions, exhibitors, and a pitch competition. These yearly summits support early-stage food and farm entrepreneurs within their first five years of business by strengthening their development ecosystem. Entrepreneurs will understand what resources are available to them across the state of Wisconsin (per Summit). Emerging entrepreneurs will understand what resources are available to them across the state of Wisconsin (per Summit). Budget and additional funding measures will be utilized to assist in logistical planning. The summit will run smoothly due to well-planned logistics.

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Health & Well-Being

Sandy Tarter
FoodWIse Coordinator



Joy Weisner
FoodWIse Educator



Update on FoodWIse funding: Due to an extended timeframe to use FoodWIse carryover funding, Area FoodWIse Coordinator Sandy Tarter and FoodWIse Nutrition Educator Joy Weisner positions will each be reduced to 50% on December 1, 2025, and continue until the end of the federal/FoodWIse fiscal year, September 2026.

Continued planning for transition of kitchen supplies and FoodWIse resources to local partners. The goal is to share equipment and curriculum for adults needing support with independent living skills including healthy eating and food preparation.

Sharing of FoodWIse Hmong Food Fact Cards to area Food Service Directors and partners. This addition

of culturally relevant Hmong vegetables added to the Harvest of the Month collection will bring awareness and knowledge of these foods to local partners in effort for them to consider incorporating these vegetables in menus.

Participation in the Healthy Food in Schools Task Force under the Eau Claire Health Alliance-Nutrition and Physical Activity Action Team. Review of survey results from area middle and high schools. Prioritize initiatives with South Middle School and Augusta School district to be continued in 2026. Through this collaborative community effort, the health and well-being of youth will be enhanced.

Preparation for continuation of Extension support of the Market Match program through the Eau Claire Farmer Market. The goal is to continue providing a \$10 Market Match for participants using their FoodShare benefits at the farmer market. (Margo Dieck, Sandy Tarter)

Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator



A presentation where Extension educators connected with over 20 local nonprofits around the services and programming Extension provides in the community. This presentation was designed to make partnership connections and provide a greater understanding of how Extension serves and partners with local organizations. (Margo Dieck, Garret Zastoupil)

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An interactive presentation on the benefits of music for mental health where participants learned and practiced several tools utilizing music for mental health improvement. Through this program participants learned the connection between strategically using music to lessen the negative health impacts of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Development of a handout to direct participants at local food pantries to resources and assistance for basic needs. The goal of this effort was to promote 211, FindHelp, and 988 for wrap-around support for residents who are experiencing food insecurity.

Spotlight

SNAP benefits were frozen during the government shutdown, leading to an increase in utilization of food pantries. In conversation with Feed My People food bank, a gap was noticed. FMP was handing out information on food pantries and meal sites and did not include information on basic needs. I developed a handout to promote basic needs resources and assistance through 211, FindHelp, and 988. This handout was given at all pop-up pantries through FMP in Eau Claire, Chippewa, and Dunn Counties.

BASIC NEEDS RESOURCES

Find goods, services, and help for free or at a reduced cost for things like:

- clothing
- bus passes
- hygiene items
- mental health support
- substance use support

 **FINDHELP - FINDHELP.ORG**
Search for free or reduced-cost resources like food, housing, financial assistance, health care, and more.

 **211 - GREATRIVERS211.ORG**
Help with basic needs, local services, and crisis care. Available 24/7. Dial 211 or 877-947-2211, visit their website to chat online with a representative, or text your ZIP code to 898211. (available until December 31st)

 **988 - 988LIFELINE.ORG**
Whether you're facing mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just need someone to talk to, caring counselors are here for you. You are not alone. Call, text, or chat to get support.

Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator

A game night was executed by a UWEC honors class. This class project aimed to build connections within 4-H members who participated and provide a game/activity resource for adult and teen leaders to be used in their club or group meetings.



Review of submitted Charters to make sure that 4-H policies and procedures are followed and that Clubs and Groups have a plan laid out for the year.

An interview night as part of the Awards program organized by the Leaders Association that incorporates interviews into the process of awarding scholarships and county awards. This process builds relationships between volunteers and youth in the program and provides interview practice for those applying for scholarships.

Planning for Kids in the Kitchen 4-H Club with the LE Phillips Memorial Library. This session's theme will be "Salad Explorers" and will be for 4-6th graders to build confidence in the kitchen and explore tastes from around the world.

Planning for a 4-H club experience with 4-H AmeriCorps at the Altoona Boys & Girls Club. This club will reach new audiences and allow them access to the wider 4-H program while also supporting the Boys & Girls Club.

Submission of 4-H Club charters for those clubs administered by the 4-H Educator, including Juntos, Boys & Girls Club, ECASD Fiber Arts & Baking Clubs, and Kids in the Kitchen. Charters must be submitted to comply with UW-Madison and Wisconsin 4-H policy.

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An artist in residency collaboration amongst multiple entities both inside and outside of Extension, with the goal to create a distance learning program to be offered statewide to all 4-H members within a targeted range to increase participation in the woodworking/whittling project. (Emery Bork, Jay Johnson, Rachel Hart-Brinson)

Planning for multi-county youth development programming for 4-H members and community youth in collaboration with Area Six 4-H educators. The goal is to deliver engaging events in speaking, STEM, robotics, performing arts, and leadership throughout the year, so that youth across Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties have expanded access to skill-building opportunities and collaborative learning experiences. (Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson, Zachary Rozmiarek)

Spotlight

Many counties do not have active woodworking or whittling projects due to the nature of the policies required by WI 4-H, or they do not have enrolled adult volunteers. There is also a lack of programming around folk art. Through a grant that faculty and staff at UW-Madison in the Institute of Upper Midwestern Cultures and the German, Nordic, and Slavic Department received from Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education, we can partner with them to receive an artist in residence. We are currently working with the artists in residence to create a distance learning curriculum on common wood culture, green woodworking, and carving. We are currently working to develop instructional videos and curriculum. We plan to release the program statewide in early 2026. Thus far, this program has impacted my work with introducing 4-H members to folk art, its significance in establishing connection to culture and past.

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

Regional workshop conducted for WI Department of Health Services Maternal and Child Health Title V Adolescent Well-Being Initiative Year 3 Local/Tribal Health Department grantees. The 60-minute workshop included a presentation on the UW-Extension Youth Substance Use Prevention Toolkit. Questions and feedback were given from participants

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around how this toolkit could support their adolescent well-being work. (Sarah Boulton, Danette Hopke, Jen Braun, Selena Freimark, Sheena Cook-Fuglsang)

A set of workshops on health care, health insurance, and childcare for farmers in collaboration with Covering WI, The Ohio State University, American Farmland Trust, and Northcentral SARE. The goal is for farmers to develop strategies to integrate health insurance and childcare into farm risk management, so that they make informed, strategic, and economically viable decisions that fully consider all aspects of their farming operations and lifestyle. (Stephanie Plaster, Allison Espeseth, Crystal Walters)

Over the past year, Covering Wisconsin has coordinated and overseen 12 regional- and population-focused coalitions in which Wisconsin professionals interested or directly involved in health insurance enrollment gather to discuss changes to health coverage policy, share outreach and educational strategies, receive free professional training, and offer ideas for relevant consumer resource messaging and design. Through our efforts, a total of 88 coalition meetings were held, attracting 1,649 attendees, to focus on the health coverage issues affecting Wisconsin residents, especially immigrants, Spanish-speaking residents, Hmong residents, and those located in Central, East Central, Milwaukee, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Western regions. (Caroline Gomez-Tom, Allison Espeseth)

Navigator enrollment assistance provided to anyone in Wisconsin, where 97,013 consumers were assisted with health insurance questions or enrollment. Through this effort, our Navigators completed 4,041 qualified health plan enrollments through the federal Health Insurance Marketplace and assisted 5,615 consumers with Medicaid, resulting in widespread access to health care and improved health outcomes. (Adam Vanspankeren, Allison Espeseth, Elizabeth Rothe)

A set of workshops on health care, health insurance, and childcare for farmers in collaboration with Covering WI, The Ohio State University, American Farmland Trust, and Northcentral SARE. The goal is for farmers to develop strategies to integrate health insurance and childcare into farm risk management, so that they make informed, strategic, and economically viable decisions that fully consider all aspects of their farming operations and lifestyle. (Stephanie Plaster, Allison Espeseth, Crystal Walters)

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)