

Extension Eau Claire County

December 2025 Report

Agriculture

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Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator



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. (Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

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

Manure and commercial fertilizers are common sources of nutrients applied to agricultural fields. Management of current soil fertility levels and understanding of cropping system needs for additional nutrients are important for efficient use of fertility dollars and protection of ground and surface water. Farmers enrolled in cost-sharing programs are required to construct a current nutrient management plan. Nutrient management education workshops provided a platform for farmers to learn about efficient use of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and lime. The workshops were hosted in partnership with the Division of Extension UW-Madison Nutrient and Pest Management Program, Eau Claire County Land Conservation Department, and Chippewa County Land Conservation and Forest Management Department. A new approach was implemented using hands-on mapping activities, soil sample maps, and soil fertility worksheets. Farmers learned about field crop nutrient fertility and management to develop a certifiable nutrient management plan. Farmers learned crop nutrient needs and matching those needs with current soil fertility levels, nutrient application, and crop nutrient removal. A post-meeting evaluation indicated all farmers increased their knowledge of nutrient management and crop needs. I provided education and information using Extension's Nutrient Management Farmer Education curriculum and additional on-farm research.

Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



An in-person learning event for beef producers, where participants learned about forage sampling, winter feeding the beef cow herd, strategies to select replacement heifers, and best practices for livestock hauling. (Ryan Sterry, Bill Halfman)

Planning for the 43rd Annual Western Wisconsin Ag Lenders Conference, for ag business professionals, to be held in-person in January 2026. Participants will learn more about technology use and artificial intelligence applications in agriculture; grain, dairy, and livestock markets; strategies farmers can use in tough economic times, and more. (Ryan Sterry, Jerry Clark)

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Spotlight

Local conversations with beef producers highlighted rising feed and replacement heifer costs and a strong need for practical guidance on feeding strategies and selecting productive, long-lasting animals. In response, Extension hosted a December pop-up workshop that brought producers together to learn hands-on forage sampling, feed analysis, winter feeding decisions, and strategies for selecting more profitable replacement heifers. Evaluations showed strong knowledge gains across all topics, with producers planning to apply what they learned through improved winter feeding, and better heifer retentions supporting both profitability and long-term herd success.

Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

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An activity for people living with dementia and their care partners where individuals engage in a seasonal, nature-based craft with evergreen boughs. This effort is designed for participants to take part in a hands-on, festive activity that encourages the use of fine motor skills, stimulates the senses, boosts creativity and provides an opportunity for positive socialization.

Provide garden articles to the public published in the Extension in the Valley, tri-county monthly newsletter that focuses on Agriculture and Horticulture news, where participants learn about various topics. This month includes information on the winter care of houseplants, planting & care of amaryllis, the herb Rosemary, winter care of trees & shrubs and choosing a Christmas tree. This ongoing effort is designed to keep participants connected to current horticulture topics and concerns. (Margaret Murphy, Amber Gilles, Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

Yearlong service to the public of Chippewa, Dunn and Eau Claire Counties to provide research-based plant/landscape advising lawn, landscape and garden questions. The goal of this effort is to educate individuals so they can implement best practices in their landscapes that will positively affect the environment and their communities. To date, over 375 individual contacts have been made.

Spotlight

The public has many venues where they can search for information regarding their lawn, landscape and garden questions. Many individuals, community organizations as well as municipalities reach out to UW Madison Extension for assistance with their horticulture questions as it's known that we provide timely, research-based / evidence-based objective information allowing us to meet the needs of the public while helping them to implement best practices in their landscapes. In 2025, the primary way the public in my region reached out to Extension with their horticulture questions was by phone - contacting their local Extension office or me directly. I also engaged with individuals in person who chose to come into the office as well as by email (77% of the horticulture contacts reached out to me directly or through their local Extension office) The remaining contacts were via the Ask Your Gardening Question online form. I follow up with individuals personally and, when needed, network people to other Extension resources.

Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Community Development Educator

Planning for a leadership development program for local government employees in collaboration with HR leaders and city and county officials. The goal is to identify and leverage existing resources to design a comprehensive program

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framework, so that local governments can build organizational capacity, foster positive workplace cultures, and attract and retain the talent necessary to effectively meet the public's needs.

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.

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.

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)

Spotlight

Community Development Educators Garret Zastoupil and Tim Borud heard growing concerns from community members about the challenges of working in isolation. People expressed frustration over not knowing who else was involved in similar efforts, struggling to collaborate across groups, and feeling uncertain about their ability to work together effectively on shared community issues. A multi-county mapping and social capital project was designed with the goals of 1. Identification: Identify and map organizations working on specific system-level issues. 2. Connection: Develop and deliver a social network mapping curriculum. 3. Relationships: Adapt and deliver Courageous Connections* curriculum to help organizations develop strategic relationships. *Note: Courageous Connections is a curriculum that was previously developed and has been well-received. It teaches skills for building relationships that lead to collaborative action.

Health & Well-Being

Sandy Tarter
FoodWIse Coordinator

Joy Weisner
FoodWIse Educator

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Participation with WI Nutrition Incentive Network to bring state funding for nutrition incentives to area farmers markets offering a Market Match/Double Bucks program. This effort will support FoodShare families in receiving expanded access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Sandy will co-lead the Western Region Hub along with UWEC Professor Briana Rockler.

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

Spotlight

Extension identified a growing need for physical activity and health education among older adults in the community. Many older adults face challenges such as declining physical health, reduced mobility, social isolation, and mental health issues. These challenges are often exacerbated by a lack of access to regular exercise programs tailored to their needs. Additionally, there is a significant gap in health education specifically aimed at this demographic, which can lead to poor nutrition and increased risk of chronic diseases. By engaging in the StrongBodies program, Extension aims to address these critical needs. The program provides older adults with the opportunity to participate in structured, progressive training sessions that are designed to be safe and effective for their age group. Furthermore, the program includes comprehensive health education components to support participants in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The overall goal is to improve physical and mental health, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and enhance social connectedness, thereby improving the quality of life for older adults in the community. By promoting preventive health measures, StrongBodies can help reduce the burden on healthcare systems and lower costs associated with chronic disease management. By promoting physical activity and health education, StrongBodies helps address disparities in health outcomes and contributes to building healthier, more resilient communities.

Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator



Collaborating with the Safe and Sober Spaces Task Force to plan for policy, systems, and environmental change around increasing the frequency and availability of substance free events/spaces/groups/establishments in Eau Claire County. Current work is focused on connecting with local businesses to host sober events or making positive policy changes around alcohol consumption at their establishment. Creating policy guidelines around sober events and responsible alcohol serving and working with local media to creatively advertise sober events.

Collaborating with the Youth Mental Health Task Force to plan for an equitable approach to increasing the amount of youth accessing mental health services in Eau Claire County. Current work is focused on connecting adults who support youth with resources, generating age-appropriate talking points around mental health topics, updating existing materials on the Eau Claire Health Alliance website, creating a one-pager around top resources for youth mental health, and planning for a resource fair centered around youth mental health.

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Spotlight

Data from the Youth Behavior Risk Survey (YRBS-<https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrbs>), a survey completed by middle school and high school students in Eau Claire County, proves mental health among youth is worsening. Rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide continue to rise, and fewer youth are reporting feeling connected at school and having a supportive adult they can turn to. Marginalized groups report worse rates of mental health status when compared to the average. The Youth Mental Health Task Force is hoping to increase the amount of youth accessing mental health services or other community connections by educating parents, caregivers, and other adults who work with youth about the opportunities available. We plan to target populations whose mental health is worse when compared to groups (per YRBS reporting every two years).

Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator



The Eau Claire County 4-H Awards Banquet in partnership with the Eau Claire 4-H Leaders Association to recognize achievements of 4-H members and the dedication of 4-H volunteers. Recognition and celebration are important aspects of a successful positive youth development experience.

Planning for a partner "Foods project club" with the Eau Claire Area Library entitled "Kids in the Kitchen-Salad Explorers." This program aims to expand participant's understanding of a "salad," explore different flavors, and increase confidence in the kitchen.

Robotics Day for 15 youth in grades 5–8 from three counties, where participants explored coding and robotics through hands-on challenges. Through this effort, youth built confidence in technology and discovered pathways to STEM careers. (Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson, Zachary Rozmiarek)

The Area 6 4-H Educators have begun planning for the 2026 Speaking and Demonstration Contest. This event is held every year. It is a traditional program that allows youth to build their speaking skills. They also get practice researching and developing their piece. Currently, the educators have worked together on finding a location, creating a registration, and promoting the event. (Zachary Rozmiarek, Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson)

Planning for Camp Counselor training in February. Camp Counselor training aims to build a strong counselor team and give camp counselors the skills to be effective and confident camp counselors. (Rachel Hart-Brinson, Seth Harrmann, Zachary Rozmiarek)

A virtual "Cultural Baking" program that explores baking and its connections to culture and traditions. The goal is to learn new baking techniques and try new flavored combinations while increasing confidence in the kitchen so that young people will be more equipped to deal with challenges and open to discovery. This year's recipes included Swedish crackers, Hlibeh (a Palestinian fenugreek-flavored cake), and cornmeal & cranberry cookies. (Rachel Hart-Brinson, Andrea Ripley, April Daniels, Zachary Rozmiarek)

Planning for 4-H programming partnerships with the Altoona Public Library, the Eau Claire Area School District, Augusta Public Library, and the Eau Claire Boys & Girls Club by the 4-H AmeriCorps Member, Kelly Rudolph.

Area 6 4-H educators have begun planning for Art U 2026. This program is a collaboration between Area 6 4-H and UW-Stout Art Education Department. To prepare we met with the professor at UW-Stout to develop this year's

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program. We have decided on the dates, times, and began looking at the types of activities that will be offered. We have also begun promoting the event through newsletters, Facebook, and a press release. (Zachary Rozmiarek, Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson)

Spotlight

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) 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.

Gracie Gray | 4-H Associate Educator



Planning for a project-based Cloverbud program series for young 4-H members. The goal is to provide engaging, hands-on opportunities for youth to explore their sparks, build foundational communication skills, and experience learning-by-doing, so that they develop confidence, curiosity, and a strong foundation for future 4-H project work and positive youth development.

Planning for hands-on activity tables for a community event for youth and families, in collaboration with 4-H youth and adult volunteers as well as partners from Lampert Lumber. The goal is to provide engaging opportunities for youth to explore woodworking and other craft-based activities through experiential learning, so that they can build knowledge and skills in potential spark areas, work alongside caring volunteers to complete complicated tasks, and grow through high-quality 4-H positive youth development experiences.

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](#)

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Value Added Programming

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)

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)

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)

An Agriculture and Conservation Roundtable for farmers, agriculture industry professionals, conservation organizations, and agency staff where Natural Resources Educators and partners facilitated breakout sessions on five key topics: peer networks and local leadership, trust and communication, funding and economic opportunities, technology and research, and consistency and accountability. Through these sessions, participants identified practical actions and targeted strategies to guide implementation of Wisconsin's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. This effort was designed to support farmers in reducing nutrient loss from agricultural land, improving water quality, and strengthening collaboration across sectors. (Anna James, Daniel Zerr, Jen Mcnelly, Kayla Rombalski)

Facilitation of every other month meetings of the Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership, where partners meet to discuss ways to implement a ten-year comprehensive watershed management plan, plan events, assess activities, update each other on work being done, and formulate new ways to collaborate. (Daniel Zerr, Kelsey Hyland)

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)

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)