

Upcoming Events

- Chippewa Valley Healthy Water Summit - March 20, 2026
- Beef Quality Assurance - February 16, 2026
- Eau Claire Farm Show - March 3-4, 2026
- Northwest NOPP Meeting - March 19, 2026
- Pesticide Applicator Training - February 4, February 26, March 17, 2026
- Cattle Feeding and Management - March 24, 2026
- Camp Counselor Training-February 7-8 at Beaver Creek
- 4-H Discovery Day at LE Phillips Memorial Library-February 28, 1-4:30PM
- Sarah Nelson Memorial Pancake Breakfast, February 22, 2026
- Home & Garden Show Action Tables, Feb 22, 2026
- Performing Arts Festival-March 7 at Elk Mound High School

Community Development Statewide Programming

- Fund Development & Donor Relations, April 1-29 on Wednesdays from 1-2:30 p.m., Virtual
- Introduction to Plain Language: Make Your Communication Clear, Inclusive, and Impactful, March 18, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. OR April 22, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Virtual

Agriculture

For updated Valley E-Newsletters click [here](#)

Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator



A training program for private applicators where participants learned about safe handling and application of restricted-use pesticides to protect themselves and the environment. (Jerry Clark, Deanna Wiersgalla)

Planning for a Healthy Water Summit for farmers, decision makers, elected officials, and industry and agency professionals in collaboration with county public health and land conservation departments.

The goal is to increase water quality awareness by providing local information that enables community members to make informed decisions. (Jerry Clark, Amber Gilles, Kristi Peterson, Garret Zastoupil, Jeanne Walsh, Margaret Murphy, Ryan Sterry, Todd Prill)

Spotlight

Pesticides are a management tool to assist farmers with control of farmstead pests such as weeds, plant diseases, insects, and rodents. Farmers interested in using restricted use pesticides to control pests on land and buildings owned and operated by them need to be certified every five years through a state-mandated pesticide training program. Farmers learned about the proper use of restricted pesticides through a Private Pesticide Applicator training and certification testing program held in Menomonie. The watch-party program was taught by UW Pesticide Application Training Program Manager Jordan Kampa and Pest Management Outreach Specialist Laura Flandermeyer. Thirteen farmers learned rules and regulations to safely handle and apply restricted-use pesticides. Topics covered included basic pest management identification and physiology, federal and state regulations, personal protective equipment, handling pesticides, calibration, and keeping pesticides on target. Following training, farmers completed a 70-question

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County

January 2026 Report

examination to be evaluated later to determine certification. Certification lies within the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. Additional programs are planned for Altoona, Bloomer, and Stanley

Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



Ryan met with farm organization leaders and agricultural lenders to discuss the state of the agricultural community and how to adapt our livestock budgeting and marketing tools to meet producer needs in the Chippewa Valley.

The 43rd Annual Western Wisconsin Ag Lenders Conference was an in-person seminar for ag business professionals, where participants learned about emerging agricultural economic issues to make better-informed lending decisions. Topics presented by Extension educators and specialists included technology use and artificial intelligence applications in agriculture; grain, dairy, and livestock markets; and strategies farmers can use in tough economic times. A post-conference evaluation indicated attendees found this year's topics to be useful (4.25-4.75; scale 1 = poor and 5 = excellent). Written comments include "really interesting information and staying engaged," "excellent again," and "thank you for helping us identify risk for our borrowers in their purchasing relationships." (Ryan Sterry, Brenda Boetel, Brian Luck, Jerry Clark, Kelly Wilfert, Leonard Polzin, Kristi Peterson)

Planning February and April 2026 in-person Save a Calf Save A Cow Workshops for dairy (with Spanish interpretation) and beef producers. The goal is to provide information and techniques to boost cattle caretakers' confidence in preparing the cow for calving, obstetric techniques and newborn calf care so that their health and reproductive programs maintain their farm's economic viability. (With: Sandy Stuttgen, Heather Schlessler, Jackie Mccarville, and Matt Lippert)

An article for beef producers on best management practices and current research in livestock systems. Articles like these keep livestock producers up to date with local and regional livestock news, market trends, and production ideas to help increase the economic viability of producers. (Beth McIlquham, Bill Halfman, Ryan Sterry, Sandy Stuttgen)

Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

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



Planning spring garden programs with community partners. Currently, programs scheduled include a third year of partnering with the Eau Claire County ADRC Dementia Care Specialist in offering classes for our Nature Club. I am also scheduled to give programs on winter gardening, container gardening, keeping gardening accessible as we age, sensory gardening, the benefits of using native plants, how garden practices can protect our water, and getting the garden ready for spring planting.

Planning health and wellness garden articles/activities to share with the Chippewa County Wellness Committee which focuses on building a culture of health and wellness for Chippewa County. The goal is to raise interest and awareness on the health benefits that gardening provides and to encourage people of all ages to try gardening on some level. Articles will also be shared in our regional newsletter.

Provide garden articles to the public published in the Extension in the Valley, tri-county monthly newsletter that focuses on Horticulture and Agriculture news, where participants learn about various topics. This month includes information on sustainable gardening practices in the home landscape, and invasive species. This ongoing effort is designed to keep

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County

January 2026 Report

participants connected to current horticulture topics and concerns and includes links to many other articles as well as upcoming events. (With: Amber Gilles, Jerry Clark, & Ryan Sterry)

Working with the Community Garden Oversight Committee to plan educational workshops and activities throughout the gardening season that will be available to both garden participants and the public. The goal of this effort is to engage new and experienced gardeners in various gardening topics including soil health, vegetable gardening, managing pests using IMP, and how to encourage pollinators in your garden. (Margaret Murphy, Amber Gilles)

Spotlight

The Oversight Committee oversees two community gardens comprising 54 garden plots for individuals, families or organizations. We saw a need to be more purposeful in providing opportunities for both education and socialization at the gardens to more fully realize the many wellness benefits that gardening has to offer. We will be offering monthly classes at the gardens plus, having "garden hours" to provide further information and answer questions.

Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Community Development Educator



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.

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 bottlenecks by ensuring adequate supply at every rung of the housing ladder—from transitional housing to workforce ownership.

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 strengths-based perspective internally that they are mandated to use with families, creating a congruent culture that reduces cynicism and improves practice.

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 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.

Spotlight

While the educator was conducting the community needs assessment, he met with several organizations in the region that were also offering leadership and nonprofit development opportunities in the Chippewa Valley. One nonprofit executive director reached out in Winter 2025, requesting a collective meeting of nonprofit "supporters" including

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County

January 2026 Report

UWEC Continuing Education, UWEC Leadership Program, Pablo Foundation, and Extension to discuss coordinating activities and sharing programs and opportunities. The group is currently meeting to advance its efforts, coordinate a response and begin longer-range planning.

Health & Well-Being

Sandy Tarter
FoodWise Coordinator

Joy Weisner
FoodWise Educator



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 help support families with FoodShare to access more fresh fruits and vegetables. Sandy will co-coordinate the WI Western Hub of 8 farmers markets including Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Market and Menomonie Farmers Market.

Participation in the Eau Claire Health Alliance Coalition (ECHA) to promote the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities of Eau Claire County through collaborative and focused action. The Eau Claire Health Alliance is the result of a merger of two long standing coalitions in Eau Claire County: Eau Claire Healthy Communities and the Alliance for Substance Misuse Prevention.

Collaborating with The Healthy Food in Schools Task Force with the ECHA to promote mental and physical well-being by improving availability and access to healthy food and physical activity, especially in underserved communities. This specific task force is interested in assessing interest and opportunities for increasing access to healthy food in three Eau Claire County schools, focusing on schools with a high proportion of students experiencing food insecurity.

Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator



Co-Chairing the Eau Claire Health Alliance: Mental Health & Community Connectedness health priority area. The goal of this effort is to guide the work of two task forces, which are collaborative groups with specific and focused health improvement plans connected to objectives identified in the Community Health Improvement Plan. Current task force work is focused on youth mental health and safe and sober spaces in the community.

Serving on the Steering Committee for the Eau Claire Health Alliance (ECHA) to support agenda planning for ECHA Coalition meetings; provide oversight, leadership, support, and voting on ECHA Coalition issues; and support of overall ECHA Coalition and Task Force organization, structure, and membership. This effort ensures ECHA efforts are aligned and advancing towards meeting overall coalition objectives.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County

January 2026 Report

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. The goal is to 'Improve mental health by providing opportunities for community connection.', and the specific objective is 'Support at least three strategies to increase community access to options for safe and sober spaces for socialization outside of work, school, and home, focusing on areas/communities with the largest gaps in access. Current work is focused on collaboration with the Eau Claire Express and Volume One, as well as finalizing 'Best Practice' guides.

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. The goal is to 'Support youth mental health', and the specific objective is 'At least quarterly each year promote training, programs, and resources that equip families with knowledge, skills, and resources to support youth mental health focusing on youth most at risk. Current work is focused on planning for a movie screening and community conversation, supporting a mental health resource fair, creating age-appropriate talking points handouts, and creating a guide around youth mental health for adults who engage with youth.

Spotlight

Recent survey data shows that youth mental health in Eau Claire County is declining, with rising rates of anxiety and depression and fewer students feeling supported at school. To address this, our local health task force is working to connect more young people with mental health services and community resources. We are specifically focusing on educating parents, caregivers, and adults who work with youth (like faith or youth leaders) to ensure that the groups most affected by these challenges receive the help and support they need.

Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator



A new 4-H club opportunity in partnership with the Altoona Boys & Girls Club where the Eau Claire AmeriCorps members lead an after-school 4-H club. The first two weeks explored building using Legos and creating seed art mosaics to further spark exploration in creativity.

Kids in the Kitchen-Salad Explorers where young people in grades 4-6 enrolled in a 4-H club in partnership with the Eau Claire public library. This club experience was designed to provide access to the 4-H program to a new audience, explore new tastes and flavors, and increase cooking skills. We met for 4 sessions and made Lemon & Mint potato salad, Greek cucumber & tomato salad, pasta salad, and quinoa & apple & kale salad. All participants tried all of the salads and a majority reported that participating in the class gave them more confidence in cooking.

Planning for 4-H Discovery Day at the LE Phillips Memorial Library. This event helps young people practice leadership and promote spark exploration and 4-H through hands-on stations.

Planning for the county Project Exploration Day for K-5th graders. We are currently recruiting session leaders from adult and youth volunteers to help young people explore and develop their sparks.

The Area 6 4-H Educators have continued 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. (Zachary Rozmiarek, Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson)

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County January 2026 Report

Planning continues for Art U 2026. This program is a collaboration between Area 6 4-H and UW-Stout Art Education Department. The Art Ed Students will be presenting the lessons online and in person to the youth. This last month we worked with the students and staff at UW-Stout to finalize the projects that will be presented. We also organized the supplies and sent them to our support staff to get ordered. Finally, we have continued to collect registrations from youth. We have 47 youth registered this year. (Zachary Rozmiarek, Jordan Blue, Rachel Hart-Brinson)

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 to increase participation in the woodworking/whittling project. (Emery Bork, Jay Johnson, Josh Firgens, Rachel Hart-Brinson, Sara Waldron)

Spotlight

The Eau Claire 4-H Educator coordinated a partnership program with the Fabrication Lab at UW-Stout for youth in grades 5-9 where they chose images to convert into 3D printed panels that were inserted into a frame and a light was soldered inside to make a lithophane box. This two-day experience was an opportunity for young people with a spark in STEM to gain experience with graphic conversion software, 3D printers, laser cutters, and soldering on a university campus and begin thinking about career possibilities. We have been asked to provide more STEM learning opportunities. And, UW-Stout's Fabrication Lab has been asked to bring in more community groups. It was a great partnership opportunity. The Fab Lab director worked with his student workers to develop and test the project before they led it, so it was also a learning opportunity for future tech teachers. Nine out of ten kiddos enthusiastically gave at least one thumbs up. Katie H. said, "We are very grateful for adults taking time out of their weekends to make this happen. He had a wonderful experience!" Cassie H. said, "He loved it! The lithophane box was so cool!"

Gracie Gray | 4-H Associate Educator



Planning for a program planning session at camp counselor training for new and returning youth camp counselors. The goal is to provide an engaging, hands-on learning experience that supports camp counselors in planning effective camp program sessions, so that youth develop leadership and communication skills, understand the key components of program planning and implementation, and feel confident creating and leading meaningful experiences for campers.

Planning for a Cloverbud Stuffed Animal Show at the county fair, for youth in grades K-2, in collaboration with the Eau Claire County Fair. The goal is to provide a supportive, activity-based learning experience where youth practice basic showmanship skills within a positive and age-appropriate showing environment, so that youth can build confidence interacting with adults, develop early showmanship and preparation skills, and explore potential interests in animal projects and future participation at the Eau Claire County Fair that may become a spark area.

Planning for a 4-H Garden Project, a spring and summer project with biweekly meetings, for youth in grades 3-13. The goal of this program is to provide hands-on learning experience in garden planning, planting, maintenance, and harvesting, so that youth develop practical gardening skills, build confidence and responsibility, and discover personal interests and sparks that support lifelong learning.

Planning for Paws and Valentines, a Cloverbud activity session, for youth in grades K-2 and their families, in collaboration with the Eau Claire Community Humane Association (ECCHA) and the Eau Claire County 4-H Dog Project. The goal is to provide a hands-on, service-oriented learning activity, where youth learn about the role of the humane society, how animals are cared for, and the importance of responsible pet ownership and dog training through the 4-H Dog Project; youth will also create adoption valentines to display on dog kennels, so that youth build awareness of humane societies,

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Extension Eau Claire County

January 2026 Report

practice kindness and compassion towards animals, develop a sense of responsibility, and experience generosity through service to others.

Planning for a Youth First Aid Day for youth in grades 4-7. The goal is to provide an engaging experiential learning day that teaches youth how to assess first aid situations, communicate effectively during emergencies, and respond to minor injuries, so that youth develop problem-solving skills, gain confidence in their first aid abilities, and explore current or potential spark areas related to health, safety, and helping others.

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

Provide garden articles to the public published in the Extension in the Valley, tri-county monthly newsletter that focuses on Horticulture and Agriculture news, where participants learn about various topics. This month includes information on sustainable gardening practices in the home landscape, and invasive species. This ongoing effort is designed to keep participants connected to current horticulture topics and concerns and includes links to many other articles as well as upcoming events. (Margaret Murphy, Amber Gilles, Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

Between January and December 2025, Covering Wisconsin offered 18 virtual training courses for health insurance enrollment assistants and other professionals located throughout Wisconsin. The 503 registrants were educated on Medicaid, BadgerCare Plus, and HealthCare.gov Marketplace eligibility and enrollment policy and program processes to enable effective application help and successful consumer coverage enrollment and retention. Our webinars have up-to-date information regarding health care policy changes and updates, complex case support, fixing coverage for consumers that have been victims of health insurance enrollment fraud, Special Enrollment Periods, and guidance for meeting both federal and state licensing requirements. (Elizabeth Rothe, Adam Vanspankeren, Allison Espeseth)

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.