

Eau Claire County

Annual Report



2025

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UW-Madison Extension

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Agriculture & Horticulture >>

We help farmers grow healthy crops, care for their soil, and protect our water. We support livestock farms so they stay strong and sustainable for the next generation. We also work with residents to use landscaping practices that keep our communities healthy and our environment clean. This work supports local jobs, local food, and a strong economy.

Community & Economic Development >>

Businesses, governments, and organizations succeed through development from Extension educators and specialists. We provide education for elected officials to understand their roles and responsibilities in helping communities thrive. We offer businesses the direct technical assistance and connection to support structures they need to help them succeed. Our rural entrepreneurship program identifies ways for businesses to overcome challenges and take advantage of unique opportunities.

Health & Well-Being >>

We partner with families, schools, local governments, and community organizations to support physical and mental well being. Our programs help people build skills to manage stress, strengthen relationships, and live active, healthy lives. Together, we use local data to guide policy, systems, and environmental changes that improve access to healthy food, safe places to be active, and supportive spaces for mental health. This work creates lasting change, lowers long term costs, and helps communities thrive.

Human Development and Relationships >>

We partner with families and community organizations to strengthen parenting, financial stability, and lifelong learning. Our programs help justice involved parents and children build literacy and deeper emotional connections while developing skills for budgeting and rent planning. We also work with communities to address issues like housing and childcare that shape family well being. This work supports stable homes, reduces demand on crisis services, and helps families and communities thrive.

Positive Youth Development & 4-H >>

We partner with communities to help young people grow into confident, community minded leaders through youth voice, hands on learning, and college and career readiness. Strong relationships with caring adults, 4 H clubs, and local partners create a sense of belonging and prepare youth to contribute to their communities.

Natural Resources & Conservation - Value Added State Funded Programs >>

We bring together communities, agriculture, and businesses to care for our natural resources. By supporting water testing and sharing practical, research based solutions, we help protect safe drinking water and ensure sustainable food, water, and energy for the future.



2025 Partnerships

UW–Madison Extension embraces the Wisconsin Idea by connecting university resources with the people and priorities of Eau Claire County through strong local partnerships. The information that follows shows the scope of that work – residents served, relationships with local government and businesses, and the volunteer time that helps programs grow and succeed. These efforts demonstrate how communities, volunteers, and Extension work together to create lasting local impact.



In 2025 Eau Claire County Extension partnered with:

7,603

**Resident
Contacts**

533

**Government
Contacts**

1,959

**Professional
Contacts**

4,467

**Volunteer
Hours**

Administrative

Building a Healthy and Connected Eau Claire County

My name is Kristen Bruder, and I serve as the Area Extension Director for Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire counties. I am grateful to work alongside a talented Extension team that live and work in the area.

In the following pages, you will see the reach and impact of each educator. These examples show how Extension connects UW–Madison resources with local partners to support healthy, strong communities. Our educators are helping lead community efforts that support health and well-being for all residents. They are working with local partners to address housing and homelessness and to build systems that help people find stability and hope. They also support youth, families, farmers, and community organizations through education that builds leadership, protects our natural resources, and creates spaces where people feel connected and supported.

Extension is possible because of a shared investment between the county and the university. Your support allows educators to be present in the community, build long-term relationships, and stay focused on Eau Claire County priorities.

I am proud of this work and deeply thankful for your partnership. Together, we are creating a healthy and connected future for Eau Claire County.

Kristen Bruder
Area Extension Director



Kristi is an essential member of the Eau Claire County office, providing support to educators and ensuring smooth daily operations. She manages the office website and social media presence, delivering clear, consistent, and engaging communication to the public in addition to overseeing walk-in services and phone inquiries. Compiling monthly and annual reports is more than just tracking data—it narratively connects the local office's work to the broader Wisconsin Idea, proving that the university's influence reaches every corner of the county, while tracking and managing the office budget amongst many other tasks.

Extension Highlights

- Achieved 941 Facebook Followers
- 9,645 Facebook post views
- 112 Facebook posts



Kristi Peterson
Outreach Support Associate

Crops & Soils

The Division of Extension UW-Madison Crops and Soils program connects regional educators and statewide specialists to focus on issues and challenges facing today's field, vegetable, fruit, and emerging crop producer. The Crops and Soils Program focuses on Forage and Grain Production and Management, Emerging Crops, Grazing, Pest Management, Soils, Nutrient Management, and Economics of Crop Production.

Community Impacts in 2025

- Nitrogen and manure application and management: On-farm research and educational programs for farmers to manage nitrogen and manure applications for farm profitability and water quality protection
- Manure Applicator Training: A series of training programs to increase accurate and efficient manure application to reduce environmental risk and improve farm profitability.
- Forage Quality Management: Partnerships with farmers and agronomy industry to monitor alfalfa and corn silage quality to ensure good animal performance.



Achieving More Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension works alongside the people of Wisconsin to deliver practical educational programs where people live and work – on the farm, in schools and throughout urban and rural communities.

2025 Partners

- Mayo Clinic Health Systems
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Land Conservation Department
- Chippewa Valley Forage Council
- Chippewa Valley Producer-Led Watershed
- Lamb-a-Lot Acres
- WI Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
- Wisconsin Farmers Union
- Wisconsin Farm Bureau
- A and J Agronomy



The Landscape

Western WI Ag Lenders

Conference attendance 94

Trained Applicators

72 Private Pesticide certified and training.
144 manure applicators trained

On Farm Research

43 field days and research projects held

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Manure applicators handle more than two thirds of the 12 billion gallons of manure managed each year in Wisconsin. Because of the scale and environmental risk, proper training is essential so manure is applied in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way. This protects water quality, improves safety, and helps farms operate more efficiently and profitably.

Pesticides are another important farm management tool used to control weeds, insects, plant diseases, and rodents. Farmers who use restricted use pesticides on their own land are required to complete state certification every five years to ensure they follow regulations for safe handling and application.

To support this work, Manure Applicator Training 101 sessions were offered at five locations for farmers and commercial applicators. A new hands on mapping activity helped participants make real world decisions about manure storage, transportation, environmental setbacks, application methods, spill response, safety, and communication. In total, 144 farmers and applicators completed the training and received certification.

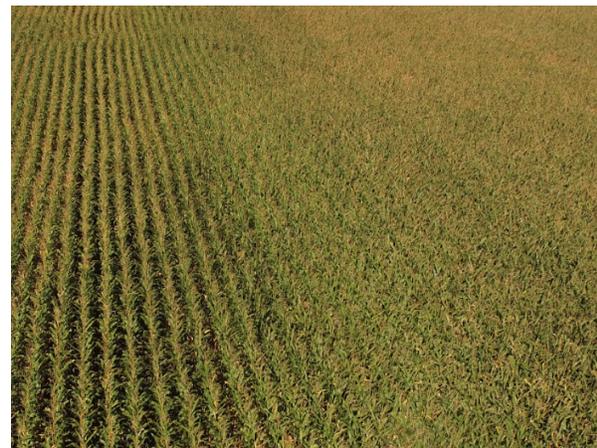
In Augusta, 11 farmers completed Private Pesticide Applicator training and testing. They learned the rules and best practices needed to safely handle and apply restricted use pesticides and remain in compliance with state requirements.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Groundwater quality is an issue identified by Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire counties. Testing of private wells revealed areas of high-nitrate groundwater.

Use of nitrogen and manure in agriculture production fields is often needed for higher crop yields. Application of additional nitrogen and above-average precipitation can increase the risk of nitrogen moving to groundwater. Farmers have an economic interest to keep nitrogen and manure nutrient investments within the crop root zone to increase yield potential and lower risk of losing nitrogen offsite.

I provided twelve nutrient management educational field days and workshops to bring research-based information to farmers and crop consultants. These programs focused on economic nitrogen and nutrient application rates to encourage farm profitability and environmental protection. Three on-farm research programs were implemented to investigate nitrogen rate and manure applications and the effect on yield and nitrate movement. Nitrate-trapping lysimeters were installed at one location to provide insight into nitrate concentrations and movement.



Jerry Clark Crops & Soils



Jerry is the regional Crops and Soils Educator for Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties. He has served as an educator in Extension since 1998 and continues to enjoy the opportunities and challenges that come with serving the agricultural community. The focus of his educational programming is on crop inputs, especially soil fertility and manure management. He uses local on-farm research to drive the information needed to make decisions. He finds the variety of work most rewarding such as on-farm research, working collaboratively, and helping individuals to improve their lives.

Livestock

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension Livestock Program strengthens the industry through statewide education and research. The program has educators and campus-based specialists focused on the following areas: beef cattle, poultry, sheep and goats, swine, and meat science.

Community Impacts in 2025

- In-person programming included a beginner's lambing school, beef calving school, Chippewa Valley Forage Council annual meeting, beef quality assurance, and two beef cow-calf workshops.
- Key contributor to the highly popular Beginners' Beef School winter series. Co-taught our first live demonstration for the Badger Dairy Insight series.
- Contributed to Extension in the Valley Newsletter. Facilitated/hosted Western Wisconsin Ag Lenders Conference and Farm Rent workshops.



Achieving More Together

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2025 Partners

- Western Wisconsin Ag Lenders
- Farm Bureau
- Wisconsin Farmers Union
- Chippewa Valley Forage Council
- Northcentral Cattlemen's Association
- Land and Water Conservation Department
- Equity Livestock Cooperative



The Landscape

Industry Scope

97% Family Farms
\$85.1M Total Ag Sales

Livestock

28,000 Cattle & Calves
4,017 Sheep & Goats

Outreach

94 Ag Lenders Trained
40 BQA Certifications
22 Field Days/Workshops

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Calving and lambing are demanding, high-stress periods on the farm. New farmers especially need practical, hands-on training to build confidence and competence.

Decisions made during calving and lambing directly affect livestock health, welfare, and future productivity. Farmers must know what's normal, when to act, and when to call a veterinarian.

When asked why they attended, participants shared stories of wanting to grow their herds/flocks, but not feeling confident in their skills to take on the extra work; of lessons learned the hard way without prior hands-on experience; and instances in which partners had differing levels of livestock handling experience, and sought training so all partners could handle responsibilities independently.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

With the livestock educator role being new, a goal was to re-establish beef cow-calf producer programming in the area. Why It Matters: Within that goal, emerging needs identified focused on forage use and selecting profitable replacement heifers.

Two beef cow-calf producer events were held in 2025, providing hands-on learning in animal selection, pasture management, and forage quality. These resources help producers address profitability, since feed is the number one expense for beef cow-calf producers. With a record low beef cow inventory, addressing animal selection helps beef producers plan to "breed back better."



Ryan Sterry
Livestock



I am your regional Livestock Educator, providing educational programming and applied research in Livestock production for the residents of Chippewa Valley. Since 2006, I have worked in Extension, moving into my current role at the end of 2024. I enjoy the variety the job brings, working in both classroom and on-farm settings. I find it rewarding to explore new ways to adapt research-based information for application with our area's farms.

Community Development

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension Community Development Program strengthens local communities and organizations that want to enhance local decision-making, and strategic plans. While responding to new challenges and opportunities. Community Development programs are designed and delivered to meet local identified needs.

Community Impacts in 2025

- County Government Strategic Planning: Led the comprehensive strategic planning process for the Eau Claire County Board and department heads, aligning internal operations with long-term community goals.
- Homelessness Prevention Strategy: Facilitated a high-impact workshop series for the Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative, uniting service providers to create a roadmap for making homelessness rare and brief.
- Chippewa Valley Nonprofit Exchange: Co-founded a regional collaboration with UW-Eau Claire and local foundations to launch a resource hub, centralizing support for the nonprofit sector.



Achieving More Together

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2025 Partners

- Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors
- Housing Our Neighbors Planning Collaborative
- City of Eau Claire
- University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC)
- Eau Claire Community Foundation
- Pablo Foundation
- Local Homeless Service Providers (Various Agencies)
- County Department Heads



The Landscape

Growth & Future

4% Projected Growth
Population increase for
Eau Claire County

Community & Support

1000+ Non-profits
Serving the Eau Claire County region
44 Unsheltered Individuals
Identified in Eau Claire County
Identified in Eau Claire County July 2025

Civic Leadership

62 Department Heads
& Board Supervisors
participated in Strategic
Planning

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

A county government without a clear strategic plan often finds itself reacting to crises rather than preventing them. Leaders needed a shared "North Star" to guide policy and spending. Strategic planning ensures that taxpayer dollars are spent on the community's highest priorities. I stepped in to provide a neutral, research-based facilitation process that allowed department heads and elected officials to align their visions. By guiding the County Board through this process, we moved from individual department silos to a unified strategic front. This work ensures that every decision made in the coming years is backed by a collective commitment to the county's long-term health and fiscal stability.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

A Collaborative Front Against Homelessness
Homelessness is a complex issue that no single agency can solve. In Eau Claire, the "revolving door" of service provision needed a unified, systems-level strategy. Why It Matters: When service providers work in isolation, vulnerable residents fall through the cracks. We focused on the Housing Our Neighbors collaborative to build a plan that is "rare, brief, and nonrecurring." I facilitated a series of intensive workshops where providers moved beyond their individual missions to build a shared community plan. This isn't just about charity; it's about a smarter, more efficient system that identifies gaps in housing and closes them before people reach a point of crisis.



Garret Zastoupil Community Development



As the Regional Community Development Educator for UW-Madison Extension, Garret serves as a strategic partner for local governments and nonprofits across the Chippewa Valley. With a focus on organizational leadership and systems-level problem solving, Garret specializes in helping communities navigate complex challenges—from childcare shortages to emergency service sustainability. By bridging the gap between University resources and local needs, they facilitate the collaborations necessary to build a more resilient and connected region. Whether facilitating a county-wide strategic plan or coaching nonprofit leaders, Garret is dedicated to the idea that we achieve more when we work together.

FoodWise

FoodWise is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). With local strengths, we support healthy eating habits, active lifestyles and healthy community environments for Wisconsin residents experiencing limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community and systems levels.

Community Impacts in 2025

Engaged with 765 unique learners for 3508 direct educational contacts around nutrition topics in a variety of settings with youth and adults.



Achieving More Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension works alongside the people of Wisconsin to deliver practical educational programs where people live and work – on the farm, in schools and throughout urban and rural communities.

2025 Partners

- Augusta Elementary
- Flynn Elementary
- Lakeshore Elementary
- Locust Lane Elementary
- Longfellow Elementary
- Affinity House
- Boys and Girls Club of the Chippewa Valley
- Life Without Limits
- Head Start Centers
- Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Market



The Landscape

Food Share Households
5,656

Food Share Households
52% included an Elderly, Blind or Disabled individual.

Average Allotment
per household \$276

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Outreach to low-income families and youth

FoodShare families often have limited access to nutrition resources.

We reach people where they are at and offer lessons in schools, Head Start centers, and local agencies where these families can be more easily reached to reduce barriers to nutrition education.

FoodWise delivers practical, fun, age-appropriate lessons that expand learners' senses and exposure to healthy foods that they may not otherwise experience. The youth and teachers have expressed loving our activities and enjoyed the taste tests of fruits and vegetables in their classrooms. This included spinach with Italian dressing, whole wheat crackers/tortilla, chia seed pudding, hummus & pretzels, kiwi, sugar snap peas, pineapple, dried fruit, etc. Teachers reported their students were "More willing to try new things." during and following our lessons.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Revitalization of the North River Fronts Kids Garden

What problem or need were you addressing? The North River Fronts Kids Garden had 6 decaying raised garden beds replaced in 2024 and there were more old beds left in the garden that created safety hazards for the children and 6 Master Garden Volunteers that taught there.

This garden has been in existence for over 19 years in cooperation with multiple community organizations. We wanted to make sure the revitalization was completed.

Secured a FoodWise Garden Grant and worked in collaboration with Chippewa Valley HomeBuilders Association, Chippewa Valley Technical College Residential Construction program, and Eau Claire City Parks and Rec to rebuild the last 9 beds and widen pathways for better accessibility.

-FoodWise along with Master Garden Volunteers completed a 6-week nutrition and garden education series to 45 Boys and Girls Club youth. Boys and Girls Club youth harvested a total of 70 pounds of garden vegetables throughout our six-week series. Club teens helped to prep old beds for tear down prior to raised bed reconstruction. Together, we've renovated this space where learning and growth can thrive for another 20 years to come!

-"I've never had a kohlrabi before, it's really good."The leafy part of the broccoli is my favorite part in the stir-fry!"I got to pick a tomato!"The stir-fry is SO GOOD! I want the recipe!" "I wish my school had a garden" ~ youth comments



Sandy Tarter
Nutrition Coordinator



Joy Weisner
Nutrition Educator



For over 30 years in Wisconsin, FoodWise has empowered families with evidence-based education including overall nutrition, meal planning, food safety, and food resource management. On July 4th, Congress signed a bill into law that ended federal SNAP-Ed funding effective September 30, 2025. Both Joy and Sandy will continue part-time to improve food access and expand coalition work through September 30, 2026. Feel free to reach out with questions any time.

Horticulture

Horticulture is the connection between people and plants. It supports environmental stewardship, human wellness, and the growing of local food. The program focuses on strategies to mitigate environmental challenges such as pollinator decline and environmental pollution. It offers education on how to grow your own produce to help reduce food costs and aid in nutrition, communicates the physical, mental and social wellness benefits gardening provides, and encourages people of all ages to incorporate gardening into their lifestyle even when space or mobility is limited.



Achieving More Together

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2025 Partners

- Eau Claire County ADRC Dementia Care Program
- Altoona Public Library
- Mayo Clinic Health System
- Lake Wissota State Park
- Chippewa Valley Biodiversity Partnership
- Eau Claire Area Master Gardeners

Community Impacts in 2025

- Served the community by responding to lawn, landscape, and garden questions offering year-round, knowledgeable, and individualized support, helping residents implement best practices in their landscapes that will positively affect the environment and their communities.
- Partnered with Eau Claire County ADRC Dementia Care Specialist to provide hands-on, nature-based activities for people living with dementia and their care partners offering a safe environment to connect through experiential learning that stimulates the senses, boosts creativity and fosters a sense of accomplishment and purpose.
- Helped build connection and cooperation among participants of a community based residential facility, Affinity House, involved in a multi-week vegetable gardening program. Participants learned strategies for small space gardening, making plant selection, and garden maintenance plus, were able to enjoy the fresh produce they grew.



The Landscape

Engagement & Outreach

379 Public Contacts
Individuals seeking guidance on landscaping, gardening, and lawn care.
53 Regional Events
Programs, presentations, and outreach events held.

Quality of Connection

84% Connection Rate
Survey respondents felt a direct connection to Extension experts.

Environmental Impact

70% Habitat Awareness
Reported an increased understanding of pollinator habitat management.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Older adults (60+) represent nearly 20% of the population in each of the three counties I serve, and this segment continues to grow. After walking, gardening is reported as one of the most popular leisure activities among seniors. Recognizing this, I saw an opportunity to offer strategies and techniques that support older adults in continuing—or discovering—gardening as a way to remain active, engaged, and vital as they age.

Research supports the beneficial impacts of plants and gardening on overall well-being. Engaging with plants can reduce stress and promote a sense of purpose and accomplishment. For older adults, gardening has been linked to improved hand strength, balance, nutrition, self-esteem, and overall physical health. Gardening also provides cognitive stimulation and may help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

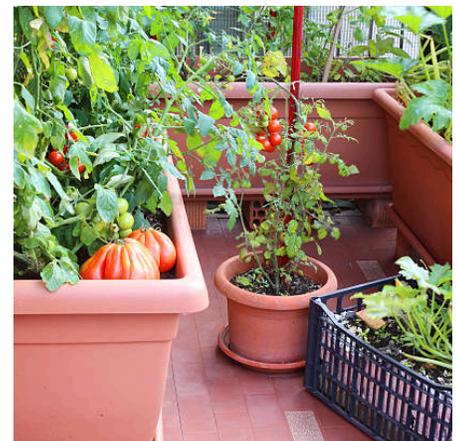
I offered six programs focused on helping individuals maintain gardening as a lifelong activity. Along with general information on the physical, nutritional, mental, and social benefits of gardening, I shared practical strategies to make gardening safer and more accessible for older adults and others experiencing mobility or physical challenges. Participants explored ergonomic and adaptive tools and shared ideas on how gardens and gardening practices can be redesigned to be easier on the body and adaptable to changing needs.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Each year, I receive requests from community groups wanting programming focused on food gardening. Individuals are interested in increasing access to nutritious, affordable food while also gaining the benefits of physical activity and time spent outdoors that gardening provides. Poor nutrition, rising costs of healthy food, and the need for increased physical activity are recurring concerns identified in community health assessments across the three counties I serve.

Research shows that people who grow their own food are more conscious of maintaining a healthy diet. Individuals who vegetable garden are reported to eat more vegetables and a greater variety of vegetables, a trend that is also observed in children who participate in food gardening. Additional benefits of food gardening include reduced grocery costs, improved mental well-being through stress relief and connection to nature, and increased physical activity.

I offered twelve programs focused on food gardening, encompassing a wide range of topics, including beginning vegetable gardening, container vegetable and fruit gardening, starting vegetable seeds indoors, and growing food for donation. These programs provided participants with the knowledge and skills needed to increase gardening success and highlighted how nurturing plants and harvesting your own food can provide a deep sense of satisfaction, pride, and connection to their food.



Margaret Murphy Horticulture



Margaret is a Senior Horticulture Educator with the University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension, serving Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties. She brings over 15 years of experience teaching a wide range of horticulture topics. Margaret is committed to advancing environmental stewardship through sustainable gardening and landscape practices that support biodiversity and ecological health. She actively engages communities in food gardening and provides outreach in therapeutic horticulture, emphasizing the connections between gardening, health, and well-being. Margaret also responds to indoor and outdoor plant, yard, and landscape questions and delivers presentations for groups and organizations on diverse gardening topics.

Health & Well-Being

We're supporting positive change for families through physical and mental health programs in addition to structural improvements needed to make the healthy choice the easy one. Our physical fitness classes and mental health training equips people with the tools they need to lead healthy, active lives. We provide public health resources and tools for community action. We provide guidance on systems changes for food security and food access.

Community Impacts in 2025

- WeCOPE (Connecting with Our Positive Emotions) - an evidence-based program that helps adults cope with life stress.
- ProQOL (Professional Quality of Life) - helping workplaces understand the positive and negative aspects of being in a helping profession, and identifying areas to make positive change.
- Mindfulness & Emotional Intelligence - leading workshops where participants learned skills to improve their emotional regulation.
- Youth Mental Health Task Force - cross-sector collaboration to connect adults with resources to help the mental health of the youth in their life.
- Safe and Sober Spaces Task Force - cross-sector collaboration to improve the substance-free environments in the community through education and policy change.



Achieving More Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension works alongside the people of Wisconsin to deliver practical educational programs where people live and work – on the farm, in schools and throughout urban and rural communities.

2025 Partners

- At The Roots LLC
- Augusta Memorial Public Library
- Eau Claire City-County Health Department
- Eau Claire County Child Support Agency
- Eau Claire County Department of Human Services Behavioral Health Outpatient Clinic
- Eau Claire Health Alliance
- Eau Claire Sober Living
- Feed My People
- Recovery and Wellness Consortium
- United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley



The Landscape

Top Health Concerns

Poor Mental Health was identified as the 2nd top health concern in Eau Claire County. (2024 Community Health Assessment)

The Support Gap

38% of Middle Schoolers & 46% of High Schoolers report rarely/never getting needed support.
18% of Adults experienced poor mental health for 14+ of the last 30 days.

Community Interest

Of 270+ residents are interested in Sober Spaces within Eau Claire County. (Local Survey, 2025)

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Community Connection Through the Safe and Sober Spaces Task Force

The 2024 Community Health Assessment clearly identified that our community is struggling with alcohol misuse and mental health. While these are big challenges, we realized that one of the best ways to address them is through connection. People need places to gather outside of work or home that don't revolve around alcohol, but in our current landscape, those "third spaces" can be hard to find. I helped lead the Safe and Sober Spaces Task Force to bridge this gap. We wanted to ensure that whether you are in recovery, "sober-curious," moderating your alcohol consumption, or just a parent looking for a night out with the kids, you have options for socialization without the presence of substances in Eau Claire County.

We launched a focused survey and heard from over 270 residents. Their stories gave us the data we need to show local business owners that there is a local demand for substance-free environments.

We are working to partner with a local publication to add a "sober tag" to their community events calendar. This simple tool allows residents to filter their plans based on their own comfort and needs.

We are creating "best practice" guides and working directly with local venues to design "sober sections" or specific substance-free experiences.

These efforts aren't about taking anything away; they're about adding more options to our rich and vibrant communities.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

Coordinate Mental Health Training Requests

The Chippewa Valley had a gap in the mental health support system, particularly when connecting organizations with mental health trainings such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). We had skilled professionals in the Chippewa Valley certified to teach QPR and MHFA, but were allowing their certifications to lapse because they weren't being utilized. Meanwhile, local organizations and schools wanted training but didn't know where to go, often utilizing national training resources that lacked local context. In an attempt to bridge that gap, I reached out to our local trainers to map out exactly who could teach what courses, where they could travel, and what extra expertise they brought to the table. By creating a centralized trainer directory and an online request form, it turned a disconnected process into a streamlined local network. Now, when a local organization needs help, they aren't matched with a stranger from a national list; they are matched with someone local who understands the community and their needs. We're keeping our local experts trained and ensuring that when someone in the Chippewa Valley reaches out for mental health education, the result is tailored and stays local.



Margo Dieck Health & Well-Being



In my role as a Health and Well-Being Educator, I thoroughly enjoy helping program participants make informed decisions about their health and collaborating with partners to positively impact the health and wellbeing of the community. I prioritize work that improves the policies, systems, and environments where we live, learn, work, and play. I welcome your suggestions, questions, and opportunities to partner together in work that creates lasting, positive change in our community.

4-H Positive Youth Development



Achieving More Together

Community-led 4-H programs deliver quality activities and leadership opportunities that are leading to engaged, energized, and informed young people across the state. 4-H is a movement – in Wisconsin, 98% of our 4-H members are inspired to make positive changes in their communities.

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2025 Partners

- Eau Claire Area School District
- Altoona Public Library
- Eau Claire County Fair
- Altoona Boys & Girls Club
- Eau Claire Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association
- UW-Stout Fab Lab and Art Education department
- UW-Eau Claire Education Department
- Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Community Impacts in 2025

- Every year, the Older Youth Council holds the Sarah Nelson Memorial Pancake breakfast in memory of an OYC member who survived cancer, but was tragically killed in a car crash. This past year they raised \$7000. They donated \$5000 to Joshua's Camp, added \$1000 to the Sarah Nelson Memorial Scholarship Fund, and put \$1000 toward their service project fund. They used part of that money to make tie blankets to donate to the chemotherapy units in local hospitals.
- Research shows that attending camp has lifelong positive impacts--those who attend camp are more likely to try new things, make stronger friendships, and are more confident. Eau Claire County 4-H partners with Clark and Dunn Counties to offer a 4-day camp experience. Because of donations, we were able to offer scholarships to an already affordable camp experience this last year. Attending camp cost just \$75. In 2025, we had 81 total youth campers with 15 older youth counselors. Thirty-five of those youth were from Eau Claire County.



The Landscape

Youth Membership

324 Enrolled Members

94 First-Year Members

Adult Volunteers

68 Enrolled Adults

Volunteer Value

\$141,032 Estimated Value

4,148 Hours Reported

(\$34/hour rate)

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

I made a goal to conduct a needs assessment and visit all 4-H clubs at the beginning of the 2025-26 program year. I started this position in 2019. I have not visited all of the 4-H clubs since 2020. Also, people were expressing that they wanted more “fun” opportunities to build relationships across the county. I wanted to reconnect, get feedback on the county-wide program, and build relationships with club members and leaders. I successfully visited all ten 4-H clubs and had members fill out sticky notes with what was going well and what could go better and also vote for county-wide activities that could build relationships across clubs. I also distributed a QR code to a needs assessment survey to parents. I received 23 responses to the digital survey and an uncounted number of sticky notes and votes. Engagement was high. I compiled the responses and am working on planning the asked-for programming.

IMPACT TO THE COUNTY

In order to enhance the 4-H member experience, I wanted to provide a Project Exploration or Clover College experience for Eau Claire County. Eau Claire County had not had a project learning day for members in grades k-5 since I started. Families sometimes leave 4-H because there is not enough project area support. And, I wanted to incorporate another youth leadership opportunity for our teen members. Other counties provide such programming so I had several models to choose from. I asked for volunteers to help plan the program and worked with adult volunteers, Kayla Davis and Megan Hofeldt to plan. We had 4 youth session leaders and 4 adult leaders with 20 youth registrants. Each youth attended 3 sessions. Youth could make a rubber band rocket, make a leather bookmark or keychain, decorate a cake, build a birdhouse, make stamp art, draw your own comic book, or make diamond art. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive from attendees and session leaders. All those who attended have re-enrolled in the 4-H program for 2025-26.



Rachel Hart-Brinson
4-H Positive Youth
Development



I have been the 4-H Educator in Eau Claire since April 2019. I appreciate the community-centered mission of Extension. I value the opportunities for continued learning and growth. My favorite part of my job is working with young people and watching them grow and develop into confident leaders. Camp and camp counselor training are my favorite parts of my job. I enjoy building partnerships with community organizations and the dedicated volunteers that make 4-H possible. I look forward to reporting on our efforts to grow the program with new audiences and club types for 2026 while improving our county program's retention rate.



Extension

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