

### Upcoming Events

- [Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference](#). May 13-15, 2026, Green Lake, External & Internal Audience
- ["Calm Bodies, Kind Minds"](#), 4-H Cloverbud Program (K-2), May 26th, 6-7pm, Extension Eau Claire County Office
- In person [YQCA training](#), May 26, 6:30PM at Extension Eau Claire County office
- Juntos trip to Camp Nawakwa, May 30, 8am-5pm, [Camp Nawakwa](#)
- May 16 [Horticulture Conference Transitioning to Native Plants](#): How to improve the biodiversity of your garden
- May 20: [County Officials Workshops](#) in Wisconsin Florian Gardens Eau Claire, WI
- [4-H Summer Camp](#), June 7-10, Kamp Kenwood and Lake Wissota State Park
- [In Pursuit of Place Summit](#), June 23-25, Lambeau Field Green Bay, External & Internal Audience

### Agriculture

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

Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator



*A regional workshop where farmers and agronomists learned about local nitrogen on-farm research to better understand research results, data, and improve nitrogen application to improve farm profitability and protect ground and surface water.*

*An educational field tour where farmers learned about planting date impact and persistence of five cover crop species to help farmers make decisions about cover crop species selection and timeliness of planting.*

*An on-farm research study to better understand manure application, commercial nitrogen application rates, and nitrogen credits on corn yield and potential effect on ground water. Results from this study will help farmers, agriculture industry professionals, and agency professionals in adjusting manure and commercial nitrogen applications to optimize corn yield and protect groundwater resources.*

### Spotlight

Cover crops are becoming widely adapted to cropping systems across the Chippewa Valley. Questions remain about cover crop species selection, benefits, and challenges to meet the goals of cover crop adaptation. Planting dates and species selection are two decisions driving cover crop establishment and success. A Multi-Species Cover Crop Tour was held in partnership with the Chippewa Valley Producer-led Watershed to observe five species of cover crops planted on three different dates following three different crops. The tour was anchored by the Cover Crop Establishment Demonstration Trials funded by the Wisconsin Fertilizer Research Council. Berseem clover, winter camelina, hairy vetch, winter triticale, and winter rye were planted in fall 2025 following winter rye grain harvest (August 25), corn silage (September 23), and soybeans (October 2). Biomass samples were taken on November 13 from the August 25 planting demonstration which revealed a range from hairy vetch (1920 lbs./acre) to berseem clover (192 lbs./acre.) Thirteen

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farmers and agronomy professionals attended the tour and increased knowledge about the impact of cover crop species selection and planting date. A handout was created using photos and biomass measurements from each planting date location. Farmers were engaged as many questions were asked about field history, agronomic practices, and planting equipment.

### Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



We delivered a virtual six-session educational course for beginning and prospective beef producers during evening Zoom sessions. Our goal was to increase knowledge across key beef production topics including marketing, cow-calf/stocker/backgrounding/finishing enterprises, handling facilities, health and veterinary care, grazing, feeding and nutrition, and reproduction and genetics. As a result, participants reported greater confidence and intent to adopt improved management practices that support profitable and sustainable beef operations. (With: Extension Beef Team)

An online presentation for beef producers on best management practices and current research on genetics and selecting breeding stock, with an emphasis on matching production goals and genetics to each farm's environment and management (with Beth McIlquham and Bill Halfman).

The Chippewa Valley Forage Council Beef and Dairy Forage Seminar was an in-person educational workshop for forage producers and ag industry professionals. Forages tie together agronomy, water quality, dairy, and livestock production interests.

### Spotlight

Extension Regional Educators (Jerry Clark and Ryan Sterry) and Outreach Specialists (Leonard Polzien, Todd Prill, Luana Queiroz, and Bill Halfman) addressed current agronomy, beef, and dairy production topics at the 2026 Chippewa Valley Forage Council Spring Seminar. They included a dairy market outlook, transitioning forage needs when transitioning from dairy to beef, nitrogen management research, assessing the needs of alfalfa growers, managing crop rotations for water quality, and an update from the Midwest Forage Association. A seminar evaluation was completed by nine attendees (scale 1 = poor and 5 = excellent). All presentations resulted in a gain in knowledge ranging from +1.1 to +2.0.

## Horticulture

### Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

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



A virtual presentation for a StrongBodies class where participants learned the principles of companion planting and how it can support soil health, save space with inter-planting, provide mutual support for nearby plants and help discourage insect pests so they can be encouraged to food garden, even if space or mobility is limited, increasing their intake of healthy foods.

An in-person presentation for attendees of the JCEP (Joint Council of Extension Professionals) Conference focused on accessible and adaptive gardening strategies to help individuals of all abilities continue to garden as their needs change over time. Participants learned about research highlighting the lifelong benefits of gardening and explored creative, practical ways to stay connected to gardening at every stage of life so they can continue to experience the many benefits gardening provides including stress relief, focus recovery, fostering strength and balance and delivering a sense of accomplishment.

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# Extension Eau Claire County

## April 2026 Report

*An in-person class for the public teaches participants how to start a vegetable garden, understand soil health, learn about plant selection, planting, and garden maintenance so they can grow their own produce and experience the benefits of food gardening such as increasing their intake of healthy foods.*

*An in-person hands-on class to teach at-risk youth how to plan, plant and tend a vegetable garden. Participants learn about soil health, plant selection, techniques for small-space gardening and garden maintenance so they can learn to grow their own food and experience the wellness benefits of gardening including increased access to healthy foods, stress relief, focus recovery and a sense of accomplishment. .*

*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 growing the classic hollyhock flower as well as timely topics from Wisconsin Yard & Garden Weekly. This ongoing effort is designed to keep participants connected to current horticulture topics, gardening tips and concerns and includes links to many other articles as well as upcoming events.*

*Staffed an Extension table at the GE Bleskacek Family Memorial Bloomer Public Library resource fair for the public to provide information on horticulture and other Extension programs and upcoming events. This effort was to provide information and raise awareness on available resources to the public.*

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

### Spotlight

*Gardening for life is a program focused on accessible and adaptive gardening strategies to highlight the lifelong benefits of gardening and explores creative, practical ways to stay connected to gardening at every stage of life so that participants can continue to experience wellness benefits such as stress relief, focus recovery, increasing strength and balance and feeling a sense of accomplishment. The program includes a presentation, handouts, and discussion plus, a sampling of tools that can help make gardening easier and safer.*

## Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Community Development Educator



*Planning for a regional satellite site for the Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (CommNS) semi-annual conference for community leaders and nonprofit professionals in collaboration with Clear Vision Eau Claire. The goal is to provide local access to statewide plenary sessions paired with interactive regional workshops, so that Chippewa Valley organizations can build their capacity for positive community change without the barriers of travel. (Garret Zastoupil, Elizabeth McCrack, Sarah Schlosser)*

*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 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.

### 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 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



*Collaborating efforts with Positive Youth Development (PYD)/4-H Educator and HWB Educator to address mental health decline, stress, and promote parent-child interactions for families in the Chippewa Valley.*

*Planning a take-home activity and resource packet in which FoodWise educators provided two resources - 30 days of Movement Calendar (Iowa State Extension) and Look and Cook Recipes (Discover MyPlate).*

*Strengthening the sustainability of the Kids' Garden series at North River Fronts by supporting a Master Gardener Volunteer with UW-Madison approved garden education materials such as nutrition-focused recipes and produce-handling safety resources.*

*Collaborating with 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. 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. Current work is focused on creating two new resources for Eau Claire County schools—Healthy Classroom Snack Ideas and Healthy Concession Stand Ideas—to support healthier choices for students and families.*

*Weekly meetings with WI Nutrition Incentive Network and Double Up Food Bucks team 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 added fresh fruits and vegetables. Menomonie and Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Markets will be expanding their match programs from \$10 per week up to \$20 per week to participants. Markets will also be allocated \$250 for marketing materials.*

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# Extension Eau Claire County

## April 2026 Report

An educational caregiver event at the River Source Family Resource Center (Chippewa Falls) where parents learned helpful techniques to help parents/caregivers involve their young children in the kitchen. Families had the opportunity to make and taste a Banana Sushi snack. This effort supports parents in encouraging their families to eat healthy and reduce mealtime struggles.

Ongoing efforts include continued collaboration and relationship-building with new staff at the Western Dairyland Fresh Start Program to sustain a nutrition education series for at-risk teens and young adults. The series focuses on nutrition, food preparation and cooking, and food safety, with the goal of empowering participants to adopt healthier lifestyles through building practical skills for preparing nutritious snacks and meals at home.

Completed collaboration with Chippewa County Healthy Communities- Pathway to Health members on developing the Access to Healthy Foods-Food Resources page and food access handout. This effort See the link here: <https://arcg.is/11XKCa3>. This directory and guide help residents identify local food resources, improve food security, and share nutrition education resources.

Collaboration with Lake Holcombe School District and Lake Holcombe Food Pantry to identify food insecurity needs and support actions to increase food security with school aged youth. Adding a Snack Program in the fall to the school district's current Backpack program will allow for increased food access for all youth.



Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator

A preconference session for the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) where participants built connections across institutes, learned about and practiced several mindfulness practices, and created a self-care plan. The goal is to increase opportunities to practice mindfulness and reduce overall stress.

Planning to bring free mental health training opportunities to Eau Claire County through a partnership with Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin. The goal is to provide Mental Health First Aid and Question, Persuade, Refer training to community members and organizations to increase the number of individuals who can support someone in distress and connect them to appropriate professional care.

Planning for a 'sober event landing page' for community members seeking alcohol-free spaces in partnership with Volume One. The goal of this effort is to cultivate a permanent online space for community members to find alcohol-free restaurants and events and learn from community members who are alcohol-free and how they navigate the Chippewa Valley through long-form stories and articles.

Planning for a Partnership Summit across Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties in collaboration with partners who work on food insecurity, housing, transportation, and childcare. The goal of this effort is to provide education on local infrastructure through a panel discussion and utilize collective action to achieve common goals through the facilitation design of Open Space Technology.

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.

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.

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# Extension Eau Claire County

## April 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 supporting an alcohol-free baseball game, a sober event landing page with a local media organization and collaborating with Chippewa County Healthy Communities on an alcohol-free events toolkit.*

*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 creating a handout on age-appropriate talking points for supporting youth mental health, editing a handout that helps people connect with the appropriate mental health care, and planning for an upcoming film screening and mental health resource fair in collaboration with UWEC.*

### Spotlight

*As the late 2025 federal shutdown strained local resources, I engaged in conversations with key partners to identify immediate needs surrounding food access and how Extension could support those efforts. It became clear that while individual organizations were responding, they were often operating in silos. This situation underscored a broader opportunity for Extension to lead a unified approach to community resiliency, ensuring the Chippewa Valley is better prepared for future disruptions or crisis situations.*

## Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator



*Planning for Foods Project programming to allow for Spark Exploration for the youth enrolled in the Foods Project or Food Decoration Project.*

*Planning for a tri-county intern onboarding training program that introduces summer interns to positive youth development theory, builds our Area 6 team, sets clear professional goals for interns, and provides a solid foundation for support of the Area 6 4-H summer programs.*

*Planning for Kid's Day programming at the Eau Claire County Fair where 4-H youth and volunteers staff activity tables allow youth to explore their sparks and promote the 4-H program.*

*Planning for May 3 Camp Counselor Training where counselors practice leading their sessions, continue to build their leadership abilities, and practicing empathy to prepare for camp.*

*A presentation for the UWEC "Culture of Pets" class on 'Poultry as Pets?' that used personal experience, anecdotes and photos from 4-H Poultry Project members, and exploration of the Eau Claire City ordinance on keeping poultry to explore when and if poultry would be considered pets.*

*Rachel was selected as one of the WAE4-HYDP's (Wisconsin Association of Educators and 4-H Youth Development Professionals) recipients of their Achievement in Service Award. This award recognizes 4-H youth development*

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## April 2026 Report

professionals for their contributions to the profession and was awarded by her peers from a pool of applicants. The award was presented at the annual Joint Council of Extension Professionals conference. Rachel was also recognized as part of a team for their work developing a promotional package for the Performing Arts Festival and their submission will be forwarded to the regional competition.

### Gracie Gray | 4-H Associate Educator



*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 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 youth outreach tabling event for families and children at the Eau Claire Marathon Kids' Fun Zone. The goal is to promote 4-H and engage participants in hands-on activities such as a collaborative puzzle mural and rock painting, so that youth and families increase awareness of 4-H opportunities while fostering creativity, community connection, and a sense of belonging through shared art experiences.*

*An Earth Day-themed program called "Earth Explorers" for Cloverbud-aged youth, where participants learned about caring for the planet through a read-aloud, group discussion about composting versus recycling, and a recycled art project using plastic bottles. Through this effort, youth built early environmental awareness, practiced responsible waste habits, and developed creativity while learning how their choices can help protect the Earth.*

*Planning for an interactive STEM building workshop for Cloverbud-aged youth. The goal is to engage youth in hands-on learning about constraints in engineering and architecture through guided LEGO challenges, brainstorming, and reflection activities, so that youth develop problem-solving skills, strengthen creativity, and gain an understanding of how real-world limitations influence design and construction.*

## 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*

*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)*

*Health insurance Navigator assistance for anyone in Wisconsin, where a total of 74,147 coverage services were provided directly to increase enrollment, retention, and appropriate use of benefits. Through this effort, our Navigators assisted 13,360 consumers with qualified health plan enrollments through the federal Health Insurance Marketplace and applications to Medicaid, supporting access to health care and improved health outcomes. (Adam Vanspankeren)*

*A presentation for a volunteer retreat where participants were made aware of the questions and self-talk that impact their behavior and mental wellness and learned how to adjust their thinking to accommodate better questions. (Luisa Gerasimo)*

*We delivered a virtual six-session educational course for beginning and prospective beef producers during evening Zoom sessions. Our goal was to increase knowledge across key beef production topics including marketing, cow-calf/stocker/backgrounding/finishing enterprises, handling facilities, health and veterinary care, grazing, feeding and nutrition, and reproduction and genetics. As a result, participants reported greater confidence and intent to adopt improved management practices that support profitable and sustainable beef operations. (Sandy Stuttgen)*

*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)*