

Extension Eau Claire County

August 2026 Report

Upcoming Events

- September 23 1:00pm - 3:00pm | Farm Lease workshop
- September 12 at 10:00am | Prairie Walk at Lake Wissota State Park
- September 19 at 10:00am | Garden Hour at Chippewa Falls Community Garden
- September 28 at 5:30pm | Dos and Don'ts of Rain Gardens
- October 3 at 1:30pm | Creating Pumpkin Planters at Altoona Public Library

SAVE THE DATE

2026 Partnership Summit: Reconvening

share progress | continue networking | commit to action

October 29 | 9-11 am
 via Zoom

A partner-led working session hosted by UW-Madison Extension

The conversations and connections that began at the 2026 Partnership Summit have laid the foundation for meaningful community action, and we'd like to continue that important work together. We invite you to join us for a **virtual reconvening session on Thursday, October 29 from 9:00 - 11:00 am via Zoom**. This will be an interactive session to reconnect, hear updates on the group work that began at the Summit, celebrate progress, and identify next steps as we continue creating positive changes together. Open to all. [Register here.](#)

Agriculture

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

Jerry Clark | Regional Crops & Soils Educator



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

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. (Jerry Clark, Joshua Kamps, Todd Prill)

A field day where farmers learned about nitrogen and soil management strategies through local on-farm research to help farmers make decisions about nitrogen application and soil conservation to increase farm profitability and protect the environment. (Jerry Clark, Todd Prill)

Spotlight

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Dry soil conditions across most of the Chippewa Valley leading to questions about nitrogen availability and irrigation strategies. Irrigation and soil fertility applications and management can be a major expense in the production of grain and silage. Nitrogen and phosphorus possess risk to moving through the soil profile to groundwater and off-site to surface waters such as rivers and lakes. Management of nitrogen and soil conservation is important to protecting farm profitability and water resources. A field day was held as part of the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Project on-farm research regarding manure and nitrogen fertilizer applications. Nitrate-trapping lysimeters were installed in 2024 and 2025 to better evaluate and better understand water and nitrate movement. Speakers at the field day included Dr. Mallika Nocco, Extension Agriculture Water Management Specialist, "Increasing Irrigation and Fertigation Efficiency"; Dr. Steven Hall, Extension Agriculture Water Quality Specialist, "Managing to Keep Nutrients Out of the Water,"; Megan Blauwet, Nitrogen Management Outreach Specialist, "What have we learned with NOPP?"; Todd Prill, Agricultural Water Outreach Specialist, "Impact of Soil Conservation Practices on the Landscape"; and Jerry Clark, Regional Crops and Soils Educator, "Insights from Local On-Farm Nitrogen Application Research." Thirty farmers and agronomy professionals increased their knowledge about nitrogen and water interactions and movement. Handouts were created with the data collected from the projects to help with discussion points.

Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator



A workshop for beef feedlot operators where participants learned about facilities and stockmanship, silages and feeding, and vaccinations and chute-side care, to help them improve the sustainability and profitability of their farm operation. (Ryan Sterry, Bill Halfman, Luiz Ferraretto)

A workshop for beef cow-calf producers where participants learned about pasture weed management, rotational grazing, selection tools for cow longevity, and calf marketing strategies to help them improve the sustainability and profitability of their farm operation. (Ryan Sterry, Bill Halfman, Mark Renz)

A field day focused on feeding high-oleic soybeans (HOSB) to dairy cattle was hosted for dairy producers and agriculture professionals. During this field day, participants increase their HOSB related knowledge through educational sessions, peer-to-peer learning, and a facility tour. The goal of this effort was to help farmers and their advisors make informed, strategies, and economically viable decisions regarding HOSB adoption and use. (Katelyn Goldsmith, Daniel Smith, Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

Spotlight

Cow-calf production is the predominant beef enterprise in Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire counties. A regional workshop was held in partnership with a local farm to demonstrate pasture management, cow longevity, and calf marketing strategies. Improving pasture management is a win-win for resource conservation and reducing feed costs. Due to high replacement heifer costs, genetic improvement plans should include longevity traits. Finally, opportunities may exist to add value to calves to meet market demands before being marketed this fall. The program was co-led with state beef outreach and weed management specialists.

Of the 32 participants, 12 completed evaluations. Respondents reported increased knowledge in pasture management (+0.75), cow longevity (+0.67), and marketing strategies (+1.33) on a 5-point scale. Participants highlighted gains in weed identification, rotational grazing, and paddock sizing. Suggested future topics included crossbreeding strategies, cattle handling and facilities, and additional pasture management practices.

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Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | Horticulture Educator

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An in-person activity for youth where participants learned about growing potatoes, harvesting vegetables and general garden care. This effort was part of an ongoing outdoor classroom provided by Eau Claire Master Gardeners to help kids understand where many of their everyday vegetables come from, and how they are grown, what part of the plant we eat and how to harvest them.

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 included information links to water-wise landscape plantings, currently seen yard and garden insects and pumpkins. 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.

A monthly in-person opportunity for the public to visit the Chippewa Falls Community Garden, ask gardening questions, and explore seasonal topics in more depth. In August, we focused on fresh produce donation. Participants learned best practices for sharing fresh produce from their garden and were provided information on where to donate in Chippewa County. This effort was designed to encourage gardeners to share their excess produce with food recipient organizations, other community groups or neighbors facing food insecurity.

Spotlight

As the harvest season is upon us, August is a great time to address food insecurity within our communities. Participants at the community garden, along with individuals who joined us for our Garden Hour event, learned best practices for sharing fresh produce from their gardens and received information on where to donate. Our goal is to encourage gardeners to share their excess produce with food recipient organizations, community groups, and neighbors who may be experiencing food insecurity.

Community Development

Vacant | Community Development Educator

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Health & Well-Being

Sandy Tarter
FoodWise Coordinator



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 families with FoodShare to access 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.

Collaboration with the Health Dunn Right- Mental Health and Wellness Action Team with support in helping to update the Community Resource Guide. This effort will strengthen coalition capacity and provide the most up-to-date resources for community members.

Bi-weekly meetings of the WI Nutrition Incentive Program including individuals from Feeding America-Eastern WI, UW Madison-Extension, regional hub coordinators, farmers markets, American Heart Association, and others. This collaboration is a statewide effort to implement nutrition incentive programs with farmers markets, community supported ag programs, and retail stores such as co-ops including the Double Up Food Bucks program.

Collaboration with the Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Market to implement the Double Up Food Bucks program. This program will support sustainability with the Market Match program, infuse added value to vendors, and increase food access to people with FoodShare.

Margo Dieck | Health and Well-Being Educator



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.

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. The task force concluded their work this month.

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

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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. The task force concluded their work this month.

A nutrition lesson for adults in recovery where participants learned the value of adding macronutrients and micronutrients to their diet to improve overall health in recovery. Through this effort participants learned how nutritious foods positively impact their physical and mental health and support their recovery.

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, Jennifer Park-Mroch, Margo Dieck, Sara Ennocenti)

Continued planning and support of the Market Match Program in collaboration with the Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Market through acquiring funding and educating the community about the program. The goal of this effort is to ensure FoodShare eligible community members continue to receive free Market Match dollars to increase access to local, nutritious foods. (Sandy Tarter)

A 6-week program (WeCOPE) for adults where participants learn 11 self-care and coping skills. The goal of this effort is to improve skills to manage stress, improve coping, increase positive emotions, and improve mental health. (Luisa Gerasimo, Missy Bablick, Nalatlie Ursin, Tracy Henegar)

Spotlight

Eau Claire Sober Living identified nutrition education as a primary need for its members as they navigate the complexities of being in recovery. In response, targeted education was provided to help participants broaden their understanding of nutrition and how food can impact their recovery. This collaboration ensures residents have a basic understanding of macronutrients and micronutrients, learn easy ways to incorporate them into their daily routine, and experience new nutritious foods.

Positive Youth Development

Rachel Hart-Brinson | 4-H Program Educator



Rachel's last day with the Eau Claire team was August 14, 2026.

A hands-on workshop where young people strung beads on wire in a pattern to create beaded keychains. This program was requested as a follow up to an art program earlier this year because youth wanted to further explore their spark of bead art.

A day camp series experience where young people baked cookies from Mexico, China, Italy, and France and explored culture through food. This program was provided to help kids explore their spark of baking and foster curiosity about the world.

4-H Activity Tables that provide hands-on learning opportunities for youth visiting the Eau Claire County Fair and leadership opportunities for 4-H members. This year's activities included foam pennants or door hangers, "We Stick

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Together In 4-H" group art project, rock painting, cookie decorating, Lego challenge, temporary tattoos, and chick holding.

An Annual Financial Report work night where the 4-H Educator reviews the requirements for the Annual Authorization paperwork and changes to this year's process and supports 4-H Leaders in completing their paperwork and completing an audit for each other. Four clubs and one group were represented.

A program in partnership with the Fall Creek Public Library where youth participants explored the theme of dinosaurs through art and science activities. This program was to provide an opportunity to explore sparks and participate in high-quality programming, as well as expand partnership opportunities and reach new and different youth.

A rock painting program was held in partnership with the Fall Creek Public Library to provide an opportunity for young people to explore creativity and self-expression as well as learn about geology.

A GooseChase virtual scavenger hunt developed in collaboration with a 4-Her to engage families and youth in an opportunity to explore the Eau Claire County Fairgrounds and build relationships.

A paper scavenger hunt activity for the Eau Claire County Fair that encourages youth and adults to work together to visit all parts of the fair and check out different kinds of exhibits with the possibility of winning a shake.

Gracie Grey | 4-H Associate Educator



Gracie's last day with the Eau Claire team was August 12, 2026.

A Cloverbud Stuffed Animal Show at the county fair, for youth in grades K-2, where participants practiced 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.

A tabling opportunity at the Altoona National Night Out for families, where participants learned about the mission of the 4-H program and had a chance to practice hands-on art skills. Through this effort the Eau Claire County 4-H program reached many community members and built connections on a foundation of positive youth development.

An interactive Young Builders LEGO program for local youth, where participants explored principles of architecture and design through hands-on building challenges and projects. Through this program, young builders developed creative problem-solving skills and learned how thoughtful engineering can shape and serve their community.

A resume workshop for 7th-12th grade 4-H youth, where youth learned how to create and edit a resume and cover letter to provide them with the necessary skills and professional documents to confidently apply for scholarships or jobs.

A 3-hour, hands-on quilting workshop for youth and their families, where youth learned different quilting techniques, explored global quilting styles, and developed an understanding of the historical importance of the craft to help youth foster a greater appreciation, respect, and connection to the practice of quilting.

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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](#)

Collaboration Across Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties

A field day where farmers learned about management of nitrogen, irrigation, and soil interactions through local on-farm research to help farmers make decisions about nitrogen and irrigation applications and soil conservation to increase farm profitability and protect water resources. (Jerry Clark, Mallika Nocco, Megan Blauwet, Steven Hall, Todd Prill)

Coordinating action steps from the 2026 Partnership Summit to continue collaboration and coordination of next steps. The goal is to create an impact report, create videos with partners to answer questions, create a website to host all follow-up information, and plan for a reconvening of partners in October. (Margo Dieck, Deanna Wiersgalla, Garret Zastoupil)

Continued planning and support of the Market Match Program in collaboration with the Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Market through acquiring funding and educating the community about the program. The goal of this effort is to ensure FoodShare eligible community members continue to receive free Market Match dollars to increase access to local, nutritious foods. (Margo Dieck, Sandy Tarter)

A beef cow-calf focused field day was offered to beef producers and those interested in grazing/livestock topics in and around Trempealeau County. Participants had the opportunity to learn about soil testing for pasture fertility management, pasture weed management, herd reproduction planning, and flies and ticks. This workshop aimed to improve knowledge of pasture management, encourage and observe a rotational grazing set up, and provide practical livestock health and herd management tips. (Grace Finnerty, Bill Halfman, Jerry Clark, Ryan Sterry)

Value Added Programming

A 6-week program (WeCOPE) for adults where participants learn 11 self-care and coping skills. The goal of this effort is to improve skills to manage stress, improve coping, increase positive emotions, and improve mental health. (Margo Dieck, Luisa Gerasimo, Missy Bablick, Natalie Ursin, Tracy Henegar)

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Facilitation of regular (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, Todd Prill)

An event for families where youth participants aged 5 and up could try archery and learn about 4-H shooting sports. Through this activity, it introduces youth and families to shooting sports in a safe, structured environment. This event fosters personal responsibility, discipline, and focus while strengthening family engagement and connecting new audiences to 4-H positive youth development programs. (Jason Hornickel)

Between January and December 2025, Covering Wisconsin offered 18 virtual trainings 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)

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)

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, Allison Espeseth)