



## Agriculture

Jerry Clark | *Regional Crops & Soils Educator*



*Sign up to receive the Extension in the Valley agriculture and horticulture e-newsletter [HERE](#).*

A study to better understand community engagement to address healthcare access and delivery in rural areas. Results from this study will help decision makers and health care professionals guide rural healthcare research.

A study to better understand farmer practices on soil compaction. Results from this study will help farmers and agronomy professionals in managing soil compaction and overall soil health. (In collaboration with: Francisco Arriaga and Jordan Kampa)

A study to better understand the Interaction of Winter Cereal Rye as Cover Crop and Manure Application on Soil Nitrate and Corn Yield. Results from this study will help farmers and agronomy professionals in managing rye cover crops and manure in corn production systems.

A leadership program presentation for business and industry leaders in the Chippewa Valley where leaders learned of the economic impact of Chippewa Valley agriculture to increase awareness and understanding of the local agricultural industry. The goal of the presentation as invited speakers is to increase awareness of the economic, social, and environmental impact of the agricultural industry.

An annual meeting of the Red Cedar Conservation Farmers where farmers and agriculture industry leaders learned new soil, nutrient, and conservation research to make informed field crop and soil management decisions and increase farm profitability. (In partnership with: Matthew Bolen)

A series of 3 in person and 1 virtual Crops & Soils Program update meetings for crop and forage growers, consultants, agronomists, students and agency staff where participants learned about recent research results and crop management practices learned during the 2026 growing season. Extension specialists shared talks related to nutrient management, forage and grain production and pest management with the goal that attendees can make more informed crop management decisions to improve farm resilience and profitability. (With: Liz Gartman, Anastasia Kurth, Anne Pfeiffer, Chris Bandura, Christine Clark, Daniel Marzu, Daniel Smith, Emily Bick, Harkirat Kaur, Jordan Kampa, Jordyn Sattler, Joshua Kamps, Kevin Jarek, Laura Flandermyer, Luana Dantas Queiroz, Mallika Nocco, Marta Moura Kohmann, Matt Ruark, Megan Sankey, Melissa Ohlrich, Rodrigo Werle, Sam Bibby, Scott Reuss, Steven Hall, and Will Fulwider)

A nutrient management program for farmers where participants learned to identify nutrient application strategies and management decision points to improve farm profitability and protect ground and surface



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water. The goal of the program is to increase overall efficiency of nutrients applied to the landscape. (With: Ryan Sterry)

## *Spotlight*

*I serve as an Extension agriculture professional on the Mayo Clinic Midwest Rural Health Research Community Action Board (CAB), which identifies emerging rural health issues and guides Mayo Clinic researchers to ensure studies reflect real community needs. In 2023, I led formal survey analysis, writing review, and editing that demonstrated the CAB's strong influence on rural health research—shaping study design, pre-research activities, and implementation across all participating projects. By integrating community perspectives into every stage of research, the CAB strengthened the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of rural health research throughout the Midwest.*

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**Ryan Sterry | Regional Livestock Educator**



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

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

## *Spotlight*

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



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## Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | *Regional Horticulture Educator*

*Extension in the Valley agriculture and horticulture e-newsletter, view newsletters [HERE](#).*



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

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

Yearlong service to the public of Chippewa, Dunn and Eau Claire Counties to provide research-based plant/landscape advising for lawn, landscape and garden questions. The goal of this effort is to educate individuals so they can implement best practices in their landscapes that will positively affect the environment and their communities (over 380 *individual contacts with the public who reached out to Extension for horticulture guidance*.).

### Spotlight

*Community members, organizations, and municipalities continue to turn to UW-Madison Extension as a trusted source for timely, research-based horticulture guidance they can confidently apply in their own landscapes. In 2025, most residents in my region reached Extension by calling or visiting their local office, with 77% of horticulture questions coming through direct, personal contact by phone, email, or in person. By following up individually and connecting people to additional Extension resources when needed, Extension ensured residents received practical support tailored to their unique lawn, landscape, and garden needs.*



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## Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | Regional Community & Leadership Development Educator



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

Strategic planning for a community-serving organization where we updated the organization's mission and vision statement, identified goals, and developed action plans. The planning process is intended to clarify the organization's purpose and develop achievable steps to realize its vision.

Planning for Operational Direction and a Strategic Workshop Series for Department Heads and Oversight Committees in collaboration with the County Manager and Board Chair. The goal is to facilitate structured working sessions to guide departments through the tiered service catalog and environmental scan, so that leadership is equipped to make intentional policy decisions and difficult budget choices based on a shared, data-driven framework.

### Spotlight

*Extension partnered with community-serving organizations to help leaders navigate change and strengthen their ability to serve local needs through clear missions, shared goals, and strategic direction. By working directly with organization leaders, Extension diagnosed needs and facilitated a customized strategic planning process that built trust, clarified priorities, and produced actionable plans for collective impact. This work—including preliminary strategy workshops and a strategic planning proposal—helped position Hope Gospel Village as a community anchor, strengthening collaboration across the local continuum of care to better address homelessness and addiction.*



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## Health and 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 support FoodShare families in access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

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

### Spotlight

*Extension responded to community-identified needs by bringing the StrongBodies program to older adults who face barriers to safe exercise, health education, and social connection. Through age-appropriate strength training, health education, and group-based classes, participants improved physical strength, mental well-being, and built meaningful social connections that reduce isolation. By supporting healthier, more connected older adults, StrongBodies strengthens overall community health while helping prevent chronic disease and reduce long-term healthcare costs.*

## Human Development and Relationships

**Luisa Gerasimo** | *Human Development and Relationships Educator*



A series of meetings and efforts aimed at allowing Dunn County to serve as a control for a childhood savings project that is being funded in Ashland and Bayfield Counties. These two counties will provide starter funds for families that open a savings account for their newborn children, while our county will just send out information encouraging parents to begin saving. Results from this study will show whether offering incentives will increase the uptake of families beginning child savings accounts to help their children.



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save for their future education/training. (Working with: Heidi Ungrodt)

**Planning for in-person continuing education workshops** in six regions of Wisconsin, including one in Western Wisconsin, for childcare providers in collaboration with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network. The goal is to provide high-quality, research-based education to directly improve childcare providers' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors and indirectly improve child well-being. (Planning with: Lindsay Weymouth, Alicia Utke-Becher, Amanda Griswold, Carol Bralich, Hannah Zellmer, Kula Yang, Lisa Bents, Missy Bablick, Pattie Carroll, Robert Nix, Roxy Etta, Sarah Hawks, Tracy Henegar)

**Making Reading Memories** is for families involved in the justice system. The parents in jail are video recorded reading storybooks, which are then shared with their children at home. This month a mother called our office asking to get a copy of a video recorded several years ago. The father had passed away and the recording I made during his participation is one of the only remaining places where the child can hear that very important voice.



**Leadership of HAT, the Housing Action Team**, a coalition organized under the Public Health Department's Health Dunn Right initiative that meets regularly to address the severe lack of affordable, safe and quality housing options in Dunn County. Here is a note I got from a member of HAT this month: "I appreciate that you shared the resources with me. 😊 We've been rockstars this year, it's been great to be a part of this group!"

**Planning for a 2026 kick-off for HAT**, the goal is to bring the coalition together to reflect on how far the group has come and to re-focus on goals for 2026, so that the group's impact on housing is wider and deeper in the coming year. I recently graduated from a multi-month facilitation training program offered by UW Extension and will be bringing new tools to the leadership of this important county group.

**Parents Forever**, a co-parenting course continues to be offered in person and online for parents and caregivers experiencing separation, divorce or changes in the custody of their children. Parents tell us they learned skills to prioritize the parent-child relationship and better communicate with their co-parent. Many express that they wish they had this information earlier in the process as they now regret the fighting they did in front of their kids. (In collaboration with: Missy Bablick)

**Just In Time Parenting** newsletter (pre-birth up to 5 years old) for parents, caregivers, childcare professionals, and professionals who are serving families. Subscribers get evidence-based parenting strategies and child development information to support positive family dynamics and child well-being. Through this effort, participants gained practical tools to strengthen their parenting skills and promote healthy childhood development, leading to a positive impact on family resilience and child success. My voice appears on several of the new shorter recorded (vs print) versions for parents of newborns. (With: Amanda Griswold, Alicia Utke-Becher, and Kula Yang)



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## Spotlight

**NEW! Adopt a Book - Bins for Kids:** Research completed for the local effort to get books into family homes includes finding contact information for local laundromats, mapping their location, a physical visit to each of the four locations in the county to take photos of the physical location where a bin could be placed, cooperation with Birth to 3's Dunn County Play Group and local libraries and book stores to request donations of books. A free children's book was placed in the family waiting area in the Dunn County Government Center to help families access free books and resources for parenting classes early in 2025. The success of this effort led the educator to consider other gathering places for local families to access children's books and parenting resources. The goal is to help families access books, increase time spent reading to children, and point local families to Extension Family Engagement and Relationships resources.

## Positive Youth Development

Zachary Rozmiarek | 4-H Program Educator



The January Clover Courier can be viewed [HERE](#).

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



Planning has begun for Camp Counselor training in February. Camp Counselor training aims to build a strong counselor team and also give camp counselors the skills to be effective and confident camp counselors. (Planning with: Rachel Hart-Brinson & Seth Harrmann)

Dunn County 4-H Youth had a great time watching "White Christmas" at the Mabel Tainter Theater. In addition to the show, they got a backstage tour, and then went on stage to learn a dance routine! The goal of this event was to present a new experience to the youth. By partnering with the Menomonie Theater Guild and Leaders Council, we were able to make the tickets more affordable for everyone.

The Area 6 4-H Educators have begun planning for the 2026 Speaking and Demonstration Contest. This event is held every year. It is a traditional program that allows youth to build their speaking skills. They also get practice researching and developing their piece. Currently, the educators have worked



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together on finding a location, creating a registration, and promoting the event. (Preparing with: Jordan Blue & Rachel Hart-Brinson)

A virtual "Cultural Baking" program that explores baking and its connections to culture and traditions. The goal is to learn new baking techniques and try new flavor combinations while increasing confidence in the kitchen so that young people will be more equipped to deal with challenges and open to discovery. (With: Rachel Hart-Brinson, Andrea Rippley & April Daniels)

Dunn County 4-H held a Small Animal Project meeting where April Daniels was invited as a guest speaker. She spoke about poultry and rabbit agility. Since this, we have been working on incorporating rabbit agility into our program. This will open up opportunities to youth that were not previously there. It will also help strengthen our partnership with the Dunn County Fair by providing another event for fair goers to attend. (In partnership with: April Daniels)

The Area 6 4-H educators have begun planning for Art U 2026. This program is a collaboration between Area 6 4-H and UW-Stout Art Education Department. To prepare we have met with the professor at UW-Stout to develop this year's program. We have decided on the dates, times, and began looking at the types of activities that will be offered. We have also begun promoting the event through newsletters, facebook, and a press release. (With: Jordan Blue & Rachel Hart-Brinson)

## *Spotlight*

*Youth in grades 5–8 from Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire counties participated in Robotics Day at UW-Stout, a hands-on STEM experience developed to expand access to coding, robotics, and problem-solving opportunities outside of school. In partnership with UW-Stout's Fab Lab and the FIRST Ambassadors Program, youth built, programmed, and competed with robots while exploring real-world applications of engineering and computer science. As a result, 80% of participants reported increased confidence using technology and 100% said the experience encouraged them to consider future STEM careers, strengthening local workforce readiness.*

## **Value Added Programming**

A strategic planning workshop for Dunn County Health Services staff, where participants engaged in structured dialogue and collective decision-making, to co-create strategic priorities to strengthen organizational capacity and foster sustainable health initiatives. (Selena Freimark)

Over the past year, Covering Wisconsin has coordinated and overseen 12 regional- and population-focused coalitions in which Wisconsin professionals interested or directly involved in health insurance enrollment gather to discuss changes to health coverage policy, share outreach and educational strategies, receive free professional trainings, and offer ideas for relevant consumer resource messaging and design. Through our efforts, a total of 88 coalition meetings were held, attracting 1,649 attendees, to focus on the health coverage issues affecting Wisconsin residents,



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especially immigrants, Spanish-speaking residents, Hmong residents, and those located in Central, East Central, Milwaukee, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Western regions. (Caroline Gomez-Tom, Allison Espeseth)

Navigator enrollment assistance provided to anyone in Wisconsin, where 97,013 consumers were assisted with health insurance questions or enrollment. Through this effort, our Navigators completed 4,041 qualified health plan enrollments through the federal Health Insurance Marketplace and assisted 5,615 consumers with Medicaid, resulting in widespread access to health care and improved health outcomes. (Adam Vanspankeren, Allison Espeseth, Elizabeth Rothe)

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, Kelsey Hyland)

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## Area Extension Director

Kristen Bruder | *Area Extension Director – Dunn, Chippewa, and Eau Claire Counties*



Please reach out with questions and ideas. The role of the AED is much like the department head in the county. 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.

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## Upcoming events

[Event Calendar – Extension](#)