



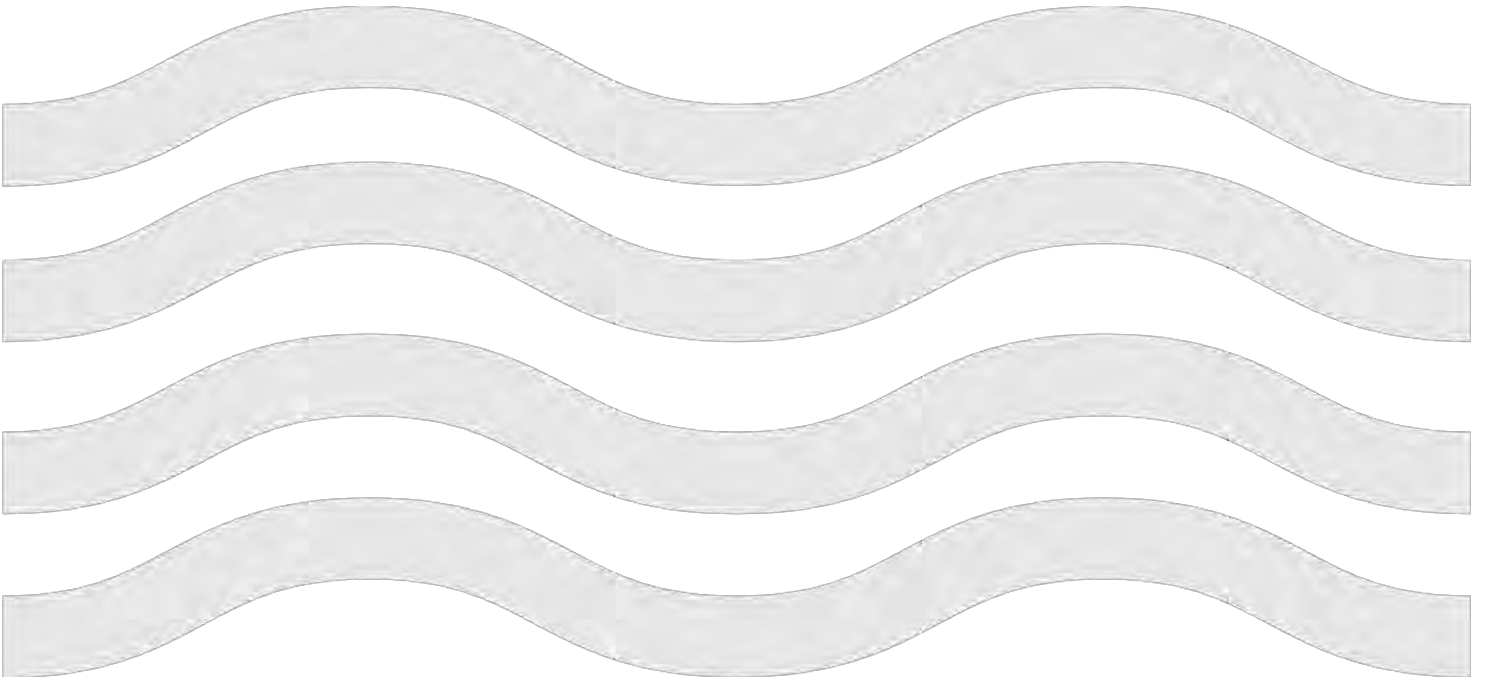
**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
PORTAGE COUNTY



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2023



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*This icon denotes educational or planning efforts that work toward improving water quality in Portage County, Central Wisconsin and the State as whole. While these efforts are highlighted in this annual report, there is more work being done by Extension to address water quality concerns outside of what is here. For more information about these efforts, or other efforts Extension has undertaken regarding water quality, please reach out to our office.*

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# UW-MADISON EXTENSION

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

## Agriculture & Horticulture »



Our network of researchers, outreach specialists, and local educators are on the leading edge of creating practical solutions for livestock and crop production in addition to farm and labor management. We provide customized guidance, business planning assistance, and industry knowledge for what today's agricultural operators are facing.

## 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'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 choice. 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.

## Families & Finances »

Reinforcing family connections, financial knowledge, and strong relationships is at the heart of Extension's programming. We support learning and emotional bonding by building literacy skills in justice-involved families. We guide community and individual development across lifespans. We teach financial security through rent planning and budget management.

## Natural Resources & Conservation »



We work at the crossroads of communities, natural resources, and agriculture to protect our environmental assets and guide resource management. We support individual and regional water-well testing along with education to address safe drinking water. We educate farmers, businesses, and communities on safe practices to ensure access to plentiful, sustainably managed sources of food, water, and energy.

## Positive Youth Development & 4-H »

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. They're developing leadership skills, building connections, and finding what topics spark their interest.



# Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent

## 2023 Portage County Producer-Led Watershed Project Outreach and Education.

### Abstract:

A Producer-Led watershed protection project for Mill Creek (FMCWC) and Tomorrow River Watershed (FFTWC) farmers, students, and local residents where they learn about and adopt soil and water conservation practices to reduce the environmental impacts of agriculture on surface and groundwaters.



My roles include coordinating field days, providing educational content, providing one-on-one consulting for farmers interested in cover crops and no-till planting, and assisting farmers in fulfilling their goals for environmental sustainability and improving water quality while maintaining or improving farm profitability.

### Outcome Statement:

Hosted the Wisconsin Prairie Chicken Festival April 16th. 225 attendees learned about the prairie chickens in central Wisconsin along with learning about prairie plants, pollinators, and the Farmers of Mill Creek youth education project.

Held and taught a youth education on-farm field day in May where youth learned about soil health, cover crops, prairie and pollinator plantings, and groundwater. 25 first graders plus 5 adult chaperones attended.

Hosted and provided educational content for a Field Day December 13th where 100 farmers, agribusiness professionals, youth, and area residents learned about conservation activities in the Mill Creek watershed. 54 of the 100 attendees were youth from 3 area High Schools.



Learning about Cover Crops with John & Matt



Soils with Ken



MC December Field Day 2023 Field

## BY THE NUMBERS

### On-Farm Youth Education Field Day

25 Students

### FFTWC September Field Day

75+ Attendees including Farmers, Agribusiness Professionals & Students

### FMCWC December Field Day

100+ Attendees including Farmers, Agribusiness Professionals & Students

### FMCWC & FFTWC Newsletters

725+ Farmers, Agribusiness Professionals, & other Stakeholders

### Pesticide Applicator Training & Testing

127 Farmers





# Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent

Helped organize, facilitate, and provided educational content for February kickoff meeting of the Farmers for Tomorrow watershed project. Sixty area farmers and agribusiness professionals learned about Regenerative Agriculture, cover crops, no-tilling, and other conservation practices to reduce nitrates in groundwater.

Helped organize, facilitate, and provided educational content for September Farmers for Tomorrow Soil Health Field Day. Twenty-five area farmers and agribusiness professionals plus 36 high school students and their Ag instructors from 2 area High Schools learned about factors affecting soil health.



Inspecting and Discussing No-Tilled Rye in Sweet Corn



Talking Farming with John



## Farmers of Mill Creek and Farmers for Tomorrow Newsletters.

### Abstract:

A newsletter for farmers, agribusiness professionals, and area residents where they gain knowledge about soil and water conservation opportunities to help reduce the environmental impact of agriculture.

### Outcome Statement:

The Farmers of Mill Creek and Farmers for Tomorrow newsletters are a tool I use to expand my educational outreach to over 400 area farmers, agribusinesses, and other stakeholders within the Mill Creek watershed spanning western Portage County into eastern Wood County and 325 farmers, agribusiness professionals, and area residents within the Tomorrow River watershed spanning eastern Portage County, south into very northern Waushara County, and into southwestern Waupaca County. I author articles and serve as editor and coordinator. The newsletters are published three times throughout the year focusing on soil and water conservation opportunities for farmers. View Farmers of Mill Creek Newsletters at <https://go.wisc.edu/6a5d3f>

## FARMERS OF MILL CREEK WATERSHED COUNCIL

FMCWC Newsletter

Publication - December 2021

### Farmers of Mill Creek meet with students, PACRS

by Larry Lee, Brownfield Ag News

The Farmers of Mill Creek farmer-led watershed group's annual meeting was an opportunity to review the accomplishments of 2021 and showcase some work being done by the next generation of farmers.

The December 8th event began at Eron's Event Barn, where host John Eron told the group it was good to get back together to see progress after a year off from having meetings. John said, "Our farmer group decided it's one thing teaching farmers about what's going on, but our board really wanted the next generation to learn about this and get their angle on where they want to see farms going in the future. That's when we really started working with Auburndale and taking a look at working with schools." He looked at the students from Auburndale and Wisconsin Rapids and said, "You guys are the future of farming."

Mark Courmoyer is the agriculture educator for Auburndale school district, which has several students participating in conservation projects. He said they had an interesting year. "John introduced us to Sierra (Huffman-Konko) from Jay-Mar, she's one of the agroecologists and she's been an excellent role model. She's been to our school. She's been to our school. She's been to our school."



John Eron Welcoming Students and Guests at December 2021 Field Day Photo: K. Schroeder

## FARMERS FOR TOMORROW WATERSHED COUNCIL

FFTW Newsletter

Publication - September 2023

### Fall Soil Health Field Day 2023

The Farmers for Tomorrow Soil Health Field Day was hosted by John Ruzicka and Guth Farm, Inc.

Focus for the day was on soil health principles and cover crops. The field day took place in a green pea field no-till planted to a multi-species cover crop mix about a month ago alongside a just harvested sweet corn field and finished with lunch and shop talks. Twenty-five area farmers, crop consultants, Land and Water Conservation and NRCS staff were in attendance along with 36 high school students and their Ag instructors from Amherst and Almond Bancroft schools.

Station 1: The Soil Pit with Jamie Patton, USDA-NRCS State Soil Health Coordinator. Soil was a Richford loamy sand, field was in no-till vegetables and cover crops for seven years. Jamie talked about the soil layers, organic matter, the importance of soil microbes, the benefits of living roots, and gave a demonstration on aggregate stability.



Soil Discussion with Jamie - Photo M. Hertz

Soil State Test for Aggregate Stability - Photo M. Hertz

Healthy Soil, Healthy Roots

continued on next page



Talking Cover Crops with John and Ben - Photo K. Schroeder

### In This Issue

- 2023 FFTWC Incentives
- Corn Silage Strategy
- Cover Crops Research Project
- Cover Crop Rotation Residues
- Wisconsin Water & Soil Health Conference
- Cover Crop Impacts on Pollinators
- Have you seen this Invasive Weed?



# Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent

**2023-2024 Field-Scale Corn Nitrogen Rate Study on Irrigated Loamy Sands, Portage County, Wisconsin. A Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP) project.**



## Abstract:

An on-farm, field-scale, research project to evaluate environmentally sustainable nitrogen application rates for grain corn grown on irrigated sandy soils in Central Wisconsin. Results from this research will improve our understanding of nitrogen cycling so farmers can optimize economic returns while improving efficiency of nitrogen fertilizer use resulting in more sustainable corn production on our sandy soils in central Wisconsin.

## Outcome Statement:

We are challenged with reducing nitrate leaching to the groundwater in Central Wisconsin. Field-scale studies on sustainable nitrogen (N) application rates for grain corn grown on the irrigated sandy soils of Central Wisconsin are lacking. Through this project we hope to get a better understanding of N use at 5 different N application rates and its effects on yield while also tracking soil nitrate levels from pre-plant to postharvest. The goal of this project is to improve our understanding of N cycling so we can implement and adapt N management practices that optimize economic returns while improving efficiency of N fertilizer use resulting in more sustainable corn production on our sandy soils in central Wisconsin.

In 2023, Field corn was no-tilled into green cereal rye and the cover crop terminated. Nitrogen was side-dressed at five different N application rates when corn was at V5 growth stage (6" to 8"). Corn was irrigated as needed and additional N was applied through the irrigation system over the entire 26-acre trial. Corn plots were harvested in early November, recording grain yields and moisture content.

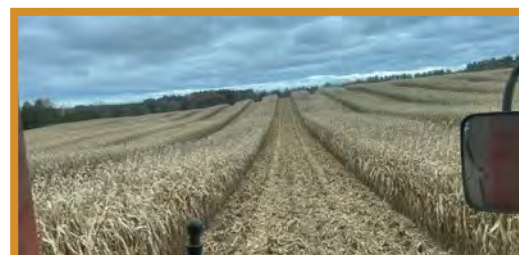
First year's data will be statistically analyzed and presented to Central Wisconsin farmers, crop consultants, and stakeholders in February and March 2024. This is a 2-year project and will be repeated during the 2024 growing season.



Air Temps and Rainfall data collection



Ben Sidedressing corn at V5



NOPP 2023 Harvest 11-10-23



Treatment Differences 6 weeks after planting



NOPP 2023 aerial photo plots 305 to 101 taken 6-30-23





# Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent

## Invasive Weed Management in Portage County ~ Teasels & Wild Parsnip

**Teasels**, *Dipsacus spp.*, is a relatively new invasive weed in Portage County. It thrives in sunny open areas, including prairies, moist meadows, along roadsides, ditches, wetland margins, pastures, and disturbed areas. Legal classification in Wisconsin is Restricted meaning it is an invasive species that is already established in the state and can cause or have the potential to cause significant environmental or economic harm or harm to human health. Note: It is unlawful to transport, transfer, or introduce a restricted species.

**What's the concern?** Teasel will invade open areas, including prairies, roadsides, and disturbed areas. While there aren't many populations in our area right now, now's the time to address the situation before it becomes a bigger problem. Nip it in the bud.



Mature Teasel w/Seedheads

**How do we identify Teasels?** Teasels are herbaceous plants that grow as a basal rosette for at least one year. In the second to third year, plants form a spiny, angled flowering stalk 2' to 6' tall, produce seed and then die. Thus, classified as a monocarpic perennial. A major identification feature is their unique egg-shaped flower heads with spiny bracts during fall into spring in Portage County.

**How do we manage Teasels?** For detailed management options see the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension teasel management publication A3924-14 [go.wisc.edu/898pd8](http://go.wisc.edu/898pd8) and the Common Teasel identification YouTube video (3.5 min) [go.wisc.edu/3woeux](http://go.wisc.edu/3woeux).

**Wild Parsnip**, *Pastinaca sativa*, is an invasive member of the carrot family that continues to spread into unmanaged areas throughout Wisconsin. It likes to grow in sunny, grassy areas along roadsides, railroads, and field borders but is not limited to these conditions. The primary means of spread is by seed that can be moved long distances while mowing roadsides after the plant sets seed.

**What's the concern?** The biggest concern isn't the fact that it is invasive and rapidly spreading but that it will cause burns and blistering of the skin if you come in contact with plant sap in the presence of sunlight. This is known as phytophotodermatitis. Blisters and rashes appear 24 to 48 hours after exposure.

**How do we identify Wild Parsnip?** Wild Parsnip produces a non-flowering leafy rosette of leaves the first year. It looks a lot like celery at this stage. In the second to third year, it produces a flowering stalk 4' to 5' tall, flowers, produces seeds, and then dies. Classified as a monocarpic perennial. Major identifying features are the grooved stems and flat-topped yellow flowers blooming in late June to early July in Portage County.



Wild Parsnip Flower & Stem

**How do we manage Wild Parsnip?** For detailed management options see the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension Wild Parsnip management publication A3924-15 [go.wisc.edu/iv54if](http://go.wisc.edu/iv54if) and Wild Parsnip identification YouTube video (2:26 min) [go.wisc.edu/98u2x8](http://go.wisc.edu/98u2x8).



**What can I do as a Concerned Citizen to help?** Know how to identify Teasels and Wild Parsnip and report locations at the Wisconsin First Detectors Network website [go.wisc.edu/jm0jf8](http://go.wisc.edu/jm0jf8). Several options are listed including a downloadable smartphone app.



# Agriculture

Anna James, Regional Natural Resource Educator &  
Guolong Liang, Commercial Vegetable Agriculture Water Specialist

## Water Quality & Conservation Practices Survey



This project was developed to better understand the social indicators (awareness, attitudes, constraints, capacity, and behaviors) of producers around the topics of water quality and conservation practices to improve water quality. The information gathered also helps to better understand producer needs in regards to water quality improvement, and how education and outreach programming can address those needs. Another goal of this effort was for Anna and Guolong to create relationships with producers, so it was agreed that surveys would be given via in person interviews that would take place at producer's farms.

To achieve their goals, Anna and Guolong worked with local partners and area experts to create the survey using the Social Indicator Planning & Evaluation System (SIPES) as a guide. During the summer of 2023, Anna and Guolong traveled to 12 different farms in the Central Sands area and interviewed producers. They used the survey as an outline for conversation, but promoted follow up question and discussion during the interviews.

As a result of this effort, Anna and Guolong have gained a better understanding of the farming systems in the Central Sands, specifically vegetable and potato production systems. They've also created relationships with producers who have not traditionally worked with UW-Madison Division of Extension. Data from the survey are evidence that this effort has, thus far, achieved the initial project goals. The following data points are a small representative of the total data pool, but serve as a good summary of how the needs of producers and their social indicators focused on the topics of water quality and conservation practices to improve water quality.

- 67% of participants view contaminated drinking water as a problem in their area
- When asked to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements, participant responses showed
  - 100% of participants agree or strongly agree that "it is my personal responsibility to help protect water quality"
  - 100% of participants agree or strongly agree that "my actions have an impact on surface water and groundwater quality"
  - 92% of participants agree or strongly agree that "using conservation management practices on farms improves water quality."
- 11 out of 12 participants are currently using conservation tillage methods on all or some of their operation acres
- Trusted sources of information about soil and water (ranked from most trusted to least trusted by participants); 1) University Extension and NRCS, 2) County Land & Water Conservation, 3) Private agronomists & producer-led watershed groups, 4) Peers, 5) Trade and industry groups, 6) Resources Conservation & Development Council, 7) DNR & processors/buyers
- Comments show that a lack of equipment or concerns about equipment costs are the major barrier to adopting conservation tillage.

The data from this survey will be used to inform future education and outreach programming and to help inform other stakeholders and agencies about producer's social indicators in hopes that they will use the information to guide their efforts as well.





# Community Development

Katie Livernash, Community Development Educator

## Clean Energy

Through a grant awarded by the University of Michigan, Extension staff have been planning and preparing for a community engagement process around utility-scale solar development in the county.

Two large scale solar development projects are currently either underway or proposed in the county, and other parts of the state are also seeing renewable energy development projects pop up on their landscapes.

This project is an opportunity for Portage County residents and community members to voice their opinion and share their experiences around these kinds of developments. Extension staff have a goal of improving the planning and community engagement process to align large scale solar projects with benefits for communities.



Photo by Mark Stebnicki: <https://www.pexels.com/>

## Broadband

Over the fall, Portage County Extension worked with County planning and North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission staff to complete the Portage County Broadband Plan.

Further, the county is also undertaking a Rapid Design Study. The completion of this plan positions the county to apply for necessary broadband expansion funding which can fill the gaps in currently underserved and unserved areas of the county, thus improving the overall quality of life and economic opportunity for the county.



## Staffing Update

After more than 10 years in the Community Development Educator position, Nathan Sandwick, took a new position with USDA Rural Development. Nathan worked extensively in broadband, community planning, non-profit capacity building, and community sense of place among other efforts.

We were fortunate to hire Katie Livernash as the new Community Development Educator in Portage County. Katie started in September and has fully immersed herself in broadband, renewable energy, and housing projects. Katie came to this position from the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and is a UW-Stevens Point alumni.



Katie Livernash  
Community Development Educator

## Healthy Choices, Healthy Lives

FoodWise is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed). 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.

## Achieving More, Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension works alongside the people of Wisconsin throughout urban and rural communities to deliver practical educational programs where people live and work. In Portage County, FoodWise partners with Stevens Point and Almond schools, treatment programs, Head Start, ADRC, Children's Wisconsin, and emergency food systems to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in our communities.

## Community Impacts in 2023



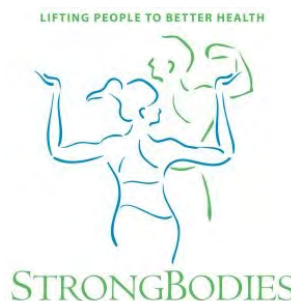
Engaged with 454 learners around nutrition education topics in a variety of settings, including early care and education centers, K- 12 school settings and senior nutrition centers.



Partnered with 5 sites and senior nutrition centers to support the strength-training program, StrongBodies to over 200 participants. StrongBodies provides nutrition education and improves muscle strength, balance, and flexibility so participants can stay healthy and socially connected.



Worked with Hunger & Poverty Prevention Partnership to support the community garden program at 13 sites. Produce is donated to organizations serving community members with limited income.



## BY THE NUMBERS

Whether people are healthy or not they are affected by systems, policies, and environmental factors.

**1,803**

county residents experience limited income and low access to a grocery store<sup>^</sup>



**8%**

of county residents use SNAP benefits to purchase food for themselves and their families.\*



<sup>^</sup>County Health Rankings

\* WI Dept of Administration and WI Dept of Health Services





## Inspiring Collaborations

Portage County Nutrition Educator, Penny Schmitt, provides nutrition education to participants of parenting classes through Children's Wisconsin in Portage County. The lessons provide parents with information regarding best practices when feeding children, family mealtimes, and healthy food options from MyPlate.

One of the lesson topics is "Patience Works Better than Pressure." Parents learned that pressuring children into eating often backfires and can lead to battles at the dinner table. Parents learned that one of the best things they can do when feeding their children is to provide healthy food options and allow children to choose from those choices. Allowing children to explore and choose foods may help them develop healthier eating habits over time. Parents also learned quick and healthy meal ideas and the importance of being a positive role model. One of the parents commented, "I really liked the method of just letting your child eat and letting go. Also knowing what to do for better snacks and snack times."



Patience in Action



FoodWise "Kids in the Kitchen" with Stevens Point School District



Penny Schmitt & Julia Perock

## Multi-level Program Efforts

The Central Wisconsin Farmers Market Collaborative has completed 2 years of research at 6 different farmers markets in Central Wisconsin. This \$200,000, 2- year planning grant is engaged in researching and developing business plans that will support FoodShare and EBT access at the Stevens Point Farmers Market, with the goal to improve access to healthy foods for folks with limited incomes.

The grant funded a Farmers Market Regional Coordinator as well as paid local interns from UWSP and UW-Madison to engage in research around the potential partnerships that will make nutrition incentive programs successful at the Stevens Point Farmers Market. This work is crucial to expanding access to healthy foods for SNAP recipients while supporting economic opportunities for local farmers and producers.



Local Free Market





# Human Development & Relationships

Sherry Daniels, Human Development & Relationships Educator

## Financial Wellness of Portage County (FWPC)

FWPC is a program for families and individuals, where participants learn how to create financial goals and gain money management skills. The goal of this program is to enable participants to prepare for and take charge of household financial situations that occur due to changes in income or unforeseen hardships. In 2023 FWPC served 63 individuals/families, compared to 75 in 2022.

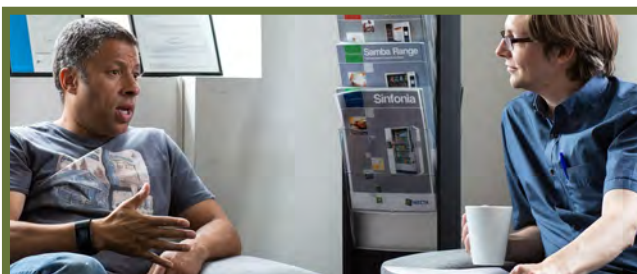


## RentReady

RentReady is a monthly in-person course where participants learn how to find and apply for rental housing, understand their responsibilities as a renter, how to communicate effectively with their landlords, and manage housing expenses. Through this program, homeless populations, and those who have negative credit or rental records can increase their ability to find and keep safe affordable housing, thereby increasing their stability and decreasing their reliance on public support. We have placed just over 100 individuals in the first three years of the RentReady program. In 2023 we worked with 35 RentReady units (individuals or families). We placed 15 units into safe, affordable housing which included 36 people. We have placed many more working with clients in the Salvation Army Rapid Rehousing programs and Transact Hope who also attend our program.

## Lead Encouraging Financial Conversations

Lead Encouraging Financial Conversations, a six-module course (6 hours total) for social workers, case managers, and community agency staff where they learn about financial competency skills such as goal setting, budgeting, building credit and paying off debts, strategies for saving money, and how to engage their clients in money management discussions. The goal of this effort is to build their knowledge and confidence when engaging clients in financial conversations



Encouraging Financial Conversations

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Financial Wellness of Portage County

Served 63 individuals/families

### Rent Ready

Placed 15 units,  
36 people

### Planning AHEAD

Trained 48 people

### Financial Wellness at UWSP

Trained 21 students to be financial coaches



# Human Development & Relationships

Sherry Daniels, Human Development & Relationships Educator

## Financial Training for Drug Court Participants

Multiple trainings teaching financial wellness concepts using Consumer Financial Protection Bureau curriculum for incarcerated populations. This has been very beneficial to participants by helping them pay off court fees and fines, establish a budget, and improve their credit. The goal is to help them make a successful transition.

## Planning AHEAD

Planning AHEAD is a 7-session course (7 hours total) that helps adults of all ages to make end-of-life financial, healthcare, and final wishes decisions in order to reduce the stress experienced by survivors and to ensure that their wishes are honored. Daniels helped to write this curriculum that was pilot tested in Portage County and it is now used statewide. The series was taught three times in Portage County in 2023. Some quotes from attendees were, "This has helped me immensely so my grandson will not have to go through what I did when my father died unexpectedly." "When my mom died, she had nothing planned and it caused many disagreements between my siblings, to the point we no longer talk to each other. I do not want this to happen with my children and this class helped."



Planning Ahead

## Financial Wellness at UWSP

Students attending UWSP have little experience with loans and do not understand the ramifications of this debt long-term. The Student Financial Security Association has been established at UWSP for eight years, due in part to my teaching a day-long financial coaching seminar on campus once each semester. This association offers peer-to-peer financial coaching and financial education events. Most of their questions and education focus on increasing knowledge concerning student loans. In 2023, 21 student financial coaches were trained. Capacity is built into this program by training past coaches to mentor new coaches. In evaluating the training program, the following quotes were received from students. "This training should be a requirement for every student." and "I came to this training feeling very uncomfortable about being a financial wellness coach and I am leaving feeling much more prepared." The financial coaches go on to help other students improve their knowledge of student loans and other financial topics. This helps to improve financial literacy on campus and after graduation.



Financial Wellness Coaching UWSP



# Wisconsin 4-H



Connie Creighton, 4-H Educator

**When you join 4-H, you're a part of something big!** 4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization, with more than six million members and over 90,000 clubs.

The four H's are head, heart, hands, and health. That means we are committed to providing opportunities for youth to learn life skills like decision-making, problem solving, caring for others, generosity, making healthy choices, and more.



4-H Ambassadors in Amherst Fair Parade

4-H Programs help youth learn about new topics, find their passion, and are a big part of who they are. Positive Youth Development programs provide leadership and oversight for the Portage County 4-H program which, in 2023, involves 307 youth, thirteen 4-H Clubs, and 103 adult volunteers. The adult volunteers carry out the roles of club organizational leaders, project leaders, activity leaders, and resource leaders to supplement the work of Extension professionals in providing educational opportunities for the 4-H youth volunteers enrolled as 4-H members throughout Portage County. Our research-based youth enrichment programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to grow into the global leaders of tomorrow. We provide diverse educational opportunities to prepare youth for success in Wisconsin and beyond.

4-H involves youth in project-based education. Through project learning, youth can explore their interests ("sparks") and master new skills. 4-H projects are meant to be hands-on to create a memorable learning experience. This hands-on process allows youth to understand not only how to do something but also why they are doing it.

To measure how well 4-H youth members are thriving (age 13+) Wisconsin 4-H uses the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Survey for the past 4 years. In 2023 13% of the teens surveyed (20) completed the survey in Portage County.



Market Animal Project Participants

## BY THE NUMBERS

### 4-H Clubs in Portage County

13 clubs

### 4-H Youth Members in Portage County

307 Youth Members

### 4-H Leaders in Portage County

103 Adult Volunteer Leaders

### 4-H Programs & Participants

16+ programs

400+ youth & adult participants

144 youth 4-H members showed at the 2023 Portage County Amherst Fair

158 Youth 4-H members showed at the 2023 Portage County Rosholt Fair





# Wisconsin 4-H

Connie Creighton, 4-H Educator

Over the past several years Wisconsin 4-H has been a leader nationally in utilizing the 4-H Youth Thriving Model survey to evaluate and improve program quality.

## Developing Outcomes

Youth who thrive because of participating in 4-H...

- Are more likely to be motivated in school and succeed academically
- Interact with others in positive ways
- Set and achieve high personal standards for themselves
- Contribute to their families, communities, and beyond through generosity
- Are active participants in strong personal and community networks
- Take personal responsibility for themselves and the world around them

## Thrive Survey Portage County 4-H 2023

5.5	<b>Youth Sparks</b> - This outcome measures how 4-H programs give youth opportunities to explore topics they are interested in learning about, passionate about, engaged with.
6.0	<b>Youth Belonging</b> - This outcome measures how safe, welcome and supported youth feel in 4-H programs.
5.8	<b>Caring Adults</b> - This outcome measures how youth feel the adults in their 4-H programs care about them and investing time in youth.
5.8	<b>Challenging Growth</b> - This outcome measures the extent to which adults in the program help youth to see new possibilities, push them to reach higher and hold them accountable.
5.8	<b>Youth-Adult Partnerships</b> - This outcome measures how youth feel about adult volunteers working with them and if they feel respected, listened to and have their ideas taken seriously.

Experience Scoring Guide	
1.0 to 2.2	Very low quality
2.3 to 3.5	Low quality
3.6 to 4.8	Moderate quality
4.9 to 6.1	High quality
6.2 to 7.0	Very high quality

## Are Portage County 4-H Members Thriving?

**YES!** Youth reported all areas of the thriving trajectory as either high or very high.

6.2	<b>Growth Mindset</b>
5.6	<b>Openness to Challenge and Discovery</b>
5.9	<b>Hopeful Purpose</b>
5.2	<b>Goal Management</b>

Experience Scoring Guide	
1.0 to 2.2	Very low quality
2.3 to 3.5	Low quality
3.6 to 4.8	Moderate quality
4.9 to 6.1	High quality
6.2 to 7.0	Very high quality

During 2023 the Portage County 4-H Youth Development program focused on supporting and empowering volunteers and youth leaders to develop their life skills through leadership opportunities.

4-H provides members with opportunities that connect them to their community. All of our thirteen 4-H Clubs participate in one or more community service projects a year like; senior home visits, food pantry collection, Salvation Army bell-ringing, Trick-or-treating for Operation Bootstrap, raking on Make a Difference Day, donating to various organizations and creating supplies for programs like Empty Bowls and the Humane Society.



4-H Members Highway Clean-up



# Wisconsin 4-H

Connie Creighton, 4-H Educator

## Empowering 4-H Youth With Life-Skills & Leadership Development

When asked to tell us something interesting or important they learned in 4-H one teen wrote “I learned all about showing chickens, sewing, and decorating cakes. I love that 4-H has helped me explore these passions as well as discover new ones... Besides the actual projects, I have learned many leadership skills within my club and my community. I have learned about public speaking and how to give demonstrations by going to workshops and contests. I have also gained a great understanding of others by going to 4-H summer camps and becoming a counselor at them as well.” Other teens responded: “I learned how to be a better leader and how to help my community better,” “I learned how to be a leader. Also I learned respect and responsibility. These things will help me when I am an adult but they also help me as a teen,” “I’ve developed a lot of confidence and work ethic with my time in 4H,” “Leadership,” and “The life long friends and connections along the way. I value teaching others what I have been fortunate to learn.”

On the same survey when asked what in life gives you joy and energy? A teen responded “Honestly 4-H. It has given me a great group of friends from around the state. Every time I come home from a 4-H event I feel refreshed and ready to try new things and be the best I can be.”

On the Award Application members were asked How has your 4-H experience contributed to your development as an individual? Teens replied “I have been able to gain fantastic communication skills as well as teamwork skills. Since I am a part of our club's main leadership group as the treasurer I have been able to work with a great group of people which has helped with both of these aspects.” “Since I was little I enjoyed cooking and baking for my family. Where I learned some adulting skills like meal planning for the week, budgeting, and about unit pricing. it had a big impact in my life because I dreamed of becoming a chief.”

## Project Exploration

Connie and the 4-H leaders helped plan and facilitate a series of project workshops offered both in person and virtually.

- A series of county-wide sewing project meetings for beginner sewers. Three instructors and 11 participants.
- Portage County 4-H Leaders received a donation of over 80 boxes of ceramics (about 330 pieces of unpainted ceramics). Three ceramics workshops were held for over 60 4-H members. The generous donation allowed us to offer the workshops free of charge. We donated 20 boxes to the Waupaca 4-H program.



4-H Teen Leaders with “Chris Clover” at 4-H Fall Forum



Participants at the 2023 4-H Barn Quilt Workshop





# Wisconsin 4-H

Connie Creighton, 4-H Educator

- We held 2 virtual record book workshops in May led by 4-H teen leaders and volunteer adult leaders.
- Over 16 youth and adults participated in a cake decorating workshop held in Rosholt. There are 96 youth who have signed up for this project.
- A Barn Quilt workshop was held at Boston School of Forest for 11 participants.
- Shooting sports air rifle project sessions held in Rosholt. Archery project workshop held by the Plover Clovers 4-H Club.
- Market Animal Committee planned and hosted 7 educational events for 62 beef, sheep & swine market animal youth.



Shooting Sports Members

## Camp Programs

- Connie assisted in planning and teaching at the 2023 Winter Leadership Camp. There were 41 youth from eight counties who attended. When asked, 95% of the teens reported that they felt safe at camp, 98% felt welcomed, 90% made new friends, and 85% left the program knowing how to set achievable goals. When asked what their favorite thing about camp was, 9 said making new friends. Other responses included: "the food and seeing the adults be good role models for the youth, the adults taught me how to be a good leader," and "the leadership activities," During camp I also led robotics breakout sessions.
- Partnered to teach 4-H Summer Camp Counselor Training. The training was supposed to be in person for the counselors and due to a variety of schedule conflicts, we changed it to a Zoom.
- Coordinated a two-day overnight camp experience for youth in grades 3-6, where youth participated in STEM activities, nature projects, team building, and made connections with each other. Forty youth, eight counselors, and nine adults from Portage and Waupaca Counties. experienced overnight 4-H camp. Campers reported feeling like their counselor treated them with respect and that their cabin group worked as a team.
- Facilitated two Cloverbud/Explorer 4-H Day Camps in July at the Boston School of Forest for youth in grades K-3. Both 4-H and non-4-H youth were invited to attend. We had 13 campers, three counselors, and four adult volunteers participate in the July 25th day camp while 11 campers, five teen counselors, and four adult volunteers participated in the July 27th day camp. Day camps provide leadership opportunities where our teen leaders taught, lead, and mentored our youngest 4-H members at camp.



4-H members at the 2023 4-H Winter Camp



Camp Counselors leading sing-alongs Cloverbud Camp





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