



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
PORTAGE COUNTY

December 2024 Activity Report

We teach, learn, lead and serve, connecting people with the University of Wisconsin, and engaging with them in transforming lives and communities.

Agriculture

Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent



Farmers of Mill Creek Cover Crop Field Day December 10, 2024. Hosted and provided educational content for the annual Farmers of Mill Creek December Cover Crop Field Day where 110 farmers, agribusiness professionals, youth, and area residents learned about conservation activities in the Mill Creek watershed, benefits of stacking conservation practices, viewed a drone application of cover crops demonstration, toured fall seeded cover crop fields to learn about differences in planting times and annual covers vs. winter hardy cereal rye, and toured the Auburndale High School cover crop demonstration plots. Youth from 2 area High School Ag programs and the Mid-State Tech Ag students joined us.



Discussion about living winter cover crops vs. annual cover crops.

An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title VI, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requirements.



Additional Agriculture work being conducted in Portage County

- Based on direct Wisconsin grower feedback, a Virtual Brown Bag was held in the format of a grower panel. Because Washington, New Jersey, and Massachusetts cranberry growers face low ice accumulation in winters and have learned about sanding without ice through trial and error, Wisconsin growers wanted to hear the lessons learned from these other regions based on 2023's low ice accumulation in Wisconsin. One grower from each of the mentioned regions shared their experiences, successes, and failures, before opening for questions and answers. Total Reach: 49 - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist*
- The agenda for a two-track conference held across two days, with 41 presenters, was arranged and session descriptions were prepared. This will enable growers to prioritize attendance of Cranberry School to further their production goals. Total Reach: 519 - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist*

Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development

Katie Livernash, Community Development Educator

- Planning for an educational session(s) for Portage County town officials where they will learn about where solar projects are approved and pending in Portage County, the laws that apply to solar project decision-makers, and what options they have to be involved. Through this effort, town officials will be prepared for informed decision-making and engagement regarding local land use changes.
- A series of meetings with a local steering committee to plan for the 2025 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference, which will be held June 19-20 in Wisconsin Rapids. The purpose of this conference is to showcase the scope and impact of entrepreneurial programs across the state, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem for all rural Wisconsin communities.
- A series of meetings and ongoing collaboration with Portage County elected officials and staff on the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Through this effort, Portage County leaders were made clear on and are carrying out next steps to be prepared for upcoming broadband grant applications put forth by internet service providers. Total Reach: 6 Portage County staff members and elected officials.
- Extension is serving on the local project team for the Portage County Safe Streets and Roads for All Action Plan creation, whereas this effort seeks to engage community members through demonstration and education activities as well as through public input during the planning process. The goal of this plan is to eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries through the development of a comprehensive safety action plan.



- Partnered with CAP Services, Inc. and the UW Center for Community and Non-Profit Studies to develop a grant proposal to fund and build CAP Services' housing repairs programming. A goal of this project is to improve the accessibility and timeliness of their services in order to improve housing conditions for low to moderate income individuals and improve health equity in housing.
- A series of meetings with local non-profit agencies, local elected officials, and municipal and county staff members where they discussed the possible creation of a Portage County Housing Taskforce, including feasibility, logistics, and focus of a workgroup. The goal is to coordinate housing efforts and support action across Portage County so that housing access and affordability is improved.
- Serving as a member of the founding board for the Portage County Community Land Trust start-up, where the goal is to establish a community land trust that ensures long-term housing affordability and stability in Portage County.

Additional Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development work being conducted in Portage County

- Workshops and webinar for planning and zoning staff, elected officials, zoning board members, and interested community members where they learn about the role of the zoning board so that they can make more informed decisions for their community. Total Reach: 200 participants for three workshops in three counties, plus 169 participants in webinar. - *Karen Blaha, Outreach Specialist, Center for Land Use Education & Lynn Markham, Shoreland and Land Use Specialist*
- A facilitated meeting with producer-led watershed groups in the North Central Region, where producers and collaborators learned about an opportunity for farmer leadership training and planned an in-person regional gathering. Through this meeting, producers and collaborators learned about an opportunity for their group members to participate in a training to help strengthen farmer-to-farmer programs by offering learning opportunities to increase producers' skills in leadership, communication, and relational organization. Producers and collaborators also discussed the value and benefit of participating in an in-person regional gathering to introduce new groups to the area and discuss the future plans and goals of each group. Total Reach: 5 producers and 5 collaborators from Land & Water Conservation departments - *Anna James, Regional Natural Resource Educator*



A packet of worksheets and tools to provide a structured approach for demonstration farm project teams to plan and execute outreach efforts effectively. This effort was designed to improve water quality and healthier soils in the Great Lakes Basin by equipping project partners with tools to achieve effective outreach. Total Reach: We used the Demo Farm Field Day Planner for at least 4 field days, each with a planning team of 4+ core planners. Therefore, that guidance document helped at least 16 people. We used the Video Pre-Production Planning Sheet for at least 6 videos, with each video having a planning team of 3-4 people. Therefore, that guidance document helped at least 20 people. We used the Shaping a Farmer Presentation for at least 5 farmer presentations, and we shared this to a few others outside of our own



demonstration farm. Therefore, that sheet helped at least 8 people. - *Maranda Miller, Regional Natural Resources Educator*



A video series called “Fielding Questions” highlighting successes and challenges farmers are facing while implementing soil health practices in Northeastern Wisconsin. This ongoing effort was designed to support peer-to-peer learning amongst farmers by featuring local producers sharing how they’re implementing soil health practices. Total Reach: Facebook reach was 5,000 to 13,000 people, with full video plays (on Facebook and Youtube combined) ranging from 90-205 on 5-minute videos. - *Maranda Miller, Regional Natural Resources Educator*



A study to better determine times of travel for groundwater in the central sands. This study will also check for correlation between land use and nitrate concentration in streams in the central sands. These results can be used by county conservationists and citizens to better understand the source areas of their groundwater and the length of time needed to see changes in water quality with changes in land use. - *Jen Mcnelly, Wood County Natural Resources Groundwater Educator, David Hart, Extension Wisconsin Sea Grant Program Leader & Maureen Muldoon, Extension Hydrogeologist*



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 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.

FoodWise

Mallory McGivern, Nutrition Administrator; Michelle Van Krey, Healthy Communities Coordinator; Penny Schmitt, FoodWise Nutrition Educator

- Shared leadership in the Giving Gardens committee of HPPP (Hunger & Poverty Prevention Partnership), where emphasis is placed on promoting and supporting efforts to maintain community gardens, improve food security, and provide educational programming in Portage County.
- Serving on a planning committee for a Rural Community Connection event in Almond, hosted by the ADRC. The purpose of this event is to create opportunities for intergenerational connection to build supportive community relationships.
- A quarterly nutrition education series in Portage County for adults with young children as part of the Children's Wisconsin LEAP (Learning Essentials about Parenting) program where they learn about incorporating healthy eating habits into the family routine, including family meals and eating more fruits and vegetables. The goal of this effort is to encourage healthy eating behaviors at home.



- Planning for an updated emergency food resource guide and food pantry participant/provider survey in collaboration with food providers and community organizations. The goal is to provide an updated, accurate copy of the food resource guide to community members and organizations and to use the pantry survey to learn if the needs of pantry guests are being met.

Human Development and Relationships

Sherry Daniels, Human Development and Relationships Educator

- A series of strength training sessions (StrongBodies) in partnership with Portage County ADRC, where older adults also receive education. Participants engage in regular strength training exercises to improve muscle strength, balance, and flexibility so they can stay healthy and socially connected. Total Reach: 27 senior adults
- A coaching 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.
- An online 14-module program ("Money Matters") for adults, where they learn about credit scores and reports, making a spending plan, what to do when you can't pay your bills, and identifying financial strengths. The goal is for participants to set and achieve their financial goals, save for their future, build good credit and pay off debts, and maintain positive relationships with financial institutions.
- Offered a RentReady class 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, those with negative rental records and those new to renting are able to increase their ability to find and keep safe affordable housing, thereby increasing their stability and decreasing their reliance on public support.

Upcoming Events

- A RentReady training will be held on January 29, 2025. Held in the county Annex, rooms 1 and 2, from 4:30-6:00pm.
- Two open-to-the-public Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Workshops will be held as part of the Portage County Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan update. The same information will be covered at both workshops.
 - Wednesday, January 15, 2025, from 6:00-8:00pm at Mid-State Technical College, 1001 Centerpoint Drive, Stevens Point, WI



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- Thursday, January 16, 2025, from 6:00-8:00pm at the Jensen Community Center, 487 North Main Street, Amherst, WI

- Rural Community Connections Taskforce Community Winter Celebrations:
 - Friday, January 17th, 3:00 – 6:00 pm at the Food & Farm Exploration Center in Plover
 - Friday, January 31st, 3:00 - 6:30 pm at the Jensen Center in Amherst
 - Saturday, February 15th, 12:00 – 4:00 pm at the Lions Camp in Rosholt
 - Saturday, February 22nd, 12:00 – 4:00 pm at Almond-Bancroft School in Almond
 - Saturday, March 8th, 12:00 - 4:00 pm at Kennedy Elementary School in Junction City