



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

## 4-H – Positive Youth Development

*Amy Boelk, 4-H Program Educator*

- Needs assessment surveys were deployed to current 4-H families and leaders within the county to capture feedback on roles, access, involvement, challenges, and needs. Results will be used to develop county-wide programming and address existing challenges. Total Reach: 270 members and volunteers; 60 respondents
- Revision of all project record book pages in collaboration with the Portage County 4-H Leaders Association to make the pages more accessible, easier to read, and youth-friendly based on feedback from stakeholders. The goal is to have simplified, accessible PDF pages in a youth-friendly format to encourage more youth and families to participate in record-keeping throughout the year. Total Reach: 8 record book committee revision members and 250 youth members
- Ongoing planning for transition of duties, clarification of roles and responsibilities and opportunity mapping with the Rosholt Fair Board, UW Extension and Wisconsin Association of Fairs. The goal is to smoothly transition the roles and responsibilities of the Rosholt Fair Board in hosting a fair and completing DATCP and other statutory requirements back to their board/organization and out of the UW Extension office in Portage County where it had inappropriately resided for several decades. The purpose for this transition is to increase the capacity to provide educational opportunities for member and non-member youth in Portage County during the fair weekend. Total Reach: 10 board members; 280 4-H youth and families
- An interview session for award and ambassador applicants where participants practiced interview skills and received feedback to receive recognition for their contributions and leadership within 4-H as well as to build Career and College readiness skills. Total Reach: 3 youth interviewers/peer reviewers and 8 youth interviewees

## Agriculture

*Ken Schroeder, Agriculture Agent*



A Producer-Led watershed protection project for the Tomorrow/Waupaca River Watershed farmers, agribusiness professionals, and area residents where they learn about and adopt soil and water conservation practices to reduce nitrates entering the groundwater and the overall environmental impact of agriculture. Total Reach: 70 Farmers and Agribusiness Professionals 650 Readers of the Farmers for Tomorrow Newsletters.

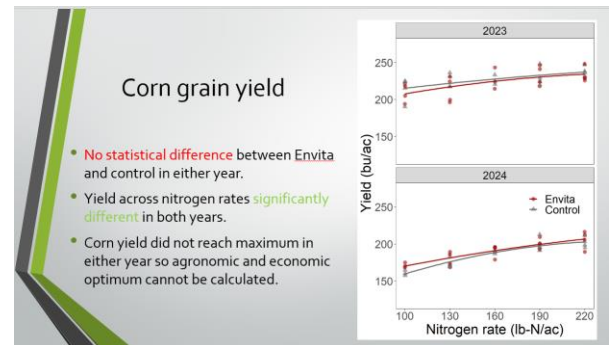


- Farmers for Tomorrow River watershed annual winter kickoff meeting held Feb 11, 2025. 30 area farmers learned how a 4th generation farmer and Leopold Conservation Award finalist from Minnesota, Tom Cotter, transitioned to conservation cropping systems and incorporated grass-fed beef into his farming operation to improve soil health on his farm. In addition, farmers learned about the cost-share opportunities available through the Farmers for Tomorrow project.
- Nitrogen Optimization Project presentation at local grower meeting. 110 growers and crop consultants learned about results of the 2-year on-farm research study looking at Effects of Nitrogen Rate on Corn Grain Yield on Irrigated Sandy Loam Soils in Portage County.



### Additional Agriculture work being conducted in Portage County

- A special program at the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Conference for college students to learn about the specialty crops industry in Wisconsin and their efforts to be sustainable. Through this effort students will have exposure to the breadth of careers and the science of sustainability available in the potato and vegetable industry. - *Natasha Paris, Regional Crops Educator*
- An updated suite of nutrient management publications is being prepared to enable cranberry farmers to reference the most up-to-date information regarding nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, and micronutrient needs and efficiency for cranberry production. The current publication suite is from 2000, and does not address modern hybrids in sufficient depth. - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist & Amaya Atucha, Fruit Crops Extension Specialist*
- A Virtual Brown Bag Zoom meeting was held for Wisconsin cranberry growers, where participants learned about on-road and off-road fuel differentiation and maintaining their farms in compliance, as well as refreshing education on Worker Protection and Safety. Total Reach: 52 - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist*
- A Nutrient Management Plan Training was organized and delivered to refresh cranberry growers on nutrient best management practices and on the creation & maintenance of a current Nutrient Management Plan for their marshes. Total Reach: 26 cranberry growers - *Allison Jonjak, Cranberry Outreach Specialist & Amaya Atucha, Fruit Crops Extension Specialist*





## Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development

### *Katie Livernash, Community Development Educator*

- Partnering on a Wisconsin Partnership Program - Community Impact Grant with CAP Services, Inc. and the UW Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies to grow and improve 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. The grant timeline is January 2025 - December 2027.
- Planning for a strategic planning effort with the Stevens Point Fire Department to identify and prioritize goals and initiatives as a department over the next 5 years. The impact of this effort is that values, goals, and objectives are aligned across the department, overall strengthening the department's sustainability and growth to effectively serve Portage County residents.
- A series of meetings with a local steering committee to plan for the 2025 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference, which will be held June 16-18 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.
- 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.
- 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**

- Planning for in-person and virtual workshops in collaboration with Wisconsin Farmer's Union and the R-STEP Collaborative. The goal is to provide an overview of large-scale solar energy opportunities in the economy and to discuss common contract terms in solar leases with Wisconsin farmers and landowners so that participants can analyze legal risk when considering these new economic opportunities. Total Reach: 31 farmers, landowners, local government officials, agriculture service professionals, or community members - *Kelly Wilfert, Farm Management Outreach Specialist, Bill Oemichen, Extension Local Government Law Educator, Diane*



*Mayerfeld, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Statewide Coordinator, & Sherrie Gruder, Sustainable Design Specialist & Energy Program Manager*

- 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 nine-month program (Local Government Leadership Academy) offered statewide for elected officials, department heads, directors, managers, and other local government leaders where they develop effective leadership skills, including relationship-building, communication, decision-making, and vision. The purpose of this program is to help local government leaders develop professionally while also improving the overall function of their local government, thus increasing their capacity to provide quality services. Total Reach: 24 Local government officials and/or staff members. - *Elizabeth Mccrank, Community Leadership Specialist, Amy Ebert, Waupaca County Community Development Educator, Benoy Jacob, Extension Community Development Institute Director & Danielle Hairston-Green, Human Development & Relationships Institute Director*



A facilitated discussion for Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri, a producer-led watershed protection group, and UW-Madison and UW-Extension Researchers where participants discussed current and future research in vegetable and potato production systems. The goal of this effort was for participants to identify current research, discuss gaps or support needed for on farm research, and collaborate on new and innovative practices to protect and improve water quality. This discussion provided an opportunity for producer-led group members to connect with researchers and identify potential projects and support for on farm research. Total Reach: 4 farmers 5 agronomists 4 researchers - *Anna James, Regional Natural Resource Educator, Guolong Liang, Commercial Vegetable Agriculture Water Quality Outreach Specialist, Natasha Paris, Regional Crops 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*

- FoodWise is a member of the Rural Community Connections Taskforce planning team with Portage County Public Health and ADRC. The taskforce planned a Community Connection event in Almond with the purpose of supporting community connections and decreasing social isolation.
- A 5-week nutrition education series for 3rd grade classrooms at Jefferson and McKinley Elementary School, where students learn about the importance of eating from the five food groups, try new fruits and vegetables, and learn how food and physical activity can help them now and in the future. This effort was designed to make healthy eating a positive experience which will help students make healthier food choices in the future.
- A series of StrongBodies strength training sessions in partnership with Berkshire (age-qualified housing), where older adults also receive nutrition and health education. Participants engage in regular strength training exercises to improve muscle strength, balance, and flexibility so they can stay healthy and socially connected.
- FoodWise staff Penny Schmitt and Mallory McGivern attended WI Chili Lunch at McKinley Elementary School, where food service staff served chili to students to promote local Wisconsin foods in schools.
- 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.
- Co-hosted the kick off meeting of the Central Wisconsin Farmers Market Collaborative (CWFMC) and Farmers Market Promotion Program grant. This collaborative and grant will bring together farmers markets from the central Wisconsin region to create a space for market managers to learn, connect and collaborate on making their markets more successful, including increasing access to EBT and other nutrition programs at markets.
- Collaborating with students from UWSP to create a Food Access Map for Portage County that includes grocery stores, farmers markets, farm stands, convenience stores and food pantries. The







purpose of this project is to assist community members in understanding all food resources available to them in Portage County.

## Human Development and Relationships

*Sherry Daniels, Human Development and Relationships Educator*

- 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.
- A 7-session course 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. Total Reach: 39 older adults
- A 6-session course for renters 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 supports.

### **Additional Human Development and Relationships & Health and Well Being work being conducted in Portage County**

- I conducted a virtual workshop on 'using data to inform grant-writing' for participants from Hmong and Hispanic Network (H2N). This is a continuation of a previous workshop and focuses on locating public health data and evidence-based approaches. This workshop results in increased capacity of community partners to utilize evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in program development and implementation, and increased community capacity to identify and address health inequities through the development and strengthening of processes and resources. It also helps build relationship with Hmong and Hispanic communities in central Wisconsin Total Reach: Seven people from H2N received the training. - *Pearly Wong, Regional Community Health Coordinator*
- Collaborate with Rural Community Connections Task Force in Portage County to plan for an "Isolation to Connection" event that brings together individuals, organizations and coalitions across central Wisconsin to network and discuss collaboration opportunity. The goal is to



increase collaborative efforts in promoting community health. - *Pearly Wong, Regional Community Health Coordinator*

- 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. Total Reach: 24 participants - *Margo Dieck, Eau Claire County Health and Well-Being Educator & Luisa Gerasimo, Dunn County Human Development and Relationships Educator*

## Upcoming Events

- [Rural Community Connections Taskforce Community Winter Celebrations](#): Saturday, March 8th, 12:00 - 4:00 pm at Kennedy Elementary School in Junction City
- A [Grant Writing Basics virtual workshop](#) will be held on both Tuesday, March 11th from 6-8 pm, and Wednesday, March 12th from 12-2 pm.
- A presentation to WISCAP agencies on the WI Partnership Program's Community Impact Grant award with CAP Service's for their Housing Repairs program will be held virtually on Tuesday, March 11th from 12-1 pm.
- An educational presentation on the Portage County Community Land Trust (CLT) start-up for the Noon Rotary Club will be held on Wednesday, March 26th at 12:00 pm at the Rose House.