Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
DUNN COUNTY

April 2026 Report

Upcoming Events:

- May 13: Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference Green Lake, WI
- May 16 Horticulture Conference Transitioning to Native Plants: How to improve the biodiversity of your garden
- May 16: "Emotion Regulation in Action" Workshop for 50 early childhood educators
- May 19: Healthcare in the Digital Age: Leveraging Broadband for Better Health and Stronger Communities Rice Lake- Northwood Technical College
- May 20: County Officials Workshops in Wisconsin Florian Gardens Eau Claire, WI

Agriculture

Jerry Clark | *Regional Crops & Soils Educator*



Sign up to receive the Extension in the Valley agriculture and horticulture e-newsletter HERE .

An educational field tour where farmers learned about planting date impact and persistence of five cover crop species to help farmers make decisions about cover crop species selection and timeliness of planting.

An on-farm research study to better understand manure application, commercial nitrogen application rates, and nitrogen credits on corn yield and potential effect on ground water. Results from this study will help farmers, agriculture industry professionals, and agency professionals in adjusting manure and commercial nitrogen applications to optimize corn yield and protect groundwater resources.

A regional workshop where farmers and agronomists learned about local nitrogen on-farm research to better understand research results, data, and improve nitrogen application to improve farm profitability and protect ground and surface water.

Spotlight

Cover crops are becoming widely adopted to cropping systems across the Chippewa Valley. Questions remain about cover crop species selection, benefits, and challenges to meet the goals of cover crop adaptation. Planting date and species selection are two decisions driving cover crop establishment and success. A Multi-Species Cover Crop Tour was held in partnership with the Chippewa Valley Producer-led Watershed to observe five species of cover crops planted on three different dates following three different crops. The tour was anchored by the Cover Crop Establishment Demonstration Trials funded by the Wisconsin Fertilizer Research Council. Berseem clover, winter camelina, hairy vetch, winter triticale, and

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winter rye were planted in fall 2025 following winter rye grain harvest (August 25), corn silage (September 23), and soybeans (October 2). Biomass samples were taken in November 13 from the August 25 planting demonstration which revealed a range from hairy vetch (1920 lbs./acre) to berseem clover (192 lbs./acre.) Thirteen farmers and agronomy professionals attended the tour and increased knowledge about the impact of cover crop species selection and planting date. A handout was created using photos and biomass measurements from each planting date location. Farmers were engaged as many questions were asked about field history, agronomic practices, and planting equipment.

Ryan Sterry | *Regional Livestock Educator*



We delivered a virtual six-session educational course for beginning and prospective beef producers during evening Zoom sessions. Our goal was to increase knowledge across key beef production topics including marketing, cow-calf/stocker/backgrounder/finishing enterprises, handling facilities, health and veterinary care, grazing, feeding and nutrition, and reproduction and genetics. As a result, participants reported greater confidence and intent to adopt improved management practices that support profitable and sustainable beef operations. (With: Extension Beef Team)

An online presentation for beef producers on best management practices and current research on genetics and selecting breeding stock, with an emphasis on matching production goals and genetics to each farm's environment and management (with Beth McIlquham and Bill Halfman).

The Chippewa Valley Forage Council Beef and Dairy Forage Seminar was an in-person educational workshop for forage producers and ag industry professionals. Forages tie together agronomy, water quality, dairy, and livestock production interests.

Spotlight

Extension Regional Educators (Jerry Clark and Ryan Sterry) and Outreach Specialists (Leonard Polzien, Todd Prill, Luana Queiroz, and Bill Halfman) addressed current agronomy, beef, and dairy production topics at the 2026 Chippewa Valley Forage Council Spring Seminar. They included a dairy market outlook, transitioning forage needs when transitioning from dairy to beef, nitrogen management research, assessing the needs of alfalfa growers, managing crop rotations for water quality, and an update from the Midwest Forage Association. A seminar evaluation was completed by nine attendees (scale 1 = poor and 5 = excellent). All presentations resulted in a gain in knowledge ranging from +1.1 to +2.0.

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Horticulture

Margaret Murphy | *Regional Horticulture Educator*

Extension in the Valley agriculture and horticulture e-newsletter, view newsletters HERE .



Provide garden articles to the public published in the Extension in the Valley, tri-county monthly newsletter that focuses on Horticulture and Agriculture news, where participants learn about various topics. This month includes information on growing the classic hollyhock flower as well as timely topics from Wisconsin Yard & Garden Weekly. This ongoing effort is designed to keep participants connected to current horticulture topics, gardening tips and concerns and includes links to many other articles as well as upcoming events.

Staffed an Extension table at the GE Bleskacek Family Memorial Bloomer Public Library resource fair for the public to provide information on horticulture and other Extension programs and upcoming events. This effort was to provide information and raise awareness on available resources to the public.

An activity to illustrate the wellness benefits of gardening for participants in the Chippewa County Recovery Court Program. Participants learned how gardening is a great way to incorporate many wellness benefits such as stress relief, focus recovery and a sense of accomplishment into your life and were able to build their own spring flower garden in a pot. This effort was designed to encourage people to include plants and gardening in their lifestyle to experience the many benefits that gardening can provide.

A virtual presentation for a StrongBodies class where participants learned the principles of companion planting and how it can support soil health, save space with inter-planting, provide mutual support for nearby plants and help discourage insect pests so they can be encouraged to food garden, even if space or mobility is limited, increasing their intake of healthy foods.

An in-person presentation for attendees of the JCEP (Joint Council of Extension Professionals) Conference focused on accessible and adaptive gardening strategies to help individuals of all abilities continue to garden as their needs change over time. Participants learned about research highlighting the lifelong benefits of gardening and explored creative, practical ways to stay connected to gardening at every stage of life so they can continue to experience the many wellness benefits gardening provides including stress relief, focus recovery, fostering strength and balance and delivering a sense of accomplishment.

An in-person class for the public to teach participants how to start a vegetable garden, understand soil health, learn about plant selection, planting, and garden maintenance so they can grow their own produce and experience the benefits of food gardening such as increasing their intake of healthy foods.

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An in-person hands-on class to teach at risk youth how to plan, plant and tend a vegetable garden. Participants learn about soil health, plant selection, techniques for small-space gardening and garden maintenance so they can learn to grow their own food and experience the wellness benefits of gardening including increased access to healthy foods, stress relief, focus recovery and a sense of accomplishment.

Spotlight

Gardening for life is a program focused on accessible and adaptive gardening strategies to highlight the lifelong benefits of gardening and explores creative, practical ways to stay connected to gardening at every stage of life so that participants can continue to experience wellness benefits such as stress relief, focus recovery, increasing strength and balance and feeling a sense of accomplishment. The program includes a presentation, handouts, and discussion plus, a sampling of tools that can help make gardening easier and safer.

Community Development

Garret Zastoupil | *Regional Community & Leadership Development Educator*



Planning for a regional satellite site for the Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (CommNS) semi-annual conference for community leaders and nonprofit professionals in collaboration with Clear Vision Eau Claire. The goal is to provide local access to statewide plenary sessions paired with interactive regional workshops, so that Chippewa Valley organizations can build their capacity for positive community change without the barriers of travel. (In collaboration with: Elizabeth Mccrank & Sarah Schlosser)

Co-Chairing the Childcare Action Team with Health Dunn Right, guiding a new group to identify its mission and goals, and development and implement an action plan. The goal of the group is to support affordable, accessible, high-quality childcare in Dunn County by bringing together a variety of partners from the business, education, and nonprofit communities.

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.

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

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leadership is equipped to make intentional policy decisions and difficult budget choices based on a shared, data-driven framework.

Spotlight

Professional development opportunities for the nonprofit and civic sector are often concentrated in Madison, creating geographical and financial barriers for organizations in West Central Wisconsin. The Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (CommNS) identified a need to decentralize their semi-annual conference to better serve the entire state. Locally, organizations in the Chippewa Valley—which are navigating complex social and economic shifts—require accessible platforms to collaborate, share resources, and learn from statewide experts while addressing the specific needs of their local communities. In response to this outreach from CommNS, I am collaborating with Clear Vision Eau Claire to host and facilitate a day-long satellite workshop in April 2026. This effort builds upon our established partnership with Clear Vision as a key driver of civic engagement. Our response involves a "hybrid-local" design: we will live-stream the morning plenary and keynote sessions from the Madison conference to provide high-level insights, followed by locally-facilitated interactive workshops in Eau Claire. This structure allows us to bridge the gap between statewide research and local application, making the content relevant to the specific landscape of West Central Wisconsin.

Health and Well-Being

Sandy Tarter
FoodWIse Coordinator



Joy Weisner
FoodWIse Educator



Weekly meetings with WI Nutrition Incentive Network and Double Up Food Bucks team to bring state funding for nutrition incentives to area farmers markets offering a Market Match/Double Bucks program. This effort will help support families with FoodShare to access fresh fruits and vegetables. Menomonie and Eau Claire Downtown Farmers Markets will be expanding their match programs from $10 per week up to $20 per week to participants.

Ongoing efforts include continued collaboration and relationship-building with new staff at the Western Dairyland Fresh Start Program to sustain a nutrition education series for at-risk teens and young adults.

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The series focuses on nutrition, food preparation and cooking, and food safety, with the goal of empowering participants to adopt healthier lifestyles through building practical skills for preparing nutritious snacks and meals at home.

Collaborating efforts with Positive Youth Development (PYD)/4-H Educator and HWB Educator to address mental health decline, stress, and promote parent-child interactions for families in the Chippewa Valley. Planning a take-home activity and resource packet in which FoodWIse educator provided two resources - 30 days of Movement Calendar (Iowa State Extension) and Look and Cook Recipes (Discover MyPlate).

Human Development and Relationships

Luisa Gerasimo | *Human Development and Relationships Educator*



Better Questions: A one hour workshop for county Human Services staff, where participants learned to identify the questions they ask themselves and how to pick better questions to begin a path to learning that leads to positivity and resilience at home and at work. (See Spotlight near the end of this segment).

Literacy Link Programs include the **Read and Connect Workshop** where parents in jail learn the importance of interacting with and reading aloud to children. This is followed by **Making Reading Memories** where parents practice interactive reading, choose a book, and then are video recorded reading storybooks. The books are mailed to the children at home. The goal is to reduce the trauma of separation, strengthen family relationships and at the same time increase children's exposure to books.

Adopt a Book Bins: A cooperative project that will supply free children's book bins in local laundromats. The goal is to help families access books, increase time spent reading to children, and point local families to Extension Family Engagement and Relationships and local library resources. Book donation and sharing numbers will be reported later this spring.

Fathers in Focus: A monthly parenting program open to all and designed for fathers where participants learn skills to build their children's social and emotional learning. This series is designed to improve understanding of positive parenting practices, while providing social connections for fathers and father figures. (In partnership with: Pattie Carroll, Adam Trunzo, Amanda Griswold, Beverly Doll, Bob Wiegel, Heidi Ungrodt, Mary Campbell Wood, Renee Koenig, Truong Tran)

Resilient Co-Parenting: A monthly topic-specific series for parents and caregivers experiencing separation, divorce, or changes in the custody of their children, where they learn skills to improve communication and problem-solving, support children emotionally, and keep kids out of the middle of conflict. This series is designed to improve understanding of positive parenting practices that are useful

during stress, while providing social connection for parents experiencing family transitions. (With: Hannah Zellmer, Adam Trunzo, Amanda Griswold, Beverly Doll, Heidi Ungrodt, Jill Vanairsdale, Kaera Aubart, Mary Campbell Wood, Missy Bablick, Renee Koenig, Todd Wenzel, Tracy Henegar)

Spotlight: Professional Development Training Provided to County Department at No Cost

In early 2025, the director of Human Services asked me if I could do a short workshop for staff in 2026. After several discussions of what was possible given time and cost restrictions, we landed on this workshop, for which I am a certified facilitator and can provide content at no cost to the county. The topic was very timely in that the division has just wrapped up a staff satisfaction study and are beginning steps meant to improve the workplace and increase positive collaboration.



Positive Youth Development

Zachary Rozmiarek | *4-H Program Educator*



The May Clover Courier can be viewed HERE.

Planning for a tri-county intern onboarding training program that introduces summer interns to positive youth development theory, builds our Area 6 team, sets clear professional goals for interns, and provides a solid foundation for support of the Area 6 4-H summer programs. (With: Rachel Hart-Brinson & Jordan Blue)



Planning for May 3 Camp Counselor Training where counselors practice leading their sessions, continue to build their leadership abilities, and practice empathy in order to prepare for camp. (In collaboration with: Rachel Hart-Brinson & Seth Harrmann).

"Around the World in 80 Minutes" the Dunn County Spring Break Stay-cation was held at the Colfax library. Youth "traveled" to seven different locations around the globe where they learned about culture, landmarks, and traditions. They made a craft at each station that they took home with them. We had 13 youth participate and 1 youth leader assisting with the program. This program was planned and presented by Ann Lee, the 4-H assistant.

Five 4-H youth joined Dunn County 4-H and staff from the Neighbors Nursing Home to learn about and celebrate their residents! Generation Celebration 5 part in person/virtual hybrid series where 4-H youth

interview a resident at the Neighbors and write and present their story. Thus far they have learned about interviewing and interviewed their residents. There are two more sessions where the youth will write up a story and present it to the residents at the Neighbors.

The Youth Equine Project held their Horse 101 Spring Meeting on Sunday April 12at the horse arena on the Dunn County Fairgrounds. They worked to get the youth ready for the practice season by discussing right nights, clinicians, and the Dunn County Fair. The 4-H educator was on hand to share information and answer questions.

Value Added Programming

Health insurance Navigator assistance for anyone in Wisconsin, where a total of 74,147 coverage services were provided directly to increase enrollment, retention, and appropriate use of benefits. Through this effort, our Navigators assisted 13,360 consumers with qualified health plan enrollments through the federal Health Insurance Marketplace and applications to Medicaid, supporting access to health care and improved health outcomes. (Adam Vanspankeren)

Planning for a 'sober event landing page' for community members seeking alcohol-free spaces in partnership with Volume One. The goal of this effort is to cultivate a permanent online space for community members to find alcohol-free restaurants and events, and learn from community members who are alcohol-free and how they navigate the Chippewa Valley through long-form stories and articles. (Margo Dieck)

Planning for a Partnership Summit across Chippewa, Dunn, and Eau Claire Counties in collaboration with partners who work on food insecurity, housing, transportation, and childcare. The goal of this effort is to provide education on local infrastructure through a panel discussion and utilize collective action to achieve common goals through the facilitation design of Open Space Technology. (Margo Dieck)

Between January and December 2025, Covering Wisconsin offered 18 virtual trainings for health insurance enrollment assisters and other professionals located throughout Wisconsin. The 503 registrants were educated on Medicaid, BadgerCare Plus, and HealthCare.gov Marketplace eligibility and enrollment policy and program processes to enable effective application help and successful consumer coverage enrollment and retention. Our webinars have up-to-date information regarding health care policy changes and updates, complex case support, fixing coverage for consumers that have been victims of health insurance enrollment fraud, Special Enrollment Periods, and guidance for meeting both federal and state licensing requirements. (Elizabeth Rothe, Adam Vanspankeren, Allison Espeseth)

A study to better understand the bedrock geology of Dunn County. Results from this study will help the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and county officials make informed land and water use

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decisions. (Eric Stewart)

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.

Upcoming events

Event Calendar – Extension

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