



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
OCONTO COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension Oconto County

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UW-MADISON EXTENSION

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

As a statewide engagement arm of UW–Madison, the Division of Extension embodies the Wisconsin Idea to extend university knowledge to every corner of the state. That mission started in 1912 with Extension’s first agent making farm visits and continues today along with community and business development, youth engagement, and well-being programming. Our statewide network of educators and specialists with the UW–Madison College of Agricultural & Life Sciences and on UW campuses across Wisconsin is responding every day to emerging and longstanding hurdles residents are overcoming to compete and prosper. We’ve identified key opportunities to leverage local resources and leading research to affect change and improve lives through:

Supporting Wisconsin’s Agriculture Industry))

We use applied research from UW-Madison’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in addition to other Campuses along with educational outreach to support an economically viable agricultural industry that produces safe food in an environmentally responsible manner.

Fostering Leadership and Civic Engagement))

We work with communities across the state to support individuals, groups, and organizations to enhance quality of life and improve overall well-being, leading to stronger communities today and for generations to come.

Creating Positive, Healthy Change))

We catalyze positive change in Wisconsin families through evidence-based programs focused on nutrition, food security, food safety, chronic disease prevention, mental health, and substance misuse.

Empowering Families and Communities))

We support families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding, enhance aging-friendly communities, coach effective parents, and help families put technology, mindfulness, and financial awareness to use.

Enhancing Resilient Natural Resource Systems))

We help individuals and communities make informed decisions that support the state’s rich land, water, and mineral resources. We’re working to ensure that our resources remain at the heart of our communities, economies, and state identity.

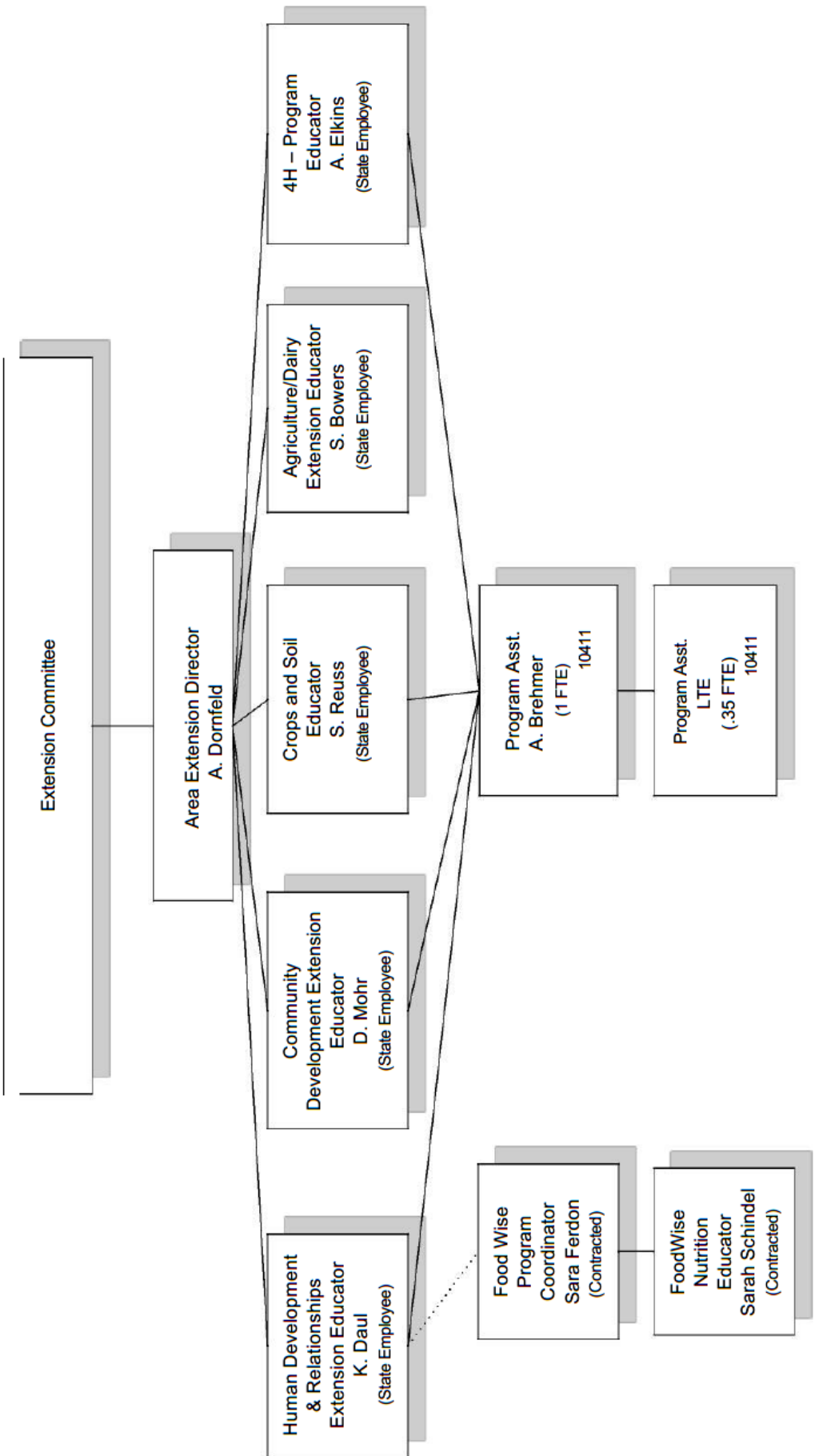
Furthering Positive Youth Development))

We prepare the youth of today to become effective, empathetic leaders of tomorrow. From teens advising local government to Wisconsin 4-H clubs, we offer diverse educational opportunities that put youth on the path to success in Wisconsin and beyond..

Home Committee))

Extension reports to the Land & Water Resources committee. They meet the first Tuesday after the first Monday of each month. The members of the committee are; Mike Beyer, Tim Cole, Wayne Kaczrowski, Pat Scanlan, and Keith Schneider.

EXTENSION OFFICE





Agriculture

Agriculture Programming: The regional model

2024 Agricultural Extension programming was delivered through the recently adopted regional educator model. Scott Reuss served Crops/Soils programming needs (Langlade, Marinette, Oconto & Shawano Counties) and Stephanie Bowers served as the Dairy Educator for Oconto County, along with Shawano, Outagamie, and Winnebago. Horticulture programming is not generally delivered through this model, although Reuss does provide invited topical presentations when merited & available.

Both in-person and virtual events (webinars) are utilized to provide convenient and accessible means for farms and agricultural service providers to engage with Extension programming. Local field days, workshops, and printed materials are still the cornerstone of Extension Agriculture programming. Webinar series that are managed by groups of educators across the state provide access to the latest research findings and recommended practices in a wider array of topic areas.

Regional educators coordinate local events and information transfer and assist with state-wide efforts. Not all state-wide efforts are webinars, as numerous conferences, workshop series, and educational resources are developed to reach a broader audience. Extension educators serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and practical application, helping farms stay updated on industry advancements and improve their operations.

Collaboration drives Extension educators' ability to efficiently provide high-quality programming to Oconto County farms and agricultural service providers. Partners include the Green Bay West Shores Demonstration Farm Network, Land & Water Conservation, Farm Service Agency & Natural Resources Conservation Service, Breakfast on the Farm committees, County Fairs, and local producer groups. This collaborative approach allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, resulting in programs that effectively address the needs and interests of the agricultural community.



Waterhemp
regrowth after
3 herbicide
applications

Ag Research

Research data drives Extension educational information. Reuss adds to local and state-wide programming by conducting many different on-farm research projects.

2024 projects included:

- Winter wheat sulfur rate effects on yield;
- Manure and nitrogen rate impacts on corn grain yield.
- Soy non-dicamba herbicide efficacy.
- Nitrogen rates/sources effect on winter triticale yield; Site also in place for 2025 data collection.
- Berseem clover cover crop after winter wheat effects on corn nitrogen needs.



Agriculture

Crops/Soils Programs delivered in 2024

Ag Newsletter articles, field days and events drive programming at the county level. The reality of the regional model means that programming within the county will vary annually. When coordinating events, Reuss makes sure to provide a mix of local research data/expertise in conjunction with state-wide Extension specialists' expertise and perspective to broaden the scope and improve the applicability of information.

Program topics delivered through 2024 events held in or very near Oconto County included Soybean Mgmt.; Grain Crop Marketing & Risk Mgmt.; Pesticide Applicator Training; Youth Machinery and Tractor Safety Certification (8 Oc. Cty. Youth); Manure Applicator Training; Cover Cropping Systems; Alfalfa Mgmt.; Land Rent Contracting; Nutrient Mgmt. Plan Development; Winter annual forages; Corn Silage and others.. Reuss provided information on alfalfa quality changes and pest issues to approximately 360 regional producers via the first-crop alfalfa management project. This project and the corollary corn silage moisture monitoring project help forage producers achieve optimal forage quality and production on their alfalfa and corn silage acres, while receiving other management resources.

The opportunity to contact Reuss directly to get specific information or request in-field consultations is another advantage of having local educators. Reuss' 2024 direct contact approximately 275 Oconto County farms via agricultural programming efforts, approximately 110 individuals at the Breakfast on the Farm and 45 at a well water quality and nitrate testing display at the County Fair; and 48 individuals via horticulture topics. Reuss indirectly contacts many residents through the monthly radio show (1st Friday, 8-9 a.m. on WOCO) which is used to discuss agricultural situations, programming, and Q & A, as well as newspaper articles and social media posts.



Cover Crop Research Plots at LeMere Farms. Testing Impact of cover crops on following corn yields.

Program Area Goals for 2025

The overall goal of 2025 programming is to maximize on-farm profitability and year to year sustainability. Specific goals include:

- Maximizing crop income return to fertilizer investment and train farms to write their own Nutrient Mgmt. plans.
- Maximize farm return to forage production through optimized harvest timing and storage.
- Minimizing opportunity for nitrates to enter ground water from crop fertilization practices.
- Improving agronomic practices (planting date, rate, selection) in all crops.
- Increase usage of IPM principles within pest management decision-making.
- Improve management of new cropping practices, such as use of cover crops and alternative forage species.

Scott Reuss

Crops and Soils
Extension Educator
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Agriculture

Dairy Programming in 2024

2024 was a great year for dairy programming as Stephanie Bowers settled into her second year as Regional Dairy Educator. With her focus on dairy heifer grazing, a practice which can help improve economic efficiencies of dairy producers and maintain & improve water quality in Oconto County, Bowers partnered with a variety of local agencies to bring relevant research and cutting-edge technologies to Oconto County. Her passion and expertise in the area of virtual fencing was caught on a local, statewide, and national level; with invitations to speak and share information regarding virtual fencing.

Beyond virtual fencing, Bowers collaborated on pasture walks, educational events, and 1:1 farm visits to address the most pressing issues our dairy producers face. Some of these activities are as follows:

- Grassland 2.0 Academy
- COMET Mental Health Training for local Dairy Producers
- Dairy Feeder Workshop
- Winter Beef Management School collaboration with Scott Reuss & Bill Halfman
- Ag Professionals Update
- Badger Dairy Insight Webinar
- Professional Dairy Producers Webinar
- Many pasture walks with producers

In addition to Bowers, additional Extension resources were deployed in Oconto County to assist our dairy producers. This includes Farm Succession Planning, Financial Management, State Grazing Specialists and more.



Virtual Fence Panelists at the National Grazing Lands Coalition Conference in Tucson, Arizona.

Dairy Program Goals in 2025:

- Dairy heifer grazing pasture walks
- Virtual Fence & Vegetation Density Technologies tested on farms

Contact: Stephanie Bowers, M.S.
Regional Dairy Educator serving
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Winnebago Counties.

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Community Development



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**BRINGING COLLABORATION & COST
EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO OCONTO
COUNTY THROUGH...**

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,

ORGANIZATIONAL & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT,

& LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY BUILDING

My Mission: Work alongside you identifying critical local needs, strategize doable solutions, organize responses, create actionable steps, and roll up my sleeves to make positive things happen and to positively transform local organization, business or community."

My Purpose:

- ☐ Cutting local costs to mandated services;
- ☐ Training Local Officials to maximize their community resources;
- ☐ Collaborating with County Depts. to lower their project costs;
- ☐ Supporting non-profits to lower costs and save resources.

KEY LOCAL PROJECTS IN 2024:

- 1. Working with Local Municipal Courts** to offer a Restorative Justice Program reaching from City of Oconto to Suring;
- 2. Collaboration with Land & Water Conservation Dept.** by studying 6 local lakes and cost sharing our resources while keeping lakeshore owners informed with a quarterly Status Overview publication;
- 3. Provided support to Leadership Oconto** with facilitating the Real Colors temperament assessment to this year's class;
- 4. Local Government Education** – 'One-on-One' Plan Commission Trainings for Local Government Officials while providing resources to local municipalities on zoning and land use concerns;
- 5. Working with the Mountain Historical Society** to preserve and rehab the historic Fireman's Park and get the recreational pond dredged this year;
- 6. Support to the Recycling Department** with the 2024 Hazardous Waste Collection Program and detailed needs survey with 121 participants;
- 7. Support to the Land and Water Conservation 10 Year Plan,** preparing to facilitate the discussions with local Stakeholders on their hopes and concerns for the natural environment.



Dale Mohr,
Your County Agent.



156 PEOPLE SERVED:

- Riparian Owners;
- Local Government Officials;
- Non-Profit Members;
- Youth Jurors & Respondents During Cases;

PARTNERED WITH:

- Local Municipal Judges & Law Enforcement;
- County Staff/Department Heads;
- Wis. Department of Natural Resources;
- UW-Stevens Point;
- Oconto County Lakes & Waterways Assoc.
- Marinette & Oconto Counties Literacy Council
- Leadership Oconto County

GRANTS PARTNERED ON:

- WDNR Grant;
- Oconto County Healthy Waters Grant.



Community Development



PRESERVING SURFACE WATERS THROUGH THE COLLABORATION OF MULTIPLE AGENCIES

Going on the 10th year since our concerned group of residents identified the need ***“to have the healthiest waters in Wisconsin”*** our team of UW-Extension, Land & Water Conservation Department, non-profits, lake Associations & Districts, UW – Stevens Point, WI Department of Natural Resources, and Oconto County Lakes and Waterways Assoc., have pooled our limited resources and at no actual costs to the county have studied more than 60 lakes regarding their respective ecosystems while gathering information about the hopes and concerns of property owners and lake users.

This year we studied another six lakes and held 12 planning & informational meetings with lake groups while applying for additional WDNR grant funding. Additionally, winter dissolved oxygen (DO) and temperature readings were recorded on six lakes during February, 2024.

Meet your Scientist “MYS” Lake Planning Sessions - Trainings



My focus was on instruction and facilitative approaches to decision making with six lakes this year. To design, invite, deliver information about the five goals of the research project, and to identify local concerns, develop contact lists, identify volunteers, present baseline information and to introduce the members of the team.

TEEN COURT - PROGRAM

Teen Court is established within the Wisc. State Statutes, affording local Judiciaries the option to defer a judgment in lieu of sanctions completed. In short, this is a second chance for youth ages 10 to 17 yrs.

Dale Mohr provides this County service (monthly during the evening at the Courthouse) which promotes volunteerism, leadership opportunities, team building, and community healing with members of the Teen Jury.

This year was a rebuilding year, the program materials and trainings were being researched to be similar to other Court Systems within the State. Meetings held with local Municipal Judges identified timelines and procedural steps, that made sense for all parties involved, in order to make the process seamless.



Oconto County Land Use - Workshops

Yearly, I develop, deliver and evaluate this program to towns. I teach the newly appointed Plan Commission members per ss. 66.1001. Teaching curriculum includes roles and responsibilities, staying legal, Robert's Rules, plan interpretation, legislative/Judicial & Quasi-Judicial decision making.

MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY - ASSISTANCE

I worked closely with the Mountain Historical Society this year to further help them plan and design their improvements to Fireman's Park in the Town of Mountain. We were able to get all required permits to dredge the site's pond which led to further landscaping being completed so that it will be ready for the 2025 kids' fishing event.



Healthy Choices Healthy Lives

FoodWise in **Oconto County** 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.



Oconto County Landscape

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

46%

of children in schools were eligible for free or reduced price meals.[^]



9%

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



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 Oconto County, FoodWise partners with schools, after-school programs, Head Start programs, senior meal programs, and food pantries to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in our communities.

Community

Impacts in 2024

Engaged with **750+ learners** around nutrition education topics in a variety of settings, including early care and education centers, K-12 school settings, and food pantries.

Worked with Kingdom Come Food Pantry to support the Oconto Falls Community Garden & donate over **6,000 pounds** of produce to numerous sites serving community members with limited income.

[^]Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

*WI Dept of Administration and WI Dept of Health Services

Inspiring Collaborations



FoodWise teamed up with NewView in FY24 to provide one series of the Strong Bodies strength training program. New View Industries is a workforce and adult day center for cognitively disabled adults. Nine participants were led through a Strong Bodies class 2 times per week for eight weeks where they learned how to safely strength train, improve strength, improve balance and increase flexibility.

After several rounds of practice, participants were able to participate with near perfect form in most cases, even with the cognitive barriers participants faced. Results indicate 100% of participants that were surveyed agree their physical health is better, have become more active and feel physically stronger! Strong Bodies class at NewView has proven to be a safe, effective way to reach low income, cognitively disabled individuals who otherwise would not have an opportunity to learn valuable information, spark behavior change, make new healthy habits and improve their overall health long-term.

Client feedback:

"I have more confidence! At first I thought I couldn't achieve it the program, but I did!"

"My strength is improved, I lost 6 pounds!"

Vocational Services/Discovery Leader feedback:

"My clients gave you rave reviews. You should be very proud of that. It's not always easy to motivate this group of women."

Multi-level Program Efforts

The Oconto Falls Community garden continues to grow and thrive. One half of the garden, approximately 1.5 acres, is a dedicated food donation garden which serves Kingdom Come Food Pantry, a food storage hub for other county food pantries. The goal was to improve many aspects of community and individual health such as improved fruit and vegetable consumption, improved access to local produce, increased physical activity, improved mental health through physical activity and being outside and a sense of community and belonging. The volume of produce donated was enough to serve over 450 families each week at Kingdom Come Food Pantry.



Contact Us

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Sarah Ferdon
Nutrition Coordinator



Sarah Schindel
Nutrition Educator



Human Development & Relationships

Lifespan and Financial Security Resources for all

Increasing confidence associated with personal finance skills, norms, and habits

Children are in stores and retail venues an average of two to three times weekly, exceeding in a standard week the time dedicated to reading, church attendance, youth group and household activities, and outdoor play. (Suiter, M. and B. Meszaros (2005)) Extension's Money as You Grow program and FDIC's Money Smart for Young People address financial literacy from K-12. Implementation of this in Oconto County has been very successful by partnering with Oconto Summer School and Farnsworth Public Library. Youth financial education must permeate the entire K-12 setting rather than wait until the middle or high school years for introduction; hence the efforts of Money as You Grow (K-4), Money Smart for Young People (1-12) in 2024. Learning about students' feelings and behaviors towards money, through the Mind over Money survey helped educators better understand how to support and engage students in the future.

Planning AHEAD is a unique comprehensive curriculum focused on end-of-life planning that is designed for people of all ages. Ninety nine percent of participants who completed an evaluation felt they had gained necessary knowledge to carry out their end-of-life planning. Additionally, 89 percent reported feeling more confident about discussing these matters with their loved ones. Katie was a part of the team that offered the program statewide in Spring and Fall with nearly 100 people registered. In a 4-month follow-up survey 93% said they are either done with their plans, actively working on them, or committed to completing their plans (compared to 37% before the course).

Increasing social connection, improving social cohesion in communities, and increasing community capacity

Social isolation and loneliness are critical concerns for both physical and mental health and are experienced at a higher rate for those who live in rural areas versus urban areas. The impacts of isolation and loneliness result in a cascade of stress hormones and inflammation in the body, and has been associated with increased risk of depression and anxiety, physical conditions such as heart disease, and even increased risk of premature mortality (National Academies of Sciences & Medicine, 2020).

52%

Local high school students who feel their mental health would improve if they had more money

300

Participants in falls prevention/strength training programs for older adults

89%

People reported feeling more confident about discussing end of life matters.

Hundreds

Little Heart Project crocheted hearts delivered with messages of hope and mental health resources



Human Development & Relationships

*Increasing social connection, improving social cohesion in communities, and increasing community capacity
(continued)*

Programming to support social cohesion and connection done in Oconto County include the mental health awareness night "Men's Event," training on assisting those who made be headed toward a mental health crisis back to a place of wellness, using COMET - Changing our Mental and Emotional Trajectory. One of the participants shared that "You and [co-facilitator] really inspired me, and I'm glad that more of my colleagues can benefit from that Wisconsin magic!" as he is bringing this resource to University of California Cooperative Extension to support the farming community as they suffer devastating loss from wildfires. Through the AARP Cupid Crew campaign, simple acts of conversation, flower and card delivery, and messages of hope were delivered to some of the aging population in Oconto County, reaching approximately 300 people.

Increasing utilization of healthy coping skills and strategies through positive self-management practices, Improving health outcomes

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Wisconsin has the highest fall death rate among older adults in the United States. As part of a response to this, Extension has offered StrongBodies (low-impact strength training for older adults) classes nonthreatening partnered with Oconto County Public Health to offer Bingocize (exercise combined with the classic game of bingo). Virtual and in-person classes were held and was experienced by just under 300 participants. When asked about how the StrongBodies program has impacted you, one respondent replied, "I've always been a bit shaky on my feet , now I have more balance and feel stronger on my feet." Another participant shared, "The class was encouraging and nonthreatening. The pace Katie worked with us."



Delivering AARP's Cupid Crew flowers, cards, and Little Hearts.



Attending annual Senior Wellness Fair

Student "graduate" of Money Smart at summer school



Men's Health Event – mental awareness gathering.





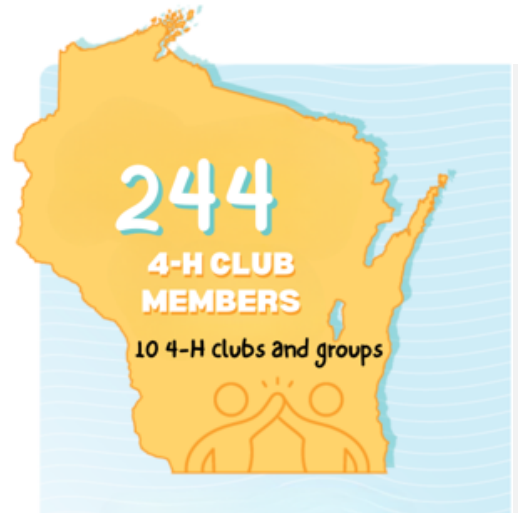
Positive Youth Development

When youth join 4-H, they're a part of something big! 4-H is the **nations largest youth development organization**, with more than six million members and over 90,000 clubs across the nation. Oconto County 4-H ended the year with 244 youth members participating in 10 clubs and groups illustrated to the right. This was a slight decrease from the year prior due to a decrease in the amount of classroom club opportunities based on the 4-H Educators capacity. Overall, the Oconto County 4-H membership numbers have continued to trend upward since the COVID-19 pandemic.

4-H provides the opportunity for youth to explore more than 500 distinct project-based activities to spark lifelong learning, including: Science, technology, engineering and math, civic engagement, health programs, agriculture, and more! On the right we see the top 10 project selections for Oconto County 4-H members.

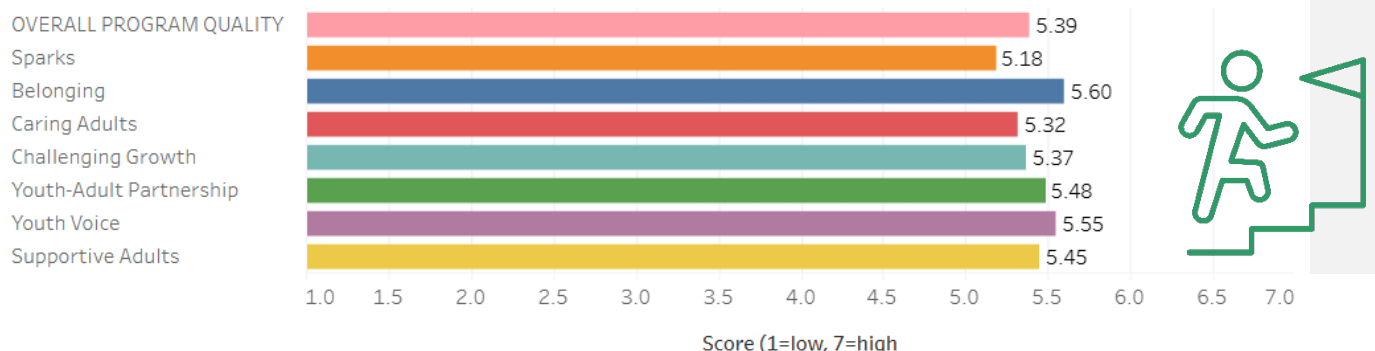
It is a goal of our program to meet the needs of our members. We strive to provide additional support and learning opportunities in the top areas of interest. These include holding an annual acrylic paining night for our art members, sharing photography contest information, and incorporating top areas of interest in county-wide clinics and camp events. Last year I introduces a new "ChickQuest" program that provided hands on STEM learning while learning about the life-cycle of a chicken. This program was featured in a classroom setting as well as open to the community at the County Fair.

"I learned that giving back to my community is very important in my life"



Top 10 Enrolled 4-H Projects	
PROJECT	MEMBERS
Art	87
Vegetables	85
Photography	70
Food & Nutrition	70
Cloverbuds	64
Poultry	58
Woodworking	52
Drawing and Painting	50
Flowers	50
LEGO	49

Program Quality





Positive Youth Development

Highlights of 2024 Oconto County 4-H educational opportunities throughout the year.

- Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies
- OHS Business Student Career Mentorship
- Summer Camp MarOcoSha
- State-wide Virtual Learning Community
- Oconto County Youth Fair
- School Marketing Campaign
- Creative Arts Festival
- Animal Project Day
- Youth Thriving Survey

- *ChickQuest
- *Earth Day Tree Planting
- *Take and Learn Kits
- *Family Recreation Events
- *Project Learning Days
- *Camp Counselor Training
- *Adventure Day Camp
- *Community Family Nights
- *Annual Achievement Night



Left to right: -Camp Counselor Training - Family Night Fun - ChickQuest Program Collage

In addition to providing support and programming to my Oconto and Marinette County 4-H programs I have also been able to participate on several teams and workgroups to support 4-H at the state and National levels, all of which have led to several professional opportunities including:

- Chair of the WI 4-H Program Quality Youth Thriving Education Sub-committee
- Recipient of Achievement in Service Award for work in Positive Youth Development field
- Contributing Author to a Positive Youth Development Academic Text
- Member of the Disability Champions Work Group
- Lead Presenter for National Extension Conference on Volunteerism Workshop
- Obtained a Bond Foundation Grant to Support Youth Summer Camp



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Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
OCONTO COUNTY



Extension

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OCONTO COUNTY



Mandi Dornfeld
Area Extension Director –
Marinette, Menominee, Oconto and Shawano Counties

Extension’s mission is to connect people with the University of Wisconsin. We teach, learn, lead and serve, transforming lives and communities. As you can see by our 2024 annual report, we are working alongside those who live and work in Oconto county to support strong, resilient people and communities. We are ready to continue to teach, lead, learn and serve the people of Oconto County.

In 2024 Extension was fully staffed and made significant contributions to the community. As you can see by our annual report, we are committed to being flexible and innovative in our programming. We are engaging with people where they live and work and supporting their goals. We have expanded our service and educational efforts to provide professional development to county department leadership teams and we look forward to creating and deepening our relationships with those who work for Oconto County.

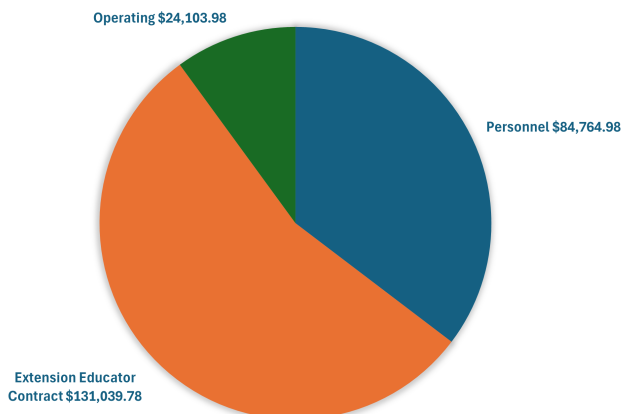
Extension’s funding includes a combination of county, state, federal, as well as research/programming funds. During 2024, Oconto County continued the contract with Extension agreeing to co-fund faculty and staff through a flat fee for services. This flat fee covers a portion of each educator’s salary and benefits. In addition, Extension also provides resources such as the area director, state specialists, professional development, human resources, onboarding support, as well as technical and programming support to assist our educators in meeting the educational needs of this county.

Our team is grateful for the continued support and look forward to deepening our collaborative efforts. Our goal is to move beyond being the “best kept secret” and towards a trusted and sought after resource.

With gratitude,

Mandi Dornfeld

UW-EXTENSION EXPENDITURES 2024 - \$239,912.74



Educational Program Areas

Agriculture
Community Development
Human Development & Relationships
4-H Youth Development
FoodWise

Extension Expenditures
Operating Expenses \$24,104
Extension Educator Contracts \$131,040
Personnel \$84,765



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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