



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
OCONTO COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2025





UW-Madison Extension’s mission is to connect people with the University of Wisconsin. We teach, learn, lead and serve, transforming lives and communities. Extension’s outreach creates key connection points for families, communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and more. We support local volunteers and leaders to take action and serve as role models in their communities. We make sure Wisconsinites have the latest research, best practices, and educational opportunities.

UW-Madison Extension embraces the Wisconsin Idea by connecting university resources with the people and priorities of Oconto County through strong local partnerships. The information that follows shows the scope of that work – residents served, relationships with local government and businesses, and the volunteer time that helps programs grow and succeed. These efforts demonstrate how communities, volunteers, and Extension work together to create lasting impact.

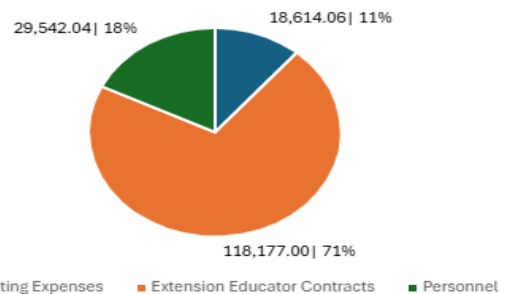
Extension is a shared investment between the county and university. Because of your support, Oconto County has educators who are local, trusted, and focused on the priorities that matter most here in Oconto County. We are grateful for your continued partnership, as together we are building opportunities, strong leadership, and a healthy future.

As the Area Extension Director of Oconto County, I am honored to work with a dedicated Extension team that lives and works right here in Oconto County and the surrounding area. As a team, we are eager to continue building and strengthening county relationships and collaborations. In the pages to follow, you will see the impact of each educator and program. These stories show how local needs connect with University of Wisconsin-Madison research and resources to make a difference for the people of this county.

UW Extension Expenditures

Operating Expenses: \$18,614.06
Extension Educator Contracts: \$118,177.00
Personnel: \$29,542.04

UW Extension Expenditures



Stephanie Nault
Area Extension Director

University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension Oconto County



EXTENSION BY THE NUMBERS

WE ARE THE *Wisconsin Idea*

UW-Madison Extension brings the Wisconsin Idea to every corner of the state. Extension works closely with communities on complex problems that require unbiased, research-based information, developing educational programming to address real-world issues through local partnerships and relationships. Extension's statewide network of educators delivers services through local collaborations and relationships to develop practical applications of research, while also using community input to inform future studies.



**Get involved at
extension.wisc.edu**



470,000

participants reached through direct engagement

Connecting Campus to Communities

through six institutes:

- Agriculture,
- Community Development,
- Health & Well-Being,
- Human Development & Relationships,
- Natural Resources, and
- Positive Youth Development



over 26,000
members of
Wisconsin 4-H



over 5,700
enrolled 4-H adult
volunteer leaders

10,500
EXTENSION
VOLUNTEERS



PROVIDED

530,000
HOURS OF
SERVICE

UW-MADISON EXTENSION

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *with* THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Agriculture (Crops & Soils, Dairy)

The Agriculture Institute supports Wisconsin's farming systems through research-based education and outreach focused on productivity and sustainability. Crops and Soils programming helps farmers make informed decisions about soil health, crop production, and environmental stewardship while improving profitability and protecting natural resources. Dairy programming strengthens the competitiveness of Wisconsin's dairy industry through education, research, and practical tools that improve productivity, animal well-being, and farm management. Together, these efforts help farmers and agribusinesses make sound decisions that support both economic success and long-term agricultural resilience.

Human Development and Relationships (Lifespan & Financial Well-Being)

The Human Development & Relationships Institute supports individuals and families across the lifespan with a focus on building resilience and overall well-being. Programs emphasize financial capability, helping people make informed decisions about budgeting, saving, credit, and long-term financial security. Educators provide research-based guidance to navigate key life stages, including caregiving, aging, and major financial transitions. This work helps individuals strengthen financial stability and adapt to changing needs throughout life.

Positive Youth Development (4-H, Teen Court)

The Positive Youth Development Institute transforms the potential of our youth into purposeful action. Through the local Wisconsin 4-H and Teen Court Programs, we bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world leadership, emphasizing experiential growth and civic responsibility. By cultivating these vital skills and supportive adult partnerships, we empower the next generation to become the engaged citizens and innovative leaders our county needs, youth who are Beyond Ready for work and life.

FoodWise

FoodWise provided nutrition education to individuals and families, particularly those with limited incomes. The program taught practical skills such as meal planning, food safety, and budgeting to support healthier lifestyles. FoodWise partnered with schools, community organizations, and local agencies to expand access to healthy foods and active living opportunities. Its evidence-based approach helped participants improve diet quality and make the most of their food resources.

Health & Well-Being (HEAL and Behavioral Health)

The Health & Well-Being Institute works to improve quality of life by promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) and supporting behavioral health across communities. Programs focus on increasing access to nutritious foods, encouraging physical activity, and creating environments that make healthy choices easier. The institute also addresses behavioral health by building awareness, reducing stigma, and supporting mental health and substance use prevention efforts. Through community partnerships and research-based education, these efforts help individuals and communities achieve better overall health and well-being.



Agriculture

Agriculture Programming: The regional model

2025 Agricultural Extension programming was delivered through the 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. Bowers resigned her position in January, 2026 and the position is in the process of being refilled. Horticulture programming is minimized through this model, although Reuss does provide invited topical presentations when merited & available.

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.

An example of how educators work to bring needed information to local farms were the pair of farm succession/transfer related events held near Coleman in 2025. Zeitler Enterprises hosted a farm-specific event with invited professional Jolene Brown. Reuss ensured that attendees had access to WI-specific resources to assist them and coordinated Extension Farm Law Specialist Kelly Wilfert's follow-up presentation at the Holstein Association Twilight Meeting also hosted at Zeitler's. 102 and 142 persons attended these two important events.

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.

2025 projects included:

- Winter wheat sulfur rate effects on yield;
- Alfalfa first crop quality estimation tool verification
- Nitrogen rates/sources effect on winter triticale yield
- Impact of Berseem clover and farm mix cover crops on corn nitrogen needs
- Corn nitrogen rates; finding the economic optimum
- Crop pest monitoring projects



Agriculture

Crops/Soils Programs delivered in 2025

Across all programming in 2025, Reuss had direct educational contact with:

- + 775 farm and agribusiness contacts at events which he presented discussions.
- + Approximately 410 ag contacts through the Alfalfa and Corn Silage Monitoring Projects.
- + 239 one-on-one agricultural contacts.
- + 107 persons through in-person well water nitrate testing or informational displays.
- + 748 youth through youth conservation field day presentations.
- + 608 contacts regarding horticulture topics through direct contact and invited workshops.
- + Approximately 140 contacts at Marinette and Oconto County Breakfast on the Farm.

Within the above totals, 314 contacts were at events hosted within Oconto County or one-on-one inquiries from Oconto County residents. In addition to the direct educational contacts, Reuss contacts Oconto County farms and residents through multiple indirect means. These include the paper/electronic Ag Newsletter; a monthly radio show (1st Friday, 8-9 a.m. on WOCO) which is used to discuss agricultural situations, programming, and Q & A; and newspaper articles and social media posts.

Program topics delivered through 2025 events held in or very near Oconto County included Corn Silage Mgmt.; Nitrogen and Sulfur Management; Pasture Management; Beef Forage Production; Crop Insurance; Pesticide Applicator Training; Manure Applicator Training; Soil Health Management; Land Rent Contracting; Nutrient Mgmt. Plan Development; Winter annual forage Mgmt.; and others. The forage quality monitoring projects for first crop alfalfa and corn silage are critical programs which allow farms to achieve optimal forage quality and production on their alfalfa and corn silage acres.



Corn negatively impacted by wind and multiple foliar diseases present in the region during 2025 growing season.

Program Area Goals for 2026

The overall goal of 2026 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
Langlade, Marinette,
Oconto, and Shawano
Counties

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cell/text 715-701-0966





Agriculture

Dairy Programming Delivered in 2025:

Bowers focused her programming efforts within the general topics of dairy heifer grazing and management; Virtual fence technology and adoption potential; and assisting in the delivery of beef management education. She was invited to present these topics at events within Oconto County which were sponsored by Grassworks, Inc. and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. She assisted with multiple state-wide programming efforts, as well, including the Dairy Insights Webinar series. She assisted in other efforts, as well, including working with producer groups and larger collaborative efforts.

Her successor will have the opportunity to expand on these programs and build new programming opportunities that meet the needs of local dairy farms and fit within the overall Dairy Program's goals.



UW-Madison, Division of Extension Dairy Program Area Goals for 2026:

The overall goal of the Dairy program is to improve economic viability of dairy farms across the state. We accomplish that through:

- + Increased adoption of climate resilient production practices
- + Improved youngstock management practices
- + Increased adoption of management strategies that improve milk quality and udder health
- + Improved production practices that optimize animal nutrition
- + Increased adoption of biosecurity practices
- + Increased adoption of management strategies that reach supply chain goals
- + Implementation of practices to improve animal welfare and herd health
- + Strategic adoption of on-farm technologies that align with farm goals and priorities
- + Improved reproductive efficiency and genetic development



Human Development & Relationships

Katie Daul, Human Development and Relationships Educator

The Human Development and Relationships Institute advances education that strengthens **resilient individuals, families, and communities across Wisconsin**. Programming spans the full lifespan and emphasizes prevention, capacity-building, and systems-level change through education, partnerships, and policy engagement.

Lifespan: Supporting Healthy Aging and Caregiving

Lifespan programs support individuals and families as they navigate aging and caregiving. Efforts focus on healthy aging, family caregiving, end-of-life planning, and the creation of age-friendly communities through local partnerships.

(Key Program Highlights by Level of Prevention)

Promoting Community Education

- **Caregivers' Compass (New Curriculum)**
Developed a flexible caregiver education series focused on skill-building, connection, and resilience. Sessions can be taken individually or as a progression. Participants receive practical tools and leave with increased confidence and social support.
- **Tech to Thrive**
Offered technology education addressing smartphone basics, digital tools, and fraud prevention—an identified community need. Educator also completed national training with the National Digital Extension Education Team, contributing to the implementation of 13 digital equity modules nationwide.

Educating Providers

- **UW-Madison CARE U Training Program**
Completed training to deliver CARE U workshops for direct care workers and helping professionals serving older adults. Topics include person-centered care, dementia, vision, mobility, nutrition, pain management, and emergency preparedness. Flexible formats (lunch-and-learns, half- or full-day trainings) support workforce realities and will be provided free of charge through an HRSA grant.





Human Development & Relationships

Changing Organizational Practices

- Reframing Aging Education

Delivered training to organizations to reduce ageism and promote inclusive, respectful communication about aging. Participants gained practical tools to integrate age-positive messaging into everyday practice.

- Promotion of Age-Friendly Environments

Engaged local school districts through outreach highlighting the role of schools as community hubs in rural areas—supporting intergenerational connections, community events, and broader public benefit from shared spaces.

Fostering Coalitions and Networks

- Community Walking Program with Health Education

Collaborated with local schools to host winter walking programs in safe, indoor spaces. Programs increased physical activity, social connection, and included brief educational lessons on overall health.

Influencing Policy and Systems

- Aging Advisory Council Engagement

Active participation on the Oconto County Health and Human Services Aging Advisory Council, providing education, advocacy, and up-to-date information on state aging initiatives to inform local decision-making.

Additional Lifespan Programs and Outreach

Purple Angel, COMET, Compassion Resiliency, Legacy Building, Powerful Tools for Caregivers, StrongBodies (local and statewide), Bingocize, Men's Event, 4-H Day Camp Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Community Action Group (Healthy Oconto County subcommittee), AARP Cupid Crew, and a 4-H/FoodWise/Lifespan Outreach Project.

Financial Security: Building Financial Well-being Across the Lifespan

Financial well-being directly impacts health, family stability, and workforce participation. Extension programs help individuals build financial literacy and management skills to reduce risk and support long-term stability.

Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills

- Money Smart for Young People

Delivered as a summer school program at Oconto Elementary School, focusing on goal setting, careers, income, and money decision-making. Early financial education builds a strong foundation for lifelong healthy financial habits.

- Money as You Grow

Implemented in the Suring School District, integrating literacy and financial education through hands-on activities and crafts. Students received books and parent guides to reinforce learning at home and encourage family engagement.

Additional Financial Security Programs Offered

Rent Smart and Planning AHEAD





Positive Youth Development

The 2024–2025 program year marked a period of significant growth and renewed momentum for Oconto County 4-H. A key milestone was the transition of the 4-H Educator role from a (0.5 LTE) shared between Oconto and Marinette counties to a full-time (1.0 LTE) position dedicated solely to Oconto County. This shift has strengthened program consistency, expanded local opportunities, and increased engagement with youth, families, and community partners.

With increased capacity, the program has prioritized youth empowerment, with a strong emphasis on elevating youth voice and expanding leadership opportunities, particularly for older youth. From leading countywide events to serving as camp counselors and facilitators, youth are taking on more meaningful roles in shaping their 4-H experience. These efforts align with the 4-H Youth Thriving Model and the national “Beyond Ready” initiative, equipping young people with critical skills in leadership, communication, and problem-solving to prepare them for future success.

A major focus this year has been the reconstruction of the Oconto County Teen Court program. After a period of inactivity, the program has been successfully rebuilt through intentional planning, recruitment, and training of youth panelists. Teen Court is now positioned to begin hearing cases, offering youth a hands-on civic engagement experience while building skills in decision making, accountability, and public speaking all directly connecting 4-H programming to county and community priorities.

Youth also engaged in expanded educational travel opportunities, including participation in the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation learning journey to Washington, D.C., made possible through secured grant funding. This experience provided meaningful exposure to national history, government, and civic leadership, while broadening perspectives and strengthening participants’ understanding of their role as engaged citizens.

Program excellence was recognized at both the state and national levels. As an Educator I received recognition through the Wisconsin Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) at the state level, as well as was honored nationally by the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP) with the Achievement in Service Award. These honors reflect a continued commitment to high-quality, impactful programming for Oconto County youth.

Highlights include strong volunteer engagement, expanded project-based learning opportunities, and continued collaboration with community partners to increase access and participation. As the program looks ahead, I will focus on sustaining this momentum, continuing to elevate youth voice, strengthen leadership pathways, and ensure all youth in Oconto County have access to meaningful 4-H experiences that prepare them to be beyond ready for work and life.

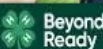


"I learned how to express my leadership further and more extensive than I did before. I learned this by going to leadership camps, making new friends, and expressing my ideas."

-Oconto County 4-H Youth



Ready then.
Ready now.
Ready for anything.





Positive Youth Development

The Oconto County 4-H Program offers a variety of educational opportunities throughout the year. A list of program highlights can be found below:

- In Person Summer School (OES)
- OHS Career Mentorship
- Summer Camp Mar-Oco-Sha
- State-wide Virtual Learning Community
- Oconto County Youth Fair
- Career Fairs/ Community Events
- Horse Education Days- Horse Bowl
- Youth Thriving Survey
- Teen Winter Leadership Camp
- Free earth day trees for planting
- Herb Kohl Learning Journey D.C. Trip
- Family Fun Nights (Gamblers Game etc.)
- Project Learning Days
- Camp Counselor Training
- Adventure Day Camp
- Teen Court Development/Pane;
- Annual Achievement Night



Images from Left to right: HKLJ D.C. Trip, Winter Leadership Camp 2025, Oconto County Painting Clinic 2025

In addition to providing support and programming to my local 4-H program I am a contributing member on several teams and workgroups to support 4-H at the state and National level all of which have led to several professional opportunities including:

- Chair of the WI 4-H Program Quality Sub-committee
- Middle School Youth Travel Experience Planning Committee
- CWF 2026 Co-lead
- Recipient of Achievement in Service Award
- Contributing Author in Professional Youth Thriving Text
- Member of the Disability Champions Group



Contact:

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Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
OCONTO COUNTY



Healthy Choices, Healthy Lives

For more than 30 years, UW–Madison Extension has provided local nutrition education across Wisconsin through the federal SNAP-Ed grant program. The congressional budget reconciliation bill signed into law on July 4, 2025 ended federal SNAP-Ed funding, effective September 30, 2025.

Working with schools, food pantries, gardens, and community centers, FoodWise has taught practical, evidence-based skills in nutrition, meal planning, food safety, and food resource management, helping people stretch food dollars and make healthier choices. We are grateful for our partners and participants and the opportunity to advance healthier communities in Oconto County.

Oconto County Impacts in 2025

Engaged with **730 learners** around nutrition education topics in a variety of settings, including **37 K-12 classrooms**, income insecure housing and adult day centers totaling **258 direct education sessions** in 2025.

Worked with **6 organizations** to maintain a community garden & donate **4,700 pounds** of produce to local food pantries serving over **500 families per week** with limited income.

In November of 2025, FoodWises' Sarah Schindel, transitioned to a part time Health & Well-Being position. Since then, work has begun to bolster well rounded Health & Well-Being educational programming including nutrition, mental health, physical activity, sleep education, cooking skills for youth and continued community garden management.



Connect With Us

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FOOD WISE Healthy Choices, Healthy Lives

2025 Achievement: Strengthening Food Access and Community Connection through the Oconto Falls Community Garden

The Oconto Falls Community Garden helped address local food and nutrition security challenges by providing fresh fruits and vegetables, with all harvest donated to area food pantries. **The project builds on strong community assets—volunteerism, collaboration, and shared care.** HSHS Hospital provided land for the garden, and funding secured through Lumberjack RC&D supported construction of a new pavilion in 2025.

Community volunteers contributed labor to build the structure, **creating a shared space for learning, gardening, and connection.**

Extension worked closely with volunteers, garden leaders, and partner organizations to coordinate planting, education, and harvest distribution. Sustainability is rooted in local leadership and ongoing engagement, with the board of directors and volunteers continuing to manage both the garden and pavilion. By combining community labor, resources, and educational programming, **the garden strengthens food access, skills, and social connection for Oconto Falls and surrounding area families.**



Policy, Systems and Environmental Change Efforts:

Marinette School District Wellness Committee
Marinette School District monthly health topic for newsletters
Healthy Oconto County – Health and Wellbeing/Mental Health Work group
Oconto Falls Community Garden- President
Food Drive Campaign at Oconto County Fair in partnership with 4-H

Increasing Skills and Knowledge in our Communities:

New View- Strong Bodies, Progressive Walking Class, Nutrition Lessons, Gardening Lesson
Parkview Apartments- Monthly Nutrition and Food Security lesson
Oconto Falls High School- Walk & Talk
Gillett Produce Stand -vegetable storage and use guides
4-H Day Camp -Nutrition and Simple Food Prep Lesson
Multigenerational placemat project



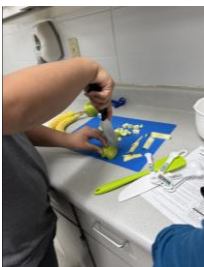
Health & Well-Being

HWB Multi-level Program Efforts

Health & Well-Being has planned to expand youth education through a new afterschool program supported by opioid abatement funds and aligned with priorities from the Healthy Oconto County Health and Wellbeing Community Action Workgroup. The effort responds to a clear need identified by partners: strengthening life skills and protective factors early to reduce future substance misuse risk.

UW–Madison Extension, school district staff, and afterschool coordinators collaborated to integrate evidence-informed programming into the new setting. Funding allowed intentional curriculum alignment, coordinated scheduling, and hands-on, engaging activities accessible to youth who may not otherwise receive this structured health education.

Two core components were sleep education and nutrition skill-building. Sleep Education helped students understand how rest affects mood, decision-making, and overall health, and supported them in finding realistic strategies to improve their habits. Teen Cuisine classes introduced basic cooking skills, kitchen safety, and nutrition awareness through simple, healthy recipes. These activities build confidence, teamwork, and independence—key contributors to long-term resilience.



Advancing Community-Wide Health Solutions:

- Healthy Oconto County – Health and Wellbeing/Mental Health Work group
- Oconto Falls Community Garden- President
- Nutrition Advisory Council
- NAMI North Bay

Increasing Skills and Knowledge in Our Communities:

- Strong Bodies- St. John Lutheran Church, Morgan
 - Sleep Education- Oconto Falls Middle School
 - Increasing Resilience- Fear of Missing Out for High School Youth- Oconto High School
 - Walk & Talk- Physical Activity and Mini Lessons at Oconto Falls High School
 - Quarterly Radio Interview- topics such as mental health, stress, exercise, goal setting
- ### Continuing Education:
- WeCOPE Curriculum
 - Deliberative Inquiry
 - UW -Madison Mental Health 101 Series Pilot



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