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Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY
UW-EXTENSION OFFICE



Adam Hady,
Area Extension Director



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
LA CROSSE COUNTY

Building Community

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Hello, and let me introduce myself. My name is Adam Hady, and I am the Area Extension Director serving Area 13. Area 13 consists of five counties (Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, and Vernon Counties). The past year has been one filled with new programming and changes to future offerings.

To start what is Extension? Extension's Purpose is to teach, learn, lead, and serve. We do this by connecting people with the University of Wisconsin–Madison and engaging with them in transforming lives and communities. Our mission is to embody the Wisconsin Idea by partnering to develop and connect the research and educational resources of UW-Madison with residents and communities to address local, statewide and national issues. With this mission our Educators

translate research from specialists and faculty at UW-Madison and other Universities into practical solutions for local needs. La Crosse County is served by a strong team that represents five Extension Institutes. These include 4-H/ Positive Youth Development, Agriculture, Human Development and Relationships, Community Development, and FoodWise. In addition to the strong educator team, Kasey Burg and Andrea Northey provide program support.

As you will hear from the Educators in the report there were many great programs, partnerships, and opportunities that enhanced the lives of the residents of La Crosse County. Some of those included work in community development such as bringing a regional housing workshop to the area and our agriculture educator highlighting a potential new crop to go into the rotation. We were able to transition the Farm to School project back to the schools with a long-term plan for success. Educators worked alongside communities and non-profits to provide facilitated discussion and planning on a variety of topics. We were also able to assist in the hosting tours for UW-Madison's 150th celebration. I should not that Extension will see a significant change in programming in the coming months. Due to Federal funding cuts to the SNAP-ed programming there will no longer be FoodWise programming, as the SNAP-ed funds covered the total program costs in the counties.

If you have questions about what we do, please don't hesitate to ask. I can be reached by email at adam.hady@wisc.edu or by phone at: 608-403-1015.



4-H Positive Youth Development



Emily Crook, Positive Youth Development Educator

What We Do: We create meaningful opportunities for youth and adults to work together on sustainable community change through civic engagement, healthy living, and science. We manage and train volunteers, host 8–10 countywide events each year, and provide educational resources and outreach for local and statewide needs.

2024-2025 Program Highlights: We had 569 youth enroll – a 5% increase in membership from the year prior, with a 5.2% increase in new members. This year we focused on making slight changes to events to better serve the needs of our families. We saw an increase in our Clover College, Expressive Arts, Foods Revue and Achievement Celebration Participation. This year our main effort was to reorganize management of the Food Stand, which was not a small undertaking.

With new roles, adjustments, sign up forms, and opportunities for feedback, we are seeing so much positive energy around our main fundraiser and look forward to making the best better. For 2025-2026, Emily hopes to bolster the Leader's Board

so that volunteers and parents see this group as a useful resource that affects positive growth in our community.

Outreach efforts: Emily, Kasey, Andrea, and 4-H Ambassador Ruth continued the 4-H Classroom Club Project with three 2nd-grade classes at Northside Elementary, enrolling 42 students in the Northside Stars 4-H. Youth took leadership roles in meetings, learned about animals, and visited Rainbow Ridge Farms and their goats—a supportive 4-H partner. In this second year of the program, we didn't expect first-year students to return, yet two 3rd-graders re-engaged through activities like Archery, Clover College, virtual events, and Summer Camp. Plans for 2025–26 include continuing the classroom club, recruiting more volunteers, and establishing a community club for graduates of the 2nd-grade program.

Human Development and Relationships



Heather Quackenboss, Human Development Educator

What we do: The Extension Institute for Human Development & Relationships supports families and communities through programming that encourages growth and understanding. As a source of well-researched information on topics related, family relationships, child development, aging, financial security, food and nutrition security, chronic disease prevention, and mental health promotion. We provide positive and powerful training that works to catalyze positive change in Wisconsin families and communities using research, evidence-based programs, and equitable facilitation skills and tools to meet the county needs.

Program Highlights: Compassion Resilience has been the most requested program over the last year which focuses on reducing burnout and compassion fatigue as well as social isolation and loneliness. Participants learn various skills and tools to personally work on resilience and groups learn techniques and methods to develop an environment of compassion. This workshop has focused on education, health

and human services, and caregivers and is also being given to organizations that work with trauma informed care or other relationship focused issues. Other groups include the Wise Wednesday's program - a social/emotional learning group that includes social cohesion, self-wellbeing techniques, compassion resilience, and mental wellness. Heather has also facilitated multiple strategic planning sessions including Strategic Facilitation and Goal Setting for La Crosse County Criminal Justice Management Council (five sessions).

FoodWise Program



Karie Johnson,
FoodWise Coordinator

What we do: FoodWise is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). We advance healthy eating habits, active lifestyles, and healthy community environments for Wisconsin residents with limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community, and systems levels.



Mary Hoeft-Leithold,
FoodWise Nutrition
Educator

Farm to School: Farm2School helps connect local farmers with area schools so that fresh, locally grown foods can be served at school meals. Each month, one local food is selected as the Harvest of the Month. This food is then featured on promotional signage throughout schools and sampled in taste tests. A collaboration between the high school students at the La Crosse Polytechnic School and Central High School and nine elementary schools in the La Crosse School District allowed for leadership growth for the participating high school students to provide the samples each month to the elementary aged students. Additionally, two videos were recorded to increase student and parent engagement were filmed on carrots and peas. Find them here: Carrots: https://youtu.be/zY8wEryLT_c; Peas: <https://youtu.be/QjAfsvxfqcY>.

Head Start: FoodWise Educator Mary Hoeft-Leithold shared ways to stretch food dollars and quick meal ideas with 29 parents at three local Head Start branches. Mary also visited 13 Head Start classrooms and provided nutrition lessons to 191 students. Students explored eating a rainbow of colors, tried new foods while going on a vegetable adventure, learned how foods grow, and moved their bodies to be active. On the last day of the nutrition series, Carrot Top, a life-size Carrot character visited the classrooms to encourage healthy eating.

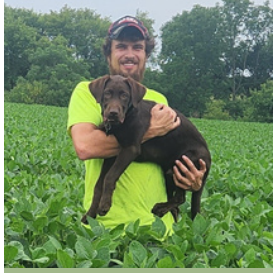


Emily Yang,
FoodWise Bilingual
Nutrition Educator

Garden Collaboration: FoodWise received a mini garden grant to enhance the experience of the current Hamilton Elementary Garden managed by GROW La Crosse. Grant funds assisted in adding garden beds, tables, picnic tables, and a sunshade to provide an inclusive space for learning. Boys and Girls Club students attended programming at Hamilton Elementary and participated in an 8 class nutrition series which included benefits of food gardens and physical activity. Students created culturally relevant recipes during direct education and were able to take recipe ingredients home to recreate recipes with their parent's following lessons.

Hmong Focused Farm to School: In conjunction with a capacity building grant for Hmong focused Farm to School, 16 classrooms in La Crosse had the opportunity to increase knowledge and exposure to culturally relevant varieties of cilantro, winter squash, green beans, mustard greens, and cucumbers. Students displayed mindfulness when trying samples and expressed they enjoyed the fragrance or disliked the texture. Students received colorful food fact cards depicting each vegetable to share with their grownups. Students increased engagement through attending field trips with a non-profit partner GROW La Crosse viewed the culturally relevant produce description signage and plants growing in GROW's greenhouse. Hmong students felt connected and represented.

Agriculture and Horticulture



Sam Bibby
Crops Educator



Kasey Burg
Support Staff



Beth McIlquham
Livestock Educator



Andrea Thill
Support Staff

What we do: The Extension Institute for Agriculture supports Wisconsin's agriculture and horticulture systems with research-based outreach to promote economically sustainable, socially responsible, and environmentally sound practices. In La Crosse County, Regional Crops & Soils Educator Sam Bibby provides farmers with research-backed resources, educational events, and decision-making tools to optimize crop yields and keep fields, marshes, and orchards thriving. Beth McIlquham, Regional Livestock Educator, delivers timely resources on beef cattle, poultry, sheep, goats, equine, swine, and meat science to help farmers, consumers, and industry partners make informed decisions.

Program Highlights: Sam and Beth spoke at the La Crosse County Farm Bureau annual meeting, connecting with local farmers and highlighting Extension resources. They also launched an agriculture newsletter reaching over 100 constituents monthly with timely updates, resources, and event details.

Sam co-led a small grains workshop for farmers, consultants, and agency staff, offering strategies for optimizing small grain production. He is also conducting on-farm research on the viability of Camelina as a cover and cash crop.

Beef production has been a major focus for Beth. She partnered with Western Wisconsin Beef Producers to distribute a newsletter covering topics like low-stress handling, feed considerations, and water needs. She hosted local Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) trainings, certifying producers for markets that require certification, and co-led Producing Quality Beef workshops with the Wisconsin Beef Council and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, covering cattle evaluation, meat quality, feeding, and management practices.

Community Development



Charlotte Peters,
Community
Development Educator

What we do: The Extension Institute of Community Development helps leaders, communities, and organizations reach their potential through education in leadership, organizational growth, food systems, economic development, and local government. Our work strengthens community vitality, enriches residents' lives, and plants the seeds for thriving communities.

Program Highlights: Life Center at Hillview – Partnered with ADRC, YWCA, and the design team to advance the project; opening is planned for early 2026.
Broadband – Collaborated with County staff to secure a grant for the Lifeline program and continue tracking funding changes.
Housing – Co-hosted a summit with seven counties on availability, affordability, and development challenges.

Strategic Planning – Supported new strategic plans for the City of Onalaska, New Horizons, Vernon County Energy District, and Habitat for Humanity.

Community Outreach – Engaged residents at Housing Week, a library housing discussion, and back-to-school events to promote Lifeline.

Strategic Facilitation – Charlotte and Heather led strategic planning for the City of Onalaska (four sessions per month over six months, producing a documented plan) and for New Horizons Shelters (eight sessions).



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