



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
DODGE COUNTY

2024

Annual Report



We are:



Promoting healthy relationships:

We support aging-friendly communities, coach parents, and help families integrate technology, mindfulness, and financial awareness into their daily lives.



Empowering health & well-being:

We provide individuals, families, and communities the tools and guidance they need to reduce stress, improve nutrition, and support physical activity.



Fostering civic & economic leadership:

We're committed to empowering citizens to make positive, transformative change in their communities.



Supporting Wisconsin's agriculture industry:

Whether on the farm or in the field, we're on the front lines of modern agriculture, helping producers build stronger and more productive food systems.



Encouraging positive youth development:

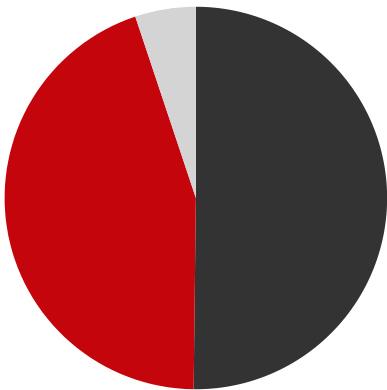
Our research-based youth enrichment programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to grow into the global leaders of tomorrow.

Who We Serve



1644

Direct Educational Contacts



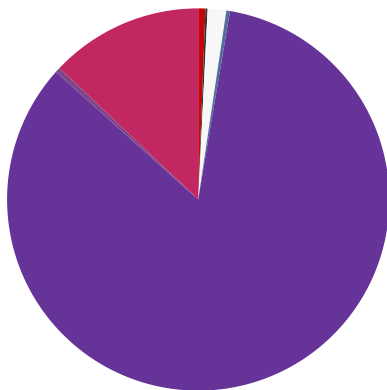
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






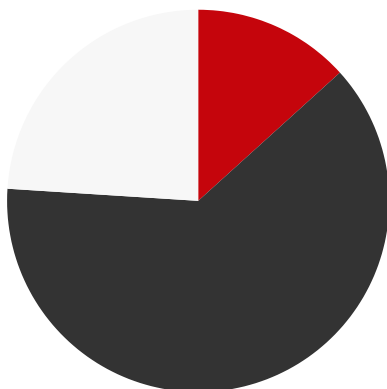
50.2




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unidentified /
not provided



-  Native American or Alaska Native - .06%
 -  Asian - .18%
 -  Black or African American - 1.57%
 -  Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander - .30%
 -  White - 83.98%
 -  Two or more - .42%
 -  Not Indicated - 12.94%
-



-  Hispanic - 13.29%
-  Not Hispanic - 62.72%
-  Ethnicity Not Indicated - 23.99%

4-H & POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Positive Youth Development Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

The focus for positive youth development is experiential learning, youth empowerment, and career and college readiness. This is an example of experiential learning with our youngest members.

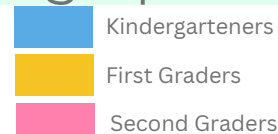
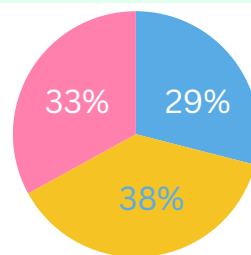
FOUR COUNTY CLOVERBUD PROGRAM

This virtual discovering 4-H learning opportunity for Cloverbuds was an effort of the 4-H educators from four neighboring counties (Columbia, Dodge, Marquette, and Sauk) in Wisconsin. The spring series was **Welcome to the Spring SPARK** Series focusing on creativity and connection with nature. It included Build your Spark - Woodworking; Grow your Spark - Gardening; Capture your Spark - Photography; and Catch your Spark - Fishing. The fall series was a sample of a variety of fall activities.



Months later, we received this picture of a member who planted her bean in her garden.

SPARK Demographics



121
Youth Enrolled in
Sparks



Gender



53 57
undetermined
11

Enrollment by Session:



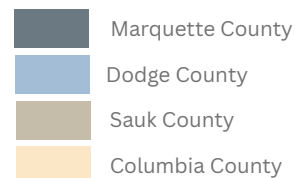
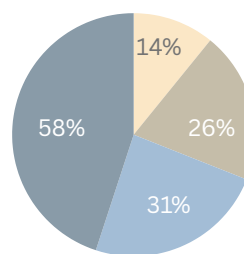
51

Fall Session



70

Spring Session



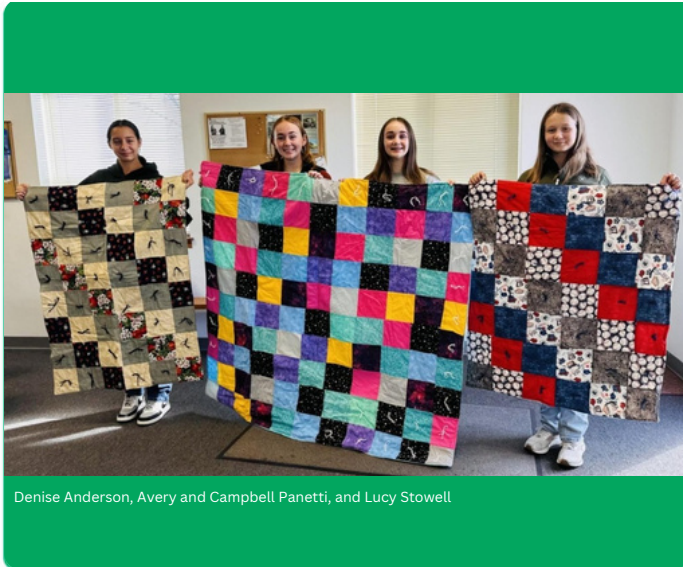
Four virtual sessions approximately 45 minutes each session. Sessions were held on the same night of the week over the course of 4 weeks for consistency and availability.

Most materials for each session were provided by the local extension office; some materials had to be obtained by the family prior to the session or were optional.

Each youth was encouraged to have an older youth or adult that was partnering with them at home to engage in the activities. This provides youth leadership opportunities, shared learning, and better follow up and support at home.

Wisconsin 4-H Dodge County

BY THE NUMBERS



Top 10 Enrolled 4-H Projects

PROJECT	MEMBERS
Photography	156
Crops	120
Beef	108
Art	107
Cloverbuds	105
Woodworking	100
Drawing and Painting	99
Dairy	98
Foods & Nutrition	95
Swine	92

+
29
4-H clubs
and groups

+
125
enrolled adult
volunteer leaders

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



PLANNING AHEAD HELPS OLDER ADULTS PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

In 2024, Carroll and the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) hosted two Planning AHEAD classes at the Juneau and Watertown Libraries. This seven-session program helps older adults navigate end-of-life planning—a process that can be emotional and complex.

Despite its importance, only 37% of Americans have completed Advance Care Directives. Planning AHEAD addresses this gap with topics like financial changes, estate planning, advance directives, end-of-life care, and grief.

The program is especially helpful for those who've recently lost a spouse or partner and are adjusting to new responsibilities. It also supports communities by reducing the need for public assistance among older adults living alone.

100% said they would share what they learned

99% of participants felt ready to move forward with planning

93% had completed or were actively working on their plans

“Because of this series, I was able to initiate a conversation with my kids (who are young adults) in a manner that didn’t make it ‘scary.’”

— Planning AHEAD participant



Expanding Access to Continuing Education for Early Care and Education Professionals in Wisconsin

Carol Bralich, Lisa Banta, Sarah Hawks, Patricia Carroll, Lindsay Weymouth, Julia Yang, Hannah Zellmer | Division of Extension | UW-Madison

Human Development & Relationships Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Methodology

To explore professionals' perspectives about the state of continuing education in Wisconsin, we conducted focus groups between October and November 2023. We centered our discussions around the Wisconsin Care Consortium for Professionals Working with Young Children and their Families. Focus groups included:

Our focus groups included 12 professionals from 12 counties. A total of 8 women and 4 men worked in group childcare centers in various licensed care at family childcare centers.

Participants represented a range of experience levels in the industry for 20 years.

Our sample represented a mix of higher education.

Participants had experience in early childhood education in a related field.

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DIRECTORS CAUCUS BUILDS STRONGER EARLY CHILDCARE COMMUNITY

In 2024, the Directors Caucus brought together early childcare administrators and business owners from Dodge and Jefferson counties to share best practices, receive legislative and licensing updates, and engage in meaningful peer dialogue. These meetings provided a much-needed space for connection and collaboration in a field facing critical challenges.

With staff shortages and limited support systems, early care and education (ECE) providers are under increasing pressure. The Directors Caucus helps address these issues by fostering a professional learning community where participants can network, problem-solve, and strengthen their businesses.

Research shows that networking and shared learning improve professional growth and the quality of care. Participants gain insights into new teaching strategies, stay informed on policy changes, and build supportive relationships.

One attendee shared, “These meetings are invaluable. I appreciate the opportunity to come together with other providers who are facing the same challenges as I am. Thank you for convening these meetings for us.”

By continuing to support these gatherings, we’re helping build a more resilient ECE community—ensuring that local children receive the high-quality care they deserve.

AGRICULTURE: CROPS



MULTISPECIES COVER CROPS AFTER WHEAT

Synthetic nitrogen fertilizer and manure from agricultural land is a key contributor to high nitrates in groundwater, which means that agriculture is also a key part of the solution. Adoption of cover crops and overwinter crops that supply the soil with a living root to prevent nitrates from leaching from the soil into groundwater is one component of the solution. Coupled with preventing nitrate loss is the need to reduce the input of nitrates from nitrogen fertilizer. Multispecies cover crops, which farmers have been adopting in part because of soil health benefits might meet both of these needs through the addition of nitrogen fixing legumes to mix.

Research that began in 2023 with three farmers in the county is expected to continue through 2027 with the goal of estimating the amount of nitrogen that a farmer could replace when using these cover crop mixes after wheat. The initial results this fall were muddled by the historic rainfalls in spring 2024, but did not show much of a nitrogen contribution to the corn from the cover crops. This is why several years of research are needed to come to a conclusion.

With these results, farmers will be able to decide on which cover crops fit their needs and if they can take credits from these multispecies cover mixes, reduce their nitrogen inputs, and reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater.



SHARING OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Research does not change practices if nobody hears about it. At the Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soils Healthy Waters Annual Soil Health Expo on February 5, Fulwider organized a series of lightning talks (<10 minutes) to highlight the agricultural research happening on Dodge County farms. There, Fulwider presented the initial results from the first year of the multispecies cover crops research to the over 100 farmer and ag professional attendees.

This project stems from needs as articulated by farmers in Dodge Co. For example, in post-event surveys from the Soil Health Expo (44 responses), 93% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that Fulwider's presentation provided information that was of interest to them.

"Dodge Co. specific research is valuable and important to hear about," and calls for more on-farm research in the county.

– survey comment



INCREASING DAIRY PRODUCTION BY PROVIDING HIGHER ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Since starting his role in October 2024, Manuel Peña has been actively engaging with the dairy community in Dodge County. He has visited local farms, attended producer meetings and events, and connected with key industry partners, including veterinarians and agricultural businesses. These efforts are part of a broader Needs Assessment process designed to identify the strengths, challenges, and opportunities facing local dairy producers. By listening directly to stakeholders, Manuel is laying the groundwork for targeted, effective educational programming.

One clear need that emerged is the demand for a Calving Management Workshop. Calving is a continuous and vital activity on dairy farms, and producers see the value in refining their practices. The workshop helped farmers: (1) recognize signs of labor and calving, (2) apply management strategies to reduce stillbirths and health issues, (3) know when cows need assistance, and (4) improve calf care after birth. Though this topic falls outside Manuel's core expertise, the program was successfully delivered in partnership with other educators and UW–Madison experts.



Another program, the Dairy Feeder School, was developed by the UW–Madison Extension Nutrition team. It focused on the crucial role of feed personnel and how their work impacts animal health, production, and overall farm efficiency. Additionally, the assessment highlighted the ongoing challenge of language barriers between farm managers and their workforce. These gaps can reduce the success of workforce development efforts, affecting onboarding, retention, and performance.

To address this challenge, both the Calving and Feeder School workshops were offered in English and Spanish, ensuring broader accessibility. Manuel also co-created Bovi-Noticias, a bilingual bi-monthly newsletter that supports continued learning by helping dairy workers strengthen job skills, communication, and on-farm safety.

Beyond workshops and newsletters, the Educator has collaborated on research with UW–Madison and Michigan State University, contributed to peer-led webinars and articles, and promoted Extension resources through radio and TV. In response to local demand, he is also preparing a Tractor and Skid Steer safety training tailored to the needs of county dairy farms.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



EDUCATOR HIGHLIGHTS

After an absence of nearly a decade, the county administrator and (our committee) brought back the position of a Community Development Educator. Pat Malone began her work with Dodge County in November of 2024. An experienced educator, Malone has provided education, facilitation, and research on a wide variety of community issues. These have included community economic analysis, First Impressions, strategic planning for counties, agencies, and organizations. She also has a strong background in natural resources with a focus on groundwater quality. She specializes in crafting solutions in partnership with the county and local groups designed to empower communities and effectively address their challenges and opportunities.

The first step in becoming a new county educator, whether you have 30 years of experience or are brand new to Extension is listening. Pat has spent the first several months of her time in Dodge County conducting needs assessment to identify the priority educational issues in Dodge County. She has used key stakeholder interviews, the Extension community forum, and Community Economic Development listening sessions to help establish educational priorities. Some of the early issues identified are housing affordability and workforce shortages.



EDUCATOR HIGHLIGHTS

In Dodge County, FoodWise partners with schools, Head Start Programs, Community Centers, senior meal programs, neurodivergent support facilities, senior apartment sites and food pantries to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in our communities. FoodWise provides evidence-based curriculum on what healthy and active lifestyles look like while encouraging consumption of fruits and vegetables, meal planning, as well as ways to stretch their food budget. Core objectives in each lesson include the MyPlate materials.



"I was scared to try dried cranberries at first, but I tried it, and liked it!"

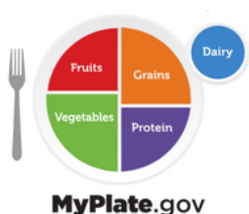
– participating student

"Excellent sessions. Found myself looking forward to each session and the interaction with others."

– StrongBodies participant

Physical activity is a key component in a healthy lifestyle, FoodWise partners with Dodge County agencies to provide no cost opportunities for physical activity. The StrongBodies program improves flexibility, strength, balance and social connectedness for adults and seniors. Dodge County FoodWise was one of the first in the state to implement the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls prevention class, a new pilot program. This program allows for a series of gentle movements, and physical postures, which has been shown to reduce the risk of falling in older adults. Both of these programs can help seniors remain independent and age in place.

FoodWise worked with schools to encourage healthy choices and physical activity through interactive evidence based nutrition lessons. Students were exposed to Wisconsin grown fruits and vegetables through the Harvest of the Month program. This program supports and encourages students to make healthy choices on their own, leading to healthier lifestyles as adults.





2024 DIVISION OF EXTENSION - DODGE COUNTY EDUCATORS & STAFF



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Educator*



WILL FULWIDER
*Crops
Educator*



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CINDY SARKADY
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KELLY FLANDERS
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Specialist*



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MANUEL PEÑA
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Educator*



MARIE WITZEL
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Development Educator*