Extension in 2020

Chris Viau, Area Extension Director

Extension’s mission to embody the Wisconsin Idea and connect university knowledge to all points of the state frequently requires direct contact with the people we serve. The COVID-19 outbreak, and the resulting physical distancing response, created and intensified challenges for our stakeholders and educators.

This past year was incredibly challenging, yet one that highlighted many positive attributes of the Extension Outagamie County team.

Extension staff led transitions and provided leadership that will have lasting impacts. After all, this is what Extension educators have been doing for the last 100+ years. Since 1912, Extension staff have delivered new techniques and ideas to the residents of Wisconsin using innovative teaching methods to inform our community members.

We engaged with parents, youth, farmers, business owners, non-profits, community groups, government officials, and other stakeholders by providing actionable guidance and resources during this stressful and confusing time. It is key to our mission to provide relevant and responsive information – this includes providing information in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats that serve the people of Wisconsin in the best possible fashion. The core strength of the Extension model is to connect community needs with actionable resources quickly and meaningfully. This model is specifically effective during volatile emergency situations.

Our educators rapidly detect disruptions and issues – and they develop, deliver, and update vetted support by collaborating statewide, across organizational boundaries, and in real time. This allows Extension to broadly share newly developed resources across the state and nationally and to strengthen cross-sector networks involved in the emergency response.

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Gardener SOS, a horticulture helpline run through the Outagamie County Master Gardener Association discovered the important first detection of the invasive lily leaf beetle (LLB) in Outagamie County. This red-orange beetle has previously been spotted in 12 Wisconsin counties. LLB is a small, bright red beetle that can cause significant damage to true lilies (Lilium spp.) and fritillaries (Fritillaria spp.)

Master Gardener Level 1 virtual classes wrapped up in mid-September and students took their test virtually during the month of October. There are 27 students that will be entering as Master Gardener Volunteers.

Home and Community Education members continue to prepare materials for elderly or those in need of care packages, activity books and greeting cards. They made a quilt for the Veterans and presented it to the VFW in the fall of 2020. Hundreds of fabric face masks were sewn and then distributed to a variety of agencies that included Outagamie County Emergency Management. The group continues to sew lap quilts and other accessories for those that are in nursing homes and assisted living.

The Outagamie Forage Council, supported by Kevin Jarek, is coordinating a statewide Midwest Forage Association Alternative Forages grant project to collect data on the quality and quantity of some of the substitute crops farmers are utilizing in response to the alfalfa shortages. Farmers, independent crop consultants, seed dealers, and agricultural professionals volunteer their time and efforts to help collect data which will help farmers make informed decisions about choices available to them.

186 Outagamie County 4-H Volunteers worked tirelessly in 2020 to switch our regular programming to a virtual platform almost overnight for our youth. Club volunteers continue to meet virtually, communicate electronically with members, and adapt to a different way of meeting and engaging within their local communities. Volunteers are still working closely with the local 4-H Program Educator to plan virtual and face-to-face meetings and events for youth and families that are safe and engaging.

The 4-H Outreach Committee, comprised of 4-H volunteers, designed and displayed two “Join 4-H” billboards on highway 41 in August and September to encourage membership.

Outagamie County Master Gardener Association (OCMGA) hosted a virtual garden walk on July 20, 2020. Participants “visited” the gardens of three local association members and found inspiration and took in some gorgeous views. There was also a horticulture question & answer session at the end of the tour.

The volunteer based Land Stewardship Committee in the (previously Town) Village of Greenville went on to the next level with the Greenville Greenbelt Program development in 2020, after years of laying the groundwork for permanent farmland preservation. The landmark date of August 10, Town Board voted to approve a detailed development of a Greenville Greenbelt Preservation Plan and also voted to participate in the Natural Resources Conservation Service matching grant program for land preservation spearheaded by the American Farmland Trust. Extension’s role has been to provide best practices for farmland presentation programs and recommendations for next steps to move in a strategic direction.
The Landscape Professionals Conference was held on March 3-4, 2020 in Kimberly. This two-day conference is designed to enhance professional landscape skills and appreciation for sustainable landscapes. Over 130 people joined us to learn the latest in research and industry developments, while networking with other horticultural professionals, including Extension Educators.

Outagamie County Master Gardeners and Little Chute Library teamed up with Karen Dickrell to teach about current recommendations for safe food preservation, and where people can find the most up to date information. Participants also learned about recipes and techniques on how to use the bountiful harvest.

The Annual Joy Conference was held in February at the Fox Valley Lutheran High School. We celebrated 45 years as a conference with a “sapphire" event that was attended by 345 individuals.

Data continues to be collected and results shared from the Wisconsin Alfalfa Yield and Persistence (WAYP) project. The WAYP provides farmers and agricultural professionals with valuable on-farm data documenting how alfalfa stands are performing over a set period of time. More than 60% of the fields, and approximately 70% of the acreage as a part of this effort comes directly from Outagamie County.

FoodWIse
Miranda Dawson began building relationships with schools in the Appleton Area School District and facilitated a series of six lessons to the 4th/5th grade classrooms at Columbus Elementary.

Kris Soper collaborated with SOAR to teach food safety and nutrition education during cooking classes for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Miranda Dawson established a partnership with COTS in Appleton to begin offering a series of cooking classes and grocery store tours for COTS residents.

FoodWIse educators began partnering with Black Creek Salvation Army to help highlight pantry staples in recipe samples offered at the pantry in an effort to move items off the pantry shelves quicker.

It's All Relative, offered by the Outagamie County Youth and Family programs offers monthly educational programs to grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members that are raising children whose family members are incarcerated or not currently capable of being with their children. Youth Development and Life Span Education provides educational materials and assists with the coordination of educational programs.
MaryBeth Wohlrabe and New London Intermediate and Middle School Counselors put together an opportunity for their students and families to order one of three different activity kits that focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) along with resources to build family engagement and relationships. A total of 65 kits were distributed to families at the end of October.

Kevin Jarek conducted a television interview with Millaine Wells, WFRV TV-5 Ag Reporter, to discuss management of this year’s alfalfa crop. The segment appeared on the noon news show and Midwest Farm Weekly which is broadcast both Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Due to the highly variable alfalfa stands across the state of Wisconsin, Kevin Jarek authored and distributed a white paper documenting how farmers could determine a fair price for standing alfalfa in 2020.

The strategic planning process, facilitated by Mia Ljung, with Kaukauna Public Library had to be tweaked due to COVID-19, but is now in full swing for 2021. In consultation with library leadership a Strategic Planning Team has been formed, the strategic planning process has been explained and will be further laid out, and staff has provided feedback via a survey and Zoom sessions.

Karen Dickrell was a co-trainer for a Train the Trainer program for “Taking Care of You” for Extension staff that were seeking to learn how to teach the materials. Additionally the series was offered for newly retired people and was held at the Appleton Public Library. The program was offered on a monthly basis.

Alicia Schroeder-Haag with the support of the Outagamie County 4-H Leaders Association prepared “Fun in a Box” programming available to all members and non-members. These boxes offered activities and educational components for youth and their families to participate in at home. A total of 156 boxes were distributed in August and November. Plans are being made to distribute more programming boxes in spring and summer. Even if COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed we are hoping to continue offering these programming boxes as another way to connect what 4-H has to offer to youth who are unable to participate traditionally.
Partnerships

Hannah Phillips was able to work with Appleton Area School District to assess opportunities to increase participation and healthy food choices and decrease waste in lunchrooms.

MaryBeth Wohlrabe served as a member of the Fox Cities Youth Advocacy Network to plan and coordinate professional development and education to youth-serving professionals and agencies.

Karen Dickrell serves on the Outagamie County Public Health Food Safety Advisory Committee, representing primarily the consumer viewpoint.

Outagamie County has strong historical roots in agriculture and women were an important part historically and still are today in the operation of the farm. Heart of the Farm series is a statewide program offered to women interested in agriculture. Sarah Grotjan helped to plan and promote the series that was offered in the spring. Our kickoff for the winter series was agriculture historian and author, Jerry Apps. Heart of the Farm series covered topics such as self care tips, tax planning and preparation, reading and understanding the milk check and direct marketing strategies among others.

2020 proved to be the year for building stronger partnerships, which became apparent as Extension’s partner Fit Oshkosh (“Fit”) closed their doors on April 30. Fit was not only an important community leader in anti-racism education, but had been instrumental in reaching and supporting Entrepreneurs of Color (EoC), through initiatives such as the Coworking Space and the ColorBold Business Association (“ColorBold”). In a year with so much racial unrest and injustice, it felt tragic for our community to lose such an important organization. The last remaining piece of Fit was ColorBold, and Extension decided to step in to figure out how the business association could grow some new legs and continue to offer business development support and support new leadership growth. Both happened! Here are some highlights:

- Virtual business development education and networking on virtual marketing, business liability, and financial planning with new partners Appleton Public Library’s Small Business - Big Impact, WWBIC Northeast, and CAP Services.

- Leadership development with a handful of dedicated business owners which now are taking on leadership roles in the recently formed ColorBold Committee. Monthly ColorBold Spotlights have been featured since September on Facebook Live. This has allowed the business association to grow its reach and interest.

Sarah Grotjan has submitted a fact sheet titled “Bedding Management and Udder Hygiene” to the Dairy Workers Module - Dairy Skills. This fact sheet covered the importance of udder hygiene for milk quality, farm profitability, and animal health and included research from the United States and Canada on various bedding types and the impact on udder hygiene.
Rent Smart continues to be an impactful program at Pillars Adult & Family Shelter as MaryBeth Wohlrabe partners with Case Workers there to teach the full workshop to residents and clients.

Sarah Grotjan helped plan a series of Farm Updates for Ag Professionals webinars held through September. These webinars replaced the in-person sessions that were held in May and September prior to the pandemic. Specialists covered topics on: animal nutrition, farm business management, considerations for tax preparation, dairy risk management, as well as updates on crops and soils for northeast Wisconsin.

Karen Dickrell serves on the Leadership Team for the Outagamie County Caregiver Coalition and is actively involved in planning meetings, strategic planning and executing the outreach efforts.

No other state harvests more corn silage than Wisconsin and that silage makes up a significant portion of the dairy rations here in Outagamie County. As a result, farmers seek assistance to determine the ideal harvest time to maximize both the quality and quantity of their silage crops. The Outagamie Forage Council planned and conducted four corn silage drydown events to assist area farmers.

The Casa Hispana Interagency continues to meet on a monthly basis and Extension is represented at these meetings where we share upcoming events and programs.

Sarah Grotjan joined a committee of members representing DATCP, UW-Madison, Extension, Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors, along with representatives from the Wisconsin Pork Producers and Wisconsin Beef Council to help meat processors acquire skilled workers and address the need for greater education. A survey has been issued to meat processors around the state. Results have been tabulated and are being shared with the Wisconsin Farm Bureau and Wisconsin Farmers Union.

MaryBeth Wohlrabe served as President of the Fox Cities Community Council to bring together local leaders in health and human services, including public and private service providers, funders, and others with a purpose of improving the delivery of all services in the Fox Cities. Specifically, the council works to bring information to members about important health and human service issues in the community, present information on successful programs here or elsewhere that address these issues, and get interested agencies together to seek solutions to identified community needs.
The English Language Learners Club at the Appleton Public Library continues to program via virtual platforms. MaryBeth Wohlrabe has continued to partner with them in 2020 to teach photography composition skills, mindfulness (calming glitter jar), robotics and coding, aerospace, among other science projects.

MaryBeth Wohlrabe served as a member of the Pre-Action Network to promote prevention programs available to school districts in their prevention of alcohol and other drugs initiatives.

The curriculum for Preparing for Emergency Livestock Transportation Response was finalized. This was a collaborative effort with agriculture educators from around the state. Upon completion of the curriculum and a pilot run, the program is planned to be offered in 2021 at locations throughout the state. This curriculum will teach emergency responders proper animal handling and best practices used during an emergency involving livestock transport on our roadways.

Hortonville Senior Activities committee started the year out seeking information about potential program growth and development moving forward. We toured the Generations Adult Community Center in Plymouth to see how their building was structured, funded and what programs they offered in February. In March we saw proposed building plans for a new building and then the pandemic set in. While the pandemic and a leadership change has stalled progress, the work of the committee continues to lay the foundation for future growth.

MaryBeth Wohlrabe serves as a member of the Appleton Housing Authority’s Family Self-Sufficiency Program Planning Committee to help promote and teach relevant, interesting educational programs to clients as they work towards self sufficiency.

Kevin Jarek partnered with the Outagamie Forage Council (OFC), four different farms, professional independent crop consultants, and seed dealers to collect and share Predictive Equations for Alfalfa Quality (PEAQ) and scissors clip results. This data helps farmers identify the moment when their alfalfa should be harvested to maximize both quality and quantity of the crop. Severe winterkill the past few springs increased the value of this information to farmers/agricultural professionals as we are experiencing a forage and feed shortage.

Extension continues to work with the Outagamie County Division of Youth and Family programs to promote family resiliency programs and resources as it relates to the work of the Outagamie County Citizen Review Program.

Sarah Grotjan co-authored a fact sheet on heat abatement titled “Animal Handling During Heat Stress.” This fact sheet covers symptoms of heat stress, as well as best management practices regarding facility use and animal handling during periods of heat stress. This fact sheet is available on Extension’s Dairy Resources website.
COVID-19 Highlights

Adaptations

Kaitlin Bricco noted individualized horticulture programming changed from in-person visits with plants in hand, to emailed pictures and descriptions over the phone. There has been an increase in questions regarding starting gardens and planting vegetables as people rediscover growing their own food.

Outagamie County 4-H moved most of its programming to virtual formats allowing for youth and families to participate in the comfort and safety of their own homes. Some volunteers worked with Alicia Schroeder-Haag to devise a safety plan for continued meetings in person with social distancing and masks.

Miranda Dawson began adapting the FoodWIse curriculum to fit a virtual platform for elementary school nutrition education.

Caregiver Chats went to virtual offerings as did the monthly meetings of the Caregiver Coalition. All of these were done with the technology connections made possible through Extension and supported by Karen Dickrell. The format for the Caregiver Chats changed to a theme-driven topic for each month, so there is information shared and then discussion follows.

The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) Family Night that was scheduled for November 2020 at the New London Intermediate/Middle School was moved to an “Activity Kit” style where families chose a kit to order and pick up at the school to engage their family in conversation and learning. This project was facilitated by MaryBeth Wohlrabe.

Children Caught in the Middle, a court-ordered program for all families that are going through a divorce, separation or determining placement of children, went to virtual meetings after a revision of the three hour class to better accommodate a class via Zoom platform. Karen Dickrell worked with the Family Court Director and Mediators to secure the proper format and adaptations to offer the class virtually to families needing mediation. The class was taught with greater frequency and Karen worked with the staff to understand how to employ the different Zoom features and adapt the presentation. Classes began in June, with multiple classes to catch up with the families that had not been able to participate because of COVID-19.

Sarah Grotjan advises the Outagamie County 4-H dairy and livestock project committees involved in the youth projects. Youth for Quality Care of Animals is a program for quality assurance and helps guide youth to producing a healthy, good tasting and safe product. Due to the COVID-19 situation, we have gone to only an online option.

Food Preservation update classes were offered by Karen Dickrell, using the Zoom platform. Participants for one of the classes included local people as well as participants from other states, Canada and Puerto Rico!

Karen Dickrell offered Taking Care of You for Child Care Providers as a four-part series in the fall via the Zoom platform. Child Care Providers received 8 registry hours for attending all sessions. This class was typically taught face-to-face in the past.
Outagamie County Home and Community Leaders and members met virtually in the fall to determine their next steps and how to operate. Many were new to the Zoom platform, but have been successful in learning the technology and adapting. Some joined via phone.

Dial gauge pressure canner testing was conducted by appointment in the parking lot at the Extension Outagamie County office site. Karen Dickrell adapted safety protocols with distance, face coverings, sanitation, an appointment system and outdoor signage so people knew where to drop off their units.

Rent Smart, practical education to help people looking for rental housing to acquire and keep decent housing, through evaluation saw the most impact in educating individuals in their rights and responsibilities as tenants and how to better communicate their needs with their landlord. The program was moved to a virtual format to accommodate learners. In the transition the class moved from a two-part three-hour session (for a total of six hours), to six one-hour sessions, which accommodate multiple schedules and learning styles.

Downsize Fox Cities sponsored the program “Who Gets Grandma’s Pie Plate.” Karen Dickrell presented the program which was professionally videotaped. 234 people watched the program via Facebook and 15 via YouTube.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers, a six week evidence based class, taught by a cohort that included Karen Dickrell, was offered via Zoom platform for families in Winnebago and Outagamie County.

Master Gardener Volunteers have been able to adapt and provide educational presentations and classes via online platforms such as Zoom, in partnership with Little Chute Public Library.

Creative Thinking

Hortonville Annual Autumn Fest was revamped from an indoor lunch and resource fair with speakers to a drive-through event. Village resources like the two new transport vans were on display as well as the Village police, fire and rescue equipment. We distributed information packets of resources available in the village and county and all participants got a lunch, packed in a bag. Though people could not interact to any degree with others, it was good to see the eyes behind the facemasks and make connections. One participant drove over in their motorized cart and then “tried out” the new transport vehicle to practice getting in and out of the van and it was successful.

The Joy Conference committee met via Zoom and determined that a face-to-face conference in 2021 was not going to be possible. In place of the conference, monthly emails are now being sent to those that request to be on the mailing list for “Glimmers of Joy.” These emails started in August and have been very well received.
COVID-19 Highlights

Sarah Grotjan and Kevin Jarek were involved in producing a series of webinars, *Farm Management Updates*, to inform ag professionals and farmers about the impact and fallout of COVID-19 on agriculture enterprises. Specialists from around the country gave informative presentations including topics on dairy policy and supply chain issues, government programs for aid due to COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on rural communities and pandemic guidelines to stay safe.

*Life Span Connect* is a Facebook posting every Wednesday by the Life Span program area. Karen Dickrell developed monthly Zoom presentations on a variety of topics including sleep, communications, decision making and holiday celebrations. Over a thousand “hits” have been recorded for the topics.

*4-H Programming* has become more available to the community with the development of program boxes and encouragement for self-paced projects at home with guidance from an educator on a Zoom meeting.

**Opportunities**

This spring and summer hit small businesses extra hard, and business owners of color have proven to be extra vulnerable to the economic effect of COVID-19 due to various factors. COVID-19 business emergency grants and loans were offered from federal, state and local resources, but some of the business owners that Extension works with were unaware of them or overwhelmed by the application process. Fond du Lac Extension and Outagamie and Winnebago Extension Community Development Educators partnered to do one-to-one check-ins with business owners from the *ColorBold Business Association* contact list. Almost 40 check-ins took place with business owners from Outagamie and Winnebago counties. Besides checking in on wellness, grant opportunities and grant writing sessions were offered. Timely, this publication was published: “COVID-19 Vulnerable Business Owners by Race & Ethnicity.”

Kevin Jarek responded to the sudden downturn in *agricultural commodities* as a result of COVID-19. Logged dozens of calls counseling and advising farmers who found themselves in an unprecedented situation. Recognizing this was a statewide need, Kevin co-authored a response titled “Defining Our New Reality - Where Do I Begin?” The steps in the article help farm families begin difficult financial conversations.

COVID-19 “*In it Together: Stronger than Ever*” initiative was organized with agencies throughout the tri-county area by the United Way and Community Foundation. Over 100 people were involved in identifying and addressing issues for the tri-county region. Specific to the issues were food availability, personal care items, prescriptions, transportation for medical appointments, connections with child care and specific needs with face masks and personal hygiene items. The larger group broke into sub groups and Extension was actively involved in the Access team and the Communication team that took us right up to the end of 2020 and into 2021.
Kevin Jarek collaborated with county and state colleagues in June to create tools and resources to help family farms apply for and receive market support payments through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). He co-led a team of three state specialists and three county agents/educators who developed white papers, Excel spreadsheets, and forms to help producers convert forage inventories, such as corn silage, to dry grain equivalents to report to the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

Working with county libraries has opened the door for outreach and a variety of Extension programs being promoted to a broader audience. Specifically, Little Chute, Hortonville, Kaukauna, Appleton, and Muehl Public Libraries have been partners in identifying how to reach out to families early in the pandemic in determining Wi-Fi availability, and how people could access Wi-Fi in their parking lots.

Because National Conferences were offered virtually, Karen Dickrell attended the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) and National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) conferences. The inservices, training and workshops were valuable and applied for application in a variety of programs for the county.

Hannah Phillips created a document outlining where food distribution is available throughout the county to those in need.

Sarah Grotjan authored a fact sheet titled “Use of Disposable Milking Gloves during COVID-19.” This fact sheet covers the steps for re-using milking gloves during a supply shortage. Dairy farms rely on a large supply of clean milking gloves to maintain high milk quality in their herds. Research has found that wearing clean gloves during milking lowers the incidence of mastitis in the milking herd as well as protecting the workers’ hands. A recording of this fact sheet can be found on YouTube.

WLUK Fox 11 featured a video on apples and applesauce for weekend programming which included Extension food safety and food preservation information provided by Karen Dickrell.

The NEW North (regional 18 county economic development corporation) weekly Friday Zoom meetings started in response to COVID-19 for economic development professionals to stay in the loop and increase collaboration. Mia Ljung shared her experience in working with Entrepreneurs of Color during these challenging times. Also, the NEW North Board renewed their commitment to diversity and inclusion and to take steps to retain talent and make NE Wisconsin a more welcoming place for everyone. Through this new partnership, Mia was asked to co-lead the 18 county NEW North D&I Roundtable subgroup on Entrepreneurship and Small Business with her counterpart in Fond du Lac County.
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