



# NEWS FROM EXTENSION

UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION MANITOWOC COUNTY



## July 2025

### Manitowoc County 4-H Members Excel at Area Animal Science Days

*By: Katrina Pionek*

*4-H Educator*

The Wisconsin Area Animal Science Days is a series of day-long events held around the state in June where youth in beef, dairy, horse, sheep, goat and swine projects increase their decision-making skills and knowledge of animals through judging and grading experiences. The older youth also take part in oral reasons on why they placed the animals the way they did.

This year Manitowoc County youth in both Dairy and Livestock projects competed in the Area Animal Science Day at the Calumet County Fairgrounds. Over the past few months, the teams practiced their skills at various farms to get hands-on experience prior to the competition. Thank you to the coaches, Vanessa Roberts (Livestock Coach) Angie Ulness and Paul Siemers (Dairy Coaches) for all their time and dedication educating our youth.

The three teams moving on to state are Dairy Senior Team, Livestock Senior Team, and Livestock Junior Team. Good Luck at State!



### Dairy Senior Team

2<sup>nd</sup> Place



Abby Schultz, Laney Neuser,  
Noelle Vos, Whitney Ulness



### Livestock Senior Team

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Lindsey Pionek, Megan Staudinger,  
Makayla Staudinger, Caitlyn Herring



### Livestock Junior Team

1<sup>st</sup> Place



Ty Mulhaney, Vincent Wetenkamp,  
Hannah Lukasek, Brady Mulhaney  
(not pictured)

## 4-H Americorp Members helping to get things done!



Eva Salm and Emelia Hansen, 4-H Americorp Members, are assisting the Manitowoc County 4-H this summer. The Americorp members are helping out with the youth development and 4-H engagement throughout our county to reach a new audience. They have been promoting 4-H at various events. They are also programming at the Manitowoc Public Library and the Manitowoc Boys and Girls Club. At the Boys and Girls Club, they are working with the members on various fair projects that the members will get to enter into the Manitowoc County Fair. Join them at the Manitowoc Public Library for a literacy cooking series!

---

## Automation on the Farm: Easing Labor, Enhancing Efficiency, and Shaping the Future

*By: Angie Ulness*

*Agricultural Educator*

Technology and automation continuously reshape the work of running a farm. A little more than a century ago, nearly every farm task relied on human muscle, animal labor, and rudimentary machines powered by horses, steam engines, or the earliest tractors. Fast forward to today, and agriculture is undergoing a quiet but powerful revolution.

Across Wisconsin and the wider Midwest, robotic milkers, automated calf feeders, driverless tractors, virtual fences, and drones are no longer ideas from science fiction—they're tools actively being used to manage daily farm tasks. In other parts of the country and world, robots are picking fruit, spraying crops, and even targeting weeds with pinpoint laser bursts.

The dairy industry in particular has seen a rapid adoption of automation. Robotic milking systems allow cows to be milked on their own schedules, multiple times a day, improving both animal comfort and milk yield. Automated feeding systems precisely deliver total mixed rations (TMR) to different groups of animals, increasing feed efficiency and reducing waste. Even calf care is evolving, with automated calf feeders ensuring young animals receive timely, measured

nutrition that adapts to their individual growth.

Whether it's a robotic milking parlor today or a driverless forage harvester in the not-so-distant future, the purpose of automation remains the same: to replace physically demanding and repetitive work with machines, sensors, and intelligent systems. Engineers and innovators focus on designing tools that save time, reduce monotony, and protect the bodies and well-being of those who work long days on the farm. These technologies can also help manage labor shortages, a growing challenge in agriculture.

[Read more...](#)

---

## Manitowoc County Libraries Become a "Libraries with Heart"

*Submitted by: Laura Apfelbeck*

*FoodWise Nutrition Coordinator*

Two libraries in Manitowoc County recently became "Libraries with Heart" after receiving a Rural Health Grant from the American Heart Association (AHA). Manitowoc Public Library and Lester Public Library in Two Rivers will be the sites.

Sue Koepe is a HeartCorps member with American Heart Association, placed in Manitowoc with University of Wisconsin Division of Extension's FoodWise program. FoodWise serves low-income, SNAP-eligible people, helping improve access to nutritious food and physical activity. So FoodWise and HeartCorps are a natural fit. As part of her HeartCorps project, Sue received funding from AHA to purchase blood pressure monitors and other materials to create a Community Heart Hub blood pressure monitoring station within the library, as well as two check-out kits. Additionally, AHA provides training, technical assistance, and education materials to support the library's efforts.

High blood pressure is one of the top risk factors for heart attack and stroke. Nearly half of American adults with high blood pressure are not aware they have this condition. Initiatives like Libraries with Heart are part of AHA's efforts to increase access to blood pressure monitoring, particularly in rural communities which frequently face even higher rates of uncontrolled hypertension.

[Read more ...](#)

---

# FoodWise Community Partnerships



## StrongBodies: A Powerful Partnership Strength Training at Ascend with FoodWise and HeartCorps

### Challenge

Ascend Services, Inc. assists more than 200 people in the Manitowoc community, helping them build a full schedule of life activities based on their choices. FoodWise staff met with Ascend staff to discuss options to meet individual's goals.

### Approach

Ascend Services promotes individual growth through community experiences, education, and employment opportunities. StrongBodies is a community-based program designed to improve physical health, confidence, and social connectedness. Given Ascend's commitment to empowering individuals, StrongBodies was a natural fit to help participants build strength and independence.

HeartCorps member Sue Koeppe leads the exercise portion of the class on site Tuesday and Thursday mornings at Ascend. FoodWise nutrition educators Jace Purdy and Haley Wagner join the group once a week to share information about healthy eating. Ascend staff offer a 3<sup>rd</sup> exercise activity outside of class to reach the goal of exercising three times per week.



Brandon Lesperance (front) and Alex Dehnert (back), Photos by Haley Wagner.

### Results

Ascend participants choose activities to engage in based on their personal and vocational goals. FoodWise is delighted to report that 13 people signed up to participate, plus staff. Strength training improves mobility, reduces the risk of conditions like osteoporosis and heart disease, and enhances overall physical and mental health.



Ascend StrongBodies group led by HeartCorps member Sue Koeppe

*"Given Ascend's commitment to empowering individuals, StrongBodies was a natural fit to help participants build strength and independence."*

**DEANNA GENSKE**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ASCEND SERVICES, INC.

### Program Highlights

- 20** Strength-Building Exercise Classes
- 13** Registered Participants
- 10** Weeks of Healthy Eating Tips



FoodWise education is funded by the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program – EFNEP. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.





## Manitowoc County Farm Markets Ranked High in Wisconsin for FoodShare Sales!

### Challenge

Farm markets offer an excellent source of fresh fruits and vegetables for the nearly 8,000 low-income people in Manitowoc County. Purchasing directly from farmers benefits both the farmer and the local community. However, people may not spend FoodShare dollars at farm markets due to transportation issues, hours of operation, or unfamiliar processes at farm markets.

### Approach

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is called FoodShare in Wisconsin. A farm market must have an Electronic Benefits Transfer machine or EBT to accept FoodShare at the market. By 2016, only Wilfert Farms and the Downtown Manitowoc Farmers Market accepted EBT/FoodShare. The Downtown Manitowoc Farmers Market also had funding to offer an incentive program but had only 5 regular FoodShare customers and sold just over \$100 in FoodShare. FoodWise and the Downtown Manitowoc Farm Market worked together to transform the market.

Together, we increased direct advertising to low-income people, offered farm market tours, improved signage, educated vendors, shared seasonal recipes, and staffed the information table with an intern to help FoodShare-eligible people process their benefits cards and better understand how the system works at both Wilfert Farms and the Downtown Manitowoc Farmers Market.

In 2021, we moved the needle from 19 unique FoodShare users to 106 and from \$528 in FoodShare sales to \$3,048. The work in 2022-24 increased success. By 2024, the market had 129 FoodShare users and \$5,503 in sales.

### Results

In the 2024 farm market season, Manitowoc County ranked number 6 in the State for the amount of FoodShare benefits redeemed at farmers markets and number 3 in the state for percentage of sales from FoodShare. In 2025, Sullivan Family Farm also began accepting EBT so we anticipate increases. Our success represents an enormous amount of work to increase access to healthy food for low-income SNAP-eligible people in Manitowoc County.



Our efforts at the Downtown Manitowoc Farmers Market resulted in a dramatic change, from 5 unique users and just over \$100 in FoodShare sales to 129 unique users and \$5,503 in FoodShare sales.



Our partnership with FoodWise has played a key role in increasing both SNAP sales and participation at the market. Their ongoing support, promotion, and collaboration enable us to reach and serve more families each season. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, our Double Bucks program further extends the value of these families' food dollars, making fresh, local food even more accessible.

ADAM TEGEN, DOWNTOWN MANITOWOC FARMERS MARKET



## The Big Apple Project Harvesting & Distributing Apples to Food Pantries Across Manitowoc, Kewaunee, and Door Counties

### Challenge

FoodWise interviews with pantry managers in Manitowoc, Kewaunee, and Door Counties, identified fresh produce access as a concern. Many food pantries lack fresh produce, stocking only canned fruits and vegetables. Barriers include sourcing, paying for, & transporting fresh produce.

### Approach

FoodWise coordinator Laura Apfelbeck worked with Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin and West Foundation, securing grant funds to plan and pilot a program collecting unsold apples from the Door County Peninsular Research Station in Sturgeon Bay and delivering them to food pantries in Door, Kewaunee, & Manitowoc Counties.

Grant funds cover harvest equipment, transportation and drivers; pantries pay \$6 per bushel (about 40 lbs). Grow it Forward and Sullivan Family Farm in Manitowoc will pick up and deliver harvested apples every other week from mid-August through October.

### Results

Six organizations including food pantries, community meal sites, and a backpack program in the region will participate in the Big Apple Project, offering more than 3500 people access to fresh fruit from Wisconsin. FoodWise will share apple-related posters and social media materials from Wisconsin Harvest of the Month and provide an opportunity to join in on the Big Apple Crunch, a statewide celebration in October, generating excitement about local foods.

*Featuring seasonal produce at the pantry and incorporating it into backpacks and community dinners is a smart, sustainable approach. Having the promotional materials from Wisconsin Harvest of the Month already available and beautifully done is a huge plus.*

*--Emily Longmeyer, NEWAHEC*



Apples are rich in fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants that can protect your heart, lungs and cells.

FoodWise goals and ours are in sync to provide nutritious food to our people in need.

**- DAN BALCH, MANAGER, LAKESHORE COMMUNITY PANTRY**



The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

## Skill Development to Support Adults in Recovery from Substance Use Disorder

*By: Cath Tease*

*Health & Well-Being Educator*

As a Health and Well-Being Program Educator, I'm honored to partner with sober living homes to help individuals in recovery build healthier, more resilient lives. One of my recent collaborations is with **Lotus Recovery Homes**, which has been providing safe, supportive, and educational transitional housing since June 2021 for people on all paths of recovery from substance use.

This summer, I launched **WeCOPE**, a multi-session, evidence-based program designed to strengthen positive coping skills. The course focuses on increasing positive emotions—an essential ingredient in building resilience and improving overall well-being. Participants learn practical tools to manage stress, recognize joy, and cultivate optimism, even in the midst of life's challenges.

The core message of WeCOPE is that it's possible to feel hope, connection, and gratitude even while facing adversity. Positive emotions have been shown to support mental and physical health, enhance adaptive coping, and encourage lasting recovery. Developed by Dr. Judith Moskowitz, WeCOPE is grounded in research that demonstrates the powerful role of positive emotions in healing. Studies show that people who practice these skills experience lower stress and depression and improved health behaviors—even in the face of serious life stressors.

Later this fall, I look forward to bringing WeCOPE to the staff at **Lighthouse Recovery Community Center**, expanding access to these life-affirming tools. As someone in long-term recovery myself, it's a meaningful privilege to support others in finding strength, joy, and purpose without the use of substances.



### Extension Manitowoc County Staff

Jayna Hintz, Extension Director, [jayna.hintz@wisc.edu](mailto:jayna.hintz@wisc.edu)

Katrina Pionek, 4-H Educator, [kmpionek@wisc.edu](mailto:kmpionek@wisc.edu)

Angie Ulness, Agricultural Educator, [angie.ulness@wisc.edu](mailto:angie.ulness@wisc.edu)

Laura Apfelbeck, FoodWise Nutrition Coordinator

[laura.apfelbeck@wisc.edu](mailto:laura.apfelbeck@wisc.edu)



Cath Tease, Health & Well Being Educator, [cath.tease@wisc.edu](mailto:cath.tease@wisc.edu)

Jace Purdy, FoodWise Nutrition Educator, [jnpurdy@wisc.edu](mailto:jnpurdy@wisc.edu)

Chiara Boss, Program Assistant, [chiara.boss@wisc.edu](mailto:chiara.boss@wisc.edu)

JeriLynn Zutz, Program Assistant, [jerilynn.zutz@wisc.edu](mailto:jerilynn.zutz@wisc.edu)

Website: <https://manitowoc.extension.wisc.edu/>

Like us on Facebook!

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove®

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

705 Viebahn St.  
Manitowoc, WI | 54220 US

This email was sent to .

*To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.*

emma®

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.