



# NEWS FROM EXTENSION

UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION MANITOWOC COUNTY



## April 2026

### National Volunteer Week Salutes 4-H Volunteers in Manitowoc County

*By: Katrina Pionek*

*4-H Educator*

UW Madison Division of Extension – Manitowoc County is proud to celebrate Volunteer Appreciation Week, April 19-25, 2026, a time to honor the devoted individuals who generously give their time and talent to support Manitowoc County 4-H.

Manitowoc County 4-H relies heavily on volunteers in the 4-H program. This year, 92 volunteers have served as 4-H club leaders, project leaders, 4-H Leaders Association members and various other volunteer roles.

*4-H Volunteers are truly integral for creating intentional and positive experiences for youth statewide. Their volunteer efforts enable youth to improve decision making skills, build leadership skills and help prepare youth to be ready for future careers. 4-H volunteers are essential to helping youth find their spark.*

According to the 2024 North Central Region Volunteer Impact Study, Wisconsin 4-H volunteers spend an average of nine hours per month supporting local 4-H experiences. Examples of their efforts include organizing 4-H club meetings, leading 4-H project experiences, leading a community service project, preparing youth for a judging contest and many other tasks.

The work of Wisconsin 4-H volunteers is continuous. Every day a volunteer is ensuring 4-H experiences are available to youth in Manitowoc County. These experiences are essential not only to youth experiencing positive relationships with a caring adult, but also to making communities stronger.

To become a 4-H Volunteer, contact the Manitowoc County Extension Office at 920-683-4172 or [Katrina.pionek@wisc.edu](mailto:Katrina.pionek@wisc.edu)



*Volunteer, Dan Schuette, is instructing 4-H members in the archery project. Through the project, he helps youth build confidence, decision making, and safety skills.*

## Wisconsin Cheese: Continuing a Global Legacy of Excellence

*By: Angie Ulness*

*Agricultural Educator*

Last month, athletes around the world competed for podium finishes, as did the Wisconsin cheesemakers. Long known as America's Dairyland, Wisconsin has cemented its reputation as the global gold standard for cheese, garnering many awards and accolades.

I attended this year's competition in Madison, and I was amazed at all the cheeses on display and, of course, the variety to taste and enjoy! Since 2005, that medal count has surpassed 7,600. This consistent performance across local, national, and international competitions proves that Wisconsin cheese is a world-class competitor.

The success is no accident. Wisconsin is the only state in the United States that requires a formal license to make cheese, and it is home to the only Master Cheesemaker program outside of Europe. When I was watching the judging take place, each category had a state-side judge and an international judge tasting, feeling, and smelling the entries to rank the 3,400 entries.

So, think about this: Wisconsin has 5,100 farm families producing the milk that makes over 600 varieties of cheese. 90% of the milk is made into cheese, and 90% of that gets exported out of our state for cheese lovers to enjoy. In total, Wisconsin produces 25% of our nation's cheese supply!

In Manitowoc County, we have one cheese plant left making cheese, Henning Cheese. They came away with some awards from the latest World Competition. I am proud to announce that their Aged Cheddar (cured for over 9 months) received a 2nd, Dragon Breath Cheddar received a 2nd, and Mango Fire Cheddar received a 3rd!

For consumers looking to bring home a champion, consider Henning Cheese or look for the other Wisconsin-made cheeses; the "Proudly Wisconsin" badge or number "55" on milk containers, which identifies the product's origin to be Wisconsin. From farm to the creamery to the global podium, Wisconsin cheese continues to prove that when it comes to quality craft, they are truly in a league of its own.



# Wisconsin Cranberries

*Submitted by: Laura Apfelbeck*

*Nutrition Educator*



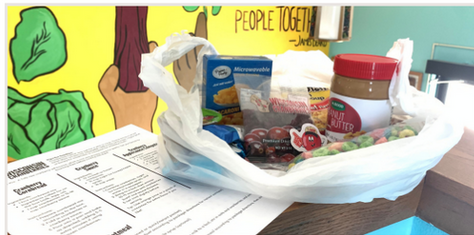
## Wisconsin Cranberries Add Nutrition to School Backpack Program



### Challenge

Grow it Forward is one of three local programs in the Manitowoc Public School District that provide weekend backpacks to elementary children in six schools, children identified by school social workers as likely to have insufficient food during school vacations and on weekends.

Grow it Forward has been providing food to 400 children (unduplicated). Because bags are dropped off on Monday but not distributed until Wednesday, foods must be nonperishable. Children may not have access or ability to prepare the foods, so they also must be ready to eat--no can openers or preparation.



### Approach

As part of the Manitowoc County Hunger Coalition, Nutrition Coordinator Laura Apfelbeck learned that finding suitable fruits had proven challenging and expensive. In the future, Grow it Forward is hoping to put their dehydrator to use, but at the moment, purchasing dried fruit is often cost-prohibitive, so kids were receiving a lot of raisins.

Over the past couple of years, Apfelbeck had periodically contacted the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association to donate dried cranberries to other programs. Cranberries, a good source of fiber and antioxidants, offer variety in our backpack program.

### Results

When contacted again, the Wisconsin Cranberry Growers Association offered to send 400 sample packs of dried cranberries, suppling fruit for one week's backpack distribution. They also sent coloring pages and stickers celebrating Wisconsin Cranberries.

The collaboration has led to exploring a collective purchasing arrangement to continue providing cranberries at a wholesale price.

**“ Promoting Wisconsin cranberries through this project was an easy ‘yes’ for us.** Cranberries are Wisconsin’s state fruit and a crop our growers take great pride in producing. By donating to the backpack program, we were able to help introduce families to a nutritious, shelf-stable fruit that’s easy to enjoy in many ways. It’s a great opportunity to highlight both the nutritional benefits and versatility of cranberries while connecting more people to a fruit that’s grown right here in Wisconsin.

– HOLLY HERLINE, WISCONSIN STATE CRANBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION ”

This program is funded by the Ruth St. John and John Dunham West Foundation, Inc. The University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming in compliance with state and federal law.

## Gardening for Good! Plant a Row for the Hungry

If you’ve been to the grocery store, you know food costs have skyrocketed. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates wholesale produce prices jumped 38% last July! for our low-income neighbors and for people on fixed incomes, those prices have severe consequences. Families may not have enough food or enough nutrient-dense food to feed their families. Fresh produce may be an expense some families just simply cannot afford.

In Manitowoc County, more than 7,500 people (9.3%) rely on federal benefits to purchase food for themselves and their families. To be eligible for FoodShare, a family of four must earn less than \$60K per year. About 43% of Manitowoc County school children receive free or reduced-price meals, meaning their families may also be struggling.

Our rural food pantries are struggling to meet these needs. Food pantry use has surged since 2025, with 90% of pantries in the US seeing increased client traffic. What can you do?

If you garden for yourself, consider planting an extra row of tomatoes, peppers, lettuce or peas to donate. The Plant a Row project simply means planting extra of whatever you already grow with the plan to donate it to a food pantry. You can find resources for yourself or your club at Doing Good Together

<https://www.doinggoodtogether.org/projects/plant-a-row>

In Manitowoc County, you can contact food pantries including Salvation Army, Peters Pantry, Two Rivers Ecumenical Pantry (TREP), Grow it Forward, or United Ministries. Most pantries gladly accept homegrown vegetables, but it's important to drop them off at a time they can be distributed promptly.

No garden space? Consider container gardening or growing a simple pot of herbs like cilantro, parsley, or chives.

No time? Your financial contribution of only \$9 can purchase a 50lb bag of potatoes or onions to support food pantry efforts to purchase fresh produce wholesale. \$20 brings in a 50lb bag of carrots. Ask the pantry manager about how to contribute! Manitowoc food pantries have been collaborating to purchase large quantities at wholesale prices. You can help!



A graphic for 'Kitchen Clean-Out'. It features a red background on the left with white text: 'Kitchen Clean-Out', 'Check dates, toss expired items.', and a search bar containing 'go.wisc.edu/AnswerLine'. On the right, there is a photograph of a woman in a white shirt looking at jars of food on a kitchen shelf. The top right of the photo has the text 'IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY Extension and Outreach'. The bottom right of the photo has the 'Extension UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON' logo.

## Wisconsin AnswerLine

A seasonal kitchen clean-out helps reduce food waste and prevents pests. Check expiration dates, discard swollen or damaged cans, and wipe shelves with warm, soapy water before restocking. If you're unsure whether a food item is still safe, AnswerLine can help: [go.wisc.edu/answerline](http://go.wisc.edu/answerline) or 1-866-540-4636.

# Rock Your Crock with Head Start Staff

By: Jace Purdy

Nutrition Educator

Thanks to a strong continuing partnership and the success of a Color Me Healthy series done with Head Starts students, nutrition educator Jace Purdy was invited to provide a lesson to Head Start staff as part of their annual wellness day.

During planning meetings, Head Start staff asked if Jace offered the introductory lesson to his series "Rock Your Crock", focusing on using a crockpot to make nutritious and easy meals.

This lesson focused on the basics of nutrition, crock pot food safety, and comparing prices in order to save money at the store. Eight staff members registered to participate and sample the All-In-One-Breakfast that Jace prepared as a sample.



## WHAT'S A SERVING?

**FRUITS** 2 cups per day

- ONE MEDIUM FRUIT = ABOUT THE SIZE OF YOUR FIST
- FRESH, FROZEN OR CANNED = 1 CUP
- DRIED = 1/2 CUP
- 100% FRUIT JUICE = 1/2 CUP

**VEGETABLES** 2 1/2 cups per day

- RAW LEAFY VEGETABLE = 2 CUPS
- FRESH, FROZEN OR CANNED = 1 CUP
- 100% VEGETABLE JUICE = 1 CUP

These recommendations are daily goals based on a 2,000-calorie/day eating pattern.

# Litracy Link: Building Family Connections Through Literacy

By: Cath Tease

Health & Well-Being Educator

caregivers connected to the Manitowoc County Jail. Through positive, literacy-focused interactions, we help strengthen family relationships and nurtures connection. These experiences support children's language and literacy development, beginning during difficult times of separation and continuing at home.

The program also connects caregivers and families to community resources, workshops, and supportive materials that help navigate challenges and build on family strengths.

### **Making Reading Memories - Manitowoc County**

In this program, parents record themselves reading a book for their child, with the book and video shared at home to foster connection and comfort. Before recording, parents participate in a Read and Connect Workshop where they learn engaging, interactive read aloud strategies that support child development and strengthen bonds. These shared reading experiences help build a strong foundation for early literacy while supporting positive, meaningful parent-child interactions.

### **Strengthening Bonds, One Story at a Time**

"This truly filled my heart with joy. I know my child will love it. I've experienced something similar before and have seen how meaningful it can be. Programs like this make a real difference for children who are apart from their parents. Thank you for the work you do."



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