



NEWS FROM EXTENSION

UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION MANITOWOC COUNTY



Manitowoc 4-H AmeriCorps "Getting Things Done"

By: Katrina Pionek

4-H Educator



When the AmeriCorps motto says "Getting Things Done," Lizzy Dvorak and Milana Meisner take it literally.

This summer, these two dynamic Manitowoc 4-H AmeriCorps members are hitting the ground running. They are out in the community, bridging gaps, and bringing hands-on learning directly to where local youth already gather. By expanding 4-H programs and creating fresh, exciting opportunities, Lizzy and Milana are building career-ready skills for themselves while making a lasting impact on the next generation.

Where in Manitowoc County are Lizzy and Milana? Instead of making kids come to them, they are taking the education, leadership, and fun straight to the source. You can spot them "getting things done" all over the county this summer:

- Community Hubs: Leading activities at the *Manitowoc Boys and Girls Club* and the *Southfield Townhouse Learning Center*.
- Local Libraries: Powering up summer reading and programs at both the *Manitowoc* and *Two Rivers Public Libraries*.
- Ag & Education: Teaching youth at the *Farm Wisconsin Discovery Center* and connecting with families at the annual *Breakfast on the Farm*.
- Safety & Celebration: Partnering with local law enforcement and neighbors at *National Night Out*.



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Celebrating 250 Years of Dairy

By: Angie Ulness

Agricultural Educator



Two hundred and fifty years ago, America was built on determination, ingenuity, and adaptability. Those same qualities continue to shape the country today. Every generation has faced defining challenges, from economic uncertainty and global conflict to public health crises, and each has found new ways to move forward. Few industries illustrate that evolution more clearly than the dairy industry.

What began as a single-family cow providing fresh milk for the household has grown into one of the world's most advanced food production systems. Even with technological progress, the focus remains on producing wholesome, nutritious food while caring for the land and the animals.

Today's dairy operations have little resemblance to those of the past. Digital technology now helps monitor animal health around the clock, providing insights that allow for earlier intervention and more personalized care. Automated milking systems allow cows to follow their natural routines, while sophisticated data analysis helps farmers make better decisions about nutrition, sustainability and herd management. Science and innovation have become everyday tools, working alongside generations of practical knowledge.

The results reach far beyond the farm. Modern dairy production uses significantly fewer natural resources than it did decades ago while producing more milk for more people. Since the mid-20th century, the environmental footprint of a gallon of milk has declined by nearly two-thirds. That innovation has strengthened both productivity and environmental stewardship.

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, the dairy story reflects a larger American story. It is the story of people who refuse to stand still, who embrace new ideas without abandoning the values that brought them here. Progress has never meant leaving tradition behind; it has meant building on it. From four-legged stools to robotics, from handwritten records to real-time data, every generation has found better ways to meet the needs of its time. The tools have changed; however, the mission has not. The enduring balance between heritage and innovation is what has carried American dairy through two and a half centuries. What will it be like in the next 250 years of Dairy?

Healthy Smiles at the Food Pantry

Submitted by: Laura Apfelbeck

Nutrition Coordinator



Health & Well-Being Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Community Health
SUCCESS STORY

Healthy Smiles at the Food Pantry

Pairing donated oral hygiene supplies with tooth-friendly food education

Challenge

Oral hygiene issues can lead to social exclusion, bullying, and low self-esteem, especially among children. For adults, it can cause embarrassment, preventing people from social interactions like job interviews or school functions. Providing toothbrushes and toothpaste helps people maintain clean teeth, supporting dignity and belonging.

Poor oral hygiene can lead to tooth decay, gum disease, and chronic pain, making eating healthy foods more difficult. Tooth-friendly foods like apples, carrots and yogurt encourage saliva production, which neutralizes cavity-causing acid and supports healthy teeth.

Approach

Extension closely collaborates with Manitowoc food pantries to expand access to nutritious foods. During the course of these efforts, Nutrition Coordinator Laura Apfelbeck learned that pantry guests commonly requested toothbrushes, toothpaste, and mouthwash but

such items are seldom available. When challenged with other expenses, new toothbrushes and such often fall off the family priority list. Laura worked with Peters Pantry manager Tracy Bruce-Minehan to identify possible resources.

Results

Identified dental care providers who accept clients without insurance and bill on a sliding scale. In Manitowoc, Noble Community Clinics agreed to provide educational materials and explore opportunities for onsite pantry visits.

Contacted America's ToothFairy, an organization that provides oral hygiene supplies to pantries. They donated toothbrushes, sample-sized toothpaste and mouthwash for the pilot.

Discussed commonly available pantry foods we could highlight as "tooth friendly." Promoting oral health alongside healthy food options holistically supporting pantry guests' health

With assistance from Extension, Peters Pantry applied for grant funding with Delta Dental of Wisconsin, requesting dental supplies for 11 pantries in Door, Kewaunee, and Manitowoc starting in November 2026. The intent is to feature healthy foods along with oral hygiene information, children's activities, and opportunities for local dental care.



Tooth-Friendly Foods



Apples



Cheese



Carrots



Yogurt

A healthy smile starts with healthy choices.

504 TOOTHBRUSHES

756 SAMPLES OF TOOTHPASTE

672 SAMPLES OF MOUTHWASH

Items donated through America's ToothFairy.



Community Partners



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.

For those interested in contributing to the Health Smiles project, please contact Peters Pantry manager Tracy Bruce Minehan at peterspantryinc@gmail.com or 920-682-6989. You can also use your credit card to donate via Paypal at the Peters Pantry website: <https://peterspantry.org>

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Supplies like soft bristle toothbrushes, toothpaste (especially for sensitive teeth), dental floss, mouthwash, denture cleanser tablets are needed.

Teen Cuisine with Manitowoc Boys & Girls Club

By: Jace Purdy

Nutrition Educator



Over the years, FoodWise has partnered with Manitowoc Boys and Girls Club to provide nutrition education and gardening programs. In the Spring of 2026 Nutrition Educator Jace Purdy met with Manitowoc Boys and Girls Club leadership to discuss summer programming, with a focus on their older participants. Together, a 5-week nutrition education series, called Teen Cuisine, was decided on. The program is designed for teens and focuses on topics where they learn about eating a variety of foods from MyPlate, label reading, culinary skills, and hand washing. The goal of this effort is to encourage healthy habits in school and at home.

Strengthening Rural Communities Through Early Support

By: Cath Tease

Health & Well-Being Educator

Cath Tease, Health and Well-Being Educator/Senior Outreach Specialist will soon be trained in COMET™ (Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory), a research-based program designed for agricultural and rural communities that helps participants recognize when someone may be struggling and respond with a supportive, structured conversation. The program focuses on early support, helping individuals reconnect with wellness before challenges develop into a crisis. The training will include:

- An overview of the COMET™ program and its approach
- How COMET™ supports rural and agricultural communities
- The role of Extension educators in expanding COMET™ outreach
- What is involved in becoming a COMET™ trainer
- Ways to incorporate COMET™ into local programming

COMET™ was developed by the High Plains Research Network Community Advisory Council and is delivered in Wisconsin through partnerships with UW - Madison Division of Extension and

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Farm Well Wisconsin. The program is typically offered as a two-hour workshop and is designed to be accessible, practical, and immediately applicable within communities.

Community organizations, coalitions, school boards and service clubs are invited to contact Cath at 920-683-5061 or cath.tease@wisc.edu to schedule a COMET™ training session.

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