



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
TREMPEALEAU COUNTY



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension Trempealeau County

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EXTENSION TREMPEALEAU COUNTY: CHANGING LIVES AND COMMUNITIES

WE ARE THE WISCONSIN IDEA

UW-Madison Extension's outreach creates key connection points for families, communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and more. We support local volunteers and leaders to take action and serve as role models in their communities, and we make sure Wisconsinites have the latest research, best practices, and educational opportunities.

THE WISCONSIN IDEA IN ACTION:

Fostering Civic & Economic Leadership »

We work with communities to build and strengthen social and economic networks, enhancing the quality of life for residents. Through education and engagement, we help communities thrive in areas including leadership and organizational development, food systems, community economic development, and local government education.

Empowering Health & Well-Being »

We support healthier lives by working with and for the people, communities, and Tribal nations of Wisconsin to build relationships, facilitate learning, and pursue data-informed and culturally based strategies. Our evidence-informed programs are focused on food and nutrition security, chronic disease prevention, community health promotion, mental well-being, substance use prevention and recovery, and access to health insurance and care.

Supporting Positive Youth Development »

We empower Wisconsin youth, and the communities who support them, to thrive. We provide young people a place to belong, a chance to experience positive relationships with others, and an opportunity to explore their interests — something we call “sparks” in 4-H. To fulfill this promise, we place youth leadership, in partnership with supportive adults, 4-H clubs, and community organizations, at the center of our work.

In 2024
Trempealeau
County educators

worked with

86
Partners

facilitated

423
Programs

engaged

3,070
Participants



Agriculture

Steve Oknek served Trempealeau, Jackson and Buffalo counties as the Area Crops and Soils Educator for most of 2024. Steve left Extension in November. One of his key initiatives was providing comprehensive training on soil fertility as a function of soil health at the Western Wisconsin Grazing meeting. This training emphasized the critical importance of understanding and maintaining soil health to achieve optimal soil fertility, which is essential for sustainable agricultural practices.

During the summer field days, Steve played a pivotal role in educating farmers on conducting proper on-farm research. His sessions were designed to ensure that farmers had the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out effective and scientifically sound studies on their farms. This education is crucial for empowering farmers to make data-driven decisions that can enhance productivity and sustainability.

Pesticide Applicator Training was conducted, with 57 area farmers receiving training, in addition to state-sponsored sessions held throughout the region.

In addition to his work on soil health and on-farm research, Steve collaborated with Extension to conduct nitrogen research related to sunflower production in Galesville. This study was particularly important because there was no existing data on optimal nitrogen use for sunflower production in Wisconsin. By using nitrogen rate recommendations from Western Minnesota as a guide, Steve's research aimed to fill this knowledge gap and provide valuable insights for local farmers. The findings from this study have the potential to improve sunflower yields and contribute to more efficient and environmentally friendly farming practices.



Steve Oknek
Crops & Soils Educator



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JACKSON COUNTY



Community Development

Melissa Kono served Trempealeau County as the Community Development Educator with a emphasis in local government in education. In 2024, the UW-Extension office played a pivotal role in planning and facilitating the MLK Day Staff In-Service for the county. This event included a session with Trempealeau County employees to discuss updates to the Trempealeau County Strategic Plan. Additionally, Melissa led a "Real Colors in the Workplace" session focused on working with different personalities, which was well-received by the acting county administrator and IT Director, Tim Robertson.

Melissa was awarded \$5,000 from the Dean's Innovation Grant to conduct free drinking water tests at farm employer-provided housing. In November, we partnered with the Water Quality Analysis Lab at UW Stevens Point to facilitate a household well water testing program. A total of 105 households, primarily in southern Trempealeau County, participated, and we found that 40% of the households had nitrate levels above the safe threshold for human consumption.

Ahead of the November election, Melissa trained at least 163 election workers in Trempealeau County. This effort involved collaboration with all 26 villages, cities, towns, and the Trempealeau County Clerk. She also produced three voter education TV shows in conjunction with WTCO throughout the year.



Melissa Kono &
Kevin Adams,
County Board
Supervisor



Melissa Kono
Community
Development Educator



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Youth & Family Development

In 2024, our youth education initiatives lead by Adam Trunzo included teaching science, technology, engineering, and math programs at libraries, schools, and afterschool programs throughout the county. Adam co-taught a bilingual career pathways program in Arcadia, equipping parents and students with the tools needed for career readiness after high school. Adam worked with others in the office to support the thriving new folkloric dance 4-H club in the county, which included securing a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board to purchase dress costumes.

Adam's parenting programs were equally impactful. He assisted in the presentation of the first-ever Fatherhood Conference in Madison, sharing our local work with incarcerated audiences. He was invited to facilitate discussions for the Opioid Settlement Committee and taught both in-person and virtual fatherhood and general parenting programs. In partnership with other county agencies, he convened a large group of organizations to coordinate services around mental health and trauma in the county.

The summer science camp program at Pietrek Park was a resounding success, selling out within days and maintaining a long waiting list. Adam also worked to bring schools from around the county to visit natural sites in southern Trempealeau County through the 8th Grade Environmental Day program, which included tours of the Lock and Dam, hikes at Brady's Bluff in Perrot Park, and explorations of the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge.



Summer Science Camp



Adam Trunzo
Youth & Family
Development Educator



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TREMPEALEAU COUNTY

Healthy Choices Healthy Lives

FoodWise in **Trempealeau County** is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed). With local strengths, we support healthy eating habits, active lifestyles and healthy community environments for Wisconsin residents experiencing limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community and systems levels.



Trempealeau County Landscape

Whether people are healthy or not is affected by systems, policies, and environmental factors.

50%

of children in schools were eligible for free or reduced price meals.^a



8%

of county residents use SNAP benefits to purchase food for themselves and their families.*



^aWisconsin Department of Public Instruction

* WI Dept of Administration and WI Dept of Health Services

Achieving More Together

UW-Madison Division of Extension FoodWise delivers Nutrition Education programming in Trempealeau County to help make the healthy choice the easy choice. FoodWise partners with Arcadia Elementary and Middle Schools, Independence Elementary School, Blair Taylor Elementary School, Whitehall Elementary School, Western Dairyland Head Start Centers in Arcadia, Independence and Blair Taylor, and with residents at Parkview low-income housing in Independence.

Community

Impacts in 2024

Trempealeau County FoodWise delivered 254 Nutrition Education events and engaged with 882 learners at these settings:

- Arcadia Elementary School: 4K, Kindergarten and 2nd Grade
- Arcadia Middle School: 5th Grade
- Blair Taylor Elementary: 4K, Kindergarten, 2nd and 5th Grade
- Independence Elementary: 4K, Kindergarten, 2nd & 5th Grade
- Whitehall Elementary: 4K, Kindergarten, 2nd and 5th Grade
- Parkview Low Income Housing in Independence

Inspiring Collaborations



After a series of Nutrition Education lessons with youth at Trempealeau County Schools, Parents and Caregivers shared this feedback:

- My child came home talking about trying new and different foods. He was so proud of himself. His favorite was the smoothie! Great job getting him out of his comfort zone.
- My child has upped his veggie intake after attending your program and has been more conscientious about having a more well balanced meal. It is helpful for children to get this message from more than just parents.
- My daughter seems more willing to eat nutritious foods that will sustain her rather than asking for empty calories. Although we strive toward good nutrition at home with lots of healthy vegetables, fruit and meat, it helps that our kids get that message elsewhere also. She also shared a great phrase with us that she learned "don't yuck my yum". I love it, thank you!
- My daughter was afraid of trying bell peppers. She thought they were spicy. After the FoodWise program she eventually tried the peppers. Now she eats them.

Multi-level Program Efforts

Trempealeau County FoodWise partnered with 4 school districts and 3 Head Start Centers to share the Harvest of the Month campaign. Postcards were sent home with students in order to reach parents & caregivers with messages in English & Spanish to promote eating Wisconsin-grown fruits & vegetables.



Connect With Us

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Wisconsin 4-H

Andrea Rippley Schlais has been instrumental in supporting the growth and sustainability of the 4-H Program in Trempealeau County. In 2024, she helped introduce a folkloric dance club, which was a valuable learning experience for everyone involved.

The year presented challenges, as Andrea also had to support Jackson County during the first half of the year due to the absence of an educator or support staff there. This dual responsibility limited her time for implementing new programs.

In April, Andrea successfully revived Clover College, serving 59 youth, including 20 non-4-H members. This program had not been held since 2019, making its return a significant achievement. Additionally, she initiated a 4-H Open House, which provided a valuable opportunity for current members to connect and for new families to learn about the program.

Andrea collaborated with after-school programs, libraries, and local groups such as WTCO, the Trempealeau County Fair, and the Trempealeau County 4-H Program. Her efforts are focused on growing the program, with a significant emphasis on recruiting certified volunteers. To grow the Trempealeau County program ongoing volunteer support is needed to continue its development.



Grupo Folklorico



Andrea Rippley-Schlais
4-H Educator



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