

# EXTENSION MANITOWOC COUNTY NEWSLETTER

June 2020



## Agriculture Remains the Backbone of State and County Economies

By: Scott Gunderson—Agriculture Agent

First of all, Happy June Dairy Month everyone! As most people reading this know, agriculture is a vital part of the economy in nearly every Wisconsin county, whether urban or rural. Family-owned farms, food processors, and agriculture-related businesses generate thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of economic activity while contributing to local income and tax revenues. Statewide, agriculture is a \$104.8 billion industry and provides 413,500 jobs.

Manitowoc County is an agricultural powerhouse. The County is home to approximately 110,000 dairy cattle compared to about 80,000 people. Dairy farms of all sizes dot the rural landscape ranging in size from about 30 cows to over 5,000 cows. As a leading milk producer, Manitowoc County routinely ranks in the top three Wisconsin counties and the top 25 U.S. counties in dairy production. Farmers are also good stewards of the land with nearly 90 percent of the total cropland in the county utilizing a nutrient management plan designed to help protect our natural resources.

The following statistics are based on an analysis by Dr. Steven Deller, Professor in the Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics at UW-Madison. Each year, Manitowoc County farms produce \$229 million of milk; \$34 million of grain, \$29 million of cattle and calves; six million dollars of hay and other crops; and nearly four million dollars of vegetables.

Agriculture employs nearly 7,000 people, up from 5,100 jobs based on the previous Agriculture Impact Report conducted five years ago. Similarly, the annual economic impact of agriculture increased over the past five years from one and a half billion dollars in 2014 to two billion dollars based on the 2019 report.

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of farms in Wisconsin and Manitowoc County are family farms, meaning they are owned and operated by families. In fact, 97 percent (1136) of the farms in the county are family owned and operated.

## EXTENSION, MANITOWOC COUNTY

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## Farmers to Families Program Helps Local Residents

By: Cath Tease—Health & Well-Being Educator and Laura Apfelbeck—FoodWise Coordinator



Volunteers at Northern Cold Storage unload boxes of produce and milk for distribution. Photo: Amber Daus

As a result of COVID-19, the USDA program Farmers to Families began delivering food weekly to communities across the US. In fact, Agricultural Marketing Service partnered with suppliers impacted by business closures to purchase up to \$3 billion in excess produce, dairy and meat products.

Though families in Door, Kewaunee, and Manitowoc counties could certainly use the food, no community in this region has a food bank, and local food pantries lack the capacity to handle entire semi-truckloads of food, which is what USDA offered. Amber Daus of Grow it Forward sought partners to make it possible for local residents to receive donations. By partnering with Northern Cold Storage, Grow it Forward became a hub, a site able to receive semi-truckloads of food from Farmers to Families.

In April, 150- 250 families picked up weekly boxes of food. Amber believed the community need was greater than the participation she was seeing, so she contacted Extension of Manitowoc County to help spread the word.

FoodWise shared information through partner networks and personal calls to isolated Spanish-speaking families. Cath Tease of the Health and Well Being Institute at Manitowoc Extension worked with Jennifer Estrada of *continued*

Crusaders for Justicia, delivering food to Spanish-speaking families. In May, 750 families received food boxes. FoodWise also connected with UW-Green Bay to recruit a student volunteer, Jenny Franzen, to deliver food to rural pantries in Kewaunee County.

In addition to meat and cheese, produce arrives each week. Some produce—like collard greens and sweet potatoes—are less familiar to local recipients. So, FoodWise and United Way created recipes featuring donated foods. Recipe cards include a food safety tip tied to COVID-19 as well. Any extra produce is processed into soups and stews by Diana Bestcha from Roadside Cucina and Cannery, then frozen for future redistribution.

Many families in our region have been deeply impacted by the pandemic: savings depleted, jobs lost, families facing uncertain futures. Farmers to Families helps both the farmers who might otherwise not sell this food and the many families who receive support. Since April 2020, Manitowoc County has received nearly \$334,000 in food, about 242,000 pounds.



Volunteers distribute donations of ground beef from the loading dock at Northern Cold Storage. Photo: A. Daus

## The Science of HOPE

*By: Cath Tease, Health and Well-Being Educator*

Students who feel connected, included and engaged at school generally do better academically and socially. Strong school connectedness can also buffer young people against anxiety, depression and peer pressure. I wanted to share some of the data collected in the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey specific to Manitowoc County Middle School age youth.

Students were asked two questions about whether they had experienced “significant problems” due to anxiety or prolonged sadness. They were not asked whether they had a mental health diagnosis. Students were also asked about non-suicidal self-harm.

54% of overall students reported they had experienced significant problems with anxiety (past 12 months). Females (63%) and Males (45%) for an average of 54%. Nineteen percent of middle school youth in Manitowoc County surveyed reported they intentionally self-harmed without intending to die.

I share this information as a newly assigned co-chair the Substance Abuse Prevention (SAP) coalition of Healthiest Manitowoc County. As an Extension educator, part of my role is to increase partnerships to promote positive mental health strategies, increase knowledge of concrete steps that build protective factors among family serving professionals, schools and other agencies and to initiate community engagement processes to identify readiness and opportunities to promote positive mental health.

Not only does the SAP coalition track rate of use and suicide rates, the coalition also works to address environmental factors that may contribute to student anxiety or prolonged sadness. Supportive adults are vital in a young person’s life. Parents and teachers are two primary sources of support, yet having other supportive adults is vital. Current alcohol use among middle school age youth in Manitowoc County is 13%. We also found that 20% of those same students responded they had no supportive adult besides a parent/caregiver.

As a coalition we are making strategic plans to build a community of supportive adults that believes all kids can be successful, no exceptions. This Kids At Hope belief systems is a county wide initiative to believe, connect and time travel.



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