

Agriculture & Extension Committee Minutes
Thursday, January 19th, 2023 5:00pm
Health & Human Services Center & Zoom
303 W. Chapel Street

Dan Nankee called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

Roll call: Dan, Ricky, Kevin, Darrell, and Roger attended the meeting in person. Barry, Maggie, Josh, Ruth, Joe, and Tom were at the meeting.

Motion to approve agenda by Ricky, seconded by Roger. Motion passed.

Motion to approve minutes of the November 17th, 2022 meeting by Kevin, seconded by Roger. The motion passed.

Report from Committee Members – Ricky mentioned that the UW Extension State Office received a USDA federal grant of approximately \$9.3 million to help establish rural partnerships. Only three were awarded in the entire country (Wisconsin, Vermont, and Auburn University). He also spoke about a book that is available through the Wisconsin Farmers Union by Tom Mosgaller that discusses community development.

The Coping Better Broadcast is produced by UW Ag Safety & Health and involves a series of podcasts dealing with stress and mental health issues concerning farmers, farm families, and agricultural professionals. The podcasts are broadcast on WRCO in Richland Center (one of them interviewed Gene Schriefer); they can also be found online on the Ag Safety website.

Dan had inquired about a sheep/goat seminar that he had heard about on the radio. Amanda provided Tom with a handout containing information about the Small Ruminants Webinar series that is taking place. Upcoming webinars will be taking place on February 8th, March 8th, and April 12th.

Several of the board members expressed an interest in receiving the meeting minutes earlier. Tom will forward the meeting minutes to the board members right away once they are available, rather than waiting to send them until just before the next meeting. That way they more of a chance to review the minutes prior to the next meeting.

AED Update – Ruth shared an update on Lynn, who had surgery earlier this month and is recovering at home. Lynn is waiting to be cleared to begin working part-time from home, and she hopes to return to the office in early February.

At the November meeting, it was reported that the Educator contracts were being signed. Previously, Iowa County was paying a higher fee for the 4-H Educator than for the other educators, due to a situation in the past where there was talk of combining the Iowa County 4-H educator with another county. It was negotiated with the state that with the new contract, Iowa County will now pay the same amount for the 4-H Educator as the other educators, and the state will pay the difference to keep the 4-H Educator fee at the same level as it has been.

Sarah officially retired on January 6th. The position has been posted and is set to close on January 24th. Lynn was hoping that two committee members may be interested in in being part of the final interviews – they would provide feedback, while Lynn would make the final hiring decision. Ricky and Dan expressed interest in being part of the interviews, which will likely be conducted in early February.

Ruth introduced Maggie Milcarek, the new FoodWise Coordinator, who briefly introduced herself and gave a summary of her background and experience.

Highlights from Educator Reports

National Resources Institute

Joe – Joe gave an update on the status of his position: last year he was asked to serve as the Interim Director of the North Central Region Water Network. His time would be split 50/50 between that and his duties as Natural Resource Educator. That was supposed to end at the end of last year, but he was asked to continue in that dual role through June, when hopefully they will have an alternative plan in place. Joe served in a position similar to that in Ohio for a number of years, so the transition was not too difficult.

Joe continues to meet with the area Land & Water Conservation offices to review the results of the SWIGG study and to come up with options for addressing issues that came up in the course of the study – particularly nitrates and bacteria. They are discussing educational options for well owners to increase awareness of the potential water quality issues, come up with ideas on how to prevent contamination, and what options there are for addressing contamination once it happens. From funds that were received from ATC lines, there is some money available to Land Conservation to address ground water issues; could possibly look into decommissioning abandoned wells.

Joe, along with Josh, hosted a regional meeting of farmer-led watershed groups in SW Wisconsin in November. About 50 people attended. The meeting included a presentation on soil health, review of the SWIGG study, and discussion about recruiting new farmers to the groups. Two more events like this are planned for 2023.

Health and Well-Being Institute

Maggie – Kathy was unable to attend the meeting, but Maggie shared information about a class that Kathy offered around the holidays that discussed options for swapping out some regular holiday favorites for healthier options. Attendees were able to sample a rice pilaf recipe, and they shared concerns about rising grocery prices.

Kathy also completed the Fall 2022 cohort of the Learning Community for Inclusive Organizational Citizenship in December, a group that met for 12 weeks to discuss issues involving identity, privilege, power, and change.

Maggie and Kathy are working on a Growing Together grant application, which is due in February and provides support for community gardens that provide food for food pantries, schools, and other FoodWise partners. They are in the process of identifying possible sites for the community gardens, which must include some sort of educational component. The sites must be able to provide a gardening expert to tend to the garden (not necessarily a Master Gardener).

Ricky asked if there were any schools that could maintain community gardens. There are schools in the area with greenhouses that are not being utilized. In order for schools to qualify for programs through FoodWise, they need to have 50% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches; currently, only Iowa Grant qualifies in our county.

Regional Ag Educators

Josh – Josh represented that three Regional Ag Educators at the meeting. He touched upon some professional development opportunities that he has participated in (seminars, conferences). Many ag contacts also attend these events, so it is a good way to connect with others.

He also spoke regarding the Nitrogen Use Optimization pilot project. A new standard for nitrogen was tabled, but since nitrogen is volatile, it is unstable and therefore difficult to track and test. There is an

opportunity to apply for a \$50k grant to perform research on farms. Farmers would work with Extension to set it up, and the money can be used for a wide variety of uses. Extension is being brought in to help analyze the data.

There is also a small grain/soybean project in the works that involves in-season crop scouting of soybean fields. Someone from Extension would scout the fields every 2-3 weeks to track crops. The data will be used to predict the profitability of growing soybeans in fields.

There are changes in the pesticide safety training program for this year. In essence, the local connection is being modified. Rather than performing in-person training ourselves, regional in-person trainings will be done by state personnel. Virtual trainings will also be offered. In addition, we will not be sending out reminder notices to those whose certifications are set to expire, and training manuals will no longer be available for purchase in the Extension offices (they must be purchased online). Josh will still be available to help out in any way possible.

Josh also mentioned the Cover Crop Program, where there are \$5 rebates available on crop insurance. He's not sure how much this program is being utilized, but he does believe that having a growing crop in fields is important.

Positive Youth Development

As was mentioned in the AED update, Sarah's last day was on January 6th, and the search is on-going to find a new 4-H Youth Development Educator. Sarah did request that Tom receive recognition for the efforts he has made in keeping things running in absence of a 4-H Educator, including gathering items for, assembling, and distributing the 4-H Discover Boxes, a series of Zoom activity sessions (one for Cloverbuds, one for students in grades 3-6).

Community Development Institute

Barry – Barry began by talking about the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The county Health Department asked Barry to organize conversations with stakeholders with the goal of working to improve the health of Iowa County residents. In the most recent CHIP assessment, these areas were identified as priority topics: mental health & alcohol/drug abuse, access to transportation, healthy living, and aging concerns.

A small group that Barry is a part of has been working on a plan for improving the Bloomfield Prairie. Nothing has been decided upon yet, but some possibilities include enhancing the shelter, extending the pier, and dredging the pond. The Iowa County board of supervisors has committed \$100k in the 2023 budget to outdoor recreation projects that promote tourism; they are hoping to tap some of that money for these improvements.

On the broadband front, the Wisconsin PSC is looking to partner with Extension as part of a possible BEAD grant. If received, Extension will work over the next couple of years to help in various ways, such as creating a community planning toolkit, education and outreach activities, and planning workshops. Extension is looking to people like Barry and other agents to develop materials and tools to be used for these activities and workshops.

Barry has also been asked to facilitate a series of conversations between our regional ag educators and local farmers to help determine programming needs and priorities. Three conversations will take place, with topics involving dairy, livestock, and crops/soils. These conversations will happen February 21-23 via Zoom.

Human Development and Relationships Institute

Ruth – Ruth highlighted her work with the Family Resource Center of Iowa County. The Family Resource Center offers programs and resources to Iowa County families, to provide a healthy start for children, and to reduce child abuse and neglect. Base funding for the program comes from the Iowa County Department of Social Services, which allows them to provide home visits to identified families as well as car seats and car seat education to those who need it.

Previously, the group did not have a permanent physical location. However, they recently applied for and received grant money, with which they were able to find a rental space that meets their needs. They will be located in the lower level of Grace Lutheran Church.

They also applied for and received a grant through the Wisconsin Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board; with these funds and the help of their dedicated volunteers, they were able to provide supports such as diapers/wipes/formula, school supplies, gas cards, personal care supplies, clothing/shoes, and summer rec offerings (pool passes). They also offered programs and activities such as play groups, parent cafés, library programs, a back-to-school event, and a community baby shower. In order to maintain these offerings, they have applied for a new grant that would help sustain their current programs, build their staff, and provide administrative support for the Board.

Ruth's and Extension's role with the group is to provide leadership, networking, problem-solving, fact-finding, and communication to help support Iowa County families.

Dan had recently inquired about the Work In Wheels program offered through SWCAP. This program offers zero-interest car loans to assist people who are in need of transportation in order to get to and from work. Those who are approved are able to purchase a used vehicle for up to \$7,200 for a monthly payment of \$175. In order to be approved, applicants must demonstrate that they will be able to make the monthly payments. Extension provides financial education to loan recipients, who are also given a copy of their credit report and instruction on how to read it. The program is very successful, with a great majority of the recipients able to complete the program. The monthly payments received go toward helping other individuals.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 16th at 5:00 pm. Darrell made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Ricky. Motion passed.