



September 29th, 2022

To: Lincoln County UW-Extension Partners

Dear Lincoln County Partners,

We have been approached by constituents confused about the status of UW-Extension funding for 2023 based upon statements made at the Board meeting on September 20th. As such, we want to provide you, and all other Lincoln County constituents that we work with and serve, clarifying information.

Currently, as proposed by the Lincoln County Finance Committee and presented to the Board at the September 20th meeting, the UW-Extension budget has been eliminated. We are also aware of a verbal commitment by the Lincoln County Board Chair to provide \$45,000 in funding to the UW-Extension budget for the purposes of supporting the 4-H program, which also enables us to maintain the FoodWise program - the nutrition education program for low-income residents. We have shared, with the County Board Chair, Don Friske, what Extension would be able to do - and not do - with these funds should the county budget be amended.

As you know, Extension provides valuable educational services to the residents, schools, communities and organizations of Lincoln County in partnership with Lincoln County government. We want you to be aware that should Lincoln County decide to eliminate funding for the Extension office, important programs and services that you know of and rely on will no longer be available to the residents of Lincoln County. Additionally, should the proposed 2023 Extension county budget not be amended, 4-H/Youth services will also discontinue.

Extension will need to wind down education services and programming to the residents of Lincoln County by the end of 2022, including but not limited to Health & Well-Being programming in partnership with the Lincoln County Health Department and school districts throughout the county, organizational and business development assistance for non-profit organizations, crops and soils research and farmer assistance, StrongBodies fitness programming for mid to older adults, and overall office assistance to help stakeholders find answers to a wide variety of questions. Additionally, without a co-investment from Lincoln County in those program areas, the ability to access regional and state Extension specialists will be lost, given the level of demand from counties continuing to make co-investments.

Programs and projects that are subject to being eliminated as a result of the county removing its funding support include, but are not limited to:

- Support for mental health programming including Raise Your Voice Club (Merrill High School), Mental Health First Aid Training, and the Lincoln County Healthy Minds Coalition
- Alcohol and other drug abuse education including the Social Norms Educational campaign (reversing adult perceptions about youth behavior) and Mock Teen Bedroom demonstrations (recognizing potential hiding places for drugs)
- StrongBodies Fitness for mid-life to older adults
- We Cope, Focus on Wellness, and Learning to Breathe programming (emotional regulation for adolescents)
- Lincoln County housing and day care businesses planning throughout the county

- Organizational development with the Board of Directors for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Northcentral, Wisconsin chapter
- Merrill Area United Way strategic planning
- Town and county rural broadband expansion planning
- Youth Tractor & Machinery Certification Course
- Nitrogen enhancement product research plots/nutrient management education for farms to increase crop yields and protect the environment
- Nitrogen and sulfur rate effects on winter wheat yield research plots
- Community Health Assessment planning (with county Health Department)

Many of these programs, particularly those offered through the Healthy Minds Coalition, are often supported by donations from community organizations and grants that are also managed by Extension. Other coalition organizations have stated they do not have the capacity to manage these funds. The collective impact of these groups will be significantly compromised without Extension support.

Volunteers that assist with such programs as Strong Bodies would no longer be supervised by Extension in Lincoln County and would not be covered by UW-Madison liability and insurance policies. Similarly, Lincoln County 4-H volunteers would lose the same support, provided funding is not reinstated as verbally expressed by the County Board Chair.

In addition to the items mentioned above, Lincoln County's Extension office would not be staffed by a front office support professional, thus not being able to be open to the public. This action will result in a drastic reduction in services to Lincoln county residents - even if funding is reallocated to maintain the 4-H program in 2023.

As is the case in all counties that currently have Extension educational services, Extension invests typically more than half of the cost in support of its educators who work in Lincoln County. Those educators are highly knowledgeable about the communities they serve because they live in the county. They know what primary issues the county faces and partner with many organizations to address them.

We value greatly our 102-year partnership with Lincoln County, serving the residents of the county. We hope our partnership continues for the next 100 years. However, we can only plan with the information in front of us and that is program and service reduction and elimination heading into 2023.

Please reach out with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Art Lersch, Area Extension Director
 UW-Madison, Division of Extension
 (715) 218-2646
art.lersch@wisc.edu



Jason Hausler, Assistant Dean
 UW-Madison, Division of Extension
 (715) 533-8006
jason.hausler@wisc.edu

Cc: Karl Martin, Dean and Director, UW-Madison Division of Extension
 Paul Delong, Associate Dean, UW-Madison Division of Extension