

Broadband in Wisconsin: Sowing the seeds of change



UW-Extension is working to connect everyone through broadband.

In the summer of 2010, the University of Wisconsin-Extension received its two largest-ever grants to help connect community anchor institutions (schools, libraries, hospitals and governments) with high-speed, affordable Internet access (“broadband”) through a project called [Building Community Capacity through Broadband](#) [1] (BCCB).

One critical piece of this project was helping bridge the digital divide -- getting access to free public computers and training on their use to people in [the project's five demonstration communities around the state](#) [2].

As part of the BCCB project we hired outreach educators to teach digital literacy, purchase devices (like the tablets pictured here) and fund fiber and WiMax infrastructure. Now these tools, along with free classes, are being used in communities and field tested, literally, around the state.

One example of this community outreach and education is the Crop Scouting and Diagnostic Clinic hosted by UW-Extension Chippewa County Agriculture Agent's Jerry Clark and Katie Sternweis of UW-Extension Dunn County. Jill Hietpas, the BCCB project outreach educator in the Chippewa Valley, worked with Cooperative Extension colleagues in the Chippewa Valley to lend the tablets for participants to learn the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) toolkit and other UW Extension-developed applications.

Jim Pingel of New Auburn came to learn how to identify and manage crop pests and issues and how technology might help him in the field.

“Using iPads and other technology is a great idea, but it can be overwhelming to decide what apps to use without getting confused,” he says. “It was nice to have these iPads with the UW-Extension apps already loaded with the information beneficial to my immediate needs. As a salesman I get people who want information now. I know the common pests (cutworms, aphids) but technology helped to see images for those I don't recognize.”

Jill also was able to pull in assistance from the Chippewa Internetworking Consortium (CINC), a community-owned network providing broadband connectivity (1-10 Gbps circuits) to the community anchor institutions in the Chippewa Valley. As part of the BCCB project, CINC is expanding their fiber network and also is building out a WiMax network. CINC gave Jill the WiMax equipment to assist with doing outreach at locations that don't have great wired connectivity -- like fields.

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Links:

[1] <http://broadband.uwex.edu/>

[2] <http://broadband.uwex.edu/bccb-demonstration-communities/>

[3] http://www.twitter.com/wi_broadband