

EXTENSION FOND DU LAC COUNTY

JULY 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
FOND DU LAC COUNTY

FOOD SECURITY, HEALTHY EATING, AND HEALTHY LIVING



FoodWise advances healthy eating habits, active lifestyles and healthy community environments for families with limited incomes through nutrition education at the individual, community and systems levels. *FoodWise* reaches individuals and families through local community partners by providing nutrition classes in-person and virtually, indirect education (newsletters, etc.), and social media/marketing. *FoodWise* is an obesity prevention program that addresses policy, system and environmental changes through local and state public health efforts.

FoodWise is federally funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Health & Well-Being works to catalyze positive change in Wisconsin families through evidence-based programs focused on nutrition, food security and safety, chronic disease prevention, mental health promotion, prevention of substance abuse and health insurance literacy. Local health coalitions efforts are supported by coalition capacity building tools and health equity frameworks. Rooted in both urban and rural communities, we're working together to help solve the state's most pressing well-being needs and to ensure that all Wisconsinites live stronger, healthier lives.

Amanda Miller, FoodWise Coordinator, Health & Well-Being Educator

Coordinating this season's donation program at the Fond du Lac farmers market, with donations provided to the Fondy Food Pantry. Donation programs reduce unnecessary food waste and help bring fresh, locally grown produce to food pantries.

Gleaning is the act of collecting excess fresh foods from a variety of locations, including farms, gardens, farmers markets, grocers, restaurants, state and county fairs, and more. There are a variety of benefits to gleaning:

Food waste: over 100 billion pounds of food are thrown away in the United States every year. There are some estimates that up to 20% of America's entire food supply goes to waste. Food waste can happen at any point in the food supply chain - the farm or grower, the grocery store, the restaurant, or individual homes. Many times, food waste occurs unnecessarily as the food is perfectly fine to consume. Examples of this include: when consumers misunderstand product dating (expiration dates, best by dates, etc.) or when a grocery store doesn't sell a fruit or vegetable that doesn't look visually appealing.

Hunger and food insecurity: While food is going to waste, there are nearly 18 million (or 13.5%) of United States households that experienced food insecurity at some time. An estimated 1 in 7 people are affected by hunger. This number is usually much higher when looking only at the child population. It is also much higher for certain households, like single-parent and older adults.

Support the farmers: oftentimes, farmers are unable to take back some of their unsold produce from a farmers market. For example, they may not have another farmers market to sell at during the produce's shelf life and are looking for less produce to take back with them at the end of the market day and before their next harvest.

Community support: a good gleaning program requires participation from farmers/vendors, food pantries, and other groups. Oftentimes, this fosters a strong connection and support for making a difference in the local community. A gleaning program can bring people together that otherwise may never have worked with each other.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



Community Development provides educational programming to assist leaders, communities, and organizations realize their fullest potential. We work with communities to build the vitality that enhances their quality of life and enriches the lives of their residents. We educate in leadership development, organizational development, food systems, community economic development, local government education and much more. In short, the Community Development Institute plants and cultivates the seeds for thriving communities and organizations.

Noah Reif, Community Development Educator

A series of meetings with the Fond du Lac Public Library Information and Outreach Coordinator on community engagement strategies and contacts to assist in the updating of the county history book, *Life by the Lake*. The Fond du Lac Public Library began work on the re-write and update of the local history book, *Foot of the Lake* in late 2024. A key aspect they wished to include and properly portray were growing populations Hmong, Indigenous, and Hispanic people who might be interested in sharing their historical knowledge with the library. Diana and Noah were asked to participate in a Community History Discussion and have a 1:1 with Melanie Kearn, the Library's Information and Outreach Specialist. Diana and Noah provided community engagement strategies, tactics and contacts with Melanie over a series of consultations. The updated version was published in early 2025 and was launched at a community event in May 2025. The event was attended by over 75 community members and featured several of the key contributors, including the leadership of Brothertown Indian Nation.

"I can't say thank you enough for taking the time to meet me and share so much of your knowledge of the community and the stories in it. The connections you shared became essential to the book and I am so grateful we were able to share the voices and stories that we were. As a person who was very new to Fond du Lac, I had not been able to gain trust or working relationships with residents and creating that buy-in proved very challenging when I was tasked with this book. Thank you for being the folks who saw a need for connection and being so welcoming and willing to share your time!"

- Melanie Kearn, Information and Outreach Specialist, Fond du lac Public Library

Curriculum review and development for a five-session online course about Financial Development and Donor Relations for Nonprofit Leaders. The purpose of this upcoming course is to increase the financial capacity of nonprofits across the state to meet community needs and take action to create positive community change.

Nationally, nonprofits list "rising operations costs" and "inadequate finances" as the top two challenges. Through county-level need assessments, it is clear this national trend aligns with the challenges of local nonprofits. Knowing this need, Extension is reviewing our existing financial development materials and developing additional ones to deliver a fund development course that will address the top two concerns of nonprofits. Additionally, given the educators experience in previous delivery, the curriculum is being updated to reflect evaluation data from previous sessions. A team of Extension Organizational and Leadership Development educators is developing a curriculum to provide Wisconsin Nonprofits with the skills and tools to assess, refine, and create fund development strategies necessary to fulfill their organizational mission. This curriculum will be delivered virtually, in five 90-minute sessions during July and August. Once the curriculum has been developed, it can be delivered by Extension community development educators on a county level.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS



*The Extension Institute of **Human Development & Relationships** provides the tools Wisconsinites need to thrive as well-rounded, capable individuals and families. We support families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding. Our programs promote aging-friendly communities, coach effective parents and help families put technology, mindfulness and financial awareness to use.*

Carol Bralich, Human Development and Relationships Educator

The average American tenant is “cost-burdened” (paying 30% or more of income toward rent). According to the 2022 State of Home Affordability in Wisconsin report, 65% of renters in the state pay more than 30% of their income on housing and 37% of renters spend more than 50%/month (among renters who earn less than \$50,000/year). The report also indicates that many renters don’t earn enough to afford the average rental unit. The hourly wage needed to afford fair market rent for a two-bedroom Wisconsin home is \$18.56. The lack of affordable housing availability makes it difficult for a community to attract and retain workers.

Prior to Carol’s hire in the spring of 2024, the Rent Smart program was provided to several Fond du Lac County community organization’s clients. Carol contacted St. Katharine Drexel Shelter’s executive director and discussed the financial and housing needs of clients. The staff was excited to restart offering Rent Smart at the shelter for all residents of the shelter during their stay. Extension’s Rent Smart course provides participants with knowledge and skills that can help them find and keep safe and affordable housing that meets their needs. The six-session course features lessons on: determining what they can afford to pay for rent, checking out the rental property and landlord, application process, understanding who’s responsible for maintenance, communication skills and rental agreements. There were 23 total Rent Smart participants at the shelter who received a completion certificate in the first half of 2025. Rent Smart is designed to help participants find and keep safe, affordable, and quality rental housing. Among Rent Smart survey respondents in 2025, 100% of respondents said this class will or might help me keep housing in the future. When residents have reliable housing that they can afford and landlords have responsible tenants, communities benefit through having a stable workforce.

When asked what they would do differently moving forward after the Rent Smart class, one participant stated, “ Building a better relationship with my landlord.”

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AGRICULTURE



If it happens on a farm or in a field, the Extension Institute of Agriculture works with you to achieve better results. Our innovative dairy management programs range from genetics to farm and business management. Extension researchers work hand-in-hand with row crop, forage and fresh produce growers to provide best practices for every aspect of the growing phase. We also advise communities on using sustainable practices to create inviting spaces free from invasive species.

Crops

Liz Gartman, Regional Crops Educator

A field day for forage growers, dairy producers, agency staff and agriculture consultants where participants learned about ongoing forage research projects, were updated on upcoming technologies, and engaged with Extension specialists and educators on a variety of forage focused topics. The goal of the event was to share relevant data, management recommendations and novel forage technologies to improve forage production on Wisconsin farms.



Forage production has not been a key focus of statewide programming in Extension. The importance of the dairy and livestock industries in the state require that we focus programming on improving the quality of forage across the state, while investigating novel forage options like cover crop and annual forages. A collection of Extension specialists and researchers from the USDA Dairy Forage Research center collaborated to provide updates on the research they are engaged in or wrapping up related the agronomic considerations of forage production along with the animal performance benefits of incorporating different forage species into diets. A rotation of field stops showcasing this research was planned for the morning of the field day, with flash talks highlighting novel technologies, grazing management and opportunities for growers to engage with researchers and Extension educators. Evaluation results are still being compiled.

“It was a great event. We were thrilled to be a part of it” “Thanks for hosting this event! I liked the conversations around N management in regards to cover crops.” “Great field day. Looking forward to next year” “Cover crop breeding efforts are important to support.”

A stop on the Clean Farm Families Poker Run event for local growers where we discussed opportunities for growers to engage in the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program, Insect Pest Trapping network and reporting, and slug monitoring. Further, we shared the new Bovinoticias newsletter and information regarding AgriAbility and the Wisconsin Farm Center. The goal of this effort was to share opportunities to join Extension on-farm efforts and build relationships between state and local educators and growers. (Liz Gartman)

- The Clean Farm Families Producer Led Watershed group hosts events over the course of the year, and while planning their annual Poker Run determined that showcasing some Extension programs would be a good fit for those attending the event.



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AGRICULTURE CONTINUED

- The Ozaukee County Demo Farm network joined the effort to monitor slugs and armyworm/cutworm moths over the growing season. As part of the planning effort, we determined that sharing these efforts with representation from our pest management program would make sense. Additionally, we have several Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program sites in Ozaukee & Washington Counties, and this event allowed us to discuss some of the preliminary results from those projects and share the opportunity for growers to participate in their own NOPP projects. The new bilingual dairy newsletter Bovinoticias was a good addition to our stop, as several Spanish speaking dairy employees attended the event.
- Approximately 42 growers, agency staff, consultants and farm employees attended the event.

Dairy

Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator

Bovi-noticias is a collaboration between Educators on the Dairy team and Farm Management team. This bilingual (English & Spanish) newsletter was designed to support dairy farms and their employees. This publication delivers accessible, research-based information in both English and Spanish, aiming to, (1) provide relevant, practical insights for workers, managers, and owners, (2) Increase awareness of the “why” behind practices to encourage employee understanding and enhance engagement of dairy teams, and (3) Serving as a resource for team meetings, facilitating discussions between management and workers, and fostering problem-solving.

The Wisconsin dairy industry faces ongoing challenges and opportunities related to optimizing animal health, productivity, and farm efficiency. While owners and managers often possess strong foundational knowledge, a need exists for easily accessible, research-based information tailored to the diverse workforce directly involved in daily dairy operations. This includes employees responsible for animal care, feeding, and other essential tasks. Language barriers can further complicate the dissemination and understanding of best practices. Recognizing this need, a collaborative effort between Dairy and Farm Management Extension Educators has resulted in the development of Bovi-noticias, a bilingual (English and Spanish) e-newsletter. This publication aims to bridge the information gap by providing relevant, practical insights and explaining the rationale behind key practices, ultimately fostering a more informed, engaged, and efficient dairy workforce, leading to improved animal well-being, enhanced resource utilization, and increased farm profitability.

Planning for a spreadsheet tool for dairy producers and consultants. The goal is to help producers understand the value of managing inventory and to be able to use the spreadsheet to account for loss and varying qualities of feed, and storage methods so that they can better plan and manage feed inventories. Feed is the largest expense on a dairy farm, accounting for about half of all input costs.

Older tools developed for feed inventory management focused heavily on storage in tower silos. Today many different storage systems including bunkers, piles, balage and dry hay may be utilized. A new tool needs to be developed. Currently a tool developed by the beef program is the best we have available and it needs to be updated for dairy specific considerations.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Positive Youth Development prepares the youth of today to become the effective, empathetic adults of tomorrow. Our research-based youth enrichment programs like teens in governance build youth and adult capacity and partnerships that help both sides grow. 4-H clubs, camps and after-school programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to develop an understanding of themselves and the world.

4-H

Tracy Keifenheim, 4-H Program Educator

- To celebrate youth creativity and expand hands-on learning within one of Fond du Lac County's most popular project areas, the annual 4-H Foods Revue provided a vibrant platform for participants to showcase blueberry-themed culinary creations. In alignment with goals to strengthen Sparks outcomes from the 2024 4-H Thrive data, this event emphasized project-based engagement, confidence-building, and healthy lifestyle choices. Youth selected from diverse recipe categories—such as desserts, salads, and soups—and presented their dishes with coordinated place settings, optional centerpiece displays, and food photography entries. Interactive judging offered opportunities for reflection, skill refinement, and preparation for fair presentations. Participants also engaged in a plant identification contest and connected socially by sharing recipes and tasting one another's creations. Through these experiences, youth deepened their interest in the Foods and Nutrition project area while strengthening community ties and cultivating a sense of belonging.


- In an effort to spark early interest in agriculture and provide a welcoming environment for Fond du Lac County's youngest 4-H participants, the 2025 Cloverbud Day Camp: Fun on the Farm invited thirty youth in grades K–2 to explore the world of farming through hands-on, age-appropriate activities. Designed as part of a broader strategy to improve Sparks scores from the 2024 4-H Thrive data, the camp combined interactive stations like butter making, egg carton planting, and farm yoga with creative crafts and group games to encourage curiosity, confidence, and connection. Youth participants shared reflections that captured the spirit of discovery, including: "That there was a Mr Healthy and it was a big guy that eats a lot of healthy stuff" and "About chickens and making butter." These responses reflect both content learning and engagement. The camp's indoor and outdoor setup supported relationship-building with adult volunteers, peers, and teen leaders, while youth-led input sparked ideas for future programming. Evaluation results showed that 75% of surveyed participants strongly agreed the camp was fun, and 63% reported learning something new and developing a greater interest in agriculture. The experience advanced Positive Youth Development goals through intentional group activities, shared meals, and trauma-informed community practices.


- To support youth engagement and address low Sparks scores identified in the 2024 Fond du Lac County 4-H Thrive data, the 4-H Associate Educator coordinated a three-day experiential day camp, All Around the World, held June 30–July 2 for youth in grades 3–8. Four participants explored music, food, sports, crafts, and geography from six countries—plus Antarctica—through hands-on, culturally immersive activities. The camp emphasized project learning and relationship-building to foster belonging and social connections with adult volunteers and peers. Campers enhanced their global awareness, fine motor skills, and creativity through art projects such as pop art, dot painting, and lantern-making; interactive challenges like rainforest construction and volcano slime; and culinary activities focused on nutrition, food safety, and meal preparation. Participants earned "passport stamps" and documented their learning, strengthening their sense of pride and connection through inclusive, interest-driven programming aligned with Sparks outcomes.

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