

EXTENSION FOND DU LAC COUNTY

JUNE 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

This past school year, the state *FoodWise* program partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to improve the school cafeteria environment for elementary school students across the state. They reached out to local Nutrition Educators in Fond du Lac County to partner with specific schools within the Fond du Lac School District. Melanie Phillips built a team for this project which consisted of *FoodWise*, Riverside Elementary School school food service, and Chartwells (district food service) to implement the "School Meal Appeal" program. Each participating school across the state, including Riverside Elementary, received \$1,000 to put towards the project. Melanie led team meetings to discuss the timeline for the project, the roles and responsibilities of each partner, and to determine overall project goals. As a result of this partnership, the team completed the "Food Meal Appeal" assessment, which is a review of each individual school's unique cafeteria environment. This is a tool that is used to evaluate the Riverside cafeteria and help identify strategies for implementation to improve participation in the school nutrition program and healthy eating habits among students in the lunchroom. Following the assessment, the team identified multiple strategies to work on in the upcoming school year. Some strategies are relatively quick, easy, and free of cost, while others may require greater time or financial commitment. Multiple strategies were implemented, including taste tests, cooking demonstrations, art work displays featuring fruits and vegetables, creative ways to display food items, and naming dishes with fun and interesting names, to name just a few. For example, due to a specific strategy, the cafeteria saw an increase in white milk consumption by 8% (compared to chocolate milk.) This project was complemented by *FoodWise*'s Harvest of the Month (monthly Wisconsin grown fruit and vegetable promotion) and nutrition education lessons in the classroom.

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

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.

A needs assessment regarding the Fond du Lac County community development position to determine the scope of future CDI work in the county.

At the request of the Fond du Lac County Executive, the educator was asked to conduct a needs assessment to determine the scope of the community development educator in Fond du Lac County. The educator, in collaboration with their local Area Extension Director, Program Manager, and Institute Director designed, organized, and executed a series of listening sessions with Fond du Lac County organizations across multiple sectors, including nonprofits, local governments, and businesses. Based on these findings, the educator will design and deploy a survey for local partners to provide feedback on potential programming and additional needs in the community that were not discussed during the listening sessions. The educator will prepare a report that includes a review of the listening sessions, survey results, and additional information gathered through 1:1's. The educator held three listening sessions on June 17th, June 19th, and June 21st that were attended by 12 community members representing nonprofit organizations, local governments, local entrepreneurs, and financial institutions. In addition to the information gathered, participants were asked to rate the listening sessions on three criteria: Was the session a valuable use of their time, was their voice heard, and was this session well facilitated. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level of agreement and 5 being the highest, participants feel the sessions were a valuable use of time (4.7 out of 5), participants feel that their voices were heard during the sessions (4.9 out of 5), and participants feel that the sessions were well facilitated (4.9 out of 5). The next step is to review the data collected and create a survey that will go out to community partners during the week of June 23. Once the survey concludes sometime in early July, the educator will prepare a report summarizing the findings.

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) for the first time in United States history. 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 combined with 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 The Beacon House 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 20 total Rent Smart participants at the substance use transition house 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 January 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.

One participant stated,

“ Thank you. This certificate will help me greatly in the future.”

Another participant wrote,

“ Never rented before, so very excited to have all this information.”



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

Creation of a data visualization tool for forage growers, crop consultants and livestock nutritionists in collaboration with local forage councils and agribusinesses. The goal is to provide timely, easy to use corn silage dry down data that these audiences can leverage to identify the optimum timing to harvest corn silage in their area which will produce forage more likely to meet animal nutrient requirements to support production.

- Across the state, crops educators and consultants that support forage growers sample and report the whole plant moisture of corn for silage. Whole plant moisture is a key guiding factor for making corn silage harvest decisions.
- There was a need to update the tool used by Extension educators to share this data with our growers. In response to the need, we identified the important data that we need to collect from growers during the dry down events, and created tools to allow for simple data collection at the dry down sites.
- With the help of our data scientist, a tool was created that provides this data, but also allows the user to manipulate the table and maps to see the information that is most relevant to their needs. Color coding data points provides an indication of the suitability for harvest of each data point, making it easy for stakeholders to visualize the data.

A webinar for farmers, crop consultants, and agency personnel, where timely crop and research updates are presented alongside agronomic recommendations from topic experts in the UW system. Through this webinar we inform our constituents so they can make the most economically and environmentally sound decisions which ultimately lead to better sustainability.

- Weather, economics, pest pressure, and research findings all change throughout the growing year. Our audience needs updates on these variables and resources to respond to them.
- We hosted a webinar twice per month and featured one to three topic experts, mainly UW faculty, to share their timely recommendations, research updates, and relevant resources with participants.

AGRICULTURE CONTINUED

Dairy

Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator

A survey for farmers, employers and employees who have different mother languages (Spanish and English) and do not speak each other's, where they provide information that helps us understand the strategies they use to bridge the language barrier and how that affects the activities at the farm.

Disruption in communications significantly decreases the farm's ability to onboard, manage, and retain employees, a critical task for successful operations. Optimal communications are a central piece to implementing successful workforce development programs. Additionally, the perception of employees regarding the language barriers on farms also remains unknown. A series of in person meetings with farmers, where we can discuss their challenges and the opportunities for the current research and future programing. As a Bilingual Regional Dairy Educator, working with the farms who have language barriers is important. The goal is to develop resources that improve communication, safety, and productivity on farms. This work supports both farmers and their Spanish-speaking employees, and it addresses broader issues by helping create more inclusive and effective workplaces in the dairy industry.

To address the identified need for accessible, research-based information for the diverse dairy workforce in Wisconsin, the Bovi-noticias e-newsletter has been developed. This bilingual (English and Spanish) publication directly responds to the challenge of ensuring all individuals involved in daily dairy operations have access to relevant and practical insights. By providing content in both languages, Bovi-noticias aims to overcome language barriers and promote a shared understanding of best practices across farm teams. Furthermore, the newsletter goes beyond simply providing information by explaining the "why" behind recommended practices. This approach fosters deeper comprehension and encourages greater engagement among employees, empowering them to contribute more effectively to farm goals. By serving as a resource for team discussions and problem-solving, Bovi-noticias facilitates better communication and collaboration between management and workers. Ultimately, this initiative directly responds to the need for a more informed, skilled, and engaged dairy workforce, which is crucial for improving animal health, optimizing resource utilization, enhancing farm efficiency, and increasing profitability within the Wisconsin dairy industry.

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.

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

A three-day culinary camp for youth, where participants explored cooking skills, food safety, and nutrition through hands-on activities. Through this program, youth increased their culinary confidence, developed life skills, and engaged in experiential learning that supports positive youth development.

Youth in Fond du Lac County expressed interest in learning how to cook, improve their kitchen skills, and explore food preparation in a safe, supportive, and engaging environment. There was a need for interactive summer programming that builds confidence, supports healthy habits, and helps youth develop practical life skills. In response, Fond du Lac County 4-H hosted a three-day Foodie Camp in June 2025. Eleven youth participated, engaging in activities that introduced food and nutrition basics, meal preparation, recipe adaptation, and food safety. A team of a Youth Leader, Adult Volunteer, 4-H Summer Intern, and 4-H Program Educator led campers through diverse, hands-on culinary tasks—from making pasta and jams to pickling and baking. Youth took turns rotating through meal prep, kitchen clean-up, and group reflections. Evaluation results showed strong impact: 73% of youth said they “loved it,” and 18% said it “was fun.” 100% of participants reported learning new skills or growing their interest in cooking. 64% of youth felt significantly more excited about cooking, and 64% felt they learned “a lot.” Youth favorites included making Tanghulu, churros, frozen grapes, and fruit gummies. Participants developed skills in recipe following, oven use, and teamwork. This program demonstrated how youth can thrive in well-facilitated experiential environments—building skills that support lifelong wellness and confidence in the kitchen. The structure, reflection time, and inclusive participation ensured engagement and learning. It exemplifies the power of youth programming to foster real-world readiness and aligns with the Wisconsin Idea’s mission of bringing education to life.

“I learned that taking your time and double checking the recipe is important. That way there won’t be as many mistakes.” - Foodie Camp Youth Leader

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