

Agriculture



With over 59,000 dairy cows in Fond du Lac county, ensuring high-quality forage production is critical to sustaining milk production and farm profitability. Helping growers meet forage quality goals for their farm means lower outside feed costs, healthier cows and improved sustainability of that farm. Furthermore, given the key role Spanish-speaking workers play, providing bilingual information is essential. Through training, newsletters, webinars, workshops, and other resources, Extension's Agriculture team ensures that feasible, science-based practices are accessible to farmers, managers and workers. This approach helps improve communication, increase efficiency, and enhance the overall performance of local dairy operations.

Crops | *Liz Gartman, Regional Crops Educator*

Planning for a four-session, 2026 Focus on Forage webinar series for livestock producers, forage growers and agriculture consultants. The goal of the series is to provide timely forage management guidance to improve forage quality and meet farm productivity goals.

- Dairy and livestock producers require high quality forages to meet the animal production goals on their farms. Using a quality forage base reduces feed inputs and leads to improved animal health, milk production and growth.
- There are many opportunities for forage growers to increase forage dry matter production and quality while optimizing input costs, and this series aims to provide research based solutions to these producers.
- The Focus on Forage planning team identified topics and speakers that address the key management challenges and opportunities that exist for forage growers. Ongoing planning will result in four scheduled webinars in February 2026 that will each address a specific topic area related to forage production.

Planning for a monthly Forage and Grazing workgroup meeting where Extension educators and specialists build relationships, provide project updates and share upcoming programs and resources to improve forage and grazing programming across the state.

- Our forage and grazing work group spans several programs, as these areas are related to crop, dairy and livestock production. It was necessary to provide a space where all three programs can collaborate and share updates and challenges related to forage production and grazing across the state.
- Our response is to host a monthly meeting for the forage and grazing work group. An agenda is prepared and posted prior to the meeting and includes a local update, project updates, resource sharing and a discussion of a research update or publication.
- The meeting provides an important touch point for educators working in the forage and grazing space and allows educators to collaborate on similar projects and programs.

Dairy | *Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator*

A statewide program promoting humane dairy cow-handling practices for dairy cow handlers where the participants will learn to be aware of their own beliefs about working with cows, which affect how they interact with them. They will also learn how to form or maintain good habits, which will make the cows easier to handle and their job smoother. This program will be available in English and Spanish (Manuel Pena)

- A growing number of people worldwide are expressing concern about the treatment of farm animals, particularly dairy cattle. Fond du Lac County is no stranger to that situation. Emphasizing that the actions and attitudes of dairy handlers have significant implications both within and beyond the farm environment is key. Recognizing this need, we are developing a bilingual learning program aimed at improving dairy handlers' understanding, attitudes, and interactions with the cows under their care. The program seeks to promote evidence-based handling practices that enhance animal welfare, worker safety, and overall farm productivity. The initiative will begin with a pilot phase designed to gather feedback through observation and participant input, allowing for systematic refinement of the training materials. Once finalized, the program will be implemented on selected farms and rigorously evaluated to assess its effectiveness in fostering positive behavioral change and improving animal well-being outcomes.

A meeting for dairy farm managers and their workforce to present the progress of the Ag safety program we are developing for their use to gather their feedback and insights to help finalize and enhance the program's design and effectiveness. (Manuel Pena)

- On dairy farms, heavy machinery such as tractors and skid loaders plays a vital role in daily operations, but it also poses significant safety risks. According to the University of Wisconsin Madison's Agricultural Safety & Health Program, tractors have caused the majority of non-highway farm fatalities in Wisconsin recently, and machinery is frequently involved in entanglement, crushing and other serious injuries. We are developing a training toolbox that farms can access at any time to support workforce education. These meetings are designed to gather feedback from farm managers and workers, helping us refine the program to ensure it's practical, effective, and tailored to the needs of those who will use it in our county.



Community Development



UW Extension Fond du Lac County Community Development provides educational programming through capacity-building workshops, facilitates community conversations that spark collaboration and action on emerging needs, and supports organizational leaders with 1:1 coaching, professional development, and connections to resources.

Noah Reif, Community Development Educator

Program development for a Nonprofit Financial Development Workshop for nonprofit leaders. The goal is to support local nonprofits in their efforts to diversify their funding sources, build organizational capacity to meet expanding community needs, and become more financially sustainable. (Noah Reif)

- County nonprofit stakeholders identified nonprofit skillset development in financial development as an area of need during the educator's summer 2025 need assessment. The educator will assess the existing fund development workshop curriculum and make updates based on previous participant feedback. The educator developed a Nonprofit Financial Development curriculum based on existing Extension resources and their own professional experience with input from community partners. This curriculum can be delivered as a single session or a series of sessions. During the workshop, participants will learn how to assess their current approach to fund development, develop their fundraising skills, and create an organizational specific fund development plan.

Facilitated meetings and coaching sessions with Fond du Lac United Way to strengthen its Fundraising Campaign. The organization faces a fiscal shortfall and needs increased board engagement to close the gap. (Noah Reif)

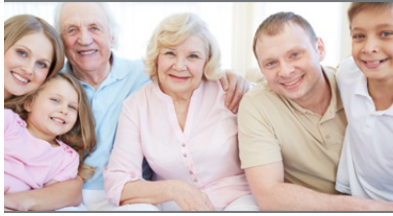
- After the August 2025 Board Retreat facilitated by the educator for the Fond du Lac United Way, the board and staff asked the educator to support their planning and implementation efforts. The organization is currently facing a \$35,000 deficit and is in need of greater board participation to make up the difference. Based on the work that began at the board retreat, the educator will prepare materials, such as planning templates and project management tools, and provide 1:1 support for the campaign committee planning team.

A series of facilitated strategic planning sessions for the Fond du Lac Festivals board of directors to review their existing strategic planning process and update the plan for their next three year planning cycle. (Noah Reif)

- The executive director of Fond du Lac Festivals contacted the educator seeking strategic planning support from the educator. The organization hosts several local festivals, including a three day event that draws over 50,000 people to Fond du Lac. Fond du Lac Festivals is seeking to review its strategic planning process and host a strategic planning session with the full board. The educator will review existing strategic planning materials, provide coaching and recommendations, and facilitate a series of strategic planning sessions with the board of directors and staff. [OCTOBER]- The educator facilitated a strategic planning session with the full board of directors on October 20th. Board members discussed, refined, and identified top intermediate and short term goals organizational goals. Participants were asked to rate the strategic planning session 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 (4.8 out of 5), participants feel that their voices were heard during the sessions (4.8 out of 5), and participants feel that the sessions were well facilitated (4.8 out of 5). As a result of the meeting, the executive committee will begin the process of identifying appropriate strategies and tactics to meet the organization's goals.

"The format and discussion helped me feel more comfortable in what our strategic planning process should be. You gave us a lot to think about and ways to improve the process. " - Local Nonprofit Leader

Human Development and Relationships



UW Extension Fond du Lac County Extension Human Development & Relationships provides programs that promote housing stability, support youth, and strengthen families. The Rent Smart program helps families gain the knowledge and skills needed to secure and maintain housing, while Adulting 101: Keys to Independence prepares older youth aging out of foster care with life skills in finance, careers, and communication. The program also offers Co-Parenting Education to improve communication between co-parents, address the impact of divorce on children, and build strategies for resilience. In addition, Extension supports helping professionals by providing financial education, professional development, and connections to financial resources.

Carol Bralich, Human Development and Relationships Educator

Planning AHEAD is a 7-session course that helps adults of all ages to make end-of-life financial, healthcare, and final wishes decisions in order to reduce the stress experienced by survivors and to ensure that their wishes are honored. End of life planning can be an intimidating process. It can also be confusing and emotional which may explain why only 37% of Americans have completed Advance Care Directives. In 2018, UW Health indicated that out of 41,000 patients, only 40% of those 65 and older had completed Advance Directives, and of those 85 and older, only 63% had one. Proactive planning for end-of-life decisions and care can prevent these financial and emotional burdens. In response to this need, Extension developed a comprehensive end-of-life program called Planning AHEAD (Advance directives, Handling financial changes, Estate Planning and Arriving at Decisions for the end of this life). The Planning AHEAD curriculum covers seven topics: Getting Started, Handling Financial Changes, Advance Directives, Estate Planning, Choices in End-of-Life Care, Final Wishes, and Understanding Grief.

In spring of 2025, the Ripon Public Library adult program specialist reached out with interest in hosting Planning AHEAD for the second time at the library. In September and October 2025, Carol facilitated a Planning AHEAD series at the Ripon Public Library with participants from Fond du Lac County. Twelve adults participated in the series with 57 educational contacts. The post-course evaluations (n= 9) indicated that:

- 89 percent of the participants stated they learned enough to move forward with planning.
- 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they have greater knowledge of estate planning, choices in end-of-life care and handling financial changes.
- 100 percent of respondents said that they felt more confident in having conversations with loved ones related to end-of-life wishes and knowing where to find reliable resources for more information on end-of-life planning.
- the majority of respondents, 78%, in the next three months, will update their end-of-life planning forms.

One participant wrote in the evaluation survey: "Make sure all your affairs are in order. Rethink them often." And, another participant wrote: "Excellent presentation, resource booklet, great atmosphere maintained in class that allowed good discussion."



Positive Youth Development



UW Extension Fond du Lac County youth grow into engaged, empathetic leaders through hands-on learning and meaningful service. Our 4-H program offers enriching experiences—from STEM challenges and animal science to creative arts—that spark curiosity and build confidence. Signature events like *Family Learning Day* and *Summer Day Camps* provide opportunities for exploration and skill-building, while service projects such as food drives and care kit assembly foster civic responsibility and community connection. In partnership with local schools and the Boys & Girls Club, we also offer after-school clubs that create inclusive spaces for growth and belonging.

Tracy Keifenheim, 4-H Program Educator

LEGO Club Meeting- The Fond du Lac County 4-H LEGO Club launched its new program year in September with a meeting focused on LEGO building skills and a Build Challenge. Designed to foster youth sparks in engineering and technology, the club provides hands-on learning and leadership opportunities. Facilitated by volunteers, youth leaders, and the 4-H Program Educator, the club meets monthly to build skills and relationships around LEGO interests. Outcomes include youth-led instruction in brick-building techniques and ongoing leadership development, with data collection planned throughout the year. Efforts to promote equitable access included collaboration with underserved community groups, offering financial assistance, and translating materials to ensure inclusivity. The club reached 50 youth and volunteers in its initial phase.

Tri-County Science Expedition to UW–Madison- In collaboration with Washington, Ozaukee, and Fond du Lac Counties, planning is underway for a Tri-County Science Expedition aimed at 4-H youth in grades 6–13. This multi-day experience will immerse participants in hands-on STEM activities across various disciplines, including biotechnology, physics, chemistry, agriculture, and geology. The program includes campus visits, lab tours, and workshops led by UW–Madison faculty to foster scientific curiosity and career exploration. Anticipated outcomes include increased youth confidence in scientific inquiry, greater awareness of STEM career pathways, and stronger connections with higher education institutions, supporting broader goals of workforce development and educational equity.

Winter Leadership Camp - Educators from nine counties, including Fond du Lac, are collaborating to plan a Winter Leadership Camp for youth aged 13 and older. This annual event focuses on experiential learning and leadership development, with youth input shaping aspects of the schedule and theme. The camp aims to help participants discover and build on their personal sparks, develop communication, empathy, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, and explore leadership opportunities within 4-H. Expected outcomes include enhanced leadership abilities, expanded peer connections, and a memorable winter camping experience that supports positive youth development.



You're Invited! UW–Madison Extension Fond du Lac County Open House

UW–Madison Extension Fond du Lac County is excited to invite you to an open house celebrating our new office location at the Fond du Lac County Government Center! Over the past several months, our staff have been busy relocating from the Fond du Lac County Campus to our new home, and we're eager to share this fresh space with you.

 **Monday, November 17**

 **2:00–4:00 p.m.**

 **Fond du Lac County Government Center, 2nd floor**

This event is open to the public, and we especially encourage our community partners and volunteers to stop by, tour the new office, and connect with our dedicated Extension staff. Enjoy light refreshments and help us celebrate this exciting new chapter in serving the Fond du Lac community!

Cindy Sarkady
Area Extension Director

Tracy Keifenheim
4-H Program Educator

Liz Gartman
Regional Crops Educator

Sherry Auchue
Sarah Stevenson
Support Staff

Noah Reif
*Community Development
Educator*

Misty Jimenez
4-H Associate Educator

Manuel Peña
Regional Dairy Educator

Cassi Worster
Marketing Specialist

Carol Bralich
*Human Development and
Relationships Educator*

Patty Percy
*Community Garden
Coordinator*

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