



## 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*

A presentation for the 2026 Thinking Outside the Barn Nutrient Management meeting in collaboration with the Washington County Land Conservation department where I shared results from the 2025 Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program field trials and discussed how growers can become involved with the program. Through this effort, I brought awareness of the opportunity for farmers to perform on farm trials regarding nitrogen management to better understand the optimal nitrogen rates for their farm.

- Each year, the Washington County Land Conservation department plans a nutrient management focused meeting for local growers. I was asked to provide an update and results from the two Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program sites in the county. I created a presentation with the plot layouts for the two sites, along with the 2025 results and pictures from the work that we completed. I also included the updates to the 2026 NOPP program that provides funding for smaller, more manageable projects that growers can participate in. I was able to respond to several questions about the program and what types of nitrogen studies can work within the NOPP framework.

An article for the "Field Fodder" column in the monthly Wisconsin Agriculturist publication for crop growers, livestock producers, agency staff and agribusiness consultants. The article focused on best practices for maintaining optimal soil fertility to support quality and yield related to forage production while minimizing nutrient loss and reducing input costs.

- In times when crop production economics are not good, growers often will reduce fertilizer use on crops, particularly perennial forage crops. This can lead to reduced persistence, disease, weed and insect challenges and poor quality forage. While important to manage costs, when it is done at the expense of forage productivity, it may not be the best decision for the farm. As this topic was identified as beneficial to the readership of the Wisconsin Agriculturist monthly publication, I researched and wrote the article connecting the importance of soil testing and building fertility in forage systems to managing the individual nutrients that drive productivity of forage stands. The Wisconsin Agriculturist has 25,000 subscribers that would potentially connect with this content, and the article will also be posted online.

A presentation during the scheduled Focus on Forage webinar series where I summarized and shared the 2025 Forage Quality Project results. Through this presentation, I shared the process by which we collected our data, the quality results found in both alfalfa and winter cereals, and discussed next steps for the project. Through this presentation, I hope to find additional collaborators for the project and demonstrate the value of the effort for forage production management.

- Our Extension research and data collection efforts are a key part of our job, but just as important is the outreach to share how stakeholders can use this work on their farms every day. The Focus on Forage webinar series provides an excellent outreach opportunity to reach stakeholders interested in forage quality. As a response to the opportunity to share, I created a presentation that outlined our data collection process and shared the



results of our work. There were 84 attendees on the webinar live, and the episode was recorded and shared on the Focus on Forage website for on-demand viewing.

Planning and preparing for a presentation for the Midwest Forage Association Symposium. The goal is to provide research-based guidelines on fertility applications for forage production to limit fertilizer input costs and nutrient loss from runoff while still optimizing forage yield and quality.

- The Midwest Forage Association staff reached out and asked for a presentation on fertility in forage systems. This has been a gap in the Symposium lineup and is an important topic due to lower hay prices and increasing input prices. I created a presentation that focused on best practices for determining existing soil fertility and selecting fertilizer application rates that meet crop needs but are not lost to runoff.

A bi-weekly radio interview for agriculture producers, consultants, agency staff and other industry persons where updates about state and local Extension-related resources, information and events that can benefit their operations are shared. The goal of this effort is to maintain a regular connection between the agriculture community and Extension resources to provide the tools to make better informed decisions regarding their farm business operations to improve farm business viability, environmental sustainability and food safety.

- As part of their offering, KFIZ radio reached out to me to provide content twice per week that is paired with the daily farm report. The need was additional, relevant content that could provide the agriculture audience with opportunities to engage with Extension and partner group resources and events. Ag producers use a variety of means to get information, including radio. Each Tuesday and Thursday morning, I provide a UW Extension update that plays along with the Farm Report. This update focuses on upcoming events, webinars, timely crop production topics, farm management information and dairy production information. Providing this information in a public media metric allows people who may be underserved or unaware of Extension agriculture programs to learn more about the types of programs offered and allows them to engage in the programs that meet their needs. This improved outreach allows Extension to serve clients that are outside of our normal means of contact. Further, it provides ag producers an additional insight into the work that is being done with Extension and opportunities to engage in programs that meet their farm management needs.

A regional agriculture newsletter for Fond du Lac, Sheboygan, Washington and Ozaukee County agriculture producers, industry representatives and agency staff that provides timely crop production updates, dairy and farm management resources and upcoming agriculture events. The goal is to create awareness of Extension programming and research in the region and maintain a connection between UW and the ag community.

- Crop, dairy and livestock producers make key management decisions every day based on challenges related to markets, weather and farm goals. It is important for them to have access to up-to-date information and opportunities to help them choose production methods that help them achieve their goals. The Regional Extension Ag Updates newsletter is prepared and e-mailed to approximately 850 ag producers, agency staff and agribusiness consultants that support farmers. In the winter months, the newsletter is sent monthly, with issues every two weeks during the crop production months. This newsletter shares field trial opportunities, timely management updates and tools to support production decisions, along with UW Extension and partner event opportunities. This newsletter consistently has a 40% open rate, and one recipient shared the importance of having upcoming local and statewide events listed in one place. It further has become a great partnership tool between Extension and local producer-led watershed groups, land and water departments and state agencies. This effort creates a greater awareness of resources available to support their farm production goals.



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.

**Dairy** | *Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator*

A weekly Thursday dairy radio segment for dairy producers, consultants, agency staff, and other industry professionals to share updates about state and local Extension resources, information, and events relevant to dairy operations. The goal of this effort is to maintain a regular connection between the dairy community and Extension resources, providing tools and timely insights to support informed decision-making related to herd management, nutrition, reproduction, farm profitability, among others.

As another Agriculture Educator in my area has already built a strong connection with farmers through regular radio updates, I have been invited to contribute a dairy-focused segment as part of the daily Farm Report. This provides a valuable opportunity to engage an established agricultural audience and expand Extension's outreach within the dairy community. Through this segment, it is possible to share research-based, science information relevant to dairy producers, along with timely updates on educational events, resources, and tools that can support informed decision-making and strengthen farm viability. Agricultural producers use a variety of sources to obtain information, including radio. Each Thursday morning, I provide a UW-Extension dairy segment as part of the daily Farm Report. This segment focuses specifically on timely dairy production topics, herd management strategies, seasonal nutrition and health considerations, and updates on upcoming events, webinars, and educational opportunities relevant to dairy operations. Delivering this information through public media allows us to reach producers who may be underserved, unable to attend in-person programs, or unaware of Extension's agricultural resources. This expanded outreach strengthens our connection with the dairy community and helps ensure that research-based information is accessible, practical, and timely. Additionally, the segment provides dairy producers with greater insight into the work being done through Extension and creates consistent opportunities for them to engage in programs that support informed decision-making, farm profitability, environmental stewardship, and long-term business sustainability.



## Human Development and Relationships



UW Extension Fond du Lac County 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*

A block party for Dads and their children, where Dads practiced interacting with their children during block play. Through this activity, Dads learned and practiced interactive conversation strategies to help their children develop their mental, physical and social skills.

The Head Start Assistant Director of Health and Family Services approached Carol to facilitate an interactive and educational activity for one of their fatherhood initiative events. The Block Party provides a structured, fun activity for Dads to practice interactive conversations with their children and spend one-on-one time together. Carol coordinated and facilitated the Block Party event with Head Start. Five stations with different types of blocks were organized in a circle around the room. Each station had a conversation prompt or open-ended questions that both the Head Start staff and the Dads could use to encourage their child to talk about what they were creating with the blocks. Each station also provided visual prompts as to how playing with blocks is related to science, reading skills, physical skills, pre-reading skills and social skills. The Dads and children rotated to a new station, moving clockwise following arrows on the floor.

The Dads received a Block Party booklet to take home to continue to practice and help their children learn and build on the concepts introduced at the Block Party. The structured play space for the Block Party provided important and focused time together for the Dads and their child/children. Dads were role-modeling by playing on the floor, encouraging their children to be imaginative, and supporting them when they were struggling with the blocks. They were also using the open-ended talking tips to help their children explain and verbalize what they were doing with the blocks. Children need experiences to be stimulating, fun, and interactive. Adults can guide children's early learning experiences and use blocks as a tool to support their development. Playing with blocks can provide experiences where children learn math and science, new words and pre-reading skills, social skills and physical skills.



## 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*

An orientation for new 4-H families provided foundational information about the program. Questions were answered to help guide new members and families through the year and promote belonging and retention of members. The goal of this effort was to build relationships.

- The Fond du Lac County 4-H program has 130 new members for the 2025-2026 4-H year. There are many great opportunities available, and it can seem overwhelming. The orientation covered many aspects of 4-H and answered questions. Participants learned how to find resources, who to ask for help, and how to get the most out of their membership. 4-H retention from year one to year two is one of the lowest percentages of 4-H youth members rejoining. The orientation supports families as they navigate their first year. All first-year members were invited to attend the first meeting of the new family orientation series. Families have the opportunity to get to know each other and ask questions. Fifteen families were in attendance. The new families were able to meet other new families, have questions answered, and learn about projects, general meetings, 4-H structure, and different county opportunities. The orientation was set up in stations after some connection activities and a short presentation. Many reported learning the difference between a project and an exhibit and learning the 4-H Pledge. A spring orientation is being planned with a focus on activities and events, day camps, leadership and 4-H roles, committees, and awards.

An educator visit during the Armstrong 4-H Club meeting for youth members and adult volunteers, where youth discussed club business. The educator led an activity and provided feedback to build relationships and provide support.

- There are 18 4-H community clubs in Fond du Lac County, and the educator visits a variety of club meetings throughout each year to stay connected with the members, see firsthand the things they are doing, and answer questions. Keifenheim also supports the volunteers and youth leaders in their roles and provides feedback for improvement. At the Armstrong 4-H Club meeting, Keifenheim led a printmaking for 12 youth, observed the overall club meeting process, spoke with a parent about printmaking, answered questions from attendees, and provided feedback in an effort to strengthen and build relationships.

A meeting for youth where they learned about LEGO building skills and participated in a LEGO Build Challenge. This effort is designed to encourage engineering, use of technology, and increase knowledge of LEGO building skills.

- Based on the 2025 4-H Thrive data for Fond du Lac County, Sparks is one of the lowest scores. To increase the Sparks score, this club focuses on a specialized interest area to promote project learning. Volunteers, youth leaders, and the 4-H program educator facilitated the 4-H LEGO Club. Keifenheim and youth leaders are working to continue LEGO Club with a transition in the youth leadership. This club meets monthly with members to build skills and develop relationships around their LEGO spark. Youth leaders teach brick-building skills to club members. Program data is collected continuously throughout the year.