



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
FOND DU LAC COUNTY



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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The Purpose To Which We Commit:

WE ARE THE WISCONSIN IDEA

UW-Madison Extension's outreach creates key connection points for families, communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and more. We support local volunteers and leaders to take action and serve as role models in their communities, and we make sure Wisconsinites have the latest research, best practices, and educational opportunities.

THE WISCONSIN IDEA IN ACTION:

PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The Human Development & Relationships program 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.

BUILDING CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES

The Extension Community Development program 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, 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.

SUPPORTING WISCONSIN'S AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Supporting Wisconsin's agriculture industry: Whether on the farm or in the field, we're on the front lines of modern agriculture, helping producers build stronger and more productive food systems. From managing livestock to crops to strategic financial planning for farms, our educators and researchers help solve challenges that Wisconsin producers face.

SUPPORTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Extension Positive Youth Development program prepares the youth of today to become the effective, empathetic adults of tomorrow. Our research-based youth enrichment programs 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.

EMPOWERING HEALTH & WELL-BEING

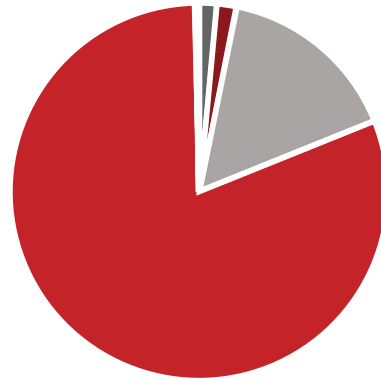
We provide individuals, families, and communities the tools and guidance they need to reduce stress, improve nutrition, and support physical activity. We work with community partners to increase access to healthy affordable food, create environments that promote well-being, and address access to quality health care.

Who We Serve



7,229
Direct Educational Contacts

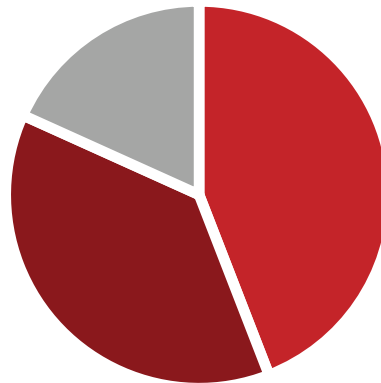
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or more



 ***896**
Female Learners

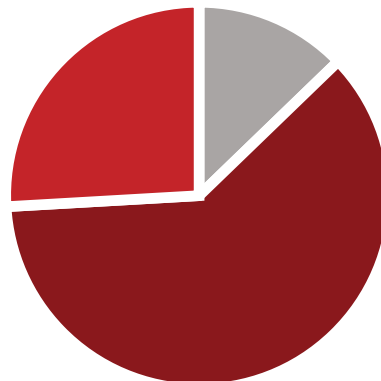
5,650 Gender
Not Indicated

 ***729**
Male Learners



1,108
Hispanic
4,403
Not Hispanic/Latino

*222 Ethnicity
Not Indicated





A Day of Discovery: Youth Thrive at Family Learning Day 2025

Family Learning Day 2025 continued its strong tradition of providing high-quality, hands-on learning experiences that help 4-H youth discover and deepen their sparks. As an annual project day designed to expand access to experiential learning, the event offered 95 youth the opportunity to participate in five interactive sessions, each focused on building skills, confidence, and curiosity across a wide range of project areas.

This effort directly supports Fond du Lac County's goal of increasing the Sparks indicator, which has been identified as an area of need through 2024 4-H Thrive data. By offering specialized, interest-based workshops, Family Learning Day creates meaningful pathways for youth to explore new topics, strengthen existing interests, and engage in project learning even in areas without established volunteer leaders. The event is made possible through the collaboration of volunteers, community members, and youth presenters, reflecting the strong community commitment to youth development.

Evaluation results underscore the program's impact. Youth completed 326 evaluations, with 99% reporting that their sessions were fun and engaging. 98% indicated they learned something new, and 88% tried something they had never done before. Nearly all participants (99%) shared that instructors were helpful, reinforcing the value of supportive, high-quality instruction. Youth testimonials—describing sessions as “very fun and engaging,” “unique,” “creative,” and “something I would do again”—highlight the excitement and confidence sparked through these experiences.

Family Learning Day continues to strengthen project learning, nurture youth sparks, and inspire future leadership. Plans to expand youth-led workshops will further elevate youth voice and deepen the program's long-term impact.

"It was fun, and I learned something new." - Family Learning Day Participant



Building thriving Nonprofits in Fond du Lac County

In 2025, Noah Reif, Community Development Educator for Fond du Lac County, strengthened local nonprofit and community capacity through high-quality facilitation, strategic planning, and collaborative program design. Her work supported organizational effectiveness, board leadership, and cross-sector collaboration—key priorities for sustainable community development.

Noah facilitated professional learning and planning processes that equipped nonprofit leaders and boards with practical skills in fundraising, governance, and goal alignment. Workshops and retreats consistently resulted in participants reporting increased knowledge and confidence, with facilitation quality rated highly across all engagements. Strategic planning efforts emphasized inclusive participation, ensuring that board members' voices were heard and that plans reflected shared priorities and organizational readiness.

In addition, Noah contributed to long-term capacity building by supporting a countywide coalition of nonprofit and private partners focused on strengthening volunteer boards and improving collaboration among organizations. Coalition partners included Fond du Lac Area Foundation, SOPHIA, Marian University, Fond du Lac United Way, and United for Diversity.

Together, these efforts demonstrate Extension's impact in building leadership capacity, fostering collaboration, and supporting resilient nonprofit organizations across Fond du Lac County.

In May 2025, a countywide needs assessment was conducted to inform future Extension community development programming. Community organizations and nonprofits expressed a need for intentional collaboration, shared resources, and accessible training in fundraising, leadership, and strategic planning. Across all sectors, participants consistently emphasized the importance of cross-sector collaboration, effective communication and storytelling, leadership development, and coordinated approaches to systemic issues such as housing, mental health, and education.

"It was great learning from you yesterday. I truly appreciate your expertise in nonprofits, and the seminar was incredibly valuable for me as someone who is new to nonprofit leadership that is also during this transitional time."



To start off the garden season, we had another get to know everyone 'Garden Party' potluck. Everyone enjoyed the idea so much last season, we thought we would do it again. Everyone brought a dish to pass and we had way too much to eat.

We had early season tilling once again, but there were not as many heavy storms, so only a few people needed to move to drier ground. Every garden season has different challenges, and we adapt. I am available to answer calls from gardeners.

I received another much-appreciated grant from Fond du Lac Area Foundation, which was put toward the upkeep of the gardens and our cover crop planting. We keep a cover crop on the plots that don't get used for the season to keep down the weeds and improve the fertility in the soil.

2025 Garden Statistics:

- 73 registrations
- 92 plots of various sizes
 - 40 ft. x 40 ft./20 ft. x 80 ft.
 - 20 ft. x 40 ft.
 - 20 ft. x 20 ft

While the garden maintains a dedicated core of families who have been involved since the early 2000s, the community is evolving with a shifting demographic. Some newer participants stay for a single season, and others remain involved.

Our Fond du Lac County Master Gardener group had another successful year growing produce for the Broken Bread food pantry.

A survey was sent to the gardeners at the end of the growing season to determine:

- purpose and value of renting a plot
- satisfaction with their plot and the application process
- willingness to recommend the program



Advancing Nutrition and Life Skills Through Community Partnerships

Until Fall 2025, the FoodWise Program was a valued, grant-funded component of the UW–Madison Division of Extension's work in Fond du Lac County. Supported through federal funding, FoodWise provided evidence-based nutrition education and food resource management programming to community members with limited incomes. When federal grant funding was eliminated, the FoodWise Program concluded locally.

During its time in Fond du Lac County, FoodWise focused on building practical skills, strengthening partnerships, and increasing access to nutrition education where it could make a meaningful difference. One example of this impact was a partnership with The Arc of Fond du Lac, an organization serving individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities, as well as youth, adults, and caregivers.

The Arc operates residential housing and a central drop-in and respite care facility that offers educational, social, and skill-building programs. Recognizing nutrition and cooking as essential life skills that support independence and health, The Arc partnered with FoodWise to provide accessible nutrition education tailored to participant needs.

FoodWise collaborated with The Arc to deliver hands-on, practical programming, including:

- A healthy eating and food budgeting session within the Self-Advocacy series
- A MyPlate introduction offered during monthly Self-Selection classes
- A series of cooking classes in three residential housing sites

Classes emphasized balanced meals, food budgeting, and simple cooking skills, supporting participants' confidence and day-to-day decision-making.

Although FoodWise is no longer active in Fond du Lac County, the program's work reflects UW Extension's commitment to collaboration, evidence-based education, and community-driven solutions that strengthen individual and family well-being.



Crops

Resilience is a key to sustainability for crop and forage growers in Fond du Lac County and across Wisconsin. Regional Crops Educator Liz Gartman’s outreach efforts in 2024 focused on providing these producers with the tools necessary to respond to challenging markets and volatile growing conditions.

The Fond du Lac Forage Council partners with Extension to contribute locally relevant data points, supporting research for alfalfa harvest quality, alfalfa yield and persistence, and corn silage harvest management. Additionally, the Dairy Forage Day Program was planned for January of 2026, sharing important research updates related to corn silage production and management, as well as a discussion about grain risk management.

Other related programming that Gartman has key involvement with includes the annual 4-part Focus on Forage webinar series, Foundational Crop Scout Training, Badger Crop Connect webinar series and Badger Crop Update program planning. These events provide key management recommendations for growers across the state and Fond du Lac County. Two Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Projects were also in progress during 2025, providing important nitrogen rate data to inform updated UW nitrogen recommendations.

Gartman also provides bi-monthly agriculture updates via the Regional Ag Updates e-newsletter that reaches 850+ e-mailboxes, an Extension Update on KFIZ radio paired with the Farm Report each week and article contributions to press including the Midwest Forage Association’s Clippings, Wisconsin State Farmer, Wisconsin Agriculturalist and the Extension Crops and Soils topic hub. These are all ways for Gartman to share her programming and UW research with producers in the region and across the state.



Crops Educator Liz Gartman discussing wheat plant growth staging at the Foundational Crop Scout Training field day

Dairy

Access to training and unbiased, research-based information is essential for dairy operations in Fond du Lac County and across east-central Wisconsin. In 2025, Manuel Peña focused on identifying specific producer needs and delivering targeted educational opportunities to address those gaps.

Dairy nutrition remained a central focus. Through the Feeder’s School workshop in Fond du Lac, Peña and a team of experts provided science-based recommendations and practical applications to improve herd performance and operational efficiency. This programming addressed not only nutritional management but also workforce development, emphasizing safety and technical skills essential for daily farm operations. Calf and transition cow management were also prioritized. In collaboration with specialists, Peña contributed to the Calving Management Practices program, which combined research-based information with hands-on learning. Participants developed practical skills in colostrum management, record keeping, and calving assistance, including dystocia management.

Collaboration with the Fond du Lac Forage Council was another key component of this work, highlighting the strong connection between forage production and dairy performance. Participation in community-valued events such as corn silage dry-down that strengthened engagement with local producers. These efforts contributed to the planning of the Dairy Forage Day Program in January 2026, which shared research updates and practical strategies for corn silage management.

All programming was offered in both English and Spanish. Additional outreach included newsletters, webinars, radio segments and trainings developed with university specialists, ensuring continued access to relevant, science-based resources that support the long-term success of dairy producers.



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT & RELATIONSHIPS

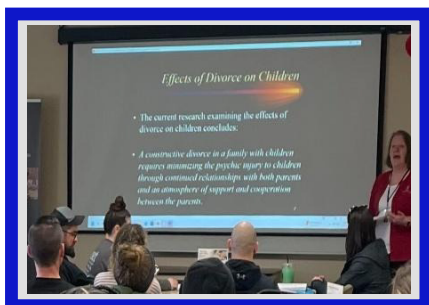


All families experience transitions in life, and many will experience divorce, separation, or changes in the custody of their children. Divorce and separation can have profound consequences for children, parents, and families, although adequate support can mitigate negative outcomes in childhood and adolescence.

Extension's Human Development and Relationships program in Fond du Lac County collaborates with the family court providing parent education for parents and caregivers experiencing divorce, separation, or changes in the custody of their children. Living Apart and Parenting Together (LAPT) is a three-hour program in Fond du Lac County that provides parents who are divorcing with valuable skills for reducing parental conflict, improving communication with co-parents, supporting children during periods of uncertainty and understanding the legal custody process. Keeping It About the Kids (KIAK) is offered to co-parents who have never been married. These in-person programs are co-facilitated with a family court social worker and Birth to 3 Coordinator.

As a result of the co-parenting program, parents improve their understanding of parental well-being, co-parenting relationships, and parent-child relationships. Most parents who respond to the post-program survey feel more prepared to coach their child through difficulties related to divorce or separation and are more confident they can keep their child out of the middle of parenting issues. Most parents also report learning new strategies to communicate effectively with their co-parent. The impact of this co-parenting program is important because changes in family structure can have profound impacts on child and parent well-being. Parents who engage with parenting classes during family structure changes can learn effective communication and parenting skills that act as buffers from the effects of instability.

In Fond du Lac County last year, 264 co-parents participated—205 in LAPT and 59 in KIAK—gaining skills that create calmer homes, stronger co-parenting partnerships, and better outcomes for children.



"I" statement use helps focus on the solution in a respectful way." Another stated, "I need to) remember that it's not all about me, and what I want; my children are involved as well."

STAFF AS OF APRIL 2026



Patricia Carroll
Area 14 Director



Manuel Peña
Regional Dairy
Educator



Andy Wilson
Community
Development Educator



Carol Bralich
Human Development
& Relationships
Educator



Tracy Keifenheim
4-H Program
Educator



Misty Jimenez
4-H Associate
Educator



Patty Percy
Community Garden
Coordinator



Sherry Auchue
Administrative
Assistant



Sarah Stevenson
Program
Assistant

Contact Us

160 South Macy St, 2nd Floor
Fond du Lac, WI 54935
920-906-4620
fonddulac.extension.wisc.edu
Facebook: @uwexFond du Lac



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