



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.

Dairy | Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator

A twilight meeting for members of the Fond du Lac Forage Council and forage producers, where participants received updates on current Extension projects and learned about the latest research on short corn, to increase awareness of emerging technologies and Extension resources that can support informed forage management decisions and improve farm productivity and sustainability in dairy farms.

Dairy and forage producers continually face changing production conditions and the emergence of new technologies and management practices that can influence forage yield, quality, herd performance, and farm profitability. As new research becomes available, producers need timely, research-based information to evaluate opportunities and make informed decisions that support both forage production and dairy nutrition. In addition, there is an ongoing need to increase awareness of current Extension programs and resources available to support dairy and forage operations. To address these needs, the Fond du Lac Forage Council Twilight Meeting was organized to provide producers and industry stakeholders with updates on current Extension initiatives and to facilitate the transfer of new knowledge. A subject matter expert was invited to present recent research on short corn, an emerging production practice generating interest among producers seeking to improve forage quality and production efficiency. This effort provided an opportunity for producers to learn about current research, interact with experts, and strengthen connections with Extension and the dairy and forage community. The meeting increased participants' awareness of current Extension initiatives and provided research-based information on short corn and its potential implications for forage production and dairy cattle nutrition. By connecting producers with specialists and emerging research, the program supported informed decision-making related to forage management and feed resources. Improved forage production practices contribute to maintaining a reliable supply of high-quality feed, which supports animal performance, farm profitability, and the long-term sustainability of dairy operations and the communities that depend on them.



Community Development



UW Extension Fond du Lac County Community Development provides educational programming through capacity-building workshops such as Fund Development and Fundraising, 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.

Andy Wilson, Community Development Educator

Development of a community asset mapping and gap analysis process for local decision-makers, service providers, and community partners. This work helps create a clearer picture of existing resources and unmet needs so that future planning can be more coordinated, data-informed, and responsive to the community.

Local organizations and decision-makers need a clearer, shared picture of existing community resources, geographic service access, and areas of unmet need. Information about services, community assets, and demographic indicators often exists in separate places, making it difficult to see where resources are concentrated, where gaps may exist, and where coordination could be strengthened. This effort was developed to support more data-informed planning around community needs such as food access, housing pressure, transportation, aging services, youth and family supports, and economic opportunity. In response, I began developing a community asset mapping and gap analysis process that brings local resource information together with community need indicators. This work included building and organizing a database of community organizations, mapping service locations, categorizing resources by service type and focus area, and testing ways to compare mapped assets with census-based indicators of need. I also began developing reports and visual tools that can help local partners identify patterns, discuss gaps, and use shared information in future planning conversations. This development work has created an early foundation for a more coordinated, data-informed approach to community planning. The effort is beginning to make local resources and potential service gaps easier to see, which can help partners move from anecdotal understanding toward shared analysis and more focused discussion. Over time, this work is intended to support better coordination, reduce duplication, identify underserved areas, and help local decision-makers and service providers prioritize efforts that improve access to resources across the broader community.

Identifying ways to better understand how to design and conduct a community-wide root cause analysis process for complex local issues. Results from this process will help county stakeholders and community partners move beyond identifying visible needs or service gaps and toward a deeper understanding of the underlying systems, barriers, and conditions that contribute to those issues.

Fond du Lac County organizations are working to address complex community issues such as housing instability, food access, transportation barriers, poverty, workforce challenges, disability inclusion, and service coordination. These issues are interconnected and often cannot be solved by a single organization, program, or short-term response. While early asset mapping and gap analysis work has helped identify areas where services may be limited or where additional discussion is needed, a broader process is needed to better understand why these challenges persist and how local partners might address them collaboratively. This ongoing process is focused on identifying practical methods that could be used with community partners, coalitions, service providers, and local stakeholders. Areas of focus include facilitated community conversations, systems mapping, stakeholder engagement, data-informed discussion, equity-centered analysis, problem framing, and methods for distinguishing symptoms from underlying causes. The goal is to develop a method that can help partners ask better questions, validate assumptions, identify shared priorities, and move toward more strategic community planning. The intended outcome of this process is to build a strong foundation for a future community-wide root cause analysis method. By reviewing best practices before convening broader discussions, Extension can help ensure that future conversations are structured, useful, inclusive, and grounded in both local experience and evidence-informed learning. Over time, this work is expected to support stronger cross-sector collaboration, clearer understanding of complex local issues, and more strategic planning around challenges that affect residents across the county.



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

All families experience transitions in life, and many will experience divorce, separation, or changes in the custody of their children. In the United States nearly half of all marriages will end in divorce and divorced parenthood is common. Divorce and separation can have profound consequences for children, parents, and families, although adequate support can mitigate negative outcomes in childhood and adolescence. The quality of parenting and the presence of parental conflict are key drivers of children's well-being and are often the focus of court-mandated parent education during this time.

Extension's Family Engagement and Relationship program in Fond du Lac County partners with the family court to provide parent education for parents and caregivers experiencing divorce, separation, or changes in the custody of their children. *Living Apart and Parenting Together* 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 and placement process. From January-June this year, 118 co-parents participated in this class. *Keeping It About the Kids* is offered to co-parents who have never been married. Thirty eight co-parents attended this class from January - June 2026. These programs are offered in-person co-facilitated with a family court social worker.

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, findings well documented by research. Parents who receive and engage with parenting classes during family structure changes can learn valuable and effective communication and parenting skills that act as major buffers from the deleterious effects of instability. One participant stated, "(I learned) that my child's feelings come first and not to bad mouth the other parent." Another participant wrote that the most useful thing they learned in the class was to "take time for myself even if it's just a few minutes so I can recharge and be a better mom for my kids."



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

Foodie Camp 2026, held June 15–17, brought youth together for a lively three-day experience focused on cooking, creativity, and hands-on learning. From the start, participants built a strong foundation in kitchen safety and basic skills, giving them the confidence to explore a wide variety of recipes. As the camp progressed, youth prepared everything from cinnamon rolls and coleslaw to more adventurous dishes like crab rangoons, orange chicken, and mochi—many for the very first time.

The camp emphasized active, experiential learning. Youth rotated through stations, experimented with new ingredients, and practiced techniques such as baking, food preservation, and proper mixing methods. Activities like making granola bars, fruit roll-ups in a dehydrator, peach jam, and decorative cake pops allowed participants to gain real-world skills while having fun. Each camper documented their journey in a personalized recipe book, capturing both new knowledge and favorite creations.

By the final day, the growth in confidence and independence was clear. Participants were preparing more complex foods such as bagels and banana bread and using their creations to assemble full meals. The experience culminated with youth taking home prepared foods and recipe books, extending the learning beyond camp and into their households.

Evaluation results demonstrate the program’s success. Nearly all participants reported that the camp was fun and engaging and increased their interest in cooking. Most youth also indicated they learned something new, with many highlighting both specific cooking skills and a greater willingness to try unfamiliar foods. Youth reflections reinforced this, noting excitement about trying new recipes and gaining confidence with more detailed cooking processes.

Overall, Foodie Camp 2026 successfully blended skill-building, creativity, and exploration. Participants left not only with practical cooking abilities, but also with increased confidence, curiosity, and a willingness to try new things—skills that benefit both the individual and their family.

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