

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 corn silage dry-down event partnering the Fond du Lac Forage Council, for dairy farmers and forage growers in Fond du Lac and the surrounding region, where participants could submit for free their corn silage samples to assess their dry matter content. This information helps participants determine the appropriate time to harvest their corn silage to maximize forage quality.

Dry matter (DM) data is important for determining the appropriate harvest timing for corn silage. Harvesting at the proper DM content promotes good fermentation, helps preserve nutrients, reduces storage losses, and supports consistent forage quality. Over three weeks, from August 26 through September 9, we hosted an event every Wednesday that provided dairy farmers with an opportunity to submit corn silage samples and assess their DM content. The timely results helped participants evaluate harvest conditions and make more informed decisions about when to harvest, with the goal of maximizing corn silage quality and preserving nutrients for subsequent dairy diet formulation.

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

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. On September 18, 2026, a survey was sent out to a sample of nonprofits to provide Extension and effort collaborators with understanding of educational needs. This survey will be open for approximately one month to allow community partners to provide feedback on the creation of this effort. 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.

In partnership with Sophia Partners, conducting a countywide nonprofit survey to better understand the current needs, challenges, strengths, and capacity of nonprofit organizations across Fond du Lac County. The goal is to identify shared priorities, service gaps, and opportunities for collaboration so future training, technical assistance, funding, and network activities can be better aligned with what nonprofits actually need.

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

Food prices continue to place pressure on family budgets, making it increasingly difficult for households to balance grocery costs with other essential expenses. Young families often face additional challenges, including limited time for meal planning and shopping, uncertainty about how to use digital savings tools, and difficulty identifying the most cost-effective purchasing options. While many grocery stores offer apps, digital coupons, rewards programs, and online shopping tools that can significantly reduce costs, many consumers are unaware of these resources or do not know how to use them effectively. Community organizations and libraries have identified a need for practical, research-based education that helps families save money on groceries while maintaining healthy eating habits.

Earlier this year, two librarians in Fond du Lac County reached out to Carol to present a workshop around this timely financial topic. Extension Fond du Lac County partnered with the Oakfield Library and the Fond du Lac Library to offer *Smart Grocery Savings for Busy Families*, a workshop focused on helping participants maximize their grocery budgets through simple and effective shopping strategies. The workshop was tailored to the needs of busy parents seeking realistic and time-saving approaches to managing household expenses to stretch their food budgets. The program introduced participants to grocery store apps, digital coupons, loyalty programs, meal planning techniques, and other tools that can help reduce food costs.

Through this workshop, participants increased their knowledge of strategies for reducing grocery expenses and identified tools and resources available to help them save money on everyday purchases. Participants also learned how to compare prices, use digital savings programs, plan meals around sales, and make informed purchasing decisions that support both their financial goals and their family's needs. Participants left with practical actions they could implement

immediately during their next shopping trip and an increased confidence in managing grocery spending. In addition, the program strengthened partnerships between Extension and the local library by providing timely, research-based financial education that addressed a common concern among local families.

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

Tracy Keifenheim collaborated with 4-H club officers and adult volunteers to plan the 2026 4-H Fall Kick-Off, an event designed to welcome new families, strengthen club leadership, and support youth and adult volunteers in preparing for a successful program year. Planning was guided by feedback and evaluations from the previous year's event, which showed that participants felt supported and were able to implement new ideas within their clubs.

The Kick-Off was developed to address needs related to volunteer engagement, leadership development, communication, and club support. The event includes interactive learning opportunities focused on club management, youth leadership, inclusive practices, resource sharing, and peer-to-peer networking. Updated planning materials and tools are provided to help clubs effectively organize and deliver quality programming throughout the year.

This effort supports broader goals of strengthening county 4-H clubs, increasing volunteer and youth leader confidence, enhancing relationships between clubs and Extension staff, and promoting positive youth development. The planning committee anticipates that the 2026 Fall Kick-Off will continue to build on the success of previous years by equipping youth and adult leaders with the skills, resources, and connections needed to create meaningful experiences for 4-H members and families.

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