



## Agriculture



Agriculture plays a significant role in Washington County's economy and landscape. Most farms are family-owned, and the county is known for its strong dairy and livestock production, along with key crops like corn, soybeans, hay, and wheat. Conservation practices such as no-till farming and cover cropping are widely used to promote sustainability and improve water quality. The Extension Agriculture team ensures that feasible, science based practices are accessible to farmers, managers and workers to improve sustainability and profitability of farms.

*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.

A series of 3 in person and 1 virtual Crops & Soils Program update meetings for crop and forage growers, consultants, agronomists, students and agency staff where participants learned about recent research results and crop management practices learned during the 2026 growing season. Extension specialists shared talks related to nutrient management, forage and grain production and pest management with the goal that attendees can make more informed crop management decisions to improve farm resilience and profitability.

- Each growing season is characterized by specific economic, weather and growing conditions that challenge the decision making of crop growers. The end of the season provides a unique opportunity to debrief the season and discuss how response to these challenges worked out for farmers, and what lessons might be learned for future years.
- The event hosted the following number of participants at each site: Eau Claire: 44; Monroe: 21; Appleton: 31; and Zoom/Virtual: 81.
- Evaluation results reflected that 79% of respondents would be able to use what they learned to improve management decision for their farm or their client's farms; 75% of respondents plan to implement strategies discussed in the next year; one responded answered the speakers "did a good job researching and thinking of most of the questions consultants & farmers would have" while another shared "the event provides an opportunity to interact with their peers."

## Positive Youth Development



4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults. 4-H involves youth in project-based education. Through project learning, youth can explore their interests ("sparks") and master new skills. 4-H projects are meant to be hands-on to create a memorable learning experience. Since 4-H started in the early 1900s, youth have learned by doing. This hands-on process allows youth to understand not only how to do something but also why they are doing it. Beyond traditional clubs and projects, Washington County 4-H is expanding opportunities for youth to explore career pathways through immersive career exploration, connections with local industries, and innovative STEM programming. These experiences inspire curiosity, build confidence, and prepare young people for success in school, work, and life.

*Kelly Dione, 4-H Program Educator & Ron Jakubisin, 4-H Program Educator*

The Fall Forum Design Team is planning for the 2026 Fall Forum event in collaboration with the PYD Admin Team. The goal is to align the program with the Youth Empowerment Signature Priority Area and ensure a safe and positive experience for youth grades 7 & up, and adult volunteers.

- The Fall Forum program is a statewide weekend program for youth in grades 7 & up, along with adult volunteers to gather, learn PYD best practices, network, share ideas and build youth-adult partnerships. Each year, a team of youth and adults from the Wisconsin 4-H Leadership Council plan workshops, speakers, and networking opportunities to build out the program. The structure of the Wisconsin 4-H Leadership Council is changing for 2026 and that ushered in the opportunity to create a "design team" for Fall Forum. In fall of 2025, we created a Fall Forum Design Team (currently made up of staff, but eventually will include 4-H members and volunteers) to aid in the planning and development of the 2026 event. The Design Team has met once so far to review the evaluation results of the 2025 event, and to start thinking about logistics for the 2026 site, which has been secured. We are hopeful that the design team format for planning will allow for more people to be engaged in the planning, and will continue the strong tradition of youth and adults speaking into the format and outcomes of the event.

Planning for the 2026 Summer Academy program for youth grades 8-11 in collaboration with partners at UW-Madison and Madison College. The goal is to provide a high-quality experience for youth to explore to grow their career and college readiness to prepare for their futures.

- The 2026 Summer Academy program will be occurring in June on the UW-Madison Campus and the Summer Academy Leadership Team (SALT) began meeting in fall 2025 to review the evaluation results from the 2025 event and start making plans for the 2026 event. The event is a The SALT team has been meeting to begin building partnerships with campus departments to explore ideas for career tracks, and identify campus resources to highlight. The SALT team is also working on ways to create a welcoming space, and the educational and social aspects of the event.

An ongoing after-school STEM program for youth at the Boys and Girls Club, where participants explore learning concepts through STEM activities, including LEGO education challenges.

- Washington County School Districts have robust pathways program offered for high school students that include Youth Apprenticeship programs and career related clubs and organizations that students can join in after-school. The High School also provides curriculum that supports career pathways in health care and manufacturing and engineering. Students in elementary and middle school have less opportunities for career exploration in after-

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school programming that would interest students in STEM careers. West Bend School District had to rescind an offer to partner this fall and Kewaskum School District had staff turnover and has new leadership this fall. Therefore programming needed to pivot to other youth organizations like Boys and Girls Club, who serve mostly elementary and middle school students. Washington County 4-H is partnering with Boys and Girls Club of Washington County to offer after-school programs for youth in K-8th grade. These programs highlight the full scope of 4-H opportunities and offer experiential learning that connects new skills to real-world careers. This effort will provide new opportunities for Boys and Girls Club youth to engage and learn about STEM careers and other 4-H opportunities.

A monthly newsletter for all Wash Co 4-H families where information about all club activities, countywide projects, resources and announcements are contributed by and distributed to 4-H families that offer opportunities to increase skills and engage in 4-H activities

- With 16 Clubs and 20 Countywide projects the monthly Cloverline Newsletter brings together current 4-H resources, educational events and announcements which they can take advantage of in one newsletter which is emailed and posted on the 4-H county website. Monthly Cloverline Newsletter to all 4-H families, volunteers and leaders which includes Upcoming Events & Opportunities; Updates and Reminders; Project News; Attn: Club & Project Leader info; and Submitted News (all clubs/projects invited to submit). Distributed via 4HOnline database and posted on webpage for all to access. Newsletter keeps 4-H members informed of opportunities to learn, grow and engage as a county program. Monthly newsletter is emailed and posted on county 4-H website for easy reference for families and 4-H members

Weekly Club Leader Update email blast. Features 3 (new) priorities, announcements, and/or resources for 4H volunteers serving as Club and Project Leaders to increase the capacity of volunteers to deliver 4-H club and project activities.

- The need for this effort was prompted by continual requests for information and resources by the Washington County 4-H Club Leaders, Project leaders, and parents. Additionally, events both local and statewide are shared on a web-based calendar. Weekly Club Leader Update email blast. Features 3 (new) priorities, announcements, and/or resources for 4H volunteers serving as Club and Project Leaders. Volunteers have stated in recent leaders meeting that Weekly Club Leader Updates are valuable and the 4-H Office should continue with this



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