

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

An educational program for dairy producers, crop consultants and livestock nutritionists where attendees learned about strategies for improving corn silage digestibility, opportunities for using short corn in crop rotations and risk management for corn and soybeans to provide quality forage to support milk production and total farm profitability.

- The Fond du Lac Forage council reached out to the regional crop and dairy educators to provide a forage focused program for their members. The council provided timely topic ideas to the educators to consider when determining the program.
- The educators reached out to several speakers to highlight the topics provided by the forage council. Dr. Luiz Ferraretto was willing to discuss his work with corn silage digestibility, Liz Gartman shared an update on the use of Short Corn in dairy crop rotations, John Heinberg from Total Farm Marketing provided a grain market and risk management update, and Manuel Pena discussed Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza as well as providing an update on dairy programming available to producers.
- 20 individuals representing a number of dairy farms, feed companies and agronomy consulting companies attended the meeting. Attendees commented that they would be interested in implementing different chopping heights when harvesting corn silage, improving NDF digestibility, and implementing grain marketing strategies to manage risk.

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.

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 Educator & Ron Jakubisin, 4-H Educator

A leadership retreat for fourth grade youth, in collaboration with West Bend School Counselors. The purpose of this effort is to improve problem-solving strategies, focusing on team problem solving, consensus building, and experiential team-work while providing an opportunity for youth to learn more about 4-H and build relationships with school personnel. (Kelly Dione, Ron Jakubisin)

- Based on a needs assessment conducted in January/February 2025, youth are in need of intentional programming to build communication and collaboration skills. There is also a need to build awareness of in-school opportunities 4-H can offer. Continued partnership with the elementary schools in West Bend to deliver programming to youth to build relationships and promote 4-H and leadership and teambuilding skills through a leadership retreat. The school partnership has created a continued trusting partnership in which the school requested 4-H to come to a family fun night and promote our 4-H STEM Day Camps and other 4-H club and project materials.

Planning for a STEM Virtual Learning Series for K–4 youth in collaboration with a 4-H adult volunteer and engineer. The goal is to build foundational knowledge and hands-on skills in STEM, so that youth can identify their sparks and continue exploring and developing their interests in science, technology, engineering, and math. (Kelly Dione)

- Based on a needs assessment conducted in January–February 2025, STEM programming was identified as a priority in Washington County Schools, with a documented decline in interest in STEM careers between middle and high school. Although a county-wide STEM project enrolled 10 youth, participation was limited by scheduling and access barriers that prevented some students from attending in-person meetings. In response to this need, a virtual STEM learning program was developed in partnership with a parent who is also an engineer, to expand access and maintain engagement for youth who were unable to participate in traditional programming. In response to the need for increased access to STEM learning opportunities, the 4-H educator partnered with a 4-H adult volunteer who is also an engineer to develop a virtual STEM learning series. Together, the team is planning and developing four hands-on STEM activities scheduled to begin in March. Program development includes curriculum design, purchasing and organizing materials, training on the online delivery platform, and creating marketing and communication materials. Outreach is being conducted through the 4-H community, including clubs and project areas, to ensure youth who are unable to attend in-person programming have an accessible and engaging STEM learning opportunity. This effort is expected to increase access to high-quality STEM learning opportunities for youth who face barriers to participating in in-person programming. By providing engaging, virtual STEM activities, youth will have opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering, and math topics, identify new sparks, and build confidence in their interests and abilities. These experiences are intended to support sustained engagement in STEM through continued participation in 4-H projects and learning pathways. Over time, this program will contribute to addressing decreased interest in STEM careers by helping

youth develop curiosity, problem solving skills, and awareness of STEM-related opportunities, benefiting both individual youth and the broader community by strengthening the future STEM-ready workforce.

A series of 4-H Summer camp planning and training meetings in which adult and youth members plan and train to be 'camp counselors' for Washington County's annual overnight 4-H camp experience. The Volunteer Planning Committee with guidance from the educator, will meet regularly from January to May with 22 teen leaders and 12 adult volunteers to: plan camp activities, practice presentation and facilitation skills in meetings held in Jan. Feb. March April, as well as a plan and deliver a Family Camp Orientation Night (May) prior to camp (June 11-14, 2026). Training topics to include: facilitation skills, 4-H camp policies, effective communication skills and ages & stages in order to prepare as camp leaders.

A series of social and leadership activities for Wash Co 4-H youth in 8th grade - 12th grade. The monthly events, **Wash. Co. Teen Connect**, offers high school-aged 4-H members of the 16 county clubs to come together to build a countywide community of 4-H; to continue peer connection through age appropriate activities; and engage in social activities while keeping the mission of 4-H in the forefront.

Jeremy Solin
Interim Area Extension Director

Liz Gartman
Regional Crops Educator

Kelly Dione
4-H Educator

Ron Jakubisin
4-H Educator

Karen Girard
Support Staff

Cassi Worster
Marketing Specialist