

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

A collaborative effort between Extension educators, corn silage growers and consultants to gather and share corn silage production data including whole plant moisture. Through this effort, the data collected is used to drive an online tool that helps growers identify optimum corn silage harvest timing with the goal of producing high quality corn silage.

- Wisconsin is the number one corn silage producing state, driven by the need for large quantities of quality forage for milk production. Proper timing of silage harvest is primarily driven by the whole plant moisture of the crop. Silage that is harvested too wet or too dry results in poor fermentation, affecting the palatability, stability and hygiene of the stored feed.
- For years Extension educators have partnered with industry groups to host corn silage dry downs, but much of that data had use limited to that particular growing season and region of the state.
- A team of Extension educators, along with our data and marketing specialists created a data collection process that gathered additional sample data, including county, planting date, seed brand, hybrid, fungicide use, previous crop along with the whole plant moisture collected at each dry down event.
- A reactive tool was created to allow growers to hone in on data relevant to their harvest decisions, including a map that displays whole plant moisture based on the most recent sample dates.
- Further, Extension regional crops educators provide area updates each week to share the progress of crop harvest in their area, including relevant crop status information like disease pressure and weather conditions that are posted on the Extension Corn Silage website. These activities provide a holistic view of crop progress and help stakeholders better understand contributing factors to corn silage harvest progress.

A webinar series for farmers, crop consultants, and agency personnel, where timely crop and research updates are presented alongside agronomic recommendations from topic experts in the UW system. Through this webinar we inform our constituents so they can make the most economically and environmentally sound decisions which ultimately lead to better sustainability.

- Weather, economics, pest pressure, and research findings all change throughout the growing year. Our audience needs updates on these variables and resources to respond to them.
- We host a webinar twice per month and feature one to three topic experts, mainly UW faculty, to share their timely recommendations, research updates, and relevant resources with participants.
- Our webinar series delivered tangible, useful recommendations and suggestions from topic experts to our audience when they needed them. This helped to ensure a successful season for Wisconsin crop growers. In addition, this webinar series helped to strengthen the bond between the university and the communities we serve by connecting the faculty doing ag research to the growers using those research results.

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

Development of After-School STEM Programs in partnership with Washington County school districts for youth in 5th-8th grade. These programs highlight the full scope of 4-H opportunities and offer experiential learning that connects new skills to real-world careers. Through these programs, youth will increase their knowledge of career pathways and discover personal interests in STEM-related fields.

- Washington County school districts have robust pathways programs 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 a 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-school programming that would interest students in STEM careers. Washington County 4-H is partnering with School Districts 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 Washington County School District youth to engage and learn about STEM careers and other 4-H opportunities.

A Tri-County Science STEM field trip to UW-Madison campus offering an immersive, full-day experience featuring workshops, demonstrations, and research lab tours in areas such as biology, chemistry, engineering, and sustainability. Youth engage directly with scientists while exploring college life and future STEM careers.

- Youth have limited access to immersive STEM experiences that connect classroom learning to real-world applications. There is a growing need to provide opportunities that spark interest in science and help youth envision future careers in STEM fields. We are developing a Tri-County Science Expedition that will bring together youth from Fond du Lac, Washington, and Ozaukee counties for immersive STEM learning. The planning team is coordinating logistics, designing hands-on activities in the labs of biotechnology, physics, chemistry, agriculture, geology, and engaging UW-Madison faculty and staff to support college and career readiness sessions. The program will include a UW-Madison campus visit, lab tours, and interactive workshops to foster scientific curiosity and career exploration.

Ron Jakubisin, 4-H Program Educator

Wash. Co. Teen Connect event offers high school-aged 4-H members of the 16 county clubs to come together to build a countywide community of 4-H, socialize, team-build and explore their interests in planning these future events.

- The high school-aged youth 4-H members are the group that tends to attend less meetings, and events due to other life opportunities such as jobs, traveling sports teams, increased mobility (driving) and expanding peer groups and interests. Teen Connect offers an opportunity within 4-H to continue peer connection through age appropriate activities, social activities while keeping the mission of 4-H in the forefront.

A series of 4-H Club and Countywide Project Leaders Meetings which identifies successes and roadblocks of implementing 4-H programming, and identifies goals for training, recruitment and youth leadership in the '25-'26 year.

Attending County Club meetings to provide assistance to club leaders in developing 4-H standard club meetings, along with resources and activities to help them achieve said 4-H standards.

Club leaders receiving guidance on 4-H program and club standards. Formal meeting requests, inquiry calls and club visits offer resources, tips, lesson plans, etc. that enhance their meeting experience and increase the participation and satisfaction of families and youth members. Guidance includes identifying strengths & growth areas in partnership with each club leader. Educator will offer 4-H resources, lesson plans, curriculum as needed.

A monthly newsletter to inform Wash Co 4-H families in the 16 Clubs and 20 Countywide projects the monthly Cloverline Newsletter brings together current 4-H resources, educational events and announcements which offers opportunities to increase skills and engage members in 4-H activities

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.

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