

# COMMUNITY NEEDS REPORT



Extension  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



## Agriculture Programming Sheboygan County Extension

On **June 12, 2025**, Sheboygan County hosted a Community Needs Forum with participation from representatives and partners across local community organizations. Attendees engaged in facilitated discussions around current goals, challenges, existing and needed resources, underserved audiences, and opportunities for collaboration. The purpose of this report is to highlight community-identified needs relevant to the Agriculture Institute (AG), and to demonstrate how programming from Sheboygan County Extension is addressing these gaps.

### Forum Discussion Summary

Discussion at the forum at the AG table focused on how Sheboygan County is navigating the challenge of preserving farmland amidst pressures from development and generational shifts in land use priorities. Limited federal conservation funding is intensifying the need for creative outreach, sustainable mentorship, and practical solutions that encourage conservation practices, especially among hesitant or hard-to-reach audiences like traditional farmers. The county boasts valuable resources, including UW Extension educators, peer farmer networks, agribusiness support, and educational programs, yet gaps remain in areas like legal guidance, marketing support, and inclusive funding for farms of all sizes. There's strong interest in forging new partnerships—with schools, community groups, and consumers—to amplify messages, support farm diversification, and enhance direct-to-market efforts. Looking forward, the path lies in emphasizing economic impact, empowering trusted advisors, diversifying outreach strategies, and spotlighting farmer-led research to build momentum across generations.

### Identified Community Needs & Gaps

Analysis of the forum data revealed several key needs that align with the scope of agriculture programming:

- Push diverse ag production and conservation buy-in.
- Frame conversations around economic impact—data-driven messaging.
- Leverage trusted advisors and target outreach efficiently.
- Encourage and amplify farmer-led research efforts.

### Extension Alignment

Eastern Wisconsin is the heart of the dairy industry and while cash grain crops are important to this region, grains and forages are a key component to support dairy and livestock feed needs as

well. Sheboygan County boasts 29,174 dairy cows and produces 517,445 tons of corn silage and 242,291 tons of alfalfa and grass forages (2022 Ag Census data).

Informal needs assessment conversations have revealed a need for research and programming related to forage options for dairy cattle, including best practices for integrating and using cover crops as part of livestock diets, as well as utilizing managed grazing and other soil health practices on dairy operations of varying sizes, including concentrated animal feeding operations. Further, a need exists to provide more connections between agronomic and field level management practices and feed quality metrics to ensure we are meeting animal needs when raising grain and forage crops, particularly for dairy farms. Improving alfalfa management to ensure persistence and forage quality and identifying other viable forage options due to extreme weather conditions is also an area of concern.

As a result, Extension crops and dairy educators have focused their efforts on supporting growers in these spaces. Some activities include:

- Alfalfa Harvest Quality Project - monitoring first crop alfalfa progress to identify optimum harvest value to meet dairy forage goals - grant dollars and local partnerships provide funding for forage laboratory analysis of fresh alfalfa samples
- Corn Silage Harvest Management project - partner with local agribusinesses to monitor whole plant corn silage moisture to target optimum harvest. Further creation of a statewide database for growers to visualize up to date data
- Forage Analysis Report Fact Sheets - demystifying the different metrics on a forage analysis report to help growers better use these reports to make feeding decisions.
- Focus on Forage Webinar Series - Share the most recent recommendations and research on forage related topics including corn silage, alfalfa, cover crops, annual forages and pastures to help producers make informed decisions in the growing season.
- Collaborate with local forage councils, producer-led watershed groups and agency staff to support ag producers to implement Extension research and recommendations at local field days and events.

#### **Additional Extension Resources to support Sheboygan County Farmers:**

- Farmland preservation vs. development: balancing generational views and land-use priorities.
  - Extension Crops educator provides support and resources to County staff as they look to expand Farmland Preservation opportunities to growers
- Support for farmer diversification and niche marketing (CSA, farm-to-table).
  - Extension outreach specialists provide support in the [emerging crops](#), [diversified fruit and vegetable](#), and [direct marketing of meat](#) to producers.
- Help navigating legal/permitting hurdles.
  - Extension programs include [Food & Farm Startup support](#)

- Inclusive support: ensuring both large and small farms have access to tools and opportunities.
  - Extension resources and programs are widely available to anyone interested in attending and participating.
- Disconnected middle generation: falling through communication gaps.
  - [Farm transition](#) and [succession planning resources](#) and programs are offered regularly
- Encourage and amplify farmer-led research efforts.
  - Extension Crops & Soils program supports on farm research with resources and specialists that can help growers design meaningful research projects and interpret the data.