

Agriculture



If it happens on a farm or in a field, the Extension Institute of Agriculture works with you to achieve better results. Our innovative dairy management programs range from genetics to farm and business management. Extension researchers work hand-in-hand with row crop, forage and fresh produce growers to provide best practices for every aspect of the growing phase. We also advise communities on using sustainable practices to create inviting spaces free from invasive species.

Crops | 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.
- Educators further identified Extension faculty specialists and state outreach specialists that had relevant research regarding optimum Phosphorus and Potassium use, implementing short corn into rotations, forage management innovations, improving soil infiltration and aggregation, insect and weed management updates to share with stakeholders.
- 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."

Dairy | Manuel Peña, Regional Dairy Educator

Bovi-noticias is a bilingual (English & Spanish) newsletter created through collaboration between the Dairy and Farm Management teams. It provides dairy farms and their employees with accessible, research-based information that explains the reasons behind key practices and offers practical insights for daily work. Through this effort, Bovi-noticias helps build a more informed and engaged workforce, improving animal well-being, optimizing resources, and supporting farm profitability and safety.

- The Wisconsin dairy industry continues to face challenges in animal health, productivity, and farm efficiency. While owners and managers often have strong foundational knowledge, frontline employees—responsible for daily animal care, feeding, and parlor work—need information that is both practical and easy to access. Language barriers further limit understanding and adoption of best practices. To address this gap, Dairy and Farm Management Extension Educators collaborated to create Bovi-noticias, a bilingual (English and Spanish) e-newsletter. This resource delivers relevant, research-based information that explains not only what to do, but also why it matters. The goal is to build a more informed and engaged workforce, improving animal well-being, resource use, farm efficiency, profitability, and workplace safety. In response, we launched Bovi-noticias, a bilingual (English and Spanish) e-newsletter designed for dairy farm employees and managers. The newsletter addresses language barriers and provides clear, research-based information on daily practices while emphasizing the reasons behind recommendations. This approach supports deeper understanding and encourages adoption of best practices. By serving as a tool for team discussions and problem-solving, Bovi-noticias strengthens communication and collaboration between managers and employees. Ultimately, it empowers workers to contribute more effectively to farm goals and supports the development of a skilled, engaged, and safety-conscious dairy workforce. Through email distribution, WhatsApp, printed copies at Extension events, and farm visits, Bovi-noticias is expected to initially reach about 350 people. We plan to evaluate its impact after the first year through surveys measuring readership, knowledge gained, and behavior changes on farms. These outcomes will help determine how the newsletter contributes to improved practices, stronger workforce engagement, and better communication on Wisconsin dairy farms. Over time, these efforts are expected to benefit the broader community by supporting healthier animals, more efficient resource use, and more sustainable and profitable farm operations.

A statewide program promoting humane dairy cow-handling practices for dairy cow handlers where the participants will learn to be aware of their own beliefs about working with cows, which affect how they interact with them. They will also learn how to form or maintain good habits, which will make the cows easier to handle and their job smoother.

- A growing number of people worldwide are interested in how animals such as dairy cattle are treated on farms. What dairy handlers do in their daily job matters to people both inside and outside of the farm. To meet this need, we are creating a bilingual learning program designed to enhance dairy handlers' attitudes and interactions with the cows they work with. The initiative will begin with a pilot phase, which will be carefully refined through feedback and observation. Once finalized, it will be implemented on selected farms and evaluated to measure its effectiveness in promoting positive handling practices and enhancing animal welfare.

A meeting for dairy farm managers and their workforce to present the progress of the program we are developing for their use to gather their feedback and insights to help finalize and enhance the program's design and effectiveness.

- On dairy farms, heavy machinery such as tractors and skid loaders plays a vital role in daily operations, but it also poses significant safety risks. According to the University of Wisconsin Madison's Agricultural Safety & Health Program, tractors have caused the majority of non-highway farm fatalities in Wisconsin recently, and machinery is frequently involved in entanglement, crushing and other serious injuries. We are developing a training toolbox

that farms can access at any time to support workforce education. These meetings are designed to gather feedback from farm managers and workers, helping us refine the program to ensure it's practical, effective, and tailored to the needs of those who will use it.

An Extension-led online resource hub for Wisconsin dairy producers and agricultural professionals, where educators curated and centralized timely, science-based guidance, biosecurity tools, and official state and federal HPAI resources, to support informed decision-making, improve preparedness, and reduce the risk of highly pathogenic avian influenza impacting dairy herds and the broader agricultural community.

- The emergence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in dairy cattle created an urgent need for clear, credible, and timely information for producers, veterinarians, and agricultural professionals. This need intensified when Wisconsin identified its first positive HPAI milk test through routine, standard testing in a dairy herd, signaling that the virus had reached in-state dairy operations and elevating concern across the industry. As guidance was rapidly evolving and coming from multiple state and federal agencies, many stakeholders expressed uncertainty about biosecurity practices, reporting requirements, animal movement considerations, and potential risks to herd health. Misinformation and inconsistent messaging further increased confusion and anxiety within the dairy community. Extension engaged in this effort to respond to the immediate need for a trusted, centralized source of science-based information tailored to dairy operations. By developing and maintaining a dedicated Extension webpage, educators aimed to streamline access to official guidance, translate technical information into practical tools, and support informed decision-making during an emerging animal health situation. This effort was designed to enhance preparedness, promote consistent biosecurity practices, and reduce the risk of HPAI spread within Wisconsin's dairy industry, while reinforcing Extension's role as a reliable connector between research, regulatory agencies, and the dairy community. Extension responded to the identified need by rapidly creating and promoting a centralized, accessible hub of trusted information for Wisconsin's dairy community. A dedicated HPAI Resources webpage was developed on the Extension Dairy Program website (<https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai-virus-in-wisconsin/>; short link: <https://go.wisc.edu/HPAI-resources>) to provide producers, veterinarians, and agricultural professionals with timely, science-based guidance on HPAI in dairy cattle. The page consolidated official state and federal resources, biosecurity tools, and reporting information into a single location to reduce confusion and improve access during a rapidly evolving situation. To ensure visibility and ease of access, a direct link to the HPAI resources page was added to the top navigation of the Dairy Program website, allowing users to quickly locate information following Wisconsin's first positive HPAI milk test in a dairy herd. Extension also issued a public news release to communicate the availability of these resources and reinforce consistent messaging across the industry, with versions available in both English and Spanish (<https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu/2025/12/15/uw-madison-division-of-extension-provides-resources-for-dairy-producers-following-positive-milk-test-for-hpai/>; <https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu/2025/12/15/la-division-de-extension-de-uw-madison-ofrece-recursos-para-productores-lecheros-tras-el-resultado-positivo-de-hpai-en-una-prueba-de-leche/>). In addition, Extension coordinated internally to support call handling, information requests, and media inquiries related to HPAI in dairy cattle. Educators worked closely with Extension communications staff and university leadership to align messaging, direct stakeholders to the centralized resource page, and ensure consistent, accurate responses to producer questions and media requests. This coordinated response strengthened Extension's capacity to deliver timely, credible information, supported informed decision-making, and helped reduce uncertainty during an emerging animal health situation. Outcomes and Impacts of the Effort Improved access to trusted information: Dairy producers, veterinarians, and agricultural professionals gained a single, centralized source for timely, science-based HPAI guidance, reducing confusion caused by rapidly changing and fragmented information. Consistent and coordinated messaging: Extension educators, communications staff, and leadership aligned responses to producer questions, Extension call and information

requests, and media inquiries, ensuring accurate and consistent information was shared statewide. Increased preparedness and biosecurity awareness: The availability and visibility of curated resources supported greater awareness of biosecurity practices, testing, and reporting protocols following Wisconsin's first positive HPAI milk test in a dairy herd. Enhanced outreach and inclusivity: Publishing materials in both English and Spanish expanded reach to Wisconsin's diverse dairy workforce and improved equitable access to critical animal health information. Strengthened Extension's role during an emerging issue: This effort reinforced Extension's position as a trusted connector between university research, regulatory agencies, and the dairy industry during an evolving animal health situation. Efficient response to stakeholder and media demand: Centralizing resources and directing inquiries to the webpage improved Extension's ability to respond quickly to producer concerns and media requests while minimizing duplication of effort across educators and programs.

Human Development and Relationships



The Extension Institute of Human Development & Relationships provides the tools Wisconsinites need to thrive as well-rounded, capable individuals and families. We support families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding. Our programs promote aging-friendly communities, coach effective parents and help families put technology, mindfulness and financial awareness to use.

Truong Tran, Human Development & Relationship Educator

Sheboygan County Extension is preparing for an expansion of *StrongBodies* offerings in 2026. *StrongBodies* is an evidence-based strength training and balanced program that focuses on improving muscular strength, flexibility, balance, and overall functional fitness to support healthy aging and reduce fall risk. Research shows that regular participation in strength training programs like *StrongBodies* can help older adults maintain independence, improve mobility, and enhance quality of life.

To increase access across the county, Extension is collaborating with the Sheboygan Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) in coordinating multiple delivery options to meet community needs and schedules. An in-person *StrongBodies* group continues to meet Monday and Wednesday mornings from 8–9 a.m. at the ADRC with an additional in-person group launching at Pigeon River Recreation Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2–3 p.m. For participants seeking a virtual option, Sheboygan Extension will also support the statewide virtual *StrongBodies* series, meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9–10:30 a.m. Through these efforts, Extension is expanding opportunities for residents to engage in physical activity in formats that fit their lifestyles.

Sheboygan County Extension is preparing to deliver an interactive workshop at Sheridan Elementary School that engages both parents and youth in learning about voice, choice, and decision-making. The workshop will include a hands-on activity using a simplified version of Robert's Rules of Order, allowing families to practice how ideas are shared, discussed, and voted on in group settings. This activity is designed to help youth understand that their voices matter while building skills in respectful communication and participation.

The workshop will also support parents by sharing strategies they can use at home to encourage children to express their needs and opinions, particularly in Spanish. A recent needs assessment revealed concerns among some families that children may lose interest or confidence in continuing to use Spanish as they grow older. This workshop aims to reinforce the value of bilingual communication and empower parents with practical tools to foster language use, confidence, and family connection.

In partnership with the Family Literacy Council and the Family Resource Center, Sheboygan County Extension is preparing a workshop titled *Read and Connect*, designed for families with emerging English literacy. The workshop focuses on helping non-English-speaking parents build meaningful connections with their children through reading, storytelling, and shared activities, even if they are not yet comfortable reading in English.

The session emphasizes that literacy development is not limited to reading printed English text. Parents will learn how using their home language, asking questions, talking about pictures, and sharing stories can all support children's language development and strengthen family bonds. By preparing this workshop, Extension is supporting inclusive family literacy efforts that honor cultural and linguistic strengths while building confidence and engagement among parents and caregivers.

Positive Youth Development



Positive Youth Development prepares the youth of today to become the effective, empathetic adults of tomorrow. Our research-based youth enrichment programs like teens in governance build youth and adult capacity and partnerships that help both sides grow. 4-H clubs, camps and after-school programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to develop an understanding of themselves and the world.

4-H | Sarah Feider, 4-H Program Educator

Planning for a series of learning opportunities for young people (2 zoom meetings, and 2 in person events in collaboration with 7 counties in northeast Wisconsin. The goal of Clover Con is to provide youth with an immersive, hands-on experience centered around role-playing, cosplay, and fantasy themes that foster a sense of belonging, creative expression, and personal growth. Through a series of engaging activities, participants will build costumes, create characters, design fantasy worlds, and play imaginative games—developing a wide range of artistic, cognitive, and social-emotional skills.

- In fall of 2025, a team of 4-H colleagues from northeast Wisconsin met with the WI 4-H Arts Specialist to discuss a new learning opportunity identified by young people and adults, around the topic of cosplay. After consideration, the alignment between the cosplay were identified as experiential learning alignment, and a way to reach young people with a unique twist of hands on and virtual learning spaces. The team of 4-H colleagues, led by State Specialist Johnson, engaged in conversations and planning, laying out the learning objectives and activities to fill two zooms and 2 day-long learning events. Activities and Associated Skills:Building a CostumeSkills: Design thinking, sewing, crafting, problem-solving, attention to detail, and self-expression.Writing and Creating a CharacterSkills: Creative writing, empathy, narrative development, identity exploration, and emotional intelligence.Building a WorldSkills: World-building, storytelling, systems thinking, collaboration, and imagination.Drawing and/or Painting the WorldSkills: Visual arts, composition, color theory, spatial awareness, and artistic interpretation.Skills: Teamwork, communication, improvisation, decision-making, and social interaction.These activities not only nurture creative arts skills but also support emotional regulation, stress relief, self-confidence, and social well-being. Research shows that cosplay and role-playing can significantly enhance psychological resilience and personal development in youth.The program is scheduled for mid January through mid February 2026. Registration is currently open.

A celebration for 4-H youth and volunteers for all their hard work, dedication, and efforts in 4-H throughout the year.

- This is an annual event. Beginning the year prior to the event, I wrote a letter to Acuity for their financial support of this banquet. Had several in person and virtual meetings with the venue and security. Organized youth and adult volunteers who emceed the event with the script being written by myself. Printed 70 certificates for Clover Awards with 8 Cloverbud Awards. Purchased 37 senior 4-H cords for our graduating youth. Purchased 3 plaques for project awards with 11 project award medallions. Purchased a glass award for our meritorious service award and Friend of 4-H Award. Purchased gift bags for our Record Book Awards along with Officer Book awards for 18 youth. The Community Builder Award received a certificate and \$100. Our Volunteer of the Year received a 4-H lawn chair. All the catering was done by me due to financial restraints. Due to the theater being under construction, tables were used which needed decorating. 254 people were in attendance for the event. Each

year we celebrate youth and adult accomplishments with our annual banquet where anyone is invited. This year there were a total of 150 awards handed out.

One parent emailed me stating, **"Everyone I got to talk to said that this was the best ever. Your decorations were amazing. The location felt like a party. Food was great. Thank you for making it so special!"**



Planning for a multi-county Winter Leadership Camp experience for youth ages 13 and above.

- Offering educational experiences for older youth is a priority in positive youth development. Winter Leadership Camp is an annual opportunity focusing on developing a variety of leadership skills. Educators from each of the counties collaborate to plan a schedule, theme, promotion, and other details for the event. Youth input is encouraged for parts of the planning. The impacts we are hoping to achieve are that youth will increase their leadership skills, meet new people, learn about leadership opportunities in 4-H, and enjoy a winter camping experience.

Positive Youth Development | Diana Hammer, Youth Development Educator

A situational analysis of youth empowerment opportunities and gaps in Sheboygan County so that program priorities can be determined for 2026.

Diana Hammer started on June 9 as Sheboygan County's half-time Positive Youth Development Educator. The role is focused on centering youth voices in spaces where young people and adults work together. The first priority is to meet youth and the adults who care about them to learn more about the strengths and opportunities for youth empowerment programming.

In the last month, Hammer and colleague Sarah Feider made plans with Sheboygan County Juvenile Detention Superintendent Richter to do some learning activities with incarcerated kids during the school's winter break. Hammer, Feider, and colleague Truong Tran planned an activity for Sheridan Elementary's Family Fun Squad in January which will include simultaneous interpretation and translated materials so parents and kids can participate in a bilingual learning activity. Hammer also volunteered at Plymouth High's Reality Check event to support students learning about budgeting and money management through an immersion game. While in Plymouth, she also met with PRAE Committee member Travis Luedke about youth empowerment opportunities.

After six months in this part-time position, Hammer's situational analysis confirms that there are many resources for young people in the county. School districts, organizations, and individuals are working hard **for** youth. There are fewer examples of activities happening **for and with** youth. Hammer will focus on fostering stronger and more meaningful youth-adult partnerships on civic issues in 2026. A key opportunity for this will come as she organizes two Government Days with Sheboygan County and students from Sheboygan Central High, Sheboygan South High, and Kohler High in the spring.

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