



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
DODGE COUNTY

Monthly Highlights January 2026

Agriculture - Crops

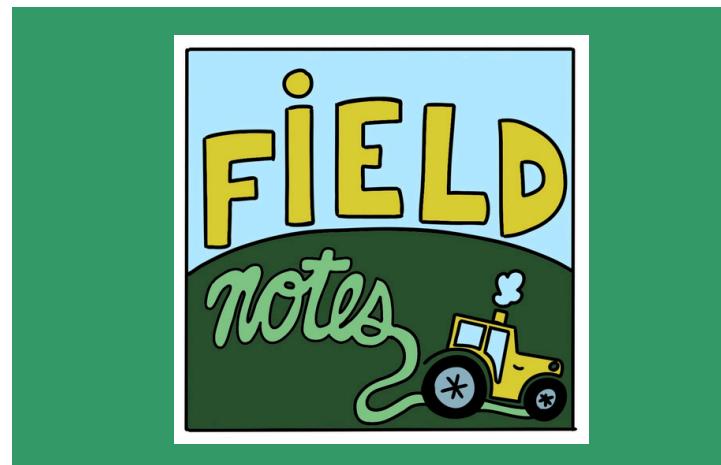
Educator: Will Fulwider

A pre-recorded audio based educational series called "Field Notes" for farmers, agronomists, and the public, where listeners learn research-based solutions to issues facing agriculture. The goal of this effort is to increase the adoption of best management practices on farms that encourage long term productivity and profitability of Wisconsin farms by sharing research-based information and relevant farmer experiences.

A special series based on on-farm nutrient management was released on Field Notes in December, targeting nutrient management season for farmers. The series has had 432 listens since being released in early December. The goal of this effort was to provide farmers who do not currently utilize nutrient management plans with an overview, broken into bite sized chunks, of the importance of nutrient management for their profitability and water quality. Total Reach: Total listenership to the podcast was 4,451 listens for 2024 with nearly 6,000 listens all time. Several episodes have garnered close to 700 listens for each episode.

There are more methods and avenues for information distribution available to farmers than ever before. Coupled with this increased accessibility

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.



to information is a preponderance of information that farmers must sort through to determine what is correct and applicable to their farm. Extension must meet the need of having multiple methods through which it disseminates information, in order for research-based information to play on the same stages as anecdotal approaches. Knowing that farmers spend a lot of time on their equipment and podcasts are a popular form of information consumption, Field Notes brings research-based information on agriculture to the podcast medium. Knowing as well that farmers appreciate the ability to hear how other farmers are using a new technology, practice, or adapting to challenging conditions, Field Notes strives to pair someone within Extension who specializes in the area with a farmer to convey the information in a way that is both research-based and practical. We produce about 10 30 minutes episodes a year. Total listenership to the podcast was 4,451 listens for 2024 with nearly 6,000 listens all time. Several episodes have garnered close to 700 listens for each episode.



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Agriculture - Dairy

Educator: Manuel Peña

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.

Statewide Bilingual Education Initiative

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.

Pilot Program Development and Implementation

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.

The Dairy Program offers education by holding in-person meetings and live webinars, as well as developing resources such as articles, factsheets, and videos.

Our program is made up of University Specialists and Regional Educators. Specialists perform scientific research based on dairy industry demands and develop practical resources for Wisconsin farm families. Regional Dairy Educators deliver research and resources to farms like yours and connect trusted, unbiased, university-based research to assist the dairy industry in making the livelihood of farming viable in the future.





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Human Development & Relationships

Educator: Pattie Carroll

Over the past month, key education and outreach efforts have advanced to support families, elevate childcare quality, and promote healthy child development across Dodge County and the state.

Statewide Continuing Education for Childcare Providers

Planning continues for a series of professional development workshops delivered in partnership with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network. Hosted across six Wisconsin regions—including an upcoming session in Beaver Dam—these workshops provide childcare providers with research-based content that strengthens daily practice and supports long-term growth. By enhancing provider knowledge, confidence, and caregiving strategies, the trainings contribute directly to higher-quality care and indirectly to healthier developmental outcomes for children. This investment is especially vital in Dodge County, where access to reliable, high-quality childcare remains central to workforce participation, school readiness, and family stability.

Raising Wisconsin's Children Annual Virtual Conference

Preparations are also underway for the annual Raising Wisconsin's Children virtual conference, which delivers research-driven parenting and child development content to families and professionals statewide. The online format ensures equitable access for Dodge County families, particularly those in rural areas or facing transportation or scheduling barriers. The conference equips caregivers

Human Development and Relationship programs in Dodge County focus on parenting, family relationships, aging, and financial education. We support resilient individuals and families from cradle to grave. Our programs offer research-based classes and resources for parents, caregivers, and professionals to promote child and family development. We also help families achieve financial well-being and build capacity among family-serving practitioners. Additionally, we support aging individuals with end-of-life planning and local partnerships. Responding to local needs our programs also promote mental health and well-being through evidence-based initiatives.



with tools to understand children's developmental needs, navigate challenging behaviors, and strengthen parenting skills—helping ensure children can thrive at home and in their communities.

Monthly Parenting Program for Fathers

A new monthly parenting series for fathers and father figures is in development. This program focuses on fostering children's social and emotional learning, promoting positive parenting practices, and creating opportunities for connection among men in caregiving roles. Fathers in Dodge County consistently report a need for welcoming, judgment-free spaces to learn and share experiences. By supporting father engagement, the program bolsters child well-being and builds broader family resilience.

Why This Work Matters

Together, these initiatives reflect Extension's commitment to supporting families at both local and statewide levels. Childcare providers gain meaningful professional support; parents and caregivers receive accessible, research-based guidance; and fathers have a dedicated space to build skills and community. Ultimately, children benefit through stronger relationships, better-informed caregivers, and environments that promote healthy development—contributing to a more resilient and thriving Dodge County.

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Positive Youth Development

Educator: Marie Witzel

Over the past month, Extension's Positive Youth Development efforts have focused on recognizing youth leadership, strengthening community partnerships, and intentionally welcoming new families into 4-H. These initiatives supported youth skill-building, family engagement, and community connection while reinforcing the values of leadership, service, and belonging.

Recognition of Youth Leadership through the Wisconsin 4-H Key Award

Dodge County Board of Supervisors supported Extension in recognizing Dodge County 4-H recipients of the Wisconsin 4-H Key Award, a statewide 4-H honor and the highest award a 4-H member can receive. This effort included identifying eligible youth, guiding the nomination and evaluation process, and documenting leadership achievements. Public recognition highlighted the importance of sustained youth engagement, leadership development, and civic responsibility. While the direct reach included two families with members receiving the award, the impact extended broadly through county board engagement and media coverage that elevated youth contributions across the community.

Positive Youth Development prepares the youth of today to become the effective, empathetic adults of tomorrow. Our research-based youth enrichment programs 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.



Shop with Cops Holiday Support and Relationship Building

Extension partnered with local law enforcement and community organizations to support the Dodge County Shop with Cops program during the holiday season. Dodge County 4-H members volunteered to wrap gifts purchased by participating youth, allowing officers and families to focus on relationship building during the shopping experience. Through this effort, 100 underserved youth received wrapped gifts and goodie bags, helping reduce holiday stress for families. 4-H members developed teamwork, service, and leadership skills while contributing to a positive, welcoming community event that strengthened youth-law enforcement connections.

Welcoming and Orienting New 4-H Families

In response to the need for a more intentional entry point for newly enrolled families, a new 4-H family gathering was planned and implemented. The gathering provided orientation to the 4-H program structure, expectations, and available opportunities, while incorporating interactive activities designed to build relationships and foster belonging. Dedicated time for questions and connection helped strengthen communication, build trust, and improve family readiness for long-term involvement—supporting retention and meaningful engagement early in the program year.